The Roles of Planners in the Built Environment

Presented

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Preamble

I am delighted to welcome each and every one of us to this occasion where issues that are relating to our profession Urban and Regional Planning will be discussed and solutions to these challenges that are affecting our profession will also be raised and discussed.

The Roles of Planners in the Built Environment, as connote in the topic, let me ask this question. Who is a town planner? What does he offers to the society? What is the impact of town planners in the built environment? Why is our built environment threatening by the various environmental challenges when there are town planners? Why do we still witness traffic log-jam when there are town planners, why do we still experience land use incompatibility in our urban areas despite the availability of town planners? Why do we still experience shortage of facilities and social amenities when there are town planners to plan for it? All these questions and many other are begging for answers to be discussed in this platform. Happy listening.

Who are the Town Planners?

Town Planners are professional who are involved in making long and short term decision about the management and development of our cities, towns, villages, and the country side. There aim is to balance the conflicting demands of Housing, Industrial development, Agriculture, Recreation, Transport, and the environment in order to allow appropriate development to take place.

Precisely, a Town Planner is identified here as a person who has gained mastery or proficiency in planning and related fields of knowledge and skills and can
**effectively help to identify and prevent social, economic and environmental problems**

**THE GENESIS - In the beginning**

A philosopher George Santayana originated the phase “*Those who cannot remember history are condemned to repeat it*”.

The modern profession of Urban and Regional Planning mainly arise in response to the urban problems caused by rapid industrialization from the late 19th century. The social reformers recognized the need for corrective intervention to deal with the growth forces unleashed by modernization because of the industrial revolution.

**Industrial Revolution**

This refers to the time *when there was change from cottage industry to town factory*. The most important of the changes that brought about the industrial to town factory.

1. The invention of machines to do the work of hand tools;

2. The use of steam and other kinds of power, in place of the muscles of human beings and of animals.

3. The adoption of the factory system.

It is almost impossible to imagine what the world would be like if the effects of the industrial revolution were swept away. Electric lights would go out, automobiles and airplanes would vanish, telephones, radios and television would disappear most of the abundant stocks on the shelves of department stores would be gone. All
these problems were solved by the promulgation of Public health act and housing Act. *The genesis of town planning can be related to industrial revolution.*

**The Eras Of The Growing Of The Cities**

(A) **Pre-classical:** In the Neolithic period, agriculture and techniques facilitated larger populations than the very small communities of Paleolithic, which probably led to the stronger more coercive governments emerging at that time. *The pre-classical and classical periods saw a number of cities laid out according to fixed plans, though many tended to develop organically. The streets of many of these early cities were paved and laid out at right angles in grid pattern, with a hierarchy of streets from major boulevards to residential alleys.*

(B) **Classical And Medieval Europe:** Traditionally, the Greek philosopher Hippodamus (5th century) is regarded as the first town planner and inventor of the orthogonal urban layout. ‘Aristotle “called him “the father of city planning” and until the 20th century, he was indeed regarded as such. The Hippodamian plan was called after him in an orthogonal urban layout with more or less square street blocks.

(C) **Renaissance Europe:** Florence was an early model of the new urban planning which took on a star – shaped layout adopted from the new star fort, designed to resists cannon fire. The renaissance was hypnotized by one city type which for a century and a half. Radial streets extend outward from a defined centre of military, communal or spiritual power.
Modern Urban Planning: Planning and Architecture went through a paradigm shift at the turn of the 20th century. The industrialized cities of the 19th century had grown at a tremendous rate, with the pace and style of building largely dictated by private business concerns. The evils of urban life for the working poor were becoming increasing evident as a matter for the public concern. The Laissez-faire style of government management of the economy, in fashion for most. The Garden city movement is a method of urban planning that was initiated in 1898 by Sir Ebenezer Howard in the United Kingdom. Garden city was intended to be planned, self-contained communities surrounded by “green belts”, containing proportionate areas of residence, industry and agriculture. Howard published his book ‘Tomorrow: a peaceful path to real reform in 1898 (which was re issued in 1902 as Garden cities of tomorrow)” his idealized garden city would house 32,000 people on a site of 6,000 acres, planned on a concentric pattern with open spaces, public parks and six radial boulevards.

