

# Can you redevelop a big city like Lagos without displacing the poor?

With a population of 21-million people, Lagos in Nigeria is one of the biggest cities in the world. Trying to accommodate this many people can be a challenge especially when it comes to redeveloping the city. Lagos has not been a shining example in this regard with reports of people often being violently forced out to make way.



Another aspect of an ever growing city like Lagos is slums. There are thousands of people living Makoko, a floating slum, considered to be the biggest in the world.

“In Makoko, there were issues of flooding, environmental crisis, as well as sustainability. To solve these problems in Makoko, the outright displacement and eviction was adopted as a strategy,” says Nigerian urban planner Lookman Oshodi.

In trying to find sustainable solutions to the problems in Makoko Oshodi was involved in the 2011 project to build the Makoko Floating School as well as another project for a community hotspot which was built last September.



The hotspot or community centre acts as a place for the fishing villages of Makoko to smoke their catch, connect to the internet and hold community meetings.

“The hotspot is a relatively new building but it was constructed of wooden materials, not the cement system we are used to. It opened in September last year and it is being used as we expected. It is being utilised by the community,” he explains.

But the Makoko Floating School, where he worked with architect Kunlé Adeyemi and was unveiled at the Venice Architecture Biennale, is what helped put him on the design world’s radar.



He said the floating school, which later collapsed due to heavy wind and rainfall, was a signature development to show how one can develop that city while not displacing people living in the slums. The school was made from local materials and built using local resources. The structure provided a space and infrastructure for students to use as a school and community to use as a community centre.

“It’s like setting the direction of policy and for the state on how informal settlements should be developed other than outright displacement and forced eviction. So what we had in mind is another picture of Lagos,” explains Oshodi.

For him, government policy is the best way to redevelop the city in a way that the poor do not get displaced in order to make way for big developments like luxury apartments being developed on [Victoria Island](#).

It’s clear, he says, that for urban planning and design based solutions to take shape in these areas, the conflict between the way the rich and the poor are treated must be resolved. “The argument in Makoko is, yes, we are low-income groups that is why we’re being treated in this manner. Why not give them something befitting as well? I hope the administration can manage this conflict by making provisions for other parts of the city.”

*The interview with Lookman Oshodi was conducted by Katie de Klee in 2016.*

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