

THE HUMAN HABITAT OF PORT HARCOURT



1995
Republished
2019

An extract from
The Human Ecosystems of the Niger Delta,
an Environmental Rights Action handbook

Dedicated to Oronto Natie Douglas

www.parkerstreetpublications.com



NOTE TO MY FAMILY

*IT snows here brother
IT hardly rains
Flakes, whitish foams of winter
Shower all around*

*IT snows here sister
I can feel the pains
Nose and eyes bleeding water
Shoots my senses aground*

*I am lost in this parable:
Leaves and Trees are separable
Leaves here die and resurrect
All trees here stand erect
Dead.*

IT is their winter

Oronto Douglas¹

¹ Oronto lived in the UK for two years while studying for his MSc in Environmental Law at De Montfort University, Leicester as a British Council scholar.

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An Extract From

The Human Ecosystems
of the Niger Delta

(an Environmental Rights Action handbook 1995)

Parker Street
Publications



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To

ORONTO NATIE DOUGLAS

1966 to 2015

1 Preface

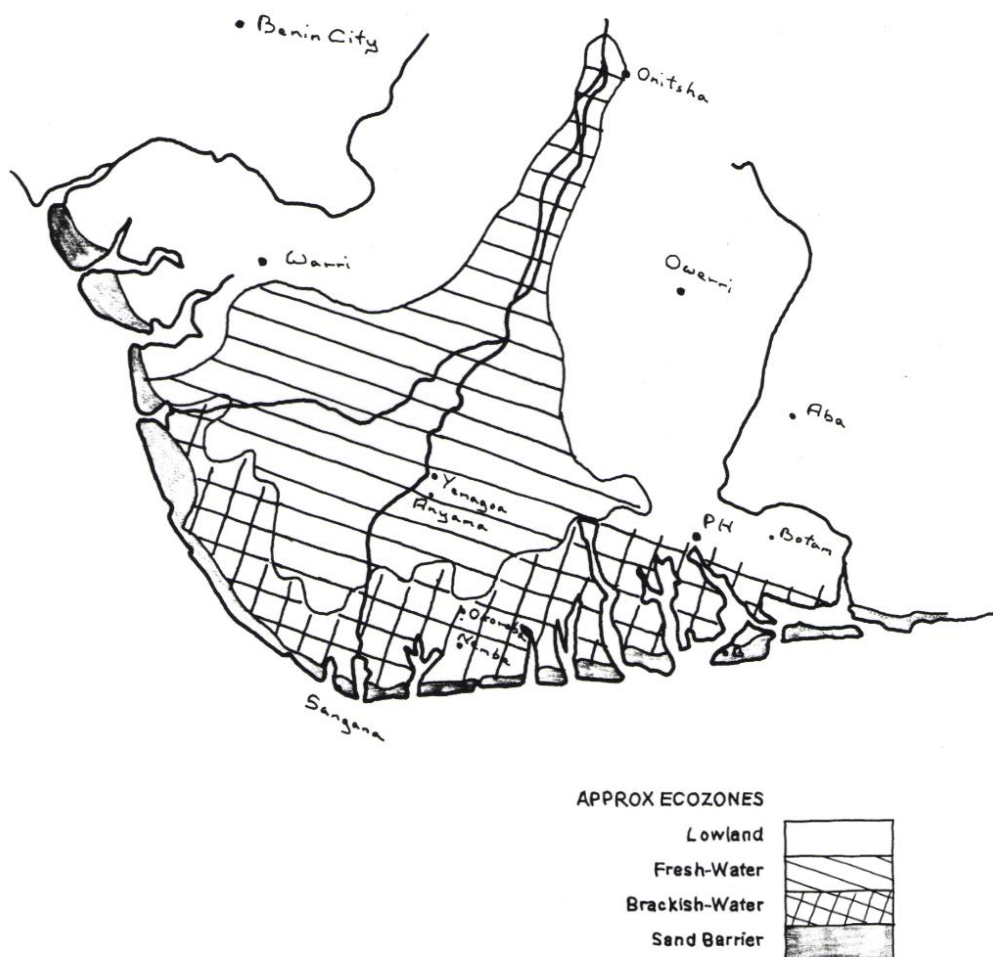
This publication contains the last, 21st, chapter of The Human Ecosystems of the Niger Delta, a handbook published by the Nigerian NGO, Environmental Rights Action (ERA) in 1998.²

The findings refer to conditions in 1995.

ERA defines the Niger Delta as five natural ecozones. Thus:

- i. Lowland Equatorial Monsoon
- ii. Fresh Water Alluvial Equatorial Monsoon
- iii. Brackish Water Alluvial Equatorial Monsoon ('mangroves')
- iv. Sand Barrier Islands of the Niger Delta
- v. Estuaries and In-Shore Waters of the Niger Delta

Figure 1: Niger Delta Ecozones



² See: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Niger_Delta_Ecosystems:_the_ERA_Handbook

Further unpublished information relating to the survey will be published in due course, meanwhile (2019), contact Nick Ashton-Jones via www.parkerstreetpublications.com

The final five chapters of the ERA handbook describe the ecological nature of a selected settlement within each of the four terrestrial ecozones in addition to Port Harcourt, which is the largest settlement.

Each settlement is described so as to emphasise the human nature of its ecosystem because, as the handbook states:

“. . . the modern landscape of the Niger Delta is a manifestation of human ecosystems. These have arisen out of [humanity’s] dynamic relationship with natural ecosystems. The relationship can also be understood as economic activity . . .”

Image 1: Lowland Equatorial Monsoon – Oil Palm and Cassava



The descriptions are based on an analysis of the Niger Delta ecosystem by way of four levels of understanding, thus:

Level I – Understanding the “Natural Ecosystem”, which is a theoretical state of affairs in which humanity is not involved.

Level II – Understanding the “Human Economic Impact” as an environmental impact assessment (EIA) of human activity.³

Level III – Understanding the human “Society” that evolves as humanity politically organizes itself in order to exploit natural resources.

Level IV – Understanding the “Resulting Human Landscape”.

Furthermore, the ERA handbook explains how the five prime ecozones can be further understood as a range of sub-ecozones and ecotones according to:

³ The Niger Delta itself and its ecosystem evolved – and continues to evolve – during our own human geological period (the Quaternary). Therefore, EIA involves an analysis of with and without scenarios whereby the significance of human activity is measured by the difference between how the ecosystem evolves and operates with human activity and without it.

“... five specific characteristics”. Either: they have deep soils where drainage is generally not a limiting factor (the Lowland Equatorial Monsoon); or they have a fresh-water regime, where, with the exception of levees, excessive soil moisture generally creates reduced soil conditions (the Fresh-Water ecozone); or they have a brackish-water regime, where excessive soil moisture creates reduced soil conditions (the Brackish-Water ecozone); or they are on a Niger Delta sand barrier island; or they are marine (the Estuary and Onshore Waters ecozone).”

In this way, therefore, as a good example, mangrove woodland evolves in brackish-water conditions (a mixture of sea and fresh water, the salt content of which depends upon tide and season) where a high water table limits the availability of soil oxygen.⁴

The ERA handbook describes “the environmental impact of modern people” on the Niger Delta as a two stage process.

“The first stage occurred before the recent accelerated growth in human population. In this stage the traditional activities of shifting agriculture and hunting, fishing and exploitation of forest products were distorted by contact with the industrialising European economy which introduced a strong market impact in all West African society creating an infinite demand for some of its products.”

⁴ At high tide, salt content increases as fresh-water flows are pushed upstream. In the wet season the volume of fresh water flowing towards the sea increases significantly. The reverse is the case in the dry season. At the point where ground water is exclusively fresh, plants intolerant of salty water take over; most significantly, the oil palm. As the soils become deeper, further inland and with rising altitude, so the more deep-rooting rainforest trees take over. For hundreds, indeed thousands, of years, humanity has modified the natural progression, for instance, by favouring raphia palm and by elevating the chicoco soils for rice production and settlement (the latter often aided by a prodigious accumulation of discarded periwinkle shells) and by cutting navigation channels. A cross-section of a sand barrier island taken from the ERA handbook indicates the complexity of the Niger Delta ecosystem. See

The “market impact” is analysed in terms of the slave trade, the palm-oil trade and the absorption of the Niger Delta into the British imperial economy.

“This stage one impact of modern people on the environment of what is now Southeast Nigeria had six effects as follows.

