

Local Government Autonomy and the Urban Political Settlement: Implications for Resilient Cities in Lagos, Nigeria.

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Abstract:

Strengthening local governance is crucial to building resilient communities in African cities that face climate vulnerabilities, infrastructure strain, and inequalities. In Lagos, local government authorities often lack the autonomy needed for effective WASH and climate adaptation service delivery. This study examines how political settlements shape local government autonomy and influence reform coalitions for urban resilience. We conducted a desk-based pre-study that combined secondary data, ACRC domain findings on WASH, climate resilience, and street lighting, as well as legal frameworks and policy reports. Applying the ACRC political settlements framework, we mapped elite group configurations, resource allocation dynamics, and service delivery outcomes. Despite constitutional provisions for local autonomy, elite bargains in Lagos prioritize control and rent distribution, weakening local governments. Fragmented responsibilities, fiscal dependence, and politicized decision-making undermine long-term WASH and climate infrastructure resilience, sidelining community needs to maintain elite consensus. Effective reform requires coalitions grounded in urban political realities, integrating marginalized actors, civil society, and reform-minded bureaucrats to sustain resilience-enhancing policies.

Keywords: Local Government Autonomy; Political Settlements; Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH); Climate adaptation, Streetlighting

Main highlights:

- Lagos LGAs lack real autonomy for WASH, climate adaptation and streetlighting.
- Elite bargains centralize control and weaken local governance.
- Fiscal dependence and fragmented mandates harm resilience.

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- Politicized project siting sidelines community needs.
- Reform coalitions must unite civil society, bureaucrats, and donors.
- Sustainable change requires engaging with urban political dynamics.