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Urban Degradation and Its Impacts in Mile 2 and Woji Neighbourhoods of Port Harcourt Metropolis

[1]Eyenghe, Tari; [2] Brown, Ibama & [3]Obagah-Stephen, Ramota
[1&2]Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt,
[3]Department of Architecture, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt

Abstract
Urban degradation is becoming a recurring phenomenon in urban areas in developing countries. The study assessed urban degradation in Mile 2 and Woji neighbourhoods of Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State. The study employed a quantitative approach, applying a descriptive research design. The study employed cluster and simple random sampling techniques to select neighbourhoods and respondents in the study area. The study has selected two neighbourhoods, namely Mile 2 (Mgbundukwu) and Woji, to represent the Port Harcourt City and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas (clusters) that comprise the study area. A total sample size of 100 respondents was determined employing the Taro Yamane formula at a 10% precision level and distributed proportionately across the neighbourhoods. A structured questionnaire comprising both closed-ended and open-ended questions, along with physical observation, was used for data collection. The study found that in the neighbourhoods, the most common forms of urban degradation are rusty metalwork (80%), structural cracks (76%), and poor building structures (72%) in the study area. The most prevalent contributing factors to urban degradation in the study area are poor street lighting, inadequate living conditions, and limited employment opportunities. The impacts of urban degradation include poor neighbourhood quality, increasing crime and violence, and a high cost of living, as identified in the study area. To address the issues of urban degradation in the neighbourhoods, the study proffers the following recommendations which includes Rivers State Government should initiate urban renewal programmes in the neighbourhoods to improve housing conditions, rehabilitation and provision of new physical, social and economic infrastructure and services, government should provide affordable housing as it is crucial in both neighbourhoods, the State and local authorities of the metropolis should prepare a Local Economy Development (LED) plans that will revitalise the local economy of the neighbourhoods, and government and the dwellers should collaborate to promote Community Engagement Programmes to empower residents in improving decision-making processes and development initiatives, local partnership and responsibility that will foster social cohesion and networking.

Keywords: Urban Degradation, Neighbourhoods, Port Harcourt Metropolis

Introduction
Urban areas have been experiencing rapid population growth over the last few decades (Ferreira, Walsh, & Ferreira, 2018). This growth has put pressure on urban fabrics and triggered urban degradation, particularly in the Global South, including Africa and Asia. Urban degradation is a pressing challenge within the broader context of sustainable urban development in urban areas, including cities and towns worldwide (United Nations (UN), 2012). According to Enoma and Idehen (2018), the concept of urban degradation can be described as a process whereby a formerly functional city or a portion of a city is falling into disrepair and decrepitude. However, urban degradation also portrays the deterioration and decline of urban areas, as the environment is characterised by buildings and infrastructure that are dilapidating, accompanied by a decaying social and economic fabric of the neighbourhood (Ayiti, 2024).

The lack of affordable housing, discriminatory practices, and economic inequalities contribute

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to the deterioration of urban neighbourhoods and exacerbate social and economic disparities (Desmond & Gershenson, 2016). These conditions lead to urban degradation in cities and towns (urban areas). In developing economies, large urban areas such as Mumbai, Delhi, and Kolkata in India face significant challenges to urban degradation, including overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, pollution, and the proliferation of slums. Rapid urbanisation, rural-urban migration, and inadequate urban planning have strained resources and exacerbated social and environmental problems in Indian cities (Bag, Seth, & Gupta, 2016). In Africa, cities such as Johannesburg and Durban in South Africa have experienced urban decay, characterised by the growth of informal settlements, poverty, and crime (Govender & Reddy, 2020). The legacy of apartheid, along with rapid urbanisation and population growth, has contributed to social and economic inequalities in urban areas like South Africa (Shackleton & Gwedla, 2021).

In Nigeria, cities such as Lagos, Benin, and Abuja experience rapid urbanisation, which strains the cities' limited social and infrastructural resources, as evidenced by the cities' inadequate housing stock in terms of both quantity and quality (Aliyu & Amadu, 2017). Like many cities worldwide, Port Harcourt has experienced rapid population growth and urban expansion. From an estimated population of more than a million from the "2006 national census" (Obinna, Owei & Mark, 2010). The large influx of people moving from rural to urban regions to take advantage of the opportunities there, combined with a lack of appropriate policies and administrative strategies to accommodate the growing population, puts a significant strain on the environment. Numerous environmental issues have arisen as a result, including air, water, and land pollution; climate change; traffic congestion; increased energy consumption; inadequate housing and sanitation facilities; decreased vegetation production; and reduced carbon sequestration (Bassey, Ede & Wokekoro 2020). Many neighbourhoods are facing physical, social, and economic degradation as housing quality depreciates, and facilities and services available become inadequate and obsolete, failing to meet their expected needs and provisions. There is a need to investigate the results of these conditions and their impact on the quality of the neighbourhoods' environment to improve the quality of life for residents, enhance their general wellbeing, and improve the city's landscape.

