

Squatter Settlement, Accessibility of Land and the Urban Poor

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Key words: squatter settlement, access to land, urban poor, upgrading

SUMMARY

The focus has always been on squatter or informal settlements and not on the urban poor, or their inaccessibility of land. This is a wrong approach. This is why when a squatter settlement is redeveloped, what is successfully done is to push the squatters to another location while redistributing their lands among the Richs! Squatter settlements develops because there exists some urban poor who desire at least a roof over their heads but their income and high cost of land have pushed them to where they are, and called home; and where you and I called squatter settlements. In this paper, however, the focus is on the urban poor, the connection between their socio-economic characteristics and access to land; and any attempt to resolve the problem of squatter settlement without this realization will amount to an effort in futility. In this wise, the paper recommends land reform that will not put the urban poor at a disadvantageous position with regard to access to land. Also, to ensure availability of funds for upgrading of the existing squatter settlements, Public - Private - Partnership is recommended. To sustain this and make sure the urban poor will be able to afford the provision of; and payment for some of these facilities which will be provided under this arrangement; there is the need to empower them economically.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Land in sub Saharan Africa, is a significant factor and an indispensable asset that determines the quality of life of not only the rural communities but also that of the urban dwellers too. From the land needed for cultivation by the rural farmers, the site required for urban housing, the workshop needed by roadside auto mechanics and spaces required by various government and developmental agencies, land has proved not only to be central to mans need and activities but also as the most crucial factor of production. Consequently, access to land has continued to be a tool for obtaining social prestige, economic security and political power. The growth of the economy generates physical development in our cities which most often results in increase in values of land. Naturally, in a market economy, access to the use and enjoyment of this land depends on the purchasing power of individuals concerned. Where the affluent individuals are able to purchase and occupy a choice location, the urban poor are left to grope with the marginal areas. In addition, the centripetal nature of the cities which brings about an increasing spate of economic activities also creates intense pressure on municipal services and facilities like hospitals, educational institutions, housing, transport, telecommunication systems and energy supply. With the limited funds available to the government, provision of these services is always tilted against the area occupied by the urban poor. This is more so where they encroach upon government lands or other areas where development permits cannot be given. With the influx of more squatters driven by their inability to acquire a better developable site within the city, the resulting squatter settlement will grow into a full blown slum.

Once it has evolved, the question is; what do we do to a squatter settlement? In a bid to provide answer to this question, the remainder of the paper is structured as follows: the next section (section 2) provides information on the evolution and different types of squatter settlements in Nigeria. Section 3 deals with the unwholesome effects of squatting; this is followed in section 4 by the management options proposed to deal with squatter settlement. Section 5 tackles the concluding parts and the policy implications.

2. THE EVOLUTION AND TYPES OF SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS IN NIGERIA

In Nigeria, squatter settlements can be categorized into two main groups namely the illegally occupied settlements and the illegally developed settlements. Squatter settlement can either at first begin as a commercial or a residential enclave which at the latter stage would evolve into a settlement of mixed activities.

Squatting activities on illegally occupied land is peculiar with government acquired lands. For reasons which include non- payment of compensation, project abandonments and change in government personnel, government often times do not put the acquired lands into use. Encroachment begins when the lands are put to agricultural uses by the former owners and

their tenants. The problem is further compounded by the insatiable desires of the original land owning families (who own it before government acquisition) who pounce on this land and sell it to unsuspecting buyers. Other group of squatter settlements in this category includes those located on less desirable areas of the city such as wet land, refuse dump, over pipe lines and under high tension electricity transmission line.

Illegally developed squatter settlements on the other hand, usually emerged at rural urban fringe as a result of land speculators buying agricultural land and laying it out without provision for adequate roads, facilities for health, education and recreation. The expectation is that government in the future would provide these basic infrastructures. In this circumstance, plots were bought, developed and occupied without necessary approval from Town Planning Authorities (Olanrewaju, 2001).

According to Omirin (2003), most Nigerian cities are squalid, because majority is confined to marginal areas without services or infrastructure. In this wise, city dwellers are forced to provide inefficient solutions to their refuse disposal, water supply and other needs. Whatever the type of squatter settlement, the underlying causes is the same- the inaccessibility of developable land to the urban poor.

3. ACCESS TO LAND AND SQUATTER SETTLEMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF CAUSALITY

For land to be said to be accessible to the end users, it must be physically available, economically affordable with ease of transaction and security of tenure. To the Nigerian urban poor, the issue of affordability and its twin companion - ease of transaction constitute the major hindrance to land accessibility.