- ***“The stimulation, by economic activity, of population growth and urban development, which increased the demand for food.***
- ***“The intensification of shifting agriculture in the Lowland Equatorial Monsoon ecozone so that more land was brought into agriculture as farms and fallow-land at the expense of cultured forest, which was itself subjected to more intensive hunting and gathering in addition to increased exploitation for timber. Fallow periods became shorter, thus farms less productive and abandoned earlier.***
- ***“The Fresh-Water ecozone was more intensively exploited for fishing, hunting, gathering and timber.***
- ***“The rapid spread of oil palm in the Lowland Equatorial Monsoon ecozone because of its economic value and because the changing ecological conditions favoured it: the oil palm thrives in the light open conditions and it is fire resistant, even as a small seedling.***
- ***“The domination of the raffia palm in the swamp forests as light restricting timber species were removed.***
- ***“The introduction of useful exotic plants offset by an overall decline in biodiversity.”***

The ERA handbook, written in the late 1990s explains that the stage two impact:

“. . . through which we are living now, was initiated by a combination of a peaceful settled life, high agricultural production and health services. All these factors began to push the human population beyond ecological viability (by the 1960s), with growth rates of between 2.5% and 3% (doubling times of thirty and twenty-five years respectively). The environmental impact has been a rapid and continuing intensification of the six factors described above, to give the present modern human ecosystems. In the Niger Delta we can add to this an insatiable world demand for the region's oil and

a corrupt, inefficient and environmentally careless oil industry. The result is the sad condition of the human environment in the Niger Delta today.”

Thus, concludes ERA,

“The social development of the Niger Delta is based upon the human economic impact. Six striking social indicators are evident.”

Which are (summarized):

- i. Settlement determined by access to economic resources;
- ii. Growing human population and expanding settlement;
- iii. Economic priorities are changing, (tending towards urban employment);
- iv. Administrative priorities are changing (“to suit the financial demands of a central administration which is blind to the needs of local people”);
- v. Poverty prevails; and there is,
- vi. A low level of respect for authority.

The low level of respect for authority apparent at the time of surveying arose not only from the vicious military dictatorship of Sani Abacha whose dictatorship ended only with his death in 1998 but also from the endemic corruption and bad operating practices of the oil industry, both of which continue to this day.

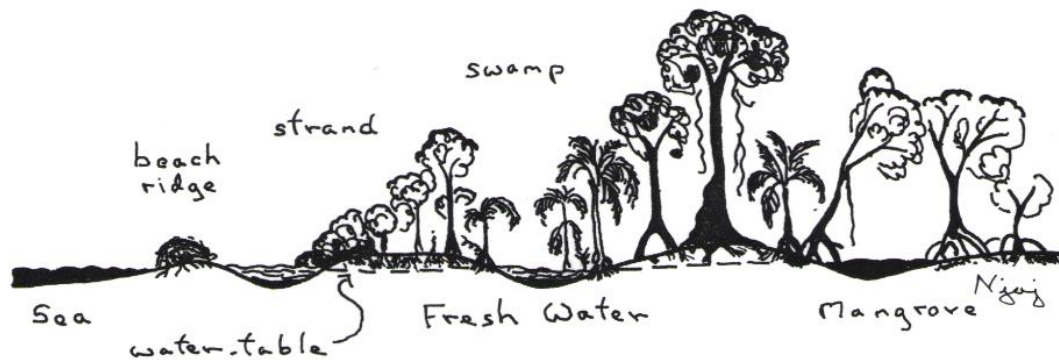
The four ecozone communities described by ERA are:

- i. The Botam-Tai Lowland Equatorial Monsoon ecozone;
- ii. The Anyama Freshwater Alluvial Equatorial Monsoon ecozone;
- iii. The Sangana and Akassa Sand Barrier Island ecozone; and
- iv. The Okoroba-Nembe Brackish Water Alluvial Equatorial ecozone (mangroves).

Each is described in relation to geographical location, topography, soils, the natural ecosystem (reconstructed), natural and viable society (pre-colonial society), modern society, the economy, the environment understood by local people, and political status.

Within this context of the wider Niger Delta, the subsequent survey was made of Port Harcourt as reproduced below.

Figure 2: Cross section of sand barrier island (from the ERA Human Ecosystems of the Niger Delta)



On re-reading, what was by necessity, a fairly rapid snapshot of the living conditions of a large proportion of Port Harcourt citizens, I am aware of its short-comings. However, I am proud that we were able to record the living conditions of the politically dispossessed. Conditions that have not improved in the quarter century that has passed. When I first visited the Niger Delta in order to record a human rights tragedy, I felt I was a 'voyeur', that I was 'in the way' and of no help to anyone. However, when I left the community the chief thanked me for taking the time to "live with us" for a few days. "Tell them what you saw," he called to as I left, "they'll believe you."

Image 2: Farmers of Okoroba, Bayelsa State, 1995

As part of the preface, I want to stress that the writing of the ERA Guide to The Niger Delta was the culmination of the efforts of a great many people associated with Environmental Rights Action in every conceivable way. Most important of all, the people of the Niger Delta, especially the host communities. Also, the many concerned people and organizations in Nigeria and elsewhere who supplied practical, moral and logistical support. Many of those who are reading this will know to whom I refer.



Lastly, I personally want to record an observation that I have verbally repeated many times but not until now written down. I was involved in the Niger Delta throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s. Sometimes I worked as an environmental and agronomic consultant, and I know that in one or two cases I was given work in order to keep me in the region. However, for most of the time, I worked as an interested activist, volunteer and witness. Nigeria has a reputation of being a violent and corrupt country and indeed I had a few 'hairy' experiences. Nonetheless, I got to all sorts of places, I got all sorts of information and I met all sorts of people in the army, in the police force, in the civil service, in the oil companies but rarely did I feel afraid, and never, ever, once did I have to pay a bribe. One time in Port Harcourt I asked a policeman to help me and offered him about US\$.10. No thanks, he said, you can do something when I've succeeded. He did succeed and that something was not allowed to be more than a drink in a bar when he was off duty. Another time, near Lake Chad, I was detained, apparently, for straying into a restricted military zone. The fairly junior OIC 'interrogated' me in his office. As a sign that money might pass between us I hooked my finger into my top shirt pocket. No thanks, he said, I'll look after you. And he did, taking me around the local tourist sites, insisting on buying me a coke and biscuits and putting me up for the night in the government guest house. I have dozens of similar stories about the help and hospitality I received from Nigerian people in all parts of the country. To say that I am in love with the people of Nigeria is an understatement.

The publication of this document is dedicated to the late Oronto Natie Douglas, the catalyst for so much of the action that ended in The ERA Guide to The Niger Delta and for other reasons that make him one of the greatest men involved in the struggle for justice in the Niger Delta.

Image 3: Oronto Douglas in the mangrove woodland near Sangana, Bayelsa State



Nick Ashton-Jones

Nick Ashton-Jones, April 2019

2 The Human Habitat of Port Harcourt

(Extracted from the ERA handbook, The Human Ecosystems of the Niger Delta)

2.1 Introduction

The modern city is the culmination of mankind's developmental processes and it is, for most of us, the environment in which we have to live.

The city is the future. When we look at Port Harcourt we see not only the lives of people now but also we see what life will be like for mankind in the 21st century. And, it is not an encouraging picture. Life for the great majority of people in Port Harcourt, as in most of the world's cities, is a grinding, daily struggle for survival in an environment that offers no comfort and little hope. Port Harcourt is devoid of sanitation, education or physical beauty. It is a reproach to all the technological advances of the twentieth century and must call into question the validity of what we glibly call development.

If modern cities are the result of humanity's struggle to improve its conditions over the past few hundred years, then that struggle should be judged to have failed dismally.

Yet, despite this gloomy picture, the human spirit, in its potential for optimism, joy and love, is as evident in Port Harcourt as it is in any place where people live together. The belief that tomorrow can be better is as evident in Port Harcourt as it is in any place where men and women seek to be good in bad times.

ERA's findings about Port Harcourt are based on a participatory survey of 1993/94. A summary of the findings make up the bulk of this chapter.

2.2 History

Port Harcourt is a colonial foundation and the impetus for its establishment was the need for a deep water port to serve a railway that would bring coal, discovered at Udi near Enugu in 1909, for export to other parts of Nigeria and West Africa. Moreover in his report on the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria in 1912, the Governor General, Sir Frederick Lugard, advocated the need to rationalise the exploitation of Nigerian products with a railway and Port to serve the eastern side of the country as a counter-balance to the Lagos rail head.

