

The dynamics of tenure, location and forced eviction: exploring the nexus in lagos informal settlements

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Generally, there is a common understanding that informal settlements are mostly characterised by lack of basic facilities, overcrowding, tenure insecurity and force eviction, and are largely occupied by the urban poor. One of the major issues which is on the increase, in recent times, in Lagos' informal settlements is forced eviction or at best threat of forced eviction. This is clearly posing a serious challenge to the livelihoods of the residents. A large body of literature argues that lack of tenure (land title) is the factor responsible for tenure insecurity and forced eviction in informal settlements

Certainly, there is a general understanding that the residents of informal settlements lack tenure security and thereby vulnerable to forces eviction because their houses are mostly: constructed on public or private land which they do not own; built without legal and planning permits and rented without formal renting contracts (World Bank, 2011). Lack of formal land title, precarious conditions of informal settlements and the need to save guide the lives of the residents from impending dangers are often used to justify forced evictions by the Lagos state government. However, evidence suggests that there are other underlining factors, largely associated with location, behind forced eviction of the residents of informal settlements in Lagos. From a pragmatic point of view, this paper argues that the vulnerability of the residents of informal settlements in Lagos to tenure insecurity and forced eviction or threat of forced eviction is exacerbated by their geographical and ecological location.

This paper is based on a larger research work which examined the complexity of factors which influence the livelihoods of the residents of informal settlements in Lagos, through the lens of the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. The study adopts multiple case study approach and draws on both primary and secondary sources of

data. It also uses multiple data collection methods, which include household surveys, households' in-depth interviews, key informants' interviews, direct observation and published documents. The study, based on four informal settlements, explores location as a driver of forced eviction and threat of forced eviction.

Specific location of settlements often presents advantages (opportunities/livelihood asset) or disadvantages (vulnerability) or both, at the same time, to the inhabitants (Farrington et al., 2002). Location, on one hand, could influence access to a particular livelihood asset and, on the other hand, it can influence the degree of vulnerability or impacts of certain shocks. Each of the four case study settlements, apart from been located within Lagos State, exhibits some specific locational features. These features have both positive and negative influence on the livelihoods of the residents. On one hand, they enhance livelihood opportunities and on the other hand, they come with a wide range of livelihood vulnerabilities, including forced eviction and threat of forced eviction. Likewise, it was observed that they influence how government relates with the settlements, in terms of urban development policies and programmes.

An analysis of the earlier cases of forced eviction documented by Agbola and Jinadu (1997) and the recent trends of forced eviction in Lagos show that the majority of the evictions occurred in the core of Lagos metropolis. Forced eviction or threat of forced eviction, either instituted by government or market led, is context specific. Informal settlements in Lagos exhibit similar generic characteristics; including lack of formal title, inadequate basic facilities and poor environmental conditions. However, vulnerability to forced eviction varies. Threat of forced and the actual forced eviction are common among the informal settlements within the core of the metropolis than those at the periphery. From a locational point of view, several factors are noted as drivers of forced eviction and threat of forced eviction in Lagos. These include site and situation of the settlements, land values and political interest.

This study concludes that even if lack of formal titles is the only reason why government instigates demolition and forced eviction of informal settlements, is not a tenable justification. The government is obligated to provide adequate housing and quality standard of living under a range of international human rights laws, including the International Declaration on Forced Eviction, and the International Covenant on

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Nigerian government is a signatory to these international declarations. Therefore, it cannot justify forced eviction and homelessness because of lack of title documents. Forced eviction contradicts government responsibilities of ensuring adequate housing and high quality standard of living.

References

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