Statement of the Problem

Urban degradation in the neighbourhoods of Port Harcourt metropolis has become a pressing

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concern, manifesting in various forms such as deteriorating infrastructure, environmental pollution, social disintegration, and economic decline. This degradation not only undermines the liveability and well-being of residents but also hampers the city's prospects for sustainable urban growth and development. The effects of urban degradation are multifaceted and severe. Deteriorating buildings, neighbourhood infrastructure, and facilities lead to decreased mobility, social life imbalance, and a reduction in the local economy, thereby exacerbating environmental pollution and urban sprawl that pose significant threats to residents' socioeconomic conditions and environmental challenges, ultimately threatening ecological balance. Several interconnected factors may have contributed to urban degradation in the neighbourhoods of the Port Harcourt metropolis. Rapid urbanisation, driven by population growth and rural-urban migration, exerts pressure on existing infrastructure and services, leading to their deterioration. Poor urban planning and governance exacerbate the problem, as evidenced by inadequate zoning regulations and a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms. Given the pervasive nature and detrimental impacts of urban degradation in Port Harcourt metropolis, conducting a comprehensive study to assess its extent, causes, and consequences is imperative. There is a need to assess urban degradation in selected neighbourhoods of the Port Harcourt metropolis to understand the issues and enhance the residents' liveability and quality of life in these areas, ultimately achieving sustainable urban growth and development in the city of Port Harcourt.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The study aims to assess urban degradation and its impacts in Mile 2 and Woji neighbourhoods of Port Harcourt metropolis, Rivers State.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

i. Assess the nature of urban degradation in Mile 2 and Woji neighbourhoods of the study area;
ii. Identify the factors contributing to urban degradation in the studied neighbourhoods; and
iii. Examine the impacts of urban degradation in the studied neighbourhoods.

The Study Area

Port Harcourt, a metropolis situated within the Niger Delta region of southern Nigeria. Port Harcourt lies along the coastal plains of the Gulf of Guinea. This geographical setting has influenced the city's development and urbanisation patterns, with the presence of waterways facilitating transportation and trade. Port Harcourt experiences a tropical wet and dry

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climate, characterised by high temperatures and abundant rainfall. The city has two distinct seasons: a wet season from March to October and a dry season from November to February. During the wet season, Port Harcourt experiences heavy rainfall, which can result in flooding in low-lying areas. The average annual precipitation ranges from 2,500 to 3,000 millimetres, with the highest rainfall occurring between July and September. Temperatures remain relatively high throughout the year, with average highs ranging from 28°C to 32°C.

A diverse population and demographic structure characterise Port Harcourt. As one of Nigeria's major cities and economic centres, Port Harcourt attracts people from across the country seeking employment opportunities and better living conditions. The city's population has experienced rapid growth in recent years due to urbanisation, migration, and natural population increase. The population is cosmopolitan, comprising various tribes and ethnic groups from Nigeria, including the Ijaw, Ikwerre, Ogoni, Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, and Efik peoples, among others. This cultural diversity significantly contributes to the city's vibrant social fabric, influencing its social dynamics, traditions, and cultural practices. Port Harcourt is a dynamic and diverse city, driven primarily by the oil and gas industry. As a major oil-producing city in Nigeria, Port Harcourt is home to numerous oil companies, refineries, and related industries, which collectively contribute significantly to the nation's economy. The oil and gas sector provides employment opportunities and generates revenue for the city and the country as a whole. Apart from the oil and gas industry, Port Harcourt's economy is supported by various other sectors, including trade, commerce, manufacturing, and services. The city serves as a commercial hub, with bustling markets, shopping centres, and business districts catering to the needs of residents and visitors alike. Additionally, Port Harcourt is home to various industries, including construction, telecommunications, banking, and hospitality, which further diversify the local economy.

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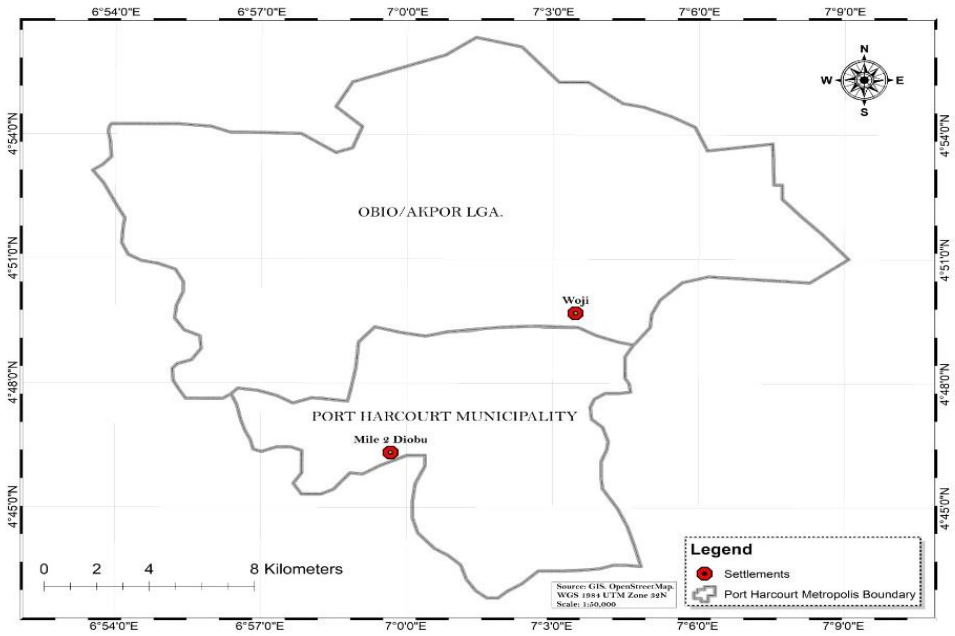


Figure 1: Port Harcourt Metropolis Showing Study Neighbourhoods
Source: GIS Lab, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt (2024)

2.0: Literature Review

The Concepts of Urban Degradation and Neighbourhood

Urban degradation has become a pervasive phenomenon in urban areas, encompassing a range of interconnected issues, including deteriorating infrastructure and public services, environmental pollution and degradation, social inequality and exclusion, displacement and gentrification, and the spatial segregation and marginalisation of specific communities. Urban degradation is synonymous with urban decay, as the fabric of the neighbourhood exhibits decay and deterioration characteristics in various aspects of residents' living conditions. The phenomenon of urban degradation emphasises the systemic nature of the problem and the need for transformative changes in urban governance, planning, and economic relations to address its root causes and promote more just and sustainable urban development (Harvey, 1989). It has become a recurring phenomenon in urban areas where the relevant municipal government and development agencies neglect physical planning and urban management activities, and where built professionals (urban planners, architects, and sociologists) and community partnerships with these stakeholders are lacking.