THE TERM BUILT ENVIRONMENT

In social science, the term built environment refers to the human-made surroundings that provide the setting for human activity, ranging in scale from buildings and parks or green space to neighborhoods and cities that can often include their supporting infrastructure, such as water supply or energy networks. The built environment is a material, spatial and cultural product of human labor that combines physical elements and energy in forms for living, working and playing. It has been defined as "the human-made space in which people live, work, and recreate on a day-to-day basis."
The "built environment encompasses places and spaces created or modified by people including buildings, parks, and transportation systems."

*Picture of a built environment*

**Modern Built Environment**

Currently built environments are typically used to describe the interdisciplinary field that addresses the design, construction, management, and use of these man-made surroundings as an interrelated whole as well as their relationship to human activities over time (rather than a particular element in isolation or at a single moment in time).

The field is generally not regarded as a traditional profession or academic discipline in its own right, instead drawing upon areas such as economics, law, public policy, public health, management, geography, design, technology, and environmental sustainability. **Within the field of public health, built environments are referred to as building or renovating areas in an effort to improve the community’s well-being through construction of “aesthetically, health improved, and environmentally improved landscapes and living**
structures” For example; community forest user group in Nepal is multidimensional institution, which serves goods and services to the communities through natural resource management.

Landscape Architecture

In landscape architecture, the built environment is understood to mean a human-made landscape, as distinguished from the natural environment; for example, a city park is a built environment.

Public Health

In public health, built environment refers to physical environments that are designed with health and wellness as integral parts of the communities. Research has indicated that the way neighborhoods are created can affect both the physical activity and mental health of the communities’ residents. Studies have shown that built environments that were expressly designed to improve physical activity are linked to higher rates of physical activity, which in turn positively affects health. However, a built up environment comprise of all land use weather in and above the land the orderly arrangement determines its aesthetic environment is obtainable or not.

The question now goes to You and I as Town Planners and would be Planner, in Nigeria we actually have a built up environment, but how was it built up? Good or bad, what are the determining factors of its shape? And how can this existing environment be corrected or turn to a functioning built environment.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF TOWN PLANNER IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Starting from you as a would be planner, how are you perceived by your immediate environment and friends, are you just seen as technical drawing board
carrier or tracing paper carrier, do they call your school, *school two* and you accept, do they call your department TRP (Totally Rejected People) and you are comfortable with that? Why? It’s because they don’t know your role in the society or they fail to hear you because you are not audible enough, Do you involve yourself in the planning of your environment, what advice do you offer your school or department on environmental issue, do you advise your parent, land lord, friends, religious leaders about the environment or it’s still the *I don’t care attitude*. What’s the role of town planner in the built environment? In addressing this, I will look at the roles from three perspectives. i.e the role assigned to town planners by the government, the role assigned by the general public and the role assigned professionally.

In Nigeria, Town Planners are viewed from these three different perspectives

1 Town Planners the *Problem Solver*

2 Town Planners the *Problem Initiator.*

3 Town Planners the *Problem Preventer.*

**Town Planners the Problem Solver**

Planners are not often involve in the Policy Formation and Policy Implementation in developing country like Nigeria; rather they are called only to provide solutions to problems created by the policy makers. Planners were been called upon to rectify the error committed in the designs not produced by planners. Many state capitals in Nigeria don’t have master plan let alone the major towns in the country. Physical developments are taking place on daily basis at a very high pace without development guide prepare by planners.
In light of the above major towns were developed without development plans, problems emerges due to the lack of/ inadequate development plans, after which environmental problems are caused e.g. flooding, inadequate infrastructures and utilities, Planners were then called to provide solution plan to solve the emerging problem caused by planlessness. In other word, approval run after development in Nigerian whereas, development ought to be running after development approval. 

*Government at all level see planners only as the Problem Solver*

Town Planners the *Problem Initiator.*

Having develop the city without plans and with no planners input ; some access road have been blocked, drainage channel has been built on, road setback has been encroached on and planner had been called upon to provide solution. In the process of correcting the effect of the planlessness, there is need for provide access road, proper drainage channel for waste water and in the process of achieving these, some existing structures will be removed (Demolished) to pave way for the correction/ redevelopment.

