

Pick a case to study that involves a governance process; provide a description of the environmental issue, the governance scale, the actors involved, their goals and priorities, the challenges they face, and how they might address them.

The Olusosun Dumpsite in Lagos State, Nigeria

Candidate Number: AD37297

Word Count: 2729

Introduction

The Olusosun Dumpsite in Lagos State was in operation from 1992 until its closure in 2019. The Olusosun Dumpsite gained widespread attention for its fire outbreak which ultimately led to its decommissioned status. Throughout this essay, I will investigate the event's leading up to the landfill's closure and the associated systems of environmental governance. By doing so, I will be examining how the developments relate to a wider discussion of power dynamics as well as a history of environmental injustice experienced by the poorer neighbourhoods in Nigeria. Firstly, I will provide a description of the dumpsite and outline the events which transpired in the run up to its closure. Secondly, I will explain the governance process involved as well as the various actors engaged, analysing the divergence in goals and priorities. Next the essay will tackle some of the governance challenges faced namely the problems of collective action and weak regulatory systems. This essay will draw on the literature of power dynamics as well as literature on environmental justice, highlighting the colonial legacy that Nigeria's waste management systems still suffers from. The issues at hand largely stem from inconsistencies within the practice of collaborative governance as well as the loopholes which can be found in government regulation relating to illegal waste dumping. A more inclusive and consensus-driven approach to collaborative governance, backed by more robust government regulation and enforcement would lead to a massive progression to the system of environmental governance.

Description of Issue

The Olusosun Dumpsite accommodates around 13,000 metric tons of waste on a daily basis. The dumpsite spans one hundred acres and was previously situated on the outskirts of Lagos State but due

to urban encroachment now sits at the city's centre. Waste from around 500 container ships is delivered to the site and approximately 100 homes exist in shanty towns in close proximity. Olusosun is rife with waste-picking, an informal economic activity which funds people's livelihoods and represents a vital survival strategy for the poor. Many of these waste pickers are children who instead of attending school, partake in physically taxing labour work. Recent reports have cited waste pickers being bitten by snakes and insects as well as succumbing to injury through slipping and falling on the dumpsite. In order to begin waste picking on the Olusosun site, registration with an informal association is required. The association is mandated to only register adults, yet employers have found loopholes by privately employing children outside of boundaries. E-waste from abroad can be found at the site, researchers who checked more than 200 containers and 21000 vehicles heading to Nigeria, found 66,000 tons of used electronics were shipped to Nigeria during 2015 to 2016 (LetsRecycle, 2013). Waste pickers tear apart burned gadgets with crude tools and then mine the components for precious metals like gold, but the dismantling process releases harmful metals like lead and mercury. The site is also home to domestic, illegal dumping. This includes the dumping of highly inflammable solid waste, which ultimately led to the site being engulfed in flames, causing blankets of soot to consume neighbouring areas. Frequent thick smokes and the foul odour emitted from the site have led to persistent calls from residents to relocate the dumpsite to other areas more fit for purpose. The oozing smell has been so devastating in nearby residential areas that one home reported spending more than 50% of household earnings on treating related illnesses (GNN, 2023). In a public statement, the governor noted that the location was no longer healthy both for trading activities and residents living in the neighbourhood. The governor went on to stress that it was important for all the stakeholders invested in Olusosun to agree on what needs to be done going forward and to cooperate with the state government on this environmental process (Ambode, 2018).

Governance Process & Actors

Collaborative governance assumes that actors engage because of an expected payoff from participation (Ingold & Leifeld, 2014). Regulation refers to all state actions designed to influence industrial and social behaviours which can include the use of economic incentives, contractual powers, deployment of

resources, franchise and other techniques all geared towards promoting and protecting both public and private interests (Ogunkan, 2022). The state governor in his public response to the closure of the Olusosun site noted “we would first of all make sure that we close down the dumpsite and then at the same time engage all of you so that we can talk and see how we can improve on the environment and also make life bearable for you and your children” (Ambode, 2019). This action was also deemed justifiable through its alignment with the Cleaner Lagos Initiative (CLI), which the administration believes will conform with international best practices (Bamigbetan, 2019). Environmental governance is the “processes, regulations, or the results of interactions between the legislative and executive governments, the civil society, the judiciary, and the people (UNDP, 1997). Furthermore, it’s also the joint responsibility and accountability of the state, market, and citizens to mobilise public resources and promote decision making towards common public good (PRIA, 2013).