Urban degradation occurs in urban living environments, commonly referred to as neighbourhoods. As defined by Sampson, Morenoff and Gannon-Rowley (2002), a neighbourhood is a spatially bounded residential area characterised by a local ecology and social

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organisation found in an urban area. It is typically defined by its physical boundaries and the interactions among its residents, institutions, and organisations. This phenomenon encompasses the physical, social, and economic dimensions of neighbourhoods, highlighting their role as cohesive social units within larger urban environments that create a sense of community, a unique character, and flexibility and diversity for residents, visitors, and other urban stakeholders (Sampson et al., 2002). There is a display of governance and sustainability aimed at actualising a liveable neighbourhood and a better quality of life for residents. Nature of Urban Degradation in Neighbourhoods of Urban Areas

The nature of urban degradation is characterised by the conditions of residential buildings occupied by residents in a neighbourhood and the available neighbourhood facilities and services that create opportunities for shared interests of the residents. Such neighbourhood facilities and services include healthcare, education, water supply and sanitation, electricity supply, open spaces, playgrounds and parks, emergency service (police and fire service), and postal services. The conditions of these facilities and services n neighbourhoods can display the nature of urban degradation which may characterise public health threat, increase illiteracy, poor waste management and environmental degradation, poor sanitary condition, poor air quality, security and safety concerns such as crime, drug abuse, prostitution, destitution, gangsterism, hooliganism, thuggery, assault and social vices (exhibiting Broken Window Theory) (Kelling & Wilson, 1982).

Similarly, the nature of urban degradation contributes to the extent of degradation in neighbourhoods of urban areas. The report presented by the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) on "The State of African Cities," published in 2008, indicated that cases of serious urban sprawl and the emergence of urban corridors exist in many parts of some cities in Africa (UN-Habitat, 2008). The increased population in urban centres and the consequent reduction in population in these rural communities lead to a further reduction of the already scarce resource allocation. This situation further plunges them into the vicious circle of underdevelopment, creating both push factors that perpetuate migration and pull factors that attract economic development. These push factors affecting rural populations include circumstances that prevent the populace from earning a decent livelihood. This scenario encompasses land deterioration, inadequate land resources, unequal land distribution, droughts, poor healthcare systems,

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extreme poverty, and religious conflict. Local economic decline is also a key push factor for moving to urban centres. At the same time, pull factors tend to inspire this rural population to move to urban centres for lifestyle reasons (Gugler, 1997).

The biggest attraction is the industrial wages; people will move to cities as long as urban wages outweigh rural wages. Other factors include employment opportunities, attraction to a better lifestyle, healthcare, education, and basic infrastructure (Unah & Okpoi, 2021). These causes of rapid urbanisation have resulted from migration and an increase in population growth. This process of urbanisation comes with benefits, as well as challenges such as urban degradation, increased population density, gentrification, overstretched public facilities and services, unemployment and poverty, and unsustainable urban growth and development.

Factors Contributing to Urban Degradation in Neighbourhoods

Numerous factors contribute to urban degradation in neighbourhoods, and some of them are:

Character of the Elite

The character and manner of the political elites in Nigeria, in terms of resource control and allocation (system theory), are one of the major bane to even development in Nigeria. The resultant consequences of this scenario are evident in the centrifugal development of housing, health, education, transportation, communication, and electricity services, as well as opportunities for remunerative employment, which are constraining the expected rates of urban growth, development, and renewal. The level of urban decay and deterioration is, in fact, poles apart when juxtaposed with the revenue generation and expenditure patterns and levels, especially at the centre and in other parts of the urban centres in the country.

Lack of Political Will

The elites and public office holders in Nigeria, in most cases, lack the political will to implement "development "policies that would affect the masses positively. Ordinarily, Nigerian leaders would want the country to excel in all aspects, including education. However, a lack of political will has been evident, occasioned by the instability of governments or lack of continuity.

Corruption

Another factor that has continued to cause degradation in Neighbourhoods is corruption. Corruption has almost been "illegally legalised" in both the public and private sectors in Nigeria. In most cases, it has led to the failure of economic and social policies. If anything has

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contributed significantly to the stagnation of the corporate development of Nigeria, it is this virus called 'corruption'. It is found in all aspects of human endeavour in Nigeria. Its prominence in Nigeria has earned our nation a place of negative prominence in the world.

Bad Governance

Due to bad governance in Nigeria, there is a strong urban bias in the development of programmes and uncoordinated efforts at other satellites settings closer to the cities development, which in turn is reflected in inadequate access to market for goods and services, and deplorable condition of the education, health, transportation, water, and sanitation sectors.