In the process of effecting the corrections, toes will be stepped on if nut cut and individual affected by the corrections will term Town Planners as problem causer or problem initiator. Have you not observed that we are called different names like Town Cancel, *Wole Wole* in Yoruba language, *IkoIko* in Edo Language, Demolisher, Town Destroyer etc. *Planners are been taken to public opinion court were sentiment will be the Chief Judge and public sympathy will convict Town Planners without any form of hearing.*
Town Planners the *Problem Preventer.*

Planners as problem preventer; This last assumed role see Town Planners as problem preventer and this point will dwell more on the topic which we are here for *'The role of planner in the built environment'.* In an ideal world, Planners *should be next to God because planning encompasses all aspect of human activities; Transportation, Security, Housing, Food, Health etc.* I have argued at many forum that a planner is better than a doctor, some of you might disagree with these line, but I will explain it in this manner; A doctor’s mistake claims life in unit while a Planner’s mistake claims life in thousand and million. Planners can even take out Doctor out of business; Imagine a well planned environment with drainage, with lawns, open spaces, good transportation system, and effective infrastructural facilities. I believe doctor won't have patient with Malaria, Typhoid etc.

Many people from all walks of life including farmers, teachers, health workers, lawyers, architects, building technologists, surveyors, engineers, sociologists, drivers, and traders among others are mystified about the state of the built environment in Nigeria especially in urban and peri-urban settlements. Nigerians continue to ask these questions: *Do we have planners at all?* What are the planners doing to address the menace of poor environmental sanitation? Why are Nigerians experiencing infrastructure crises despite the availability of so many beautiful policies? Why do we have a chunk of our active labour force in the urban areas living in slum areas despite the implementation of housing policies by successive governments? These and many other questions are ringing in the heart and minds of people (Paul Kwasi).
Planners who have received education to champion the planning efforts of the country have been sidelined by government. Hardly do people recognise professionals of the built environment especially planners in Nigeria. The many challenges confronting our dear nation in recent times have been as a result of poor planning. There is an expression that “failing to plan is planning to fail.” While it is not always true that those who fail to plan will eventually fail in their endeavours, there is strong evidence to suggest that having a plan leads to greater effectiveness and efficiency.

Many people have failed to recognize that, planners are the brain behind every successful economy. Therefore, a country that fails to recognize the roles of planners is planning to fail and therefore emergence of numerous problems would be the order of the day.

**Planners therefore play pivotal role in the built environment** as well as the economy as a whole. Many Nigerian admire developed countries in the area of transportation system, water and sanitation management, energy, housing development, neighborhood design, the informal economy, among others. However, they have forgotten the brains behind it (Planners).

In Nigerian, people actually do not know what planners do. All people do know about the work of planners is; granting permit to prospective developers; making sure that people do not build on waterways; preparing local plans, structure plans and layout schemes; and development control. It’s unfortunate that previous and successive governments in Nigeria have relegated the role of planners in managing and sustaining our cities to the background. However, planning goes beyond what people call “Town and Country Planning” and the functions described above. The
basic aim of planning with/for cities, towns, villages, and hamlets is to achieve safety, convenience, economy, harmony and aesthetics.

Despite the establishment of Nigeria Institute of Town Planners (NITP) and Town Planner Registration Council (TOPREC) with the mandate of championing Nigerian’s development planning efforts, the country continues to face challenges such as poor management of the local economy, poor environmental sanitation in cities, intermittent supply of potable water, frequent power outages, poor transport infrastructure and services, poor and non-availability of communication facilities, ineffective health care policies, shaky educational policies and inadequate educational infrastructure, development control problems, urban sprawl, emergence of slums and non linkages between agricultural and industrial development policies resulting into phenomenal rate of labour unemployment. These pertinent issues are threatening the sustainability of the settlements for posterity.

The poor planning and management of our built environment with respect to the above problems is due to the failure of government to recognise the significance of planners.

