

BUILDING COLLAPSES IN NIGERIA AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR URBAN DEVELOPMENT

BACKGROUND



Fig.1 : Map of Lagos State¹⁷

- Lagos Island is one of the Local Government Areas in Lagos State, South-West Region of Nigeria. Lagos Island is a densely populated area characterised by high-rise buildings.
- The incidence of building collapse is either triggered by natural (rainstorm/flood/earth-tremor) or man-made (use of substandard building materials, wrong foundation and site, bad usage of the structure, poor technology, etc.¹) factors. Also, poor enforcement of building regulations and frameworks further complicates the menace.
- In January 2018, a survey conducted on building collapse in Nigeria revealed that the South-West Region of Nigeria has the highest record of building collapses in the last eight years, with Lagos State accounting for about 134 deaths and 159 injuries². In addition to the highlighted figures of fatalities in the reviewing period, is the collapse of the six-storey Synagogue Church of All Nations (SCOAN) guesthouse that led to 115 deaths with 131 injured³ in 2014.

INCIDENT PROFILE

On March 13, 2019, 20 people including school children, the school administrator (female) and other occupants of the building were reported dead in a three-storey building collapse at Massey Street, Ita-Faaji area of Lagos Island, Lagos State⁴. The collapsed building served as a residence, private school for children (nursery and primary levels), shops, offices and business centres. Forty-five people including women and children were reportedly rescued alive, sustaining various degrees of injuries⁵. However, contrary to the official report issued by the State Government on the figures of fatality, the Lagos Anti-Demolition Movement in a protest on March 20, 2019, disclosed that more than 61 children lost their lives⁶ in the incident.

Prior to the building collapse, the Lagos State Building Control Agency (LASBCA) had identified and marked the affected building for investigation and possible demolition with a contravention notice served in 2013⁷. Preliminary investigations further revealed that the occupants of the building including the School who were earlier ordered to vacate the building, returned following its renovation. The return of evicted occupants to the distressed building, despite the Governments' order constituted an outright violation of the Lagos State Government Building Control Law, 2010⁸.

To ensure public safety, the Lagos State Governor issued directives for the manual demolition of about 180 defective buildings within Lagos Island⁹. The demolition exercise has begun, resulting in the loss of properties and displacement of occupants. As the demolition exercise continues, a three-storey building marked for removal by the Agency at Kakawa Street, Campos in Lagos Island suddenly collapsed on March 25, 2019. No recorded fatalities in the collapse as occupants had been evacuated. Nonetheless, as of March 25, 2019, twenty-five distressed structures have been demolished by LASBCA.¹⁰

Similarly on March 15, 2019, a two-storey building under construction at Sogoye in Idi Arere area, Ibadan of Oyo State collapsed resulting in the injury of five construction workers¹¹. The State Government has commenced investigations to ascertain the cause of the building collapse.



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RISK ANALYSIS:

The frequency in building collapse in Nigeria poses a serious concern to public safety and urban development, as the recurrence and magnitude of losses in terms of lives, properties¹² and investments are becoming alarming. Data generated between 2012 and 2016 by the Federal Ministry of Power, Works and Housing, put the figures of building collapse in Nigeria at 54¹³. In 2018 alone, Lagos State had witnessed five cases of building collapses resulting in more than 4 deaths with several people injured as recorded in WANEP NEWS¹⁴.

Attempts by the Lagos State Government to find remedial solution to the recurring building collapse in the State led to the setting up of a Tribunal of Enquiry on Building Collapses in 2015 to investigate the causes and proffered recommendations. The submissions issued by the Tribunal of Enquiry cited poor implementation of the State's Building Control Laws and corruption¹⁵, amongst others, as the principal contributory factors to building collapse. The alleged failure of regulatory bodies and law enforcement agencies to effectively monitor compliance with construction principles and prosecution of violators respectively has largely contributed to the persistent breach in building standards by contractors in the country.

Though the immediate demolition of structurally unfit buildings by LASBCA is commendable, the need to conduct a 'structural stability test' on all construction projects to ascertain the fitness of the building is critical in stemming the incidence of building collapse in the country. Amid calls for a comprehensive inquiry into the recent building collapse in the affected States, demolition of weak structures in Lagos State resulted in the massive displacement of several families, placing the vulnerable group especially women, children and the aged at risk. Therefore, an appropriate mitigation plan by the Lagos State Government including the provision of temporary shelters, social services including trauma healing sessions and monetary compensation remain critical indicators in the human rights protection for the displaced.

MECHANISMS FOR INTERVENTIONS

- On-site-assessment of the affected area by the Lagos State Governor, Akinwunmi Ambode and officials of relevant government Ministries including the National and State Emergency Management Agency (NEMA and LASEMA) to ascertain the extent of damage. The Federal Government has inaugurated an inter-ministerial committee to investigate the cause of building collapses in Nigeria with a view to forestall future occurrence.
- The Lagos State Government on March 19, 2019, set up a five-man panel comprising building professionals from the private sector to investigate the immediate and remote cause of the building collapse as well as make recommendations for adoption by the State¹⁶.
- The proactive response of relevant Federal and State Government agencies including; State Fire Service, Red Cross, Nigerian Police, Army, National Security and Civil Defence Force (NSCDC), NEMA, LASEMA, Lagos State Building Control Service, in search and rescue operations of trapped victims is commendable. The Oyo State Governor had also set up a multi-agency rescue operation team to evacuate victims from the collapsed building in the State. Post Disaster Assessment by the Federal and



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State Government has commenced to include provision of relief and resettlement centres to affected persons.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The recommendations issued by the 2015 Tribunal of Enquiry on Building Collapse in Lagos State should be reviewed and implemented by the State Government as pre-emptive strategies against sudden collapse of structures. The State Government should improve its collaboration with the Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN), Council of Registered Builders of Nigeria (CORBON), Nigerian Institute of Town Planners, amongst others, to ensure strict adherence to approved building regulations/laws and compliance by developers.
- The whistle blowing policy introduced by the Lagos State Building Control Agency to alert the agency of illegal and defective structures is commendable and should be extended to other States in the country. This channel would facilitate information exchange between community residents and the respective Ministries in identifying structures and persons found culpable of breaching building control laws across States. The arrest and prosecution of defaulters will serve as a deterrent to others.
- Training and retraining workshops for Federal and State Ministries, for example, Ministry of Works and Housing and other related State agencies on safe and quality construction practices as well as effective monitoring of building development are imperative.
- The State Government, the media and other relevant agencies also need to strengthen collaboration to sensitize the general public about the dangers associated with illegal buildings.

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