Population Growth

The unprecedented increase in the population in Nigerian cities continues to put pressure on the existing infrastructural facilities. The inability of housing delivery to cope effectively with the housing needs of the urban population has resulted in pricing most low-income earners out of the housing market. The most affected groups are immigrants from rural hinterlands who prefer to settle in the suburbs of cities. Often, this is responsible for the development of squatter settlements in peri-urban zones, which lead to urban decay.

Challenges of Policy Implementation

Stripped of all technicalities, the challenges associated with implementing policies and programmes are a significant problem in most developing nations, specifically the issue of a widening gap between intentions and results. The way the implementers exercise their discretion depends, to a large extent, on their disposition toward the policy. Therefore, the level of success will depend on how the implementers see the policies as affecting their organisational and personal interests. Other serious problems include bribery and corruption, which have significantly contributed to the failure of policy implementation in developing countries. For example, an implementation problem may arise in a situation where massive amounts are earmarked for a project. However, the officers in charge of implementation steal such amounts or a substantial part.

Impact of Urban Degradation in Neighbourhoods of Port Harcourt

Urban degradation has profound and far-reaching impacts on neighbourhoods, affecting multiple facets of residents' lives and the overall urban environment. These impacts cut across the physical, social, and economic dimensions of the urban environment. The consequences of urban degradation are the deterioration of physical buildings and infrastructure. In degraded urban areas, basic infrastructure, such as roads,

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drainage systems, and water supply systems, often falls into disrepair, leading to increased risks of flooding, waterborne diseases, and environmental pollution. Poor housing conditions, informal settlements and inadequate housing structures further exacerbate health and safety risks for residents, contributing to a cycle of poor living standards and reduced quality of life (Mumford, 1961).

The physical impacts also degraded urban neighbourhoods, such as deforestation and loss of open spaces, contribute to ecological stress and undermine the resilience of urban ecosystems, contributing to climate change and greenhouse pressure (heat stress and increased vulnerability to flooding and storms). This circumstance may trigger health and well-being challenges of residents and compound environmental problems (Mumford, 1961).

Socially, urban degradation erodes community cohesion and well-being. Degraded neighbourhoods often experience higher crime rates, reduced social capital, and limited access to essential services such as healthcare and education. Residents may face heightened social and economic challenges, including unemployment and poverty, as degraded environments struggle to attract businesses and investment. The resulting lack of economic opportunities perpetuates a cycle of deprivation and hampers social mobility, particularly affecting vulnerable populations within these neighbourhoods (Harvey, 2012). Economically, urban degradation can lead to decreased property values and disinvestment, discouraging property owners from maintaining or improving their properties. This decline in property values further limits access to affordable housing and exacerbates economic inequalities within communities.

Additionally, inadequate infrastructure and environmental degradation can hinder economic productivity and competitiveness, constraining the overall economic potential of urban areas and impeding sustainable development (Florida, 2008). Urban degradation requires holistic and integrated approaches that encompass urban planning, infrastructure development, social services, economic revitalisation, and environmental sustainability. By investing in targeted interventions that prioritise community engagement, equitable access to resources, and sustainable development practices, cities can mitigate the impact of urban degradation and promote healthier, more resilient neighbourhoods that benefit all residents.

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3.0: Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative approach utilising a descriptive research design to achieve the aim and objectives of the study. The study employed cluster and simple random sampling techniques to select neighbourhoods and respondents in the study area. The study has selected two neighbourhoods, namely Mile 2 (Mgbundukwu) and Woji, to represent Port Harcourt City and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas (clusters) that make up Port Harcourt metropolis, respectively, based on urban degradation observed. Consequently, to determine the sample size of the study, the population of the studied neighbourhoods was obtained from the 1991 population census report, which reported 62,317 persons (National Population Commission (NPC), 1991). The population was then projected to 2023 at a 3.2% growth rate (NPC, 2018), resulting in a total of 170,747 persons.

Furthermore, the standard of 5 persons per household size (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2016) was used to determine the number of households (respondents) of 34,150, for which the Taro Yamane formula was applied at a 10% precision level to achieve 100 sample size (see Table 1). A questionnaire with a pre-coded closed-ended and open-ended design was used to collect data from the respondents, including physical observations about urban degradation. The study developed a database using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22 to process the data collected during the field survey, employing univariate statistics, including measures of central tendency (percentage, mode, and frequency) and measures of dispersion (range), for data analysis.

Table 1: Determination of Sample Size for the Study

Neighbourhoods	1991 Population	2023 Projected Population at 3.2% Growth Rate	Number of Households in the Neighbourhood (5 persons per Household)	Sampled Households
Mgbundukwu (Mile 2)	55,682	152,568	30,514	89
Woji	6,635	18,179	3,636	11
Total	62,317	170,747	34,150	100

Source: NPC, 1991; NPC, 2018; NBS, 2016; Researchers' Computation, 2023

Results and Discussion of Findings

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Nature of Urban Degradation of the Neighbourhoods

The study found that the nature of urban degradation in Mile 2 and Woji, as shown in Table 2, indicates that the Mile 2 neighbourhood exhibits a broad array of deteriorative conditions across buildings and infrastructure. Common issues such as cracked and peeling paint, leaky roofs, structural cracks, and sagging floors contribute to a visibly degraded environment, impacting both the aesthetics and safety of residential and commercial spaces. Problems such as outdated electrical systems and plumbing issues pose additional health and safety risks, which can increase the likelihood of accidents or environmental hazards. This concentration of decay at Mile 2 suggests that maintenance practices, environmental pressures, or economic constraints may significantly impact its built environment. Further examination revealed that Mile 2 was grappling with deeper infrastructural issues, including unstable foundations, rusty metalwork, and deteriorating building materials, such as rotting wood and siding, that compromised its structural integrity. Poor drainage systems and inadequate street lighting exacerbate residents' challenges, frequently leading to flooding, crime, and other public safety concerns. Waste management and environmental quality in Mile 2 are also lacking, with visible air and water quality issues stemming from waste accumulation and potentially outdated sanitation practices. These cumulative issues make Mile 2 a critical zone for urban intervention, with a pressing need for targeted maintenance and regulatory policies to curb degradation and improve the quality of life.

