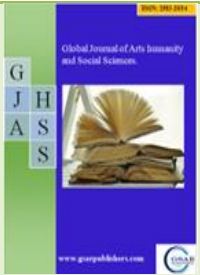
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NIGERIA'S CORECTION CENTRES AND URBAN SHANTY DEMOLITION IN YENAGOA, NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

The study examined the socio-economic and psychological implications of the 24-hour notice given to shop owners to quit the custodian center premises they rented and occupied for over eight years. Seventy-three questionnaires were administered through purposive random and snowball sampling methods to evictees of the exercise. Data was analyzed using Cross Tabulation Statistical tool. The study found the duration given to shop owners to leave as inadequate, making many to run into financial costs in dismantling, acquiring new spaces or shops, and paying new rents, as well as loss of rent advance earlier paid. The respondents knew that they could be asked to leave someday but would have preferred at least three-month notice or better still dialogue with them before taking action. The study saw the need to remove the shanties as they defaced the environment and recommend that the custodial centre should timely fence the area to prevent others from moving in. The custodial authority need to abide by the rent legislations specifying conditions for ejecting tenants.

Keywords: Custodial Centres' and Shanty Demolition

Introduction

Destruction of shanties at unauthorized sites is a common phenomenon in urban enclaves in contemporary Nigeria. It is commonly referred to as the 'removal of illegal structures' by different authorities. For purposes of urban regeneration, attaining aesthetic beauty of cities, enforcement of building codes, ensuring free flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic, as well as ensuring security checks many Nigerian governments (Federal, State, Local) authorities have embarked on such exercise at one time or another (The Guardian, 2023). What is perhaps different from one incident to another is the approach adopted in the evacuation, settlement of affected victims, and categories of targeted population.

The Muhammadu Buhari military junta of 1984-1985 was well known for its repressive tendency and destruction of so-called illegal urban structures in Nigeria. Coincidentally, the same personality again served as civilian President of Nigeria from May 2015 to May 2023. The orders to remove unauthorized structures normally clearly give reasonable time frame within which owners

or occupiers of such facilities are required to vacate or evacuate same on the orders of government said to be in the interest of society generally.

On June 17, 2022, arising from a security meeting with the State Governor, the Controller of Prisons in the State invited scores of tenants/shanty owners adjacent the Okaka custodial centre to a meeting and directed all to vacate the premises within 24 hours undisclosed reasons (Nwaogu, 2022; Premium Times, 2022).

The insecurity challenges of the country worsened under the present government, even though its leader was a former military general and Head of State between January 1984 and August 1985. During Muhammadu Buhari's second missionary journey as Nigeria's President, the country witnessed over fourteen jail breaks between May 2015 and July 2022 (Ikuteyijo & Ayodele, 2022). The most infamous of these in recent times is that of Kuje correctional facility in the nation's capital, Abuja, on July 15, 2022, where a total of 879 inmates escaped after an attack by one of Nigeria's most notorious terrorist groups of recent - the



Boko Haram. Also, in April 5, 2022 gunmen suspected to be Biafran agitators (IPOB – Independent People of Biafra) attacked the Owerri Correctional Centre and release a total of 1,844 inmates (wikipedia). A recent confessional statement by a Deputy Governorship candidate in Bayelsa State reveals that he was jailed for ten years but MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta) came all the way from the Niger Delta Region to Kaduna City in Northern Nigeria to break the jail and remove him. These instances are indicative of the fact that the terrorists often force their way into correctional facilities to release their members detained in the facilities.

Following the above security breaches the Federal Government directed the demolition of all illegal structures close to Correctional Centres alleging that these areas often inundated with make-shift or caravan structures, serve as hideouts for criminals who launch attacks on different prisons. It was from this understanding that the Bayelsa State Governor, Douye Diri, ordered the Controller of Prisons in the State to immediately remove structures beside the Okaka custodial center in Yenagoa. This policy directly affected small-scale businessmen and women who rented open spaces from the leadership of the custodial center. They constructed improvised caravan structures for trading, hair dressing, welding or mechanical workshops, garment making, etc. for over eight years and paid an average of N24,000 annual rent per shop space, though official receipts were never issued. The space allocations were not documented, and the quit notice itself was verbal. This notwithstanding, almost all structures were removed overnight by the owners following the directive.