Box 1: According to Nwanodi,⁵

“ . . . in December 1912, Lugard . . . visited the ports along the coast to find a place where there was deep enough water near to firm high ground from which a railway could be built to Udi . . . When his party reached Okrika, they found high ground behind the island, but the depth of water in front . . . was not sufficient and while investigating this water their canoe ran aground. However, as this was the most encouraging area they had seen, on returning to Lagos, Lugard directed Lt. Hughes to proceed to the Okrika area to find a suitable site for the new port and railhead.

“Journeying west of Okrika through Isaka Creek, which was in fact the main channel of the Bonny River, Lt. Hughes' party found a harbour seven miles above Okrika, with water 70 feet deep and cliffs over 40 feet high along the north and east sides. At its narrowest bend the river was 200 feet across.”

In May 1913 the colonial administration enforced the Hargrove Agreement (named after the District Commissioner) acquiring approximately 25 square miles of farmland from the local people upon which to develop the town.

Box 2: The boundary of the town was described in the agreement as follows

"All the parcel of land bounded on the South by the waterway known as the Primrose Creek or Bonny River for a distance of three and a half miles more or less, on the West for a distance of five and a half miles more or less again by the waterway known as the Primrose Creek or Bonny River, thence in a northerly direction for a distance of one mile eight hundred yards more or less by the west bank of the Creek known as the Ilechi Creek, following the bends of the said creek, to a boundary Post marked "A" at Ilechi Waterside, thence for a distance of one mile one thousand and seventy three yards due north to a boundary post marked "B" on the north by a straight line measuring approximately five miles more or less from the Boundary Post marked "B" in a direction due east to a boundary Post marked "C" on the Creek known as the Woji Creek, on the East by the said Woji Creek for a distance approximately of one and a half miles more or less, thence by the waterway known as the Okrika Creek for a distance of six and a half miles more or less to the southern boundary referred to above containing in all an area of twenty five square miles more or less . . ."

The new town was named after the British Colonial Secretary of the day, the Right Honourable Lewis Harcourt. Construction started on a temporary wharf at the site of the present harbour towards the end of 1913 so that by the end of 1914 fifteen miles of railway were complete, and by the middle of 1916 the first loads of coal were arriving from Enugu via Aba. The town was carefully planned on the high ground west of the forty foot cliffs where Hughes' party landed in 1912 and which became the site of the harbour. Thus, as the map shows the railhead is sited beside the harbour and associated ware-houses; north of this area, west of the railway line, was the commercial centre, and west of this the spacious government reservation now known as the Old GRA; Southeast of the railway station and separated from the government reservation by quarter of a mile of open land, the

⁵ Judith (Judy) Nwanodi, The Historical Geography of Port Harcourt. 1988. Not published.

African township, now known as the Old Township, was laid out as a less spacious grid-iron of streets.

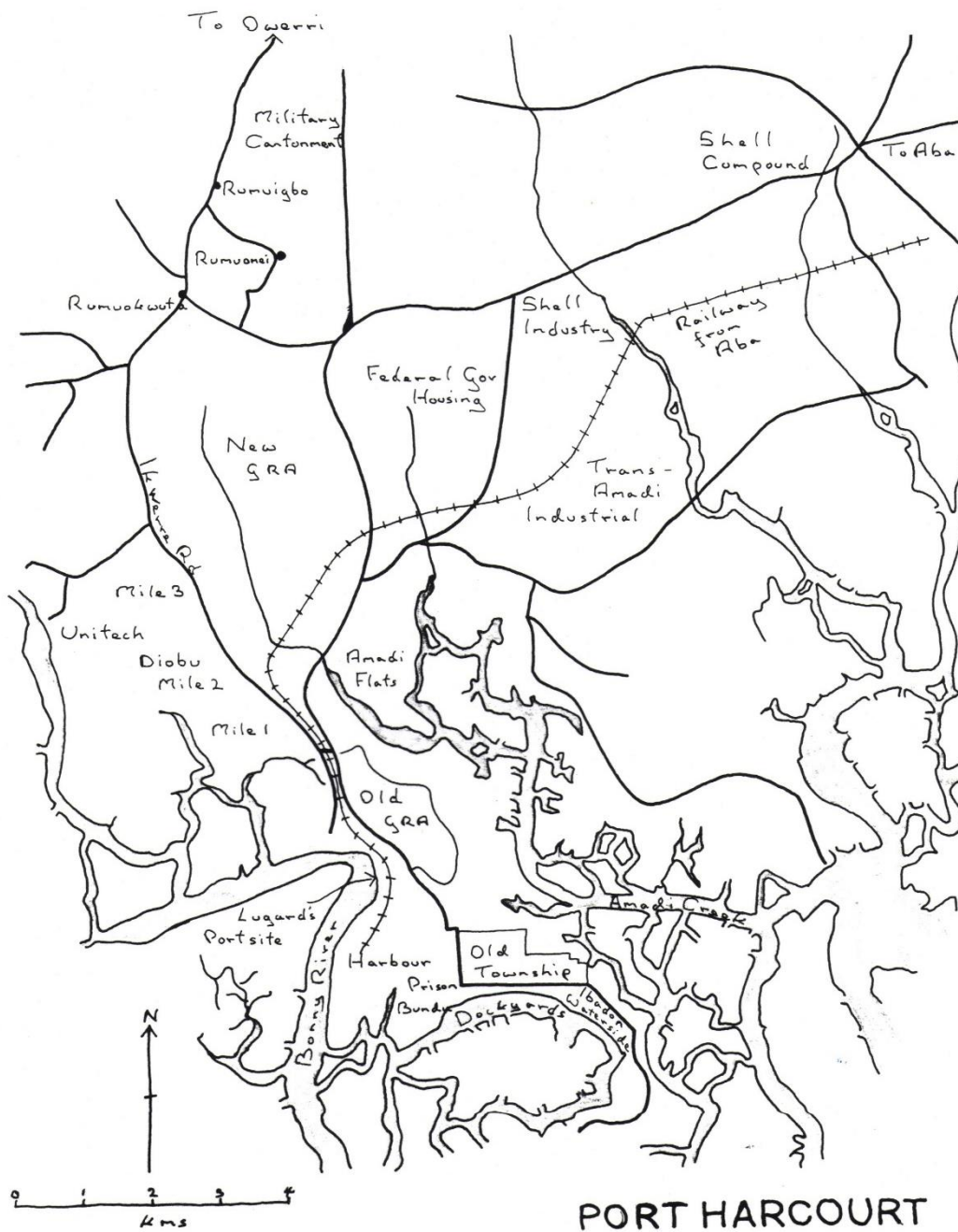
Image 4: Railway, Port Harcourt, 1995

From its inception Port Harcourt grew fast as the major port for Southeast Nigeria, becoming the provincial headquarters (originally of Owerri Province) in 1926, when government installations and departments were moved from Bonny. The official population for 1921 (i.e. the government reservation and the township) was 7,158, although the unofficial population would have been considerably more as at one time over 7000 labourers were estimated to be working on the wharves that were not completed until 1928 (Nwanodi). By 1953, the official population had reached 63,000 in Port Harcourt and neighbouring urban areas, but the actual figure was probably nearer 80,000.



The physical expansion of the city, between 1913 and 1953, largely took place on the high ground around the Old GRA and Old Township, between the Bonny River and Amadi Creek, and extending northwards along the line of the railway to Mile 3, Diobu.

Figure 3: Port Harcourt in 1995, showing locations mentioned



2.3 Modern Development

In 1956 Shell moved its South Eastern headquarters to Port Harcourt and in 1967 the city became the capital of the newly created Rivers State, both factors that enhanced the city's growth potential together with its strategic position as the main port of the South East of an independent and economically strong Nigeria. However, despite being ravaged in the civil war (June 1967 to January 1970) which temporarily decreased its population, the city's fastest period of growth commenced when the Niger Delta became one of the world's most important areas of oil production

in the 1970s at the same time as oil prices rose to their highest real historic levels. During this period, Nigeria was transformed into a middle income country and the richest in Africa.

In 1970 the total population of Port Harcourt was estimated to be 213,000, rising to 232,000 in 1973. Although these figures are for greater Port Harcourt (i.e., including Shell quarters, Rumuomasi, Rumuogba and Rumuokuta) they probably underestimate the unofficial waterside squatter settlements so that the real population of the city at the beginning of the 1970s was probably in excess of 250,000.

A number of factors contributed to the rapid growth of Port Harcourt from 1970 to the early 1980s. These were: job opportunities created by the city's position as the centre of the oil industry and a state capital; industrialisation and urbanisation generated by the oil industry and by the rapid growth of Nigeria's gross national product (an increase of 150% between 1975 and 1980); and the rapid growth of the national population (from about 40 million in 1960 to about 80 million in 1985), a disproportionate part of which was concentrated in the larger cities. Thus by 1980 it is likely that the population of greater Port Harcourt had reached 450,000.