Contrastingly, Woji's primary issues lie in its green spaces and road infrastructure, where poor maintenance of green areas and degraded road pavements are significant concerns. Despite having fewer problems with building decay or infrastructure integrity, the scarcity of well-maintained green spaces in Woji diminishes the environmental and aesthetic value of the area, impacting residents' access to recreational spaces. Additionally, road pavement issues can reduce mobility and accessibility, affecting residents' quality of life and local commerce. This differentiation between Mile 2 and Woji suggested the need for tailored urban policies, where Mile 2 could benefit from infrastructural renewal and Woji from enhanced green space management and road maintenance. Adewumi and Ajibola (2019) also documented that the prevalence of physical degradation is due to factors such as poor drainage, waste management issues and decaying infrastructures. Suleiman *et al.* (2017) highlighted issues such as cracked paint, leaky roofs, and unsustainable

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foundations as indicators of neglected building maintenance, which pose both aesthetic and safety risks to residents.

Table 2: Nature of Urban Degradation in the Neighbourhoods

Nature of Degradation	Mile 2		Woji		Cumulative	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Cracked or peeling paint	62	91.2	6	8.8	68	100
Leaky roofs	33	91.7	3	8.3	36	100
Structural cracks	68	89.5	8	10.5	76	100
Broken windows and doors	44	91.6	4	8.3	48	100
Sagging floors	29	90.5	3	9.4	32	100
Outdated electrical systems	25	89.3	3	10.7	28	100
Plumbing problems	51	91.1	5	8.9	56	100
Deteriorated siding	29	90.6	3	9.4	32	100
Rotting wood	45	43.8	4	8.3	48	100
Unstable foundation	43	89.6	5	10.4	48	100
Rusty metalwork	72	90	8	10	80	100
Poor roads and pavements	55	85.9	9	14.1	64	100
Poor drainage	42	93.3	3	6.6	44	100
Poor street lighting	75	89.3	9	10.7	84	100
Poor waste management	36	90	4	10	40	100
Poor building structures	66	91.7	6	8.3	72	100
Poor green spaces and parks	63	86.3	10	13.7	68	100
Poor air and water quality	50	89.3	6	10.7	56	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Factors Contributing to Urban Degeneration in the Neighbourhoods of the Study Area

The study highlights the role of physical factors in influencing the levels of urban degradation in Mile 2 and Woji, as shown in Table 3. In Mile 2, poor drainage systems often result in waterlogging, which exacerbates damage to buildings and roads. This inadequate drainage not only creates an unpleasant environment but also contributes to faster deterioration of infrastructure, especially during the rainy season. Additionally, Mile 2's waste management challenges result in accumulated refuse in public spaces, blocking pathways and adding to health concerns. The accumulation of waste fosters unsanitary conditions, which can attract pests and further degrade the area's air and water quality, intensifying the need for improved environmental services. Another key factor in Mile 2 is the substandard quality of building structures, which is evident in the frequency of structural issues, such as sagging floors, cracked walls, and other maintenance failures. The situation is further compounded by poor air and water quality that impacts residents' health and reduces the area's livability. Furthermore, Mile

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2's traffic conditions contribute to the area's degradation, with high congestion levels leading to increased pollution and accelerated road wear and tear. Poorly regulated traffic not only impacts air quality but also affects the community's accessibility and quality of life, emphasising the need for better traffic management strategies in the area.

Woji, in contrast, faces fewer issues with drainage, waste management, and building structure but struggles with poor road quality and pavement conditions. Cracked and uneven road surfaces hinder mobility and pose safety risks for both pedestrians and motorists. The scarcity of green spaces further detracts from the area's visual appeal and environmental quality, limiting residents' access to recreational areas and reducing the neighbourhood's capacity to improve air quality naturally. Insufficient street lighting in Woji compromises nighttime safety, raising concerns about visibility and security in public spaces. These findings suggest that while both Mile 2 and Woji experience urban degradation, the specific issues vary significantly, requiring tailored urban planning solutions. For Mile 2, improving drainage, waste management, and traffic systems would address core infrastructural issues, while upgrading building codes could enhance structural integrity and health outcomes. Woji, on the other hand, would benefit from better road maintenance, increased green spaces, and improved street lighting to elevate the area's quality of life. A focused, area-specific approach to urban development in these neighbourhoods could prevent further degradation and contribute to long-term urban resilience. The findings aligned with those of Adewumi and Ajibola (2019) and also emphasised that physical infrastructure issues, such as poor drainage, waste management, and inadequate road maintenance, significantly contribute to urban degradation. They identified that a lack of an adequate drainage system leads to waterlogging and further degradation of buildings and roads.