Statement of the problem

Nigerian governments seem to have penchant for illegal structure demolition, particularly in cities as structures constructed without official permits are demolished by various administrations. This however has not deterred many urban poor to put up such structures with or without authorization. Again, the small-scale business operators are readily attracted to such places because of the high population or number of clients, low rents, the limited nature of their working capitals, and the possibility of freely changing from one business to another or sub-letting shop as well as extending one's shop facility without needing formal permission.

The prison (custodial centre) authorities over time rented part of their unutilized land space to enterprising small-scale business operators to construct temporary shops where different craftsmen and traders engage in small-scale business.

While their allocation and occupation of the spaces lasted transactions with the tenants were verbal. It is pertinent therefore to unveil the nature of businesses carried out there; the process of acquiring a space, reasons advanced by the authorities for quitting the people, strategies adopted by affected shop owners/tenants to cope with the sudden displacement, the losses sustained and why their space allocations and payments were not acknowledged in

writing. Understanding these will lead to unveiling the remote cause(s) of the of the eviction exercise. The study thus aims at interrogating the process.

Objectives of the study

The study's principal objective is to find out the socio-economic and psychological implications of quitting a people with only 24 hour notice after nearly eight years of occupation and rent paying, while the specifics are:

- Identify the demographic structure of the affected population
- Determine the major businesses embarked upon by the people
- Evaluate the mode of acquisition of space from the prison authorities
- Unveil the underlying reasons for quitting the people
- Determine the losses sustained by the shop owners
- Find out strategies adopted by the evictees to cushion the effect of the exercise on them.

Research Questions

- What was the demographic composition of the evicted correctional center tenants?
- What were the major businesses engaged upon by the evicted persons?
- How were the spaces acquired by the people?
- What reasons informed the Correctional Centre authorities for quitting the people with short notice?
- What losses were sustained by the evictees?, and
- What are the evictees coping strategies after displacement?

Locale

Okaka Correctional Centre (Prison) is located in Okaka Community at the heart of the city of Yenagoa, capital of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Okaka shares boundaries with Yenizue-Epie and Ekeke communities from north and south, respectively, all in Yenagoa LGA, Bayelsa State. The prison was constructed about 10 years ago, and has capacity for 300 inmates, yet presently made to accommodate over 600 inmates. So far, there have been no known successful jailbreak in Okaka, although with reports of unsuccessful attempts.

Literature Review

Jailbreak is fast becoming a regular occurrence in Nigeria, with as many as 14 cases in seven years (Daily Trust, 2022). These breaks may have relationship with the management of the prisons and facilities. The lumping up of different categories of prisoners, emphasis on retribution as against the reform and rehabilitation, the non-availability of facilities, insufficient funding, as well as the preponderance of medium security as against maximum security prisons in Nigeria could be part of the reasons for the many cases of jail break (Okuteyijo & Ayodele, 2022).



The Kuje prison break by Islamic State jihadists represents a failure of our intelligence gathering and a humiliation of the powers and ability of the security agencies (Guardian, 2022). It is difficult to accept that a prison well secured by both military, police, and prison guards could be easily attacked by insurgents without serious resistance leading to escape of several inmates.

The recurring jailbreaks may not be far from the problem of infrastructure deficit facing the correctional centres, overcrowding, delayed trial of suspects, personnel shortages, lack of motivation, corruption, and other institutional bottlenecks in the correctional centres (Premium Times, 2022).

The National Assembly also sees the non-conducive prison environments as a violation of human rights and believes that it may be a contributory factor for the high number of jailbreaks in the country (???). All Nigeria prisons accommodate more than a 300 percent of their installed capacity, with a large number of suspects awaiting trial for offences related to committing heinous crimes such as terrorists, insurgents, secessionists, kidnappers, etc. (Okuteyijo & Ayodele, 2022),

Ojiugo (2022) argue that jailbreaks becomes inevitable when people suspected to have committed little offences are kept together with hardened criminals or those who committed offences like terrorism, armed robbery, drug addiction or human trafficking in prison custody for a very long time, as these are likely to revolt one day. Collaborators of those convicted of heinous crimes against society would do anything possible to get them free, including jailbreaks. Abiodun (Premium Times) sees prison congestion and jail beak as intertwined with justice delayed, lacking in working equipment, and conspiracy on the part of officials. Abiodun's position is understandable from the point that people in inhumane prison confinement, coupled with delay in getting justice, lacking of official gadgets, and sometimes conspiracy by some prison officials, encourages the culprits and their allies to initiate action to get free.

