The Disaster Waiting to Happen

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Many world cities are soon to suffer wide scale disasters and losses arising from climatic change

Many cities in the world will witness unprecedented disaster, wide-scale disruption and losses because of climate change, according to a two year research report entitled: Cities and Climate Change: Global Report on Human Settlement, GRHS, 2011. The report was anchored by UN HABITAT and launched October 18 at the Covenant University, Ota The research used the activities of urban enterprises and rising consumer population as the major parameters in reaching their conclusion. The report says half of the world’s population now live in urban centres giving rise to increased use of vehicles and other technologies that are sources of green house gasses. The report is published every two years by the UN-HABITAT and it is aimed at informing government of global settlement conditions and how urbanisation is contributing to the adverse effect of climate change. Oyebanji Oyeyinka, director, monitoring and research division, UN-HABITAT, Nairobi, Kenya, presented the report to David Oyedepo, Covenant University’s chancellor. While reviewing the report, Oyeyinka noted that because of the high incidents of urbanisation, cities accounted for up to 70 percent of harmful green house gases that are emitted into the environment. He observed that developing countries do not prepare for high growth in their cities, a situation that resulted in chaotic urbanisation where slums are formed indiscriminately. He defined a slum as a settlement which lacks adequate housing structure which can collapse; over-crowdedness (three people or more living in a normal room), poor sanitation, especially, toilet facilities, inadequate water supply and absence of security of tenure, that is, fear of termination of tenancy. Another characteristic of a slum settlement is that only less than three percent of the total land in the area is devoted to streets and public space during its planning. This is contrasted to communities in the developed societies where 35 percent of the total land is for streets and public space. The UN-HABITAT boss said Nigeria tops many other third world countries that have failed to plan for urbanisation of their cities, a situation that has made its settlements chaotic.”Because we are not prepared for migration and the high level of growth of human beings in the cities, we have recorded huge formation of slums. We didn’t plan for transportation. We didn’t plan for electricity. For 25 years, Nigeria did not invest a kobo to install adequate facilities for the supply of electricity”, Oyebanji said. Infrastructure, according to him, is critical in mitigating the problem of the people. He cited the flood in Ibadan, and said it could have been prevented had the government opened up drainages and built good roads in the affected areas. As a way of addressing the problem, he said government must show that it has the capacity to deal with the problems posed by climate change. “If you have a government that is weak and unresponsive to people in normal times, when there is problem, they will not be able to deal with it,” he said. He said Nigeria could not claim not to have money to do the basic things, but bad governance has always been its major undoing. Oyedepo, while receiving the report on behalf of the institution, said most of the recommendations of the report could only be implemented if government made very sound policy. He agreed with Oyebanji that the greatest problem confronting the country is the dearth of basic infrastructure. But he said the government could solve these problems by giving out management of its infrastructures to the private sector. He said that is the only way out because the government does not have the will to serve the people. He said he would be surprised if government even showed interest in the report presented by the UN-HABITAT. “Their interest in knowledge is nearly zero,” he said. In her remarks, Aize Obayan, vice chancellor of the University, said the school’s hosting of the UN report, was an epochal event because the GRHS has only been launched at the London School of Economics and Columbia University. By this development, Covenant University has joined the ranks of reputable universities considered fit enough to host such a highly intellectual gathering. Obayan said the University’s collaborative venture with UN-HABITAT was apt in raising the awareness on human settlement issues, population crisis and the plight of the less privileged in the society. The event attracted many academics including Alele Williams, former vice chancellor of University of Benin.