Despite the collapse of oil prices in the early 1980s and the commensurate decline in Nigeria's gross national product (exacerbated by high interest rates on profligate borrowing in the late 1980s, so that GNP declined by 75% between 1981 and 1987, converting Nigeria back to a low income country), the reduction of urban employment opportunities caused by the Structural Adjustment Programme introduced in 1986, and further economic dislocation arising from the sudden abandonment of the SAP in 1993/4, the population of Port Harcourt continued and continues to grow fast upon the basis of accelerating rural impoverishment and its own large and youthful population base. Moreover, while Port Harcourt shares many of the current economic woes of Nigeria, as the centre of the oil industry it is comparatively advantaged and it is probably growing faster than other urban areas in the country (for instance, recently Shell has relocated administrative staff from Lagos to Port Harcourt, and its sub-contractors are following suit). Thus the current World Bank estimate of a greater Port Harcourt population of around one million (about 25% of the population of the old Rivers State) is probably correct.

Image 5: The wealth of the Niger Delta. Gas flaring, Kolo Creek 1994



2.4 The Modern City - Trends and Future Development

The rapid population growth of Port Harcourt between 1953 and 1994 has pushed the physical limits of the city northwards outside the restricted high ground between the Bonny River and the Amadi Creek. Thus for about ten kilometres up the Ikwerre and Aba Roads (as far as the Shell housing and administrative complex) creating a western biased fan shaped urban complex with its southern apex at the Rivers State Government Secretariat. Urban outliers extend the fan loosely to Uniport and Choba at the Old Calabar River crossing, and to Obigbo where the Aba Road crosses the Imo River, both places where Port Harcourt commuters are building houses on cheaper land. (Also, people commute from Owerri, Aba and Bori.) A smaller fan shaped complex extends about two kilometres to the south of the secretariat including the Old Township and its associated extensions limited to some degree by the low-lying swamps further south, but extending Southwest as a narrow arm to Borokiri. Moreover, major industrial complexes are extending the urban area on the high ground west of the Bonny River and encouraging expansion along the Bori Road. These developments include the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) refinery just Northwest of Okrika Island, the National Fertiliser Company of Nigeria (NAFCON) at Onne, Onne Port, and the petrochemical works being constructed at Eleme.

The modern city is no less divided than the city plan of 1913. On the one hand are extensive planned layouts to the North, such as

the three phases of the new GRA, the Federal Government housing scheme, the Shell residential layout, the Trans Amadi industrial area, and the smaller layouts between these areas. On the other hand there are the unplanned areas based on the original settlements of the area (such as at Rumuokuta on the Ikwerre Road and at Oroabali west of the Aba Road) and unofficial settlements particularly on the watersides.

The waterside settlements are a feature of the modern city, providing land near to the city centre for people who have nowhere else to go and it is perhaps symbolic that the first settler at the Bundu Waterside established herself in 1954 (personal comments of Mama Bundu to O.N. Douglas). Such settlements are an extension of the city into unsuitable swamplands to the South, and although some of these areas have been sand-filled they will remain subject to flooding and poor drainage.

Image 6: Mama Bundu with two of her children at Bundu Waterside, Port Harcourt, 1995



Port Harcourt is a prime concentration of industry most of which may be said to be environmentally hazardous, including the oil and petroleum industry, metal fabricating, fertiliser, engineering, food processing, paint, plastic, tyres, enamelling, gas bottling, and glass manufacture.

Modern Port Harcourt is typical of a medium sized industrial and administrative city in the developing world. Thus large areas of the city are officially laid out for residential, industrial, commercial and administrative purposes, but the majority of the residents live, and much of the commercial and industrial activity takes place in unplanned and unofficial places. Also, growth is rapid and extends into areas that are unsuitable for human habitation. Houses in most areas are overcrowded while basic public services such as treated water, sewage and refuse disposal, and electricity supply are either

basic, erratic, or non-existent, in even the most salubrious areas; and pollution levels are high.

The destiny of Port Harcourt is to become the centre of a major conurbation the impetus for growth of which is the oil industry and the continuing rapid regional population growth. Within the next 40 years, trends suggest that the city will become the centre of a conurbation extending North and East in a semi-circle radiating 15-20 kilometres from the State Government Secretariat and extending from the Old Calabar River to the high ground east of the Bonny River. Tentacles will stretch through to Bonny, to Bori, along the main road to Warri, and across the Imo River to Aba. Outlying parts of the conurbation will include Owerri, Aba and Ikot Abasi, giving it a population of between 3 and 5 million people.

2.5 Ecological Setting

Port Harcourt was founded on the very edge of the West African Lowland Equatorial Monsoon ecozone defined as the high ground above the Bonny River, which is the tertiary raised coastal plain of Nigeria. This Port Harcourt ecozone contains as sub-ecozone small areas of West African Fresh-Water Alluvial Monsoon ecosystems, for instance along the Diobu river before it becomes brackish as the Diobu Creek at Amadi Flats. The Lowland Equatorial Monsoon ecozone is the most suitable for urban development within the Niger Delta because the soils are comparatively deep and well drained (which, coupled with high rainfall, is why the natural vegetation climax is a dense tropical rainforest of tall trees). It is in this ecozone that the northward growth of Port Harcourt is occurring.

Image 7: Botem-Tai, Ogoniland, 1995, indicates the Port Harcourt landscape before foundation in 1911. The Lowland Equatorial Monsoon ecozone



However, and conversely, the Brackish-water Alluvial Monsoon ecozone upon which the unofficial waterside and official sand-filled development is taking place is not suitable for human settlement having a high brackish water table and being subject to flooding. Naturally the vegetation climax of this ecozone is mangrove

woodland, although, in the unlikely event of the area being deserted by mankind a post-modern ecological climax would include the Nipa-palm, an exotic plant introduced into Nigeria at the beginning of this century.

The waste products of Port Harcourt have a dramatic impact on the Brackish-water ecosystem of the city, especially as the wastes are not easily flushed out of the system into the sea because tides tend to push them back up the Bonny Estuary. Organic products, such as oil, human sewage, and vegetable and animal refuse, may to a certain degree have a positive impact by enriching the nutrient source at the beginning of the food chain. However, if the system is overloaded with such products Biological Oxygen Demand (BOD) by bacteria and other micro-organisms that breakdown the wastes becomes so high that dissolved oxygen in the water is depleted, limiting and even entirely obliterating fish and aquatic plant life. Non-degradable or slowly degradable man-made products, such as plastics, become physically incorporated into the soil structure; but more serious are inorganic compounds, such as heavy metals, which are the by-products of industrial processes, which build up and concentrate down the food chain possibly to toxic levels, and particularly in the filter feeding arthropods and molluscs. There may be excessively high levels of the heavy metals cadmium and lead in the Bonny River.

Image 8: Waste products incorporated into the soil at Bundu Waterside, 1995. Bathhouse-latrine



Also, the physical impact of human settlement in addition to the associated commercial and industrial activity readily destroys the viability of the Brackish-water ecozone because of its comparatively low biodiversity. The stinking, sewage-strewn, plastic-

riddled, polluted and dead mud flats along the Bonny River near Port Harcourt (many of which are now human settlement sites) were mangrove woodland a few decades or even only a few years ago. Ironically there is a well-meaning but ignorant policy to sand-fill most of the Brackish-water ecozone around the city.

The conservation of the ecologically sensitive and valuable mangrove woodland around Port Harcourt and along the Bonny Estuary is important for the health and economic well-being of the city and its region, and for food such as periwinkles.

2.6 The Survey Locations

ERA surveyed eight locations in Port Harcourt, shown on

Figure 3, page 12 above. These included two illegal waterside settlements called Bundu and Ibadan, and legal but unplanned settlements at Rumuchida, to the north west of the city (Ikwerre road), at Diobu Mile I (Abakaliki Street), and in the Old Township (Aggrey Road). These settlements represent the condition of the great majority of the residents of Port Harcourt, being very overcrowded and unsanitary, made up of mainly one-room houses rarely more than 10 m² in size with little space around them. Three other survey locations - a private estate in the GRA Phase III, a Federal Government estate and the servants' quarters in a compound at Amadi Flats - contrast much better conditions, representing a more fortunate minority of residents who, nonetheless, share with everyone else in Port Harcourt, a lack of piped water, erratic electricity supply, bad refuse collection, bad transport facilities, and a generally poor urban environment, as well as a certain amount of overcrowding. We did not survey the luxury housing of the Port Harcourt and Rivers State elite because this does not represent the conditions of the mass of Port Harcourt

citizens, although it does take up a disproportionate area of the city's land.