The governance processes involved in the Olusosun site is cross-scalar, as they occur both at the national and local level. The state governor’s objective is clear, to carry out the Clean Lagos Initiative and take the action which has the highest societal benefit. He says, “I have not come to disturb you; what should be removed will be removed; we are not dumping waste here again” (Ambode, 2019). However, his actions completely contradict his statement, by decommissioning the site, he disturbs the trading activities which take place and he fails to consult with all the stakeholders with an interest in the site. Governance means a more “cooperative way of government, where state and non-state institutions, public and private actors, take part and often cooperate in public policy formulation and implementation” (Mayntz, 2001). Thus what is clear is that there was no real sense of collaborative governance occurring in the decision-making process, rather it consisted of unchecked state dominance. From a market perspective there are also diverging goals and priorities. Around 18,300 metric tonnes of used EEE arrive in Lagos shipping containers annually, originating from Germany, the UK and Belgium, with the United States contributing to approximately 20% of importation (TRT World, 2023). There is a demand and supply framework occurring here as importing e-waste continues to be a lucrative business in Nigeria, despite the ratification of the Basel Convention which was put in place to prevent the growth of such a business (TRT World, 2023). Thus the closure of the Olusosun site has been met

with bearish market sentiment as there is demand to keep business going and optimize profits. This has transpired across the local level with traders and waste-pickers dispelling their dislike for the government's decision to decommission the site, highlighting that their trading activities around the site contribute to the Lagos State economy. For example, a metric tonne of electronic scrap from used computers contains more gold than can be accrued from the extraction of 17 tonnes of gold ore (Olagunjun, 2018). On the other hand, local residents, small business owners and employees around the area received the closure with open arms stressing greater autonomy over their personal health which feeds into greater financial health and increased living standards. Despite the health and safety concerns, the elasticity to remain at Olusosun remained strong amongst waste-pickers due to the chronic poverty levels that many of the workers and their families face. For many, it's a case of generational suffering and as such the government needs to find a way to address the poverty trap amongst households. In summation, the environmental process has failed because the intended collaborative governance and effective regulation did not account for the two distinct camps: actors whose goals revolved around welfare and those whose goals revolved around profits.

Governance Challenges

Poor formulation and implementation of environmental regulation has contributed to the increased pollution and environmental injustice surrounding the Olusosun site. There has been suboptimal benefits derived from the existing regulatory and institutional frameworks which in turn have led to social and environmental welfare losses. The main governance challenges which will be addressed include collective action problems and fragile regulatory systems. A collective action problem exists when the "rational and self-interested behaviour of individuals precludes them from structuring a co-operative arrangement which will increase the joint welfare of all involved" (Ingold & Leifeld, 2014). The factors which inhibit these collective actions problems include bonding, bridging, social capital utilisation and the integration of local actors (Andrews et al. 2005; Berardo and Scholz 2010; O'Toole 1997; Provan and Milward 1995; Schneider et al. 2003; Shrestha 2012; Terman and Feiock 2014) but none of these methods were employed throughout the environmental decision-making process which led to the closing down of the Olusosun site. Public participation within environmental governance is

heavily restricted in Lagos which is made even worse by contradictory regulatory frameworks (Odemene, 2015). This will be further explored by addressing how various non-state actors were excluded from the decision making process (Fagbohun, 2012). Firstly, a spokesperson from Private Sector Participants (PSP) highlighted that “there should have been proper plans guiding all stakeholders towards the closure as it is done in other countries so that in the end, there will be soft landing for all parties” (PSP, 2019). This was not the case as it was a state dominated decision, as a result, what could have been a soft-landing has in turn led to financial strains and an aggravated civil society. Moreover, the fact that the government’s response was more reactionary to the fire outbreak, led to comments surrounding how a greater inclusion of stakeholder’s from inception would have led to a more effective management of the site, greater prevention of health and environmental risks, as well as more concrete regulations and robust enforcement against indiscriminative dumping (PSP, 2019). The lack of inclusivity in the decision making process was a feeling felt by local traders, they would have preferred the site to remain functional if their “opinion had been sought” as they felt that their knowledge of the area would have had positive gains (Olagunjun, 2018). This has led to the commonly accepted view that the state does not appreciate the beneficial role of waste pickers within the waste management ecosystem, a clear barrier to effective collaborative governance. This could be due to the underlying power dynamics within the environmental process which will be explored in the next section. Infringements on environmental regulations are frequently left unpunished, with enforcement officers succumbing to corruption through bribery (Ogunkan, 2017; Ogunkan, 2021). The government suffers from fragile regulatory systems, seeking to punish environmental offences administratively rather than through corrective measures or criminal prosecution (Ijaiya & Joseph, 2014). This is evident through the ease with which international business from the US, China and Europe continue to dock and illegally dump e-waste in Olusosun. Containers carrying vehicles filled with e-waste is a commonly practised trick which repeatedly misleads port officials since importing vehicles are legal in Nigeria (TRT World, 2023). Moreover, Olusosun suffers from the lack of any polluter pays principal structure, “It’s every man for himself” (Hinckley Group, 2019) which in turn has enabled weak producer accountability and has exacerbated health and safety risks.