Generally, as population and affluence grow, there is an increase in the demand for land by government, private individuals and corporate bodies. Unfortunately, since the physical overall supply of land within a geographical area is fixed, demand always outstrips supply by a very wide margin, especially in our urban centres. This inevitably brings about the survival of the fittest syndrome. In this struggle, government has the upper hand through the exercise of their power of eminent domain, while individuals and corporate bodies meet their land requirements in the open markets. Within the open market, the corporate bodies and the rich individuals usually with higher bargaining power, dominate the transaction; while the urban poor are left with little or no choice but to make do with the crumbs (Fig. 1). Consequently, this group of individuals, in most cases, occupies the less desirable areas such as marshy sites, neighborhood adjacent to refuse dumps and where they can find one, they encroach on government lands. The emergent settlement usually evolved as a spatial concentration of poor people in the poor areas of the cities. As expected, this settlement is usually characterized by infrastructure deficiencies, shanty structures, poor sanitation, urban violence and crime. These composition and characteristics have always made squatter settlement a source of worry and concern to their adjacent neighbours and governments.

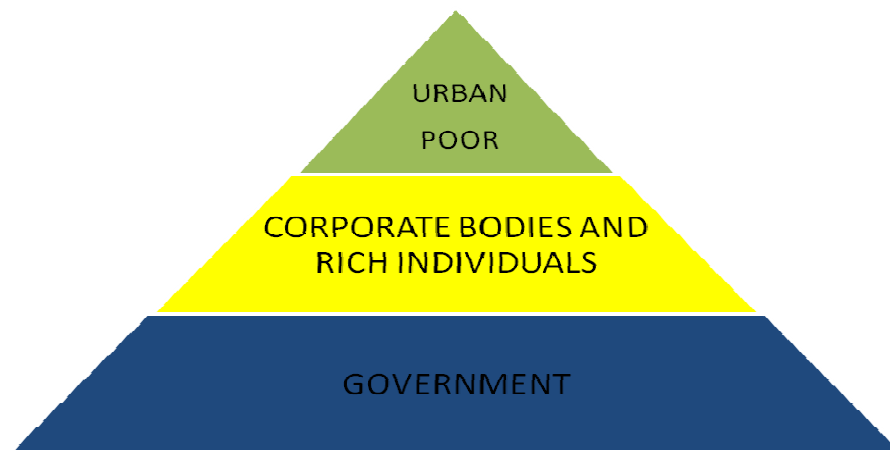


Figure 1: POWER IN RELATION TO ACCESSIBILITY OF LAND

In Nigeria in particular, the single factor that has affected land market (and hence land accessibility) more than anything else is the Land Use Act (Umezuruike 2003). Since the inception of the Act, the land market has been groping for solutions to the numerous problems which have been introduced by the Act. The fundamental issues are that the provisions of the Act have led to undue interference of the Governor in land matters (Bello, 2006). Several cases of the abuse of the Act abound, while valid access to the use of land are often denied, grants has been more guided by personal selfish interests of the operators and sometimes by the public revenue implication of such grants; in our urban areas, the purchase of land has always been equated to a purchase of law suits and problems (Omenge and Udegbe ,2000). The consequence of the aforementioned factors has led to the emergence of two types of land market: the formal and informal market.

Within these two types of land markets, there are two major sources of supply of urban lands: - the government agencies to the formal markets and land owning families to the informal markets. Within the formal land markets, allocation criteria are exclusionary and only a very small proportion of upper income earners had access to land (Okpala, 1980). For instance, Agbola (1987) reports that just 22% of the upper income earners holds over 92% of the best residential lands in the government residential estate of Apapa Lagos. The direct implication of this is that most prospective land users resort to the informal land market. With the high unit cost, time and cost involved in the perfection of title, the performance of the informal market is far from desirable. The fact is that, none of these two is favourably structured in terms of affordability to satisfy the demand of the urban poor and what we have today in form of squatter and slum settlements is a bye product of this inadequacy. According to the World Bank report, these neglected areas of the cities are the result of dysfunctional land and housing market (The World Bank, 2002). Such settlements demonstrate failures of both existing markets and of governments to respond to citizens' demand for essential services (Kessides, 2001).

The significance of land accessibility in this wise, can be seen when we compare the housing and environmental conditions of poor people among our rural dwellers with that of the urban poor. Although the quality of rural housing is not high and in some cases there may not be infrastructure like street lighting and pipe borne water but the squalid conditions that exist with the urban poor is conspicuously absence. Rural houses are well spaced from each other, far away from refuse dump; and the streams and brooks that provide portable water are located at a safe distance from any source of perceived contamination. This is simply possible because land is physically and generously available.

4 UNWHOLESOME EFFECTS OF SQUATTING

The harbinger of squatting activities is inaccessibility of land engendered by low income of the urban poor. The end product is the creation of a slum. The effects of slums have been seen from various perspectives; the commonest one being on the deplorable environmental conditions. In this wise, the World Bank Thematic Group on Services to the Urban Poor described slums as unplanned and under-served neighborhoods typically settled by squatters (The World Bank, 2002).

Where squatting is on government or any derelict land; layout are never prepared and developments are not subject to any control. In cases where the land owning families design layouts; such layout in most cases may not conform to acceptable standard and development approval on such lands are never sought from the Town Planning Authority. The absence of meaningful development control in these cases will invariably lead to haphazard or uncoordinated development which characterizes slum formation.