The waterside settlements represent the worst living conditions in the city. Although population densities (at around 1500 persons per hectare) are not the highest, the insecurity of tenure (the ever-present threat of government clearance) encourages very bad building methods and maintenance (with notable exceptions) often using unsuitable materials, and shambolic layout patterns. Moreover, the low-lying position of the settlements, often on chicoco (the acid sulphate soils of the Brackish-water ecozone) reclamation, means that drainage is poor leading to very bad sanitation in some places and even flooding. Tens of thousands of people live in the waterside settlements forced into them by extreme poverty, and although many live hopeless lives, a number have good jobs in government and private service but are nonetheless paid grossly inadequate wages. Rents are in the region of N100 per month (1994 = ca. US\$2-3) which many residents, including those in employment, find difficult to pay.

The compound at Ikwerre Road is typical of many in the city. Once it was a comparatively spacious single (often farming) family compound that has, under the pressure of demand for housing from the rapidly expanding city, become a dense agglomeration of rooms

Image 10: Interior, Ikwerre Road, 1995



fitted into every available space housing the landlord's family and a large multi-cultural population of immigrant tenant families. In layout and room-design such compounds do not differ greatly from the waterside settlements and may be even more unsanitary because human waste cannot be disposed of directly into the water.



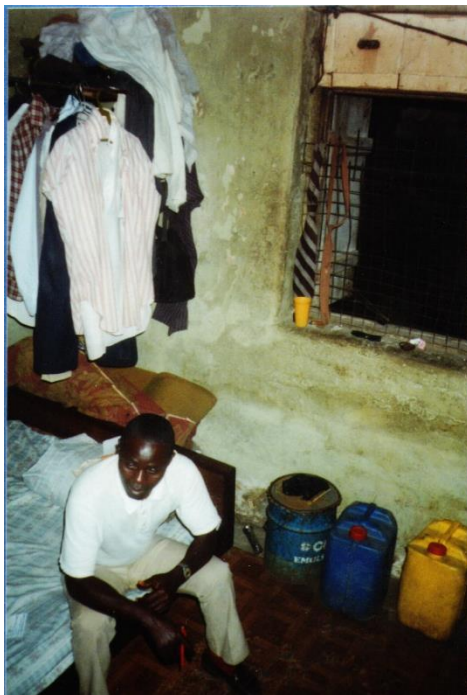
Image 9: Ablution block, Ikwerre Road, 1995

Also, being inland and often beside badly designed main roads as ribbon development, these types of compounds generally suffer more air and noise pollution, and worse ventilation. However building methods are better because of the landlord's security of tenure

and population densities (800-1000 persons per hectare) are not amongst the highest in the city because the buildings are single storey and the layout is anarchic, although open space is severely limited. Rents are around N300 (1994) per room per month, which is why so many of the city's residents prefer to live at the waterside.

In contrast to Ikwerre Road, the compound at Abakaliki Street is more typical of the housing developments that took place in the city before the frantic growth after the civil war. It is very well laid out and designed but, and perhaps because of this, it has the most overcrowded conditions that we surveyed, at 2008 persons per hectare, although the living conditions were otherwise comparatively well organised and (given the general problems of Port Harcourt) sanitary.

Image 11: Interior, 16 Aggrey Road, 1995



The compound at Aggrey Road is also fairly typical. Its condition falls somewhere between Ikwerre Road and Abakaliki Street, with a population density of about 1000 persons per hectare. It was here that we found the worst overcrowding: a family of 13 living in one room.

The conditions of the GRA Phase III Federal Government housing estates are, in contrast, much superior to the others with European design bungalows and apartments and good urban population densities. Nonetheless the housing designs are not suited to a humid tropical climate, or to the social nature of Nigerian extended families. Thus a two bedroom, first floor apartment does not suit a 13 person household, particularly where water has to be carried in for washing, bathing and flushing a cistern reservoir lavatory.

The servants quarters at Amadi Flats represent a realistic ideal and target for Port Harcourt. That is if it had running water (or even a

convenient stand-pipe), with a family of eight living in two rooms with its own bathroom and kitchen and plenty of outside space for living, relaxing and domestic farming.

2.7 The Residents

Many people were interviewed by ERA and conversations held with numerous others, and it is their stories that constitute the raw material of the ERA survey of Port Harcourt. Yet we recognise that every individual human condition is unique and to generalise is to belittle the singular humanity of the storytellers. Conditions vary from unemployed deserted wives with children to feed; to happy-go-lucky close-knit families who make a living in all sorts of legal and illegal ways; to young single men and women hopeful of some success in life; to old people waiting to die in squalid and hopeless conditions.

2.8 Cultural and Social Issues

Port Harcourt is a city of immigrants most of whom are driven to the city because of poverty in search of work. The majority come from other parts of the old Rivers State and then primarily from Imo, Akwa Ibom, Delta and Abia States in that order.

The living conditions of the city are mitigated to some extent by the traditional extended family which is the only form of welfare. Conversely however the tradition of extended family responsibility makes overcrowding in houses worse.

Despite the perseverance of the extended family and its benefits the conditions of overcrowding and of high unemployment mitigate against the health of the family structure. Married men who are not heads of households often have to live without their families and families often split up when the head loses his job. Nonetheless the family spirit rises above many of the disadvantages of living in Port Harcourt.

Mass migration to Port Harcourt also dislocates cultural structure. Most people, in a wide socio-economic class range, expressed the ideal that they were temporarily in the city and wished to return home. However, in reality, because of economic constraints and because of a sense of failure it seems that only the successful return home. As a result many children grow up without any contact with their cultural roots or wider families, and an extensive entirely urban-orientated younger generation is developing, that is to a large extent economically, socially and emotionally deprived, forming the basis of a culture is to some extent anti-social.

Common antidotes to the cultural privations of Port Harcourt life are religion and drugs.

The indigenous people who live on the land that is being taken up by Port Harcourt suffer the same cultural dislocations as the immigrants only more so because they lose forever the option of returning to their villages. In particular such dislocation is suffered by the Ikwerre people to the North of Port Harcourt and the Okrika people to the South. In fact the Okrika culture is especially endangered by the growth of greater Port Harcourt and may disappear altogether in the not too distant future.

One aspect of the recent history of Port Harcourt has been the inter-cultural conflicts, however without being able to delve too deeply into these sensitive issues we encountered more cooperation than conflict, and we conclude that inter-cultural conflict is the result of outside organisation.

2.9 Economic Issues

Poverty in rural areas (exacerbated by the city itself which consumes a disproportionate amount of limited development capital) is the reason why most people come to Port Harcourt, and on arrival poverty stares them in the face. This poverty is real because most incomes are way below the level needed to support even basic needs: we estimate that a family of six needs an income of N15,720 per month for food, water, fuel and rent only; N6710 per month if they survive on a starvation diet. This does not include clothes, education and essential household items.

Official gross salary scales in the city range between N700 per month for a police constable recruit, to N2826 for a graduate assistant at Unitech, to N5068 per month for a senior civil servant (health Service grade 15, step 8). The minority who work securely in the oil and related industries have much higher salaries of up to ten times the civil and public service rates.

Thus Port Harcourt is an economically schizophrenic city containing a small minority of First World citizens and a large majority of poor Third World citizens. It is no wonder that people resort to corruption and crime to raise their incomes.

Most people see employment as the antidote to poverty, yet many are unemployed, and many incomes come from self-employment in petty trading, servicing and industry.

The mass of citizens in Port Harcourt do not form part of or benefit from the prime economic activity of the area which is the oil industry and the associated oil servicing industry. Income equity is

unbalanced and in terms of development there is very little "trickling down" of wealth through society.

Image 12: Poverty in Port Harcourt, 1995



Because the majority of the citizens of Port Harcourt are poor, the wealth generation capacity of the city is low. Low rents do not represent an economic return on the landlord's investment so that there is no free market incentive to build houses for poor people. House-building activity is a major economic engine and we saw no house building activity outside the GRAs. However a noticeable feature of self-employment is the predominance of people from Imo and Abia States who not only seem to choose self-employment in preference to being employed but also seem to succeed well at whatever they choose to do. They probably enhance the economy of Port Harcourt for its "Third World" citizens more than the oil industry or the government.

2.10 Social Infrastructure and the Urban Environment

The paradox of so much poverty amongst such plenty is often commented upon by residents of Nigeria and visitors alike and nowhere is this paradox more evident than in Port Harcourt where the fabulous wealth generated by the oil industry (at home and abroad) and the riches of the surrounding country contrast strongly with the grinding poverty of the city. (Clichés, but nonetheless true). Because of poverty, the mass of the citizens have little economic power so that their needs are not met and consequently the social infrastructure of the city and its environment are very poor.