Table 3: Physical Factors Contributing to Urban Degradation in the Neighbourhoods

Physical Factors Contributors	Mile 2		Woji		Cumulative	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Poor roads and pavements	70	87.5	10	12.5	80	100
Poor drainage	63	92.6	5	7.4	68	100
Poor street lighting	79	89.8	9	10.2	88	100
Poor waste management	59	92.2	5	7.8	64	100
Poor building structures	75	89.3	9	10.7	84	100
Lack of green spaces and parks	75	89.3	9	10.7	84	100
Poor air and water quality	55	91.7	5	8.3	60	100
Poor traffic conditions	14	87.5	2	12.5	16	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

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Social Factors Contributing to Urban Degradation in the Neighbourhoods

The research highlighted significant social factors contributing to urban degradation in Mile 2, as shown in Table 4, particularly issues of safety, crime, and access to basic services. Mile 2's high crime and violence rates, coupled with poor police presence and inadequate security services, make residents feel unsafe and limit their engagement with the community. This insecurity not only hinders economic growth but also contributes to a cycle of degradation, as potential investors and community members may be deterred from contributing to area improvements. Without effective law enforcement, issues like vandalism, theft, and property neglect become more prevalent, perpetuating the cycle of urban decline. Another critical area in Mile 2 is the lack of trust and support networks, which reduces the sense of community and solidarity among residents. This erosion of social capital impacts how well the community can organise to address collective issues.

Additionally, inadequate educational facilities limit opportunities for youth and adults, negatively impacting their long-term socioeconomic stability and quality of life. Similarly, healthcare facilities in Mile 2 are insufficient, which restricts residents' access to essential medical services. These conditions lead to poor living standards, making Mile 2 a challenging area for families and individuals striving to improve their quality of life.

In Woji, however, social degradation is less associated with crime or basic services and more tied to community interaction and the utilisation of public space. While residents in Woji may face fewer safety concerns, poor community interaction weakens social cohesion, reducing collaboration and shared responsibility for neighbourhood upkeep. Inadequate utilisation of public spaces limits opportunities for social engagement and interaction, which are essential for creating vibrant and supportive communities. Woji also suffers from a lack of community facilities, meaning there are fewer areas for residents to gather, socialise, or participate in community events. This lack of communal resources hinders the neighbourhood's potential for social development and can contribute to an isolating environment. In both neighbourhoods, the presence of poor social welfare affects residents equally, as limited access to support services and resources impacts their overall well-being. Addressing social welfare gaps in both areas could help improve living standards and community stability. However, the distinct social challenges in Mile 2 and Woji require unique

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approaches. Mile 2 would benefit from improved security services, educational, and healthcare facilities, while Woji could focus on enhancing community facilities and fostering better social interaction. Tailoring social interventions to the needs of each area could strengthen community bonds and mitigate factors contributing to urban degradation. The study by Olawale and Ukaegbu (2018) supported the findings that high crime rates and insufficient policing services can significantly impact community trust and social cohesion, particularly in urban neighbourhoods like Mile 2. They found that social factors, such as limited police presence, weak community support networks, and inadequate educational and healthcare facilities, contribute to residents' insecurity and reduce their overall quality of life.

Table 4: Social Factors Contributing to Urban Degradation in the Neighbourhoods

Social Factors Contributors	Mile 2		Woji		Cumulative	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No safety	59	92.2	5	7.8	64	100
High crime and violence rate	62	91.2	6	8.8	68	100
Poor police and security services	69	90.8	7	9.2	76	100
Poor community interaction	60	88.2	8	11.8	68	100
Poor trust and support networks	66	91.7	6	8.3	72	100
Poor educational facilities	26	92.9	2	7.1	28	100
Poor healthcare facilities	7	87.5	1	12.5	8	100
Poor social welfare services	43	89.5	5	10.4	48	100
Poor living conditions	79	89.8	9	10.2	88	100
Inadequate public space utilisation	70	87.5	10	12.5	80	100
Lack of community facilities	42	87.5	6	12.5	48	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Economic Factors Contributing to Urban Degradation in the Neighbourhoods

The economic conditions in Mile 2 significantly contributed to its urban degradation, as shown in Table 5. With limited employment opportunities, residents struggle to secure stable income sources, which leads to financial strain and restricts their ability to invest in property maintenance or neighbourhood improvement. The low household income levels further exacerbate this issue, as residents prioritise basic survival needs over investments in their living environments. Additionally, the high cost of living in Mile 2 puts further pressure on residents' limited incomes, making it difficult for many to afford decent housing and essential services, which contributes to the visible signs of urban decline. Mile 2 also suffers from a lack of development potential, which deters investors and developers from contributing to its economic

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growth. The limited infrastructure and insufficient support for local businesses mean there are few prospects for economic revitalisation in the area. This stagnation affects residents' long-term financial security and limits community improvements, as new businesses, infrastructure projects, and job opportunities are scarce. Without development incentives, the area remains under-resourced, deepening the economic challenges that residents face and creating a cycle of urban neglect.