Nigeria's urban population is growing so fast that it has posed several challenges to the nation similar to what obtains in other climes. Moreso, most cities in Nigeria experience sub-standard and inadequate housing provision, lack of infrastructure – transportation, electricity, high rate of poverty and large number of people living in slum areas (Mabogunje, 2002). These factors make people to get temporary occupation with or without approval from the authorities to survive. The myriads of problems confronting cities and city life in Nigeria are so much that we can described the situation as deplorable or decaying cities (Mabogunje, 1968; Okoye, 1979; Bello & Nwosu, 2011). Such circumstances compel responsible government authorities to initiate actions for urban regeneration to ensure not only the aesthetic beauty of the cities but also to ensure that they were free from epidemics and other challenges.

Urban renewal programmes are deliberate efforts to restructure the urban environment to meet the needs of today's urban dwellers as well as planning for the future. Urban renewal programmes could employ several strategies such as redevelopment, urban clearance, rehabilitation, or upgrading of settlements and housing (Mabogunje, 1968). Urban redevelopment or clearance often involve the demolition of unauthorized structures described as 'illegal structures'. Such actions makes the environment aesthetically better, enhance pleasurable living, and improving the rental values of properties within such neighbourhoods (Below & Nwosu, 2011). It is for this reason that Egunjobi (1987) describes urban renewal as an inescapable response to salvaging disorderly and decaying cities. It is a strategy for correcting anomalies often found in cities with a view to achieving socioeconomic development of cities, better urban environment, and increased usage and value of properties (Bello & Nwosu, 2011).

Methodology

Data for this study were mainly the outcome of a structured questionnaire administered to evicted respondents to illicit information relating to their plight, and oral interviews with some officials of the custodial centre. Purposive random sampling and snow-ball sampling methods was used in identifying respondents quitted from the Correctional Centre (Prison) premises, many sought solace in squeezing themselves in whatever available space nearby to make ends meet. A total of 80 questionnaires were administered and 73 were correctly completed and retrieved. The cross-tabulation statistical method was used for the analysis.

Data Analysis

Table 1 below shows our respondents comprised of 60.27% and 39.73% male and female, respectively. It also show the ages of respondents, with 26.03%, 38.36%, and 27.40% aged 18-25 years, 26-35 years, and 36-45 years, respectively. Also, 8.22% of respondents were 46 years and more. The religious affiliation of respondents indicated a majority of Christians with 69.86%, 6.85% as Muslim, 4.11% as African traditional religion (ATR) adherents, and 19.18% as other religions, which included Grail Message, Eckankar, Amorc, etc. On educational attainment, 12.33% had no formal education, 36.99% had primary level education, and 46.58% attended secondary level, while only 17.81% claim to have attended tertiary institutions.

On the status of respondents, 23.29% are shop owners, 43.84% are renters or clients of the shop owners, while 32.88% are sales assistants or journeypersons. The study also seeks to unveil the geographical region of origin of respondents. It shows dominance of South-South and South-East Nigerian with 38.36% and 39.73%, respectively. The remaining four regions were sparsely represented with South-West (8.29%), North Central (5.48%), North-East (5.48%), and North-West (2.74%).

Table 1: Demographic variables

Variables	Freq.	%
1. Sex:		
Male	44	60.27
Female		
2. Age	29	39.73
(a) 18-25 yrs		
(b) 26-35 yrs	19	26.03
(c) 36-45 yrs	28	38.36
(d) 46 yrs & more		
3. Religion	20	27.40
(a) Christian	6	8.22
(b) Muslim		
(c) ATR		
(d) Others	51	69.86
4. Education	05	6.85
(a) No formal education	03	4.11
(b) Primary	14	19.18
(c) Secondary		
(d) Tertiary		
5. Status	09	12.33
(a) Shop owner	27	36.99
(b) Renter/client	34	46.58
(c) Sales Assistant/journeyperson		
6. Region of origin	13	17.81
(a) South-South		
(b) South-East	17	23.29
(c) South-West	32	43.84
(d) North Central	24	32.88
(e) North East		
(f) North West	28	38.36
(g) Non- Nigerians	29	39.73
	6	8.22
	4	5.48
	4	5.48
	2	2.74
	0	0

In Table 2, our respondents indicated specializations in different occupations/trades. However, hairdressing, eatery/drinking parlours, and cosmetic stores were most prominent. Others were welding or mechanic workshops, sales of clothing/tailoring, carpentry or woodwork, and sales of food items.