Piped water was not available in any of the survey locations when we visited them although water pipes serve most of the city. Thus water supply effectively comes from untreated public and private bore holes.

Refuse collection and dumping is inefficient and badly managed, so that rubbish is a health hazard in compounds, at collection points and at dumps.

There is no sewage system in Port Harcourt so that human waste is disposed of in septic tanks, pits, drains and open water. The major problems for the disposal of human waste are equally a shortage of latrines and a shortage of water.

As a result of the bad management of waste and poor drainage, storm water is polluted and in many parts of the city causes flooding.

Electricity supply is erratic and public street lighting does not exist over most of the city, and where it does, is poorly maintained.

Health facilities are poor and unable to cope with the "alarming" spread of Tuberculosis caused by over-crowded accommodation, poor diet and economic stress, or with the wide range of diseases caused by the poor sanitation. Although the basic facilities and staff numbers are adequate, and staff skills are good, health services are under-funded and suffer from the inadequate supply of basic services that is common to the whole city: thus it cannot operate efficiently and staff moral is low. Most of the citizens are too poor to afford proper medical attention and thus resort to the ill-advised use of patent medicines and drugs.

The health problems of Port Harcourt are mainly caused by poverty and poor water supply, and public health policy seems to be concerned with treating the symptoms of poor health rather than the causes.

Education facilities are scandalous and we use the word advisably, showing what amounts to contempt for the up and coming generation of adults in Port Harcourt and the region. That students and children in the public sector receive any education at all (remembering that study is impossible in their over-crowded homes) is a credit to the genius of their lecturers and teachers.

Provision of open spaces and other recreational facilities is limited in most of the city outside the Old GRA and Township where they are threatened with poor management and a lack of forward planning. Recreation appears to be dominated by church going and playing or watching football.

The prime use of transport in Port Harcourt is for getting to and from work. In general it is expensive (in relation to incomes), inefficient and dangerous.

2.11 Social Infrastructure and the Urban Environment - Housing

Housing is the most obvious demonstration of Port Harcourt's poor social infrastructure, and indicates why the city so manifestly fails the majority of its citizens. The housing reality for most people is four to six people living in one small room of less than 10m². Moreover, the house is in a compound that does not have a water supply for much of the time, where each person shares a toilet with thirty to forty others and a bathroom with perhaps more, where the overall population density is from 1000-2000 persons per hectare, and where the only open space is the street.

Despite this reality, government housing policy appears to concentrate on the creation of GRAs, government housing schemes that provide houses with rental values of above N40,000 p.a., and a few inadequate "resettlement" schemes of small "flats" (bungalows) which are supposed to rehouse people evicted from illegal waterside settlements (only a few dozens of expensive houses when what the city needs is thousands of additional rooms every year to ensure that the illegal housing problem gets no worse).

Port Harcourt has failed to even attempt to provide decent housing to its citizens. This is because economic power does not lie with the majority of citizens who are poor and who therefore cannot affect the free market in housing: the minority of citizens are rich and it is their spending power that influences housing policy. Because income is so badly distributed capital investment for housing is concentrated on building a few large houses for the elite

minority, and no small houses for the poor majority. If incomes were better distributed economic rents could be charged at the bottom end of the market stimulating the construction of affordable, if basic, housing for the majority.

To improve housing conditions marginally the government needs to encourage the construction of 10-20,000 two-room houses with water every year for 10-20 years, at a cost that is unlikely to be less than US\$4-6 billion. A lot of money, but which would, in the right economic conditions, greatly stimulate the local economy.

Similarly, other parts of the social infrastructure of Port Harcourt have developed in response to market forces which are dominated by the minority economic elite, for instance there is no water because the elite can afford sink bore holes, diverting capital away from public water projects.

Image 13: An alley between houses in Port Harcourt, mid-day, 1995



2.12 The Urban Environment

Because the social infrastructure of Port Harcourt has developed in response to the needs of the economic elite the urban environment is poor.

Domestic Water and Sanitation standards are low because there is no sewage treatment, no treated water, no piped water (for most of the time), and garbage collection and treatment is badly managed. As a result easily preventable diseases such as hepatitis A, diarrhoea, gastro-enteritis, typhoid, intestinal parasites and food poisoning prevail and, because of poverty and poor health facilities, can be fatal especially amongst children.

Domestic overcrowding is a serious problem. Population densities range between 1000 and 2000 persons per hectare in many residential areas of the city. Average room densities range between 2.5 to 5.5 persons per room, in rooms that are rarely

larger than 10 m², with personal indoor living space averaging about 2.4 m² per person for most of the city. Diseases such as tuberculosis, influenza and meningitis are easily transmitted in such conditions where poor environmental sanitation is exacerbated.

Environmental hazards associated with the work-place are common in Port Harcourt because of the wide occurrence of unregulated commercial and industrial businesses, because much work is done at home, because the work place is often the road-side, and because public health standards are easy to circumnavigate. Such hazards include dangerous concentrations of toxic chemicals and dust, inadequate lighting, ventilation and space, and lack of protection of workers from machinery and noise.

Many house sites in Port Harcourt are unsuitable. Often, they are on land prone to flooding or tidal inundation that has been poisoned with mis-managed landfill. They may be beside very busy and badly managed main roads where residents are subject to physical danger and high levels of dust and the fumes from motor vehicles containing carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and lead. The levels of lead may be toxic.

Image 14: Police Barracks, Port Harcourt, 1995

The open spaces in Port Harcourt are inadequate so that many children and young people has limited access to safe places for play, sport and social activities.

Port Harcourt produces a lot less refuse than European cities of the same size, but it is badly managed and seriously pollutes the urban environment.



Disease vectors encouraged by the unsanitary conditions of the city include mosquitoes (malaria, filariasis, dengue fever and yellow fever), cockroaches (hepatitis A and diarrhoea), scabies mites, and body lice and fleas (typhus).

Port Harcourt and its region is an important industrial centre producing a number of toxic and potentially hazardous wastes. The two oil refineries emit into the air sulphur oxides, nitrogen oxides,

particulates, carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons, and into the water, benzene, heavy metals and high concentrations of dissolved petroleum hydrocarbons. The National Fertilizer Company of Nigeria (NAFCON) produces the highest quantities of waste water in the Niger Delta at 10,000 cubic metres a day, mainly containing Nitrogen compounds. Other industries in the area are likely to produce, amongst other wastes, asbestos, acids, arsenic, caustic soda, cyanide, heavy metals, nitrogen compounds, oils, phosphate compounds, and vinyl chloride: all potentially toxic.

The problem is not so much the amount of toxic wastes that the industrial city produces but that within a culture of poor and corruptible management there is always the risk that control standards will be lax and circumnavigated. For the same reason, and because Port Harcourt is a port, there is the ever present danger of the illegal importation and dumping of toxic wastes from Europe. No less of a danger to an industrial area such as Port Harcourt is the export of dirty industries from Europe where strictly enforced environmental controls make them uneconomic (the Aluminium plant at Ikot Abasi is a good example).

The environment of Port Harcourt is particularly susceptible to water pollution from human and industrial wastes. Recent research suggests that levels of Cadmium, Lead and Nitrates exceed World Health Organisation recommended safety levels in a number of local rivers.

Image 15: Water supply, Bundu Waterside, 1995

Air pollution is not as serious a problem as water pollution, but the fact that at least one major oil company breaks its own rules about air pollution standards in other parts of Rivers State gives cause for concern. The most serious air pollutant is probably lead and dust from traffic for those who live and work beside main roads.



2.13 The psychological issues

The inhabitants of Port Harcourt suffer psychological stress because of social dislocation, poverty, the poor urban environment, and a sense of failure. Such stress reduces physiological efficiency, induces depression which lowers intellectual energy and efficiency, causes irrational and violent behaviour (sometimes in terms of the "mob"), and encourages some people to withdraw from society altogether. All this not only has an economic cost to society as a whole, but also conspires to destroy the Joy of Living, defeat hope and to cripple human happiness. And of what value is any society and system that results in so much human misery and degradation?

2.14 Participation in Urban Management

From the foundation of Port Harcourt in 1913 there has been very little participation by local people in its planning and management: it has known repression, indifference and occasionally, even misguided benevolence, from colonial, military and civilian rulers alike. No organic democratic institutions have been allowed to develop so that the city has been inefficiently planned on a European model unsuited to African social institutions and for the benefit of the economic elite. As a result the needs of the majority have been ignored.