Woji, by contrast, faces economic degradation more specifically related to poor business viability and limited economic activities. Businesses in Woji struggle to thrive due to infrastructure limitations and lower foot traffic, which affect their profitability and sustainability. The lack of a vibrant economic environment makes it difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises to establish themselves, resulting in few commercial opportunities and lower job availability. This economic stagnation affects residents' ability to participate in and contribute to local economic development, ultimately stifling the area's growth and reducing its attractiveness to potential investors. Poor infrastructure quality in Woji also contributes to the area's economic limitations, as inadequate roads, public transportation, and facilities can dissuade businesses and potential residents alike. The lack of dependable infrastructure limits mobility and economic exchange, creating barriers to economic advancement and community development. Addressing these challenges would require targeted interventions to improve infrastructure and enhance local business support, potentially sparking economic revitalisation. While both Mile 2 and Woji face economic obstacles, each neighbourhood's unique challenges highlight the need for tailored economic policies, such as job creation in Mile 2 and infrastructure improvement in Woji, to foster sustainable urban growth and resilience. The findings align with Ezeh and Ogunleye (2020), who investigated how limited employment opportunities and low household income levels are significant contributors to urban degradation. They also found that economic instability, coupled with high living costs and poor infrastructure quality, restricts both individual and community growth, further aggravating urban degradation in areas similar to Mile 2.

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Table 5: Economic Factors Contributing to Urban Degradation in the Neighbourhoods

Economic Factors Contributors	Mile 2		Woji		Cumulative	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Poor business viability	53	88.3	7	11.7	60	100
Low employment opportunities	80	90.9	8	9.1	88	100
Poor economic activity	49	87.5	7	12.5	56	100
Low household income levels	86	89.6	10	10.4	96	100
High cost of living	85	89.5	10	10.5	95	100
Poor infrastructure quality	82	89.1	10	10.9	92	100
Low development potential	22	91.7	2	8.3	24	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Impacts of Urban Degradation in the Neighbourhoods of the Study Area

Physical Impacts of Urban Degradation in the Neighbourhoods

The physical impacts of urban degradation in Mile 2 are shown in Table 6. The most visible physical impact was poor neighbourhood quality, accounting for 22.4% of the residents' responses. This impact can be attributed to the poor environmental quality and poor housing conditions that are used as indicators to qualify a living environment. Both indicators accounted for 21.1% and 17.1% of the responses, while other physical impacts observed by the residents included flooding problems and challenges related to vehicular traffic. Poor drainage conditions cause flooding, as the provided drains are blocked with silt and waste because they are not regularly desilted by the government and residents. Moreover, the neighbourhood was not designed with a layout that accommodates vehicular parking, as cars are now parked on the carriageways, which reduces the width of the carriageway and obstructs vehicular traffic flows.

Thus, in the Woji neighbourhood, the most felt physical impact of urban degradation was also poor neighbourhood quality, as was the case with the Mile 2 neighbourhood, which accounted for 3.9% of the responses. It was followed by flooding problems and vehicular traffic challenges that accounted for 2.6% each in the distribution. With the limited access roads and inadequate drainage in the neighbourhood, flooding incidents become inevitable during rainfall, making it challenging to collect stormwater. The vehicular traffic is caused by the limited access roads in the neighbourhood, which are disproportionate to the car ownership ratio, as both the human and vehicular populations have increased rapidly. Other impacts identified by the residents of the neighbourhood were poor housing conditions and poor environmental quality. In general, all identified physical impacts of urban degradation

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on the neighbourhoods displayed poor neighbourhood quality and environmental quality, with the highest responses being those that occasioned poor housing, flooding, and traffic problems. The findings align with Mumford's (1961) observation that inadequate infrastructure leads to environmental problems. Equally, poor waste management practices have compounded these issues, contributing to flooding and the proliferation of diseases. This situation is echoed in the study as neglecting physical infrastructure increases vulnerability to environmental degradation and deteriorates the living conditions and quality of life of residents.

Table 6: Physical Impacts of Urban Degradation on the Neighbourhoods

Physical Impacts	Mile 2		Woji		Cumulative	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Vehicular traffic challenges	9	11.8	2	2.6	11	14.5
Poor housing condition	13	17.1	1	1.3	14	18.4
Poor neighbourhood quality	17	22.4	3	3.9	20	26.3
Flooding problems	12	15.8	2	2.6	14	18.4
Poor environmental quality	16	21.1	1	1.3	17	22.4
Total	67	88.1	9	11.8	76	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Social Impacts of Urban Degradation in the Neighbourhoods

The social impacts of urban degradation are especially severe in Mile 2, as seen in Table 7, where the increasing crime and violence deeply affect residents' quality of life, accounting for 36.8% of the responses. The high crime and violence rates, coupled with insufficient police presence, have created safety and security challenges in the environment where people feel unsafe, leading to a reduction of social interactions and networking in the neighbourhood, as 13.2% of the residents attest to this concern. The lack of community trust further diminishes social activities and interactions in Mile 2 neighbourhood, as fear and suspicion prevent individuals from forming strong community bonds and exhibiting a character of isolation. This environment of insecurity and mistrust perpetuates a sense of social instability, making it challenging to establish a cohesive and resilient community. In the Woji neighbourhood, the social impacts of urban degradation are pronounced as observed in Mile 2.

The challenges of increasing crime and violence, as well as safety and security concerns, topped the list of social impacts of urban degradation in the Woji neighbourhood, which are the highest social concerns of residents, as 5.3% and 3.9%

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of respondents affirmed these social challenges. The other social challenges accounted for include a reduction in social interaction and networking, as well as a lack of community trust among residents, with 1.3% of respondents affirming these concerns. Mile 2 and Woji neighbourhoods displayed the same concern about social impacts. The general social impacts observed were crime and violence, as well as safety and security challenges, accounting for 42.1% and 31.6%, respectively, totalling 73.7% of the responses. These conditions led to the other two social concerns: reduced social interactions and networking, and a lack of community trust among residents in the study area. This situation has further hindered residents' access to neighbourhood basic facilities and services that are essential for improving their well-being, socioeconomic prospects, and general quality of life. These limitations faced in the neighbourhood compound challenges in achieving a stable and fulfilling life, as they impede both individual and communal growth. Poor community interaction, driven by a lack of shared spaces and opportunities for public gatherings, reduces residents' sense of belonging and shared responsibility for the neighbourhood. Lack of community cohesion makes it challenging to address collective issues and organise for neighbourhood improvements.