Environmental Justice & Power Dynamics

An alternative definition of environmental governance includes “power dynamics in resource management for overall country development” (Adedibu, 2015). From this we can deduce that conversations surrounding the developments of the Olusosun site and the timing of its closure relate to wider discussions surrounding power dynamics. The perception of influence can be used as a proxy for power. Carpenter and Krause found that there’s a link between reputation and outcomes by analysing how an actor’s reputation and exposure to multiple audiences conditions their administrative choices and strategic behaviour (Carpenter & Krause, 2012). This interestingly relates to the handling of the Olusosun site whereby nearby residents and home owners accused the state government of bias, stating that if pollution of a similar magnitude were to occur in more richer parts of Lagos State then it would have been handled more swiftly or would not have promulgated to such a point. Following on from this perspective, industry and government seek the path of least resistance when deciding to site a new landfill (Timmons Roberts et al., 2018). Due to them having time pressures associated with their goals and priorities, they seek to avoid communities that have the resources and capabilities to mount effective opposition against them. Thus it comes to no surprise why it was communities with low levels of voting behaviour, home ownership, wealth, and disposable income (Timmons Roberts et al., 2018) who suffered in the case of the Olusosun site.

In trying to make sense on why the Olusosun Dumpsite suffers from illegal dumping by international actors, one must first understand the meaning of environmental justice. Environmental justice is the idea that all groups of society warrant “equitable distribution of resources, environmental risk, and access to the natural world” (Johnson, 2019). However, the practice of international e-waste dumping is an impediment on the environmental justice concept, in reality marginalized groups bear an excessive burden from this practice. From a philosophical perspective, Mills argues that white racism has surmounted to an ideological framework that links people of colour with barbarism, filth, dirt, and pollution. Thus in the eyes of western countries, it is more easier to process the idea of illegally dumping

industrial waste in Africa (Mills, 2001). For the government who allow this to proceed, suggests that they might be trapped in a colonial mentality. However, due to their institutional powers means that they never directly face the consequences of their lack of action, the effects are simply passed down to civil society who are connected to the Olusosun site. This highlights that amongst all, there still remains a massive disparity between “resources appropriated and the subsisting environmental problems” (Ikelegbe and Onwuemele, 2012).

Recommendation

At the top level, Nigeria requires a “coherent, integrated, sophisticated, all-encompassing and well-structured environmental system to serve as a guiding principle in Nigerian environmental legislation” (Erhun, 2015). Firstly tackling issues on collaborative governance, the state must liberalize public participation in decision-making processes and widen accessibility to environmental data so that the exclusion of stakeholders does not occur again. Within this new inclusive framework, waste-pickers should not be stigmatised but viewed as essential stakeholders to waste management, harnessing their expertise and entrepreneurial drive to develop more localised workplace health frameworks to alleviate risks and accidents (Global Citizen, 2023). A different approach might see a focus to upskill existing waste-picking families with training to build their capacity and boost their employability to break the generational poverty trap. In addition, collaborative governance rests on the notion of expected payoffs and so the government should leverage the use of incentives to solve this environmental governance process. This can include the formation of public-private partnerships in confronting waste management such as involving entrepreneurs so that a new approach is adopted of turning waste into wealth (Egbejule, 2019). From a regulatory perspective, the government must form solid laws alongside the judiciary so that courts can be held liable to prosecuting those entities (both domestic and foreign) caught practising illegal dumping in Lagos.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Olusosun Dumpsite has caused substantial harm to civil society both from a financial perspective and a health perspective. An inadequate system of environmental governance with excluding practices and frail government regulations have culminated to its failure. The developments have associations with environmental justice, as those suffering directly from the site's poor management have suffered at the hands of international actors, an injustice which addresses Nigeria's colonial legacy. Moreover, power dynamics have played an important role especially in respect to collective action problems and the overall mismanagement of the landfill. In order to address these issues, the state needs to place equal weighting onto all stakeholders regardless of their perceived influence on the governance process. This should include a revised consideration of what each stakeholder brings to the table, looking to share knowledge and expertise rather than assess the situation as a zero-sum game. This should be reinforced with a more robust environmental punishment system which consists of deterrents to protect the area from illegal dumping. In summation, these well integrated practices would uphold environmental justice and restore power imbalances to promote progression over regression.

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