2.15 The impact of Port Harcourt on its region

A city is a living thing: it consumes resources to live, digests them and produces wastes that it has to evacuate. It is the impact of this consumption and evacuation on the surrounding country that defines the city's region.

Port Harcourt consumes land for housing, education, industrial, military, commercial and administrative purposes; for roads, and airports; and for rubbish dumps. Also it consumes people from rural areas depriving them of labour and of their best brains. And it consumes resources for its essential survival, and for its industries.

Port Harcourt evacuates wastes as refuse, gases and liquids, particularly in the form of water pollution.

Image 16: Scavenging for rubbish on Port Harcourt's Eastern Bypass, 1995

The ecological footprint of Port Harcourt (the impact that its consumption and evacuation has on the regional ecology) is large and especially on the fragile Fresh-water, Brackish-water, Estuarine and Offshore water ecozones of the



Niger Delta. The Brackish-water ecozone is especially fragile and threatened by Port Harcourt.

However, although there is no doubt that Port Harcourt has a strong and negative impact on the Niger Delta in terms of its evacuation, in terms of consumption, the influence of the city is not so easily measured. This is because the area's valuable resources (oil, timber, fish) are demanded throughout the region and the world, with Port Harcourt acting only as an export point.

2.16 Conclusions

Port Harcourt is a fast growing city and will be the centre of a large industrial conurbation early in the next century. For the majority of citizens living conditions are overcrowded and unsanitary, and their access to basic services is poor with no prospect of things getting any better and a strong likelihood of them getting worse.

The main reason for the bad living conditions is poverty which is the result of economic injustice which diverts wealth away from the majority citizens to a minority elite resulting in low wages, low capital investment in urban infrastructure, and insufficient budgets to maintain services. Because the majority of the citizens are poor and thus have little economic power, what improvements are made to the city do little to benefit them. In particular most incomes are insufficient to pay the economic rents necessary to stimulate the private construction of low cost housing. Moreover poverty means that people cannot pay for the services that they need. Also poverty encourages corruption in civil servants which makes the management of the city and the provision of basic services inefficient.

A better distribution of wealth would stimulate the internal city economy including the construction of low cost housing and reduce poverty. However such an improvement could only result from a reform of the macro-economic policy of Nigeria as a whole, which is unlikely. Similar reform is also necessary to reduce the rural poverty that induces people to migrate to Port Harcourt, and is similarly unlikely.

Thus the city's chronic housing shortage is set to get worse so that living conditions will continue to decline commensurably. However, as much of the infrastructure already exists to provide piped water to most of the city, it should at least be possible to improve the water situation with better management, and thus to raise levels of sanitation and reduce the incidence of easily preventable diseases and thus health costs.

Otherwise the future of Port Harcourt looks grim: living conditions will get worse and, in particular, the physical and mental health of the population will decline further, putting additional strains on an already chronically disabled health service. The answer to better health is not, of course, just better treatment, but better living conditions.

In terms of city management, not only are tens of thousands of new houses required every year in addition to improved water provision and better waste disposal services, but also better management and higher civil service salaries to discourage corruption. Planning needs to be based on a regional Greater Port Harcourt development plan of some sort. However, given the present socio-economic political conditions, such a plan is unlikely to be adhered to, so that, in any event, a great deal of the future growth will be in the form of illegal residential settlements. However such a plan might be able to ensure that industry is sensibly sited and that adequate provision is made for basic services such as water to the places where development (legal or otherwise) is likely to take place. Moreover it is necessary to discourage settlement in unsuitable low-lying locations and encourage settlement on the higher ground (in the LEM ecozone) perhaps with the provision of basic services such as water and transport to the places of employment.

The ecological footprint of the city on the Niger Delta will become heavier particularly in terms of water pollution of the Bonny Estuary and associated offshore waters. Also with increased

industrialisation and dependence on motor transport air pollution will become more of a problem than it is now.

The long term economic health of the area will depend upon five factors:

- i. industrial diversification, so that the economy is not entirely dependent upon oil;
- ii. successful rural development in terms of agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, so that economic development throughout the region is balanced, which will reduce the rural-urban drift;
- iii. maintenance of the ecological integrity of the Niger Delta as a whole by integrating environmental management into the development process, and thus conserving the valuable resources of the Niger Delta that contribute to the wealth of the city;
- iv. a more equitable distribution of wealth to encourage private house building and to stimulate the internal economy; and
- v. an improvement in the standards of urban management.

Image 17: Growing up in Port Harcourt, 1995



3 Some Residents' Statements⁶

3.1 Mrs Azogu

Mrs. A, who comes from Oguta in Imo State, lives in one room at Ikwerre Road, for which she pays N300 (1994) per month. She is 36, has 5 children who live with her, aged between 9 and 17 years, and her husband has left her. Mrs Azogu's room, in which the whole family lives, measured about 9.5m². The ceiling is falling down and it contains only a double bed and mattress, a bench, a kerosene stove, a plastic bucket, a table, and cooking and eating equipment.

“My husband is not here. He is unemployed in Lagos. All my children are in school. My husband has not been here for two years. He has abandoned us. I have Primary 6. I got to secondary class 3. I got pregnant in class 3 and couldn't continue. There was a time when things were good. That time he was working in Delta NEPA at Ugheli. He has since been retrenched.

“I manage. I pay N75 per term for each of my two children. Last term I paid N1,800 for my third son to get admission. I am not happy. Life is not kind to me. The money I make is just not enough to feed my children and pay house rent. Five of us live in the room. My junior sister, myself and three of my children. When my two children are on holiday, we are seven. Every day I go to the market and spend about N500 except on Sundays.

“Sometimes I make a profit (on selling in the market) of N50. At other times I make N100. Sometimes I lose. The day before yesterday and Tuesday I ran at a loss but at least my children ate.

“I take my children to the School of Health when they are sick. Sometimes they complain of stomach trouble and stooling and vomiting. At other times it is Malaria.”

⁶ Some of the residents' statements have been quoted in the final section 3. Oronto's notebooks are part of the Oronto Douglas Papers held by De Montfort University. <https://specialcollections.catalogue.dmu.ac.uk/records/D/083>

3.2 Mr and Mrs E

Image 18: View from Mr E's club

Mr E, from Akwete in Imo State, is 52, married, with 6 children, and lives mainly by running a small club that he has built on stilts over a piece of degraded and thoroughly polluted mangrove swamp overlooking an oil storage tank farm and surrounded by toilets. He was doing comparatively well because he manages to send his eldest child to school in Aba which costs him about N15,000 per year.



His house is good by Bundu standards, having a bit of land around it. It has 2 rooms: one (9m² with a front veranda about 1m deep) is part of a line of similar rooms which have concrete foundations and floors and timber frames with an external skin of corrugated galvanised sheets and an inner skin of plywood including ceiling; a second room is similar in plan but entirely constructed of wood, and is placed opposite the first so that there is a covered space, 2m wide, between the two rooms; at the rear of the second building is a simple lean-to store (6m²). The general condition of the buildings, like most in the waterside is very poor and is particularly noticeable in the roof which is a mass of small bits of corrugated galvanised sheets that are rusting away fast. Nonetheless because of the position, ventilation is good, although offset by the obvious sewage smell coming from the nearby polluted creek at low tide.

In the main room there is a music centre, a fridge, a table fan, a gas stove and two cylinders (but now too expensive to use), a double bed and mattress, a coffee table, an armchair and a stool; here sleep Mr and Mrs E and their youngest daughter. In the second room is used as a kitchen and the bedroom for the rest of the family, and it contains an iron sprung bed, a coffee table, a kerosene stove, a yam pounder, a cupboard, crates of empty mineral bottles, a plastic bucket, and pot, pans and dishes. The store contains a stool, a bucket, 3 empty 200L drums and an old table.

“I came to Bundu Waterside in 1987. I was staying in Diobu before. When I leave Diobu I came to Bundu. Just after the war I came to Port Harcourt. I just cannot say exactly but maybe 1971 or 1972. I am married with six children. My first wife gave me 3 children and the second wife has given me 3. I live in two rooms.

“The reason for my leaving Akwete is because of the shipping line business. I came to Port Harcourt to look for job as a dockworker. The company folded up: it is no more. I was a fisherman before. I was fishing in Akwete before coming to Port Harcourt. In addition I do business by using bicycle transport. If I have money I can go back to Akwete. Five of my children are with me now and my wife. I want all of us to be together.