Planners at the Metropolitan, Municipal and district level are responsible for the formulation of economic, social, and environmental policies and programmes; restructure rural economies; improve the development and management of district economies and spatial organisation; prepare perspective, medium and short-term plans for national, sectoral and sub-national development and; see to the implementation, management and evaluation of national and sectoral development policies and plans.
Planners are equally responsible for the planning and management of the growing urban and rural settlements; interpret development policies as they manifest in space and behavioral patterns in response to settlement development; and develop appropriate strategies to manage human settlement problems which arise from growth of settlements. The role of planners in national development cannot be over emphasized. Planners are into community development by proposing interventions in a form of policies, programmes, projects and plans to help shape communities. Planners help determine how communities will grow and how they (communities) will adjust to change.

Planners contributions to the design and development of communities is to bring together data, citizens’ ideas and opinions, civic leaders’ goals, and good planning practice into a deliberative process of community decision making. Planners identify the problems facing the community, focusing in particular on the physical and the built environment. They may determine that the community needs more public transport service or needs to encourage retail businesses in underserved neighbourhoods. Planners also help to determine the current and future needs of a community through population projection and needs assessment.

Planning is not an isolated activity; rather, it involves all segments of the community. Planners help create the process by which residents, business people, governors and city council members, and advocates work together to create a vision for the community, the goals the community wishes to achieve for itself, and the actions it will take to reach the goals. While the commercial market will provide many things for the community such as housing for upper income residents and many services; planning identifies the gaps in the needs of the community and helps to provide needed programmes, development, and services. Planning takes place within a legal framework, therefore, planners work with legal
tools such as ordinances to ensure the buildings and development meet the standards of health, safety, and welfare for the community, as well as allow for new innovations such as solar panels, home businesses, and mixed uses of buildings (including housing, shopping, services, etc.)

Planners play the major role in curbing the housing deficit in the country by preparing comprehensive housing development plan; develop strategies to increase the supply of affordable housing and expand home ownership among low income or disadvantaged groups. In effect, planners determine where the future housing of the country should go as well as developing housing plans for the future communities.

Planners are into development management by being in front line of decision-making in planning. Development management is mainly about getting the right development in the right place.

One of the ways planners contribute to national development is to mitigate the impacts of activities of man on the environment. Environmental planners work to enhance the physical environment and minimize the adverse impacts of development. Transport planners play critical roles in meeting the transport needs of the country. These planners are responsible for linking together all the various modes of transport and creating efficient networks for the public. At the national, regional, local level, planners prepare and implement the transportation policies, strategies and plans that help meet an area’s social, economic and environmental needs.

Planners’ contribution to national development is overwhelming. Planners are also involved in preparing urban renewal programmes, regeneration and upgrading plans. Planners prepare urban renewal programmes and policies to prevent the emergence of slums and urban sprawl.
Britain, Turkey, Ecuador and USA are some countries that have implemented renewal, regeneration and upgrading projects. Regeneration planners aim is to improve the built and social environment to help people live in the kind of places that they want and can afford to live in.

Other sectors of the economy planners make input into include health, education, agriculture, industry, banking, insurance, construction and real estate. Planners are also capable of monitoring and evaluating programmes, policies, projects and plans of the state and private institutions. From the above exposition, it is undeniable fact that planners contribute immensely to the management and sustainability of cities in Nigeria. It is my hope that, government and other professionals will recognize the need for planners in the country. Additionally, politicians should not interfere in the work of planners. The objectives of planning will not be achieved if there is high level of political interference.

**What TOWN PLANNERS DO**

Planners develop long and short term plans to use land for the growth and revitalization of urban, suburban, and rural communities, while helping local officials make decisions concerning social, economic, and environmental problems. Because local governments employ the majority of urban and regional planners, they often are referred to as community, regional, or city planners.