The findings align with those of Olawale and Ukaegbu (2018), who emphasised that neighbourhoods with poor economic conditions experience social fragmentation and increased crime. The lack of community trust and support networks contributes to a feeling of alienation among residents.

Table 7: Social Impacts of Urban Degradation on the Neighbourhoods

Social Impacts	Mile 2		Woji		Cumulative	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Safety and security challenges	21	27.6	3	3.9	24	31.6
Increasing crime and violence	28	36.8	4	5.3	32	42.1
Reduction of social interaction and networking	10	13.2	1	1.3	11	14.5
Lack of community trust	8	10.5	1	1.3	9	11.9
Total	67	88.1	9	11.8	76	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Economic Impacts of Urban Degradation in the Neighbourhoods

The economic impact of urban degradation is particularly evident in Mile 2, as shown in Table 8, where increasing unemployment rates, a decline in the local economy, and a high cost of living are observed among individuals and households, with responses indicating 21.1%, 19.7%, and 19.7%, respectively. The economic

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conditions in the Mile 2 neighbourhood can be attributed to poor infrastructure and services, as noted by the residents. The high unemployment rate among residents led to a reduction in household income, which in turn affected the local economy of the neighbourhood. In the Woji neighbourhood, the main economic impacts of urban degradation are a high cost of living, accounting for 3.9%, and a reduction in the local economy, as well as poor infrastructure and services, which account for 2.6% each, according to the responses. The increasing unemployment rate and reduction of household income were the least mentioned among the economic impacts of urban degradation.

In the studied neighbourhoods, the most common economic impacts noted by the residents were the high cost of living, reduction of the local economy, and increasing unemployment rate, which accounted for 68.4% of the responses. These challenges are related to poor business viability and limited economic activity in the study area, caused by social impacts such as crime, violence, and concerns about safety and security among residents and business owners.

The inadequate infrastructure and services make it difficult for local businesses to thrive, affecting job creation and reducing the area's economic vibrancy, which in turn reduces investment opportunities and increases the cost of living. These make the neighbourhoods unsustainable economically, and they become depressed because their socioeconomic growth and development are not attained, as they fail to attract investments. The findings align with those of Gugler (1997) and Ezeh and Ogunleye (2020), who noted that economic decline in urban areas is often fueled by inadequate infrastructure and limited job prospects, as seen in low household income levels, which can further reduce the rate at which residents care for their homes and neighbourhood. The high cost of living, attributed to a reduced local economy and an increased unemployment rate in the neighbourhoods, has reduced the overall quality of life and wellbeing of residents, contributing to urban degradation.

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Table 8: Economic Impacts of Urban Degradation on the Neighbourhoods

Economic Impacts	Mile 2		Woji		Cumulative	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Reduction of local economy	15	19.7	2	2.6	17	22.4
Increasing unemployment rate	16	21.1	1	1.3	17	22.4
Poor infrastructure and services	12	15.8	2	2.6	14	18.4
High cost of living	15	19.7	3	3.9	18	23.6
Reduction of household income	9	11.8	1	1.3	10	13.2
Total	67	88.1	9	11.7	76	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Conclusion

Conclusively, the analysis of Mile 2 and Woji neighbourhoods in Port Harcourt metropolis highlights the significant socioeconomic disparities and challenges faced by residents in both neighbourhoods due to urban degradation. While Mile 2 exhibited more severe physical and social issues, such as poor drainage, high crime rates, and limited employment opportunities, Woji struggles with inadequate infrastructure and public spaces. Addressing these challenges through targeted interventions, such as urban renewal, community engagement, job creation, and improvements in education and healthcare, is vital for fostering sustainable urban development. By implementing these recommendations, both Mile 2 and Woji can transform their neighbourhoods into vibrant, resilient communities. The focus on local participation and empowerment will ensure that residents have a voice in their development, leading to improved living conditions, enhanced social cohesion, and greater economic opportunities. Through concerted efforts, it is possible to break the cycle of urban degradation and create an environment where all residents can thrive.

Recommendations

To address the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

i. Rivers State Government should initiate urban renewal programmes in the neighbourhoods to improve housing conditions, rehabilitation and provision of new physical, social and economic infrastructure and services such as recreational spaces, streetlights, proper refuse dumps, that are lacking in the neighbourhoods to improve residents' quality of life and well-being;

ii. Government should provide affordable housing as it is crucial in both neighbourhoods. Provision of affordable housing will help to improve the living



condition of residents in the neighbourhood as an average earner will be able to afford and maintain good housing which will help to reduce blight condition in the neighbourhood;

iii. The State and local authorities of the metropolis should prepare a Local Economy Development (LED) plans that will revitalise the local economy of the neighbourhoods that will provide employment opportunities to enhance the households' income to affording better housing and improve living conditions within the study area; and

iv. Government and the residents should collaborate to promote Community Engagement Programmes to empower residents in both Mile 2 and Woji to improve decision-making processes and development initiatives, local partnership and responsibility that will foster social cohesion and networking. These initiatives will improve urban governance and social justice in the neighbourhoods.

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