“The water is rotten water. The water we drink is from the well. To get pipe-borne water you pay. Normally N3 for a jerry can. We buy the water and use the well water for washing. Even the water from the NPA and Mobile Police barracks is not good. After fetching it we have to use white cloth to filter it.

“My daughter had typhoid fever. She spent five days in the hospital at Aba Road and they gave me a bill of N4,500. Well I have paid N2,000. I am still owing them N2,500.

“The conditions are hard! I am sure say I no fit born again. Well, if I fork my wife and I no want pickin', I pull off before I pour. Well I am happy. Monkey say anywhere na home. It is not a normal place to live. We are grown up. Our body can survive it but the children cannot. It can affect their life. If I have money I will leave and go and stay in my father's compound as the first son.

“Port is a good place of living before. It was good before. Before, I go NPA, I go high sea, I have money, I feed my children, but now no way. It is not a good place for me anymore. That is why I want to go.”

The E. family give the impression of being happy and united despite their condition. Mr and Mrs E were in agreement on most points.

Image 19: Akwete women weaving Akwete Clothe

Mrs E says,

"I go to market three times a week. I go to Bundu market. I spend between N400 (1994 = ca. US\$8) and N500 at any given time. I spend about N1200 every week to feed my family. I go to church every Sunday. My husband don't go. I go with my children. The service lasts three hours. I was born at Asa in Ukwa LGA in Abia but I marry B. from Akwete. I don't want to have more children because of the condition of things.



Mr B interjects,

"If condition were better we can born 100 children." Mrs. B again: "I will go to family planning to control things."

3.3 Mr Owekigha

During the conversation Mr. Owekigha was taking care of the baby while his wife was frying groundnut.

"I am from Sabatoru near Nembe. My mother is from Akipilai in Ogbia LGA. I pay N100 per room every blessed month. My family live here with me. My wife and 3 children. I came into this house in 1990. I was previously at Andoni Waterside. I left there because of the fire incident. That fire incident destroyed almost all my property. It was painful. I went into Andoni Waterside in 1983.

"I left Sabatoru in 1979 after secondary school and stayed in many places. I stayed briefly at 24 Creek Road, then moved to number 1 Ibadan Street. I was living with my relations in both places.

"I got my first house in 1980 at Obigbo (on the Imo River) when I was employed as a poultry farm manager by Desba Feeds Ltd. I moved to NPA in 1981 and stayed for 10 year. I was retrenched in 1991."

3.4 Miss CN

Miss CN is a single woman of 23 who lives in a room at Ikwerre Road for which she pays N300 per month, sharing with 2 or 3 others. She comes from Ezianya-Obiabo, in Mbaitoli LGA, in Imo State, and works as a tailoress.

***“I stay with my uncle, a civil servant, as a pension consultant. His name is Mr. E.A. Okorafor. I did my primary here. I can't remember when I came to Port Harcourt, but my uncle came in 1991 when he was transferred from Enugu. My uncle pays the house rent and takes care of the house. We buy water from the borehole, when the tap is not running.*”**

***“I am happy because of Christ. I am a Christian and I worship at the Christian Pentecostal Mission. I go to church 5 days a week.*”**

***“My uncle is not married. He should be about 32 or so. Well, I hope to marry and have children. Possibly to have 7 children if money is there. But without money I will have only 5. I will not agree if my husband wants only 2. 4 kids is fine.”*”**

3.5 Mr OE

Mr EO lives in a single room at Ikwerre Road. He is 20, from Mbano, Mbano LGA in Imo State and works as a motor cycle rider.

***“I came to Port Harcourt in early 1994. I was in Kogi State as a trader apprentice (electrician). My Oga settled me but the amount was not enough to set up my own shop so I bought a motor cycle and I am using it as transport business. I make about N200 a day but spend N100 on expenses. I am not married. I don't have girlfriend either.*”**

***“I am a member of the Jehovah's Witness. I live alone. Sometimes I have a visitor.*”**

***“I had this accident a few days ago. I have spent about N1,320 on treating the injuries at the clinic in mile 1.”*”**

Image 20:

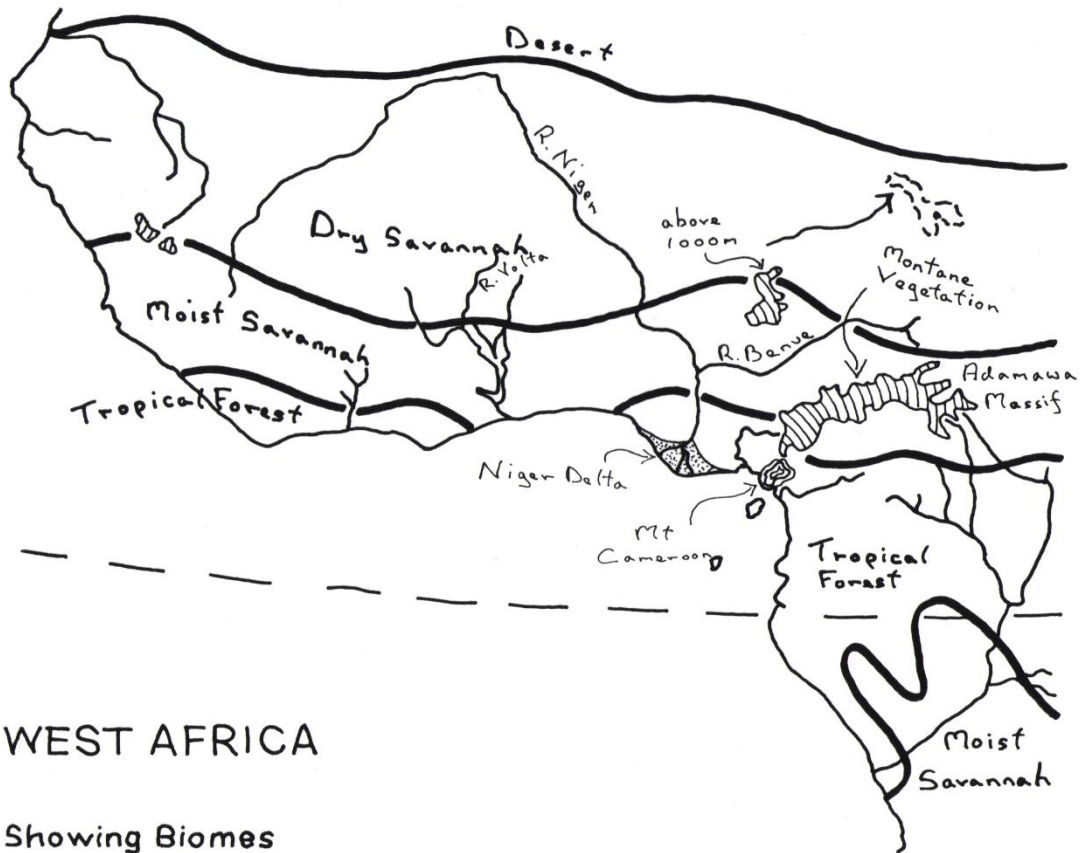
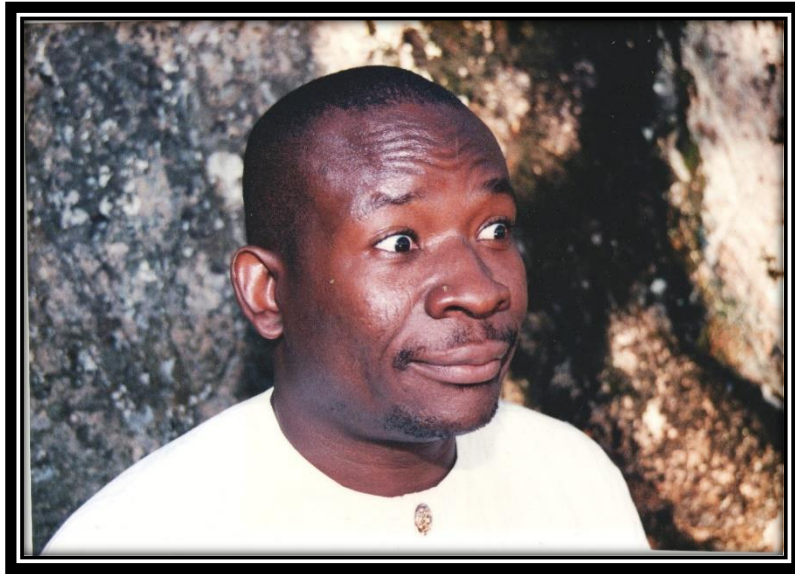


Image 21: Thanks Oronto



by
Oronto Douglas
Uche Onyeagucha
Nick Ashton-Jones
with
Susie Arnott