Another effect of squatting is that the necessary municipal services and infrastructure like roads, water supply, sanitation and waste collection are never provided. Within this neighborhood, wastes generated are thrown indiscriminately into drainage channels thereby causing blockages (Fadairo, 2006); which might eventually result in the flooding and erosion of the area.

The problem of their low income affects the level of capital formation, which deprives the people of sufficient resources to utilize in improving their homes and keep their environment healthy for comfortable living (George, 1999). The slum residents lack the basic municipal facilities; and thus are exposed to disease, crime and natural disasters (The World Bank, 2002).

Generally, squatters are usually stigmatized, especially, where the squatters are on derelict land or such area as existing or disused refuse dumps, such people are often looked at as hoodlums or miscreants; and any case of robbery attack on the neighboring settlement are usually attributed to them, even when empirical evidence does not indicate that crimes occur with more frequency within squatter settlements than outside (Mangin, 1967).

Since residents of squatter settlements lack legal titles; they are usually suffering from the problem of uncertainty in tenure. They live daily with the perpetual fear of eviction and demolition by authority. As a result of which there is no incentive to spend on housing improvements; hence they live in houses constructed with substandard materials.

5 MANAGEMENT OF SQUATTING ACTIVITIES AND SQUATTER SETTLEMENTS

Two basic approaches are of relevance in this case, preventive measures should be taken to prevent the emergent of squatter settlements. Where the squatter settlement had evolved with its attendant slum conditions, appropriate curative measures should be undertaken taking cognizance of the socio-economic implication of the options to be adopted.

The best option should be to prevent or at least curtail squatting activity. In this wise, effort should be geared towards checking the development of new squatter settlements. This can be achieved in two ways. First, by providing cheap land and services for the urban poor; for example in Owerri, the capital of Imo state in Nigeria; it will be difficult for low income earner to have access to good developable land if no support is given in a situation where cost of land is more than 30% of the total development cost (Onyike, 2007). Secondly, early occupation and adequate policing of acquired land will prevent encroachment. Erection of signposts informing and warning unsuspecting buyers and developers that the land is committed will help a lot in this regard.

However, where squatting has already taken place and slum and shanty town have evolved; what do we do? In this wise, there are three options available which are eradicating and relocating the slum residents, clearance and redevelopment; and slum upgrading (The World Bank, 2002).

Eradicating and relocating of squatters has been described as a failed response of the 1960s and 1970s by the World Bank (The World Bank, 2002). This notwithstanding, what operates in Nigeria is worse than eradication and relocation of squatters residents. In the country, the squatters are ejected and their property which are described as illegal structures are demolished. The demolition of entire Maroko settlements in 1991 and the various demolition exercises in Abuja epitomized this. Ejection of squatters and demolition of illegal structures generates social, economic and political problems with their attendant security implications. It tends to portray government as insensitive to the plight of the citizenry. Demolition also results in financial losses both to the squatters and the government; and depletes the national housing stock (Lands Division, 1996). This approach is socially destructive and involves high community cost. "The ultimate result has been the loss of these dwellings and the dispersal of the populations either into new slums or to swell the ranks of the existing slums while the area is being laid out and allocated for high class residential development" (Omirin, 2003).

Clearance and Redevelopment which is the second curative approach involves a temporary movement of the residents while the place will be cleared and new structures, usually high rise buildings erected for them on the same site. This approach involves high social and

economic costs which are almost unaffordable. Besides, the developments of high rise buildings will not provide sufficient ground level spaces which are needed by these low income families to operate their small businesses which they use to augment their meagre incomes.

The third and the best curative approach is to upgrade the squatter settlements. This is the most palatable of the three curative approaches to the management of squatter settlements because it has the ultimate effect of preserving the extensive development that had been erected and putting some order in the area. According to a report of the World Bank, upgrading rejuvenates the existing community with minimum disruption and loss of physical and social assets (The World Bank, 2002). The first step in this approach is to ensure security of tenure for the property owners in this settlement. When the fear of perpetual ejection is removed, property owners will now be interested to invest in the improvement of their houses and environment. Also private developers will be attracted to the area. In Nigeria, illegal structures in some cases are accommodated under a similar policy called regularization or ratification. The next stage is to commence on the provision of municipal facilities within the area. There are many approaches to do this, starting from the provision of a single infrastructure piece such as water supply alone to a package of services. Whatever the method being adopted, the planning and implementation should involve the community on a sustainable level.

6 CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATION

The appropriate handling of squatting activities requires a lot of political will and financial commitment on the part of the government. Political will is essential in order to embark on land reform that will not put the urban poor at a disadvantageous position with regard to access to land. In Nigeria for example, there is the need to review the Land Use Act to facilitate land accessibility most especially to the urban poor.

Since Government is becoming incapable to provide funds for the provision of these essential facilities in the face of other competing needs of the citizenry, government should be innovative in their financing. In this wise, Public – Private - Initiative should be explored. Since private investors are going to be involved, they need adequate return to make their involvement remain on a sustainable level, consequently; the urban poor need to be economically empowered in order to be able to afford the provision of; and payment for some of these facilities which will be provided under this arrangement.

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