Planners promote the best use of a community’s land and resources for residential, commercial, institutional, and recreational purposes. Planners may be involved in various other activities, including making decisions relating to establishing alternative public transportation systems, developing resources, and protecting ecologically sensitive regions. Urban and regional planners address issues such as
traffic congestion, air pollution, and the effects of growth and change on a community. They may formulate plans relating to the construction of new school buildings, public housing, or other kinds of infrastructure. Some planners are involved in environmental issues ranging from pollution control to wetland preservation, forest conservation, and the location of new landfills. Planners also may be involved in drafting legislation on environmental, social, and economic issues, such as sheltering the homeless, planning a new park, or meeting the demand for new correctional facilities.

Planners examine proposed community facilities, such as schools, to be sure that these facilities will meet the changing demands placed upon them over time. They keep abreast of economic and legal issues involved in zoning codes, building codes, and environmental regulations. They ensure that builders and developers follow these codes and regulations. Planners also deal with land-use issues created by population movements. For example, as suburban growth and economic development create more new jobs outside cities, the need for public transportation that enables workers to get to those jobs increases. In response, planners develop transportation models and explain their details to planning boards and the general public.

Before preparing plans for community development, planners report on the current use of land for residential, business, and community purposes. Their reports include information on the location and capacity of streets, highways, airports, water and sewer lines, schools, libraries, and cultural and recreational sites. They also provide data on the types of industries in the community, the characteristics of the population, and employment and economic trends. Using this information, along with input from citizens’ advisory committees, planners design the layout of
land uses for buildings and other facilities, such as subway lines and stations. Planners prepare reports showing how their programs can be carried out and what they will cost.

Planners use computers to record and analyze information and to prepare reports and recommendations for government executives and others. Computer databases, spreadsheets, and analytical techniques are utilized to project program costs and forecast future trends in employment, housing, transportation, or population. Computerized geographic information systems enable planners to map land areas, to overlay maps with geographic variables such as population density, and to combine or manipulate geographic information to produce alternative plans for land use or development.

Urban and regional planners often confer with land developers, civic leaders, and public officials and may function as mediators in community disputes, presenting alternatives that are acceptable to opposing parties. Planners may prepare material for community relations programs, speak at civic meetings, and appear before legislative committees and elected officials to explain and defend their proposals.

In large organizations, planners usually specialize in a single area, such as transportation, demography, housing, historic preservation, urban design, environmental and regulatory issues, or economic development. In small organizations, planners do various kinds of planning.

**The Revelation Conclusion**

Whether there are town planners or no town planners, the built environment will continue to grow but in a haphazard and deteriorating or positive manner.
As future planners, there are many opportunities awaiting you and everybody must strive to make sure that our built environment is devoid of deterioration and decay.

Planning jobs can vary widely, and can have many differing job titles, such as:

- City planner
- Community development officer
- Conflict resolution mediator/negotiator
- Economic development officer
- Environmental planner
- Geographic information system planner
- Heritage coordinator
- Housing analyst
- Industrial planner
- Land use planner
- Municipal planner
- Planning director
- Planning consultant
- Policy analyst
- Recreation and park planner
- Regional planner
- Resource development officer
- Social planner
- Strategic planner
- Transportation planner
- Urban designer
Conclusively, Planning is about creating good outcomes for communities. It is a challenge, but planning can produce good outcomes to ensure a sustainable environment is created for present and future generations. The days where town planners are not trained / allowed to play politics in schools, engage in sporting activities or involved in inter-departmental activities on campus should be a thing of the past.

Planners should mix with other professionals and students, to propagate, pronounced, promote and protect the role of town planner. As a planner, you may:

- recommend policy and guidelines on land use, environmental conservation, housing, and transportation;
- do research and prepare reports on demographic, economic, cultural, social and environmental issues;
• review proposals for development to ensure that they follow regulations and generally accepted planning practice;
• prepare plans for developing private lands, providing public spaces and services and maintaining and improving the environment;
• answer questions from the public on planning policies and procedures;
• speak before public meetings or formal hearings;
• Consultation with landowners, interest groups and citizens.

Now is the time to spread the gospel that, Planning improves the overall well being of people and communities by creating more accessible, equitable, healthy, efficient, and attractive places to live, work, learn and play. We should also endeavor to support our founding fathers in making sure that our profession is recognized anywhere in the world.

_Afterwards if we don’t blow our trumpet nobody will do it for us._

_Thanks for your Attention_