Table 2: Nature of Business

Variables	Freq.	%
(a) Welding/mechanic	7	9.59
(b) Hairdressing	11	15.07
(c) Provision store		
(d) Eatery/drinking parlour	8	10.96
(e) Sales of unprocessed food items	10	13.70
(f) Sales of clothes/wears/tailoring		

(g) Woodwork/carpentry	5	6.85
(h) POS (mini-banking service)	7	9.59
(i) Others	6	8.22
	7	9.59
	12	16.44

Table 3 evaluates the reasons given by the custodial centre authorities for quitting the people, and shows that 58.90% of respondents indicated directive from above (authorities above the prison management), while 20.55% said it was due to security threats from underworld men and related jailbreaks, while 12.33% indicated need to give way for urban renewal programme. Others were the need for development of the land occupied by evictees (4.11%), and other unspecified reasons (4.11%) respondents.

Table 3: Reasons given by Prison authorities for quitting the tenants

Variables	Freq.	%
(a) Directive from above	43	58.90
(b) For security reasons	15	20.55
(d) For sake of urban renewal	9	12.33
(e) Need for development of the land	3	4.11
(f) Others	3	4.11

Table 4 sought to understand the time duration of the quit notice and the actually time taken to quit the place by respondents. At a glance, 69.86% of respondents indicated that they were given between 1-2 days. In fact, the directive specifically required all to quit within 24 hours. Meanwhile, 9.5% and 5.48% of respondents indicated 3-4 days and 5-7days, respectively. None indicated more than one week.

On the duration of time, respondents would have preferred, 32.88% favoured 3-month duration; 23.29% preferred a 1-month notice, while some 16.44% would have preferred a face-to-face dialogue with shop owners by the custodial center authorities to arrive at a reasonable time period. Others (15.07%) wanted 3-week notice, while only 12.33% would have been okay with a 2-week notice.

Table 4: Duration of quit notice, and duration of notice preferred by respondents

Variables	Freq.	%
Time taken to quit the premises?		
(a) 1-2 Days	31	42.47
(b) 3-4 Days	31	42.47
(c) 5-7 Days	7	9.59
(d) More than a week	4	5.48
Preferred period of notice		
(a) Give at least 2-week notice	9	12.33
(b) Give at least 3-week notice	11	15.07



(c) Give at least 1-month notice	17	23.29
(d) Give at least 3 months' notice	24	32.88
(e) Dialogue/discuss with shop owners/tenants	12	16.44

Like the adage which says 'the dead is never afraid to be buried', so are the evictees here. Haven been given only 24 hours to quit, they took the bull by the horn to survive in this situation. Therefore, Table 5 sought to know the strategies embraced by the people to make ends meet or stay afloat. Their responses indicated that a majority of 58.90% quickly acquired new spaces within Okaka to continue same business; 12.33% dismantled their shops and sold off properties; another 12.33% of respondents' were re-allocated new spaces by the prison authorities to continue same or other business.

Similarly, 8.22% of respondents simply folded up business, while another 8.22% not only evacuated their shops but went on to start a totally new business outfit in other location. No respondent indicated leaving his shop or goods for demolition by the authorities.

Table 5: Strategies embrace for livelihood coping?

Variables	Freq.	%
(a) Quickly acquired new space in Okaka for same business	43	58.90
(b) Dismantled shop and sold properties	9	12.33
(c) Folded up business	6	8.22
(d) Started a new business at different location	0	0
(e) Left my property/goods for removal by Prison authorities	9	12.33
(f) New space was re-allocated to me by Prison authorities		

Following the quitting of the custodial centre premises by the people, Table 6 examined the socioeconomic and psychological implications on the part of the respondents/evictees. Their responses show that the people lost out in almost all fronts. They lost perishable goods (24.67%); customers/clients/business (49.32%) due to change of location; some materials recovered became unsuitable for their new structure/location (24.67%), as well as loss of rent paid in advance to authorities (15.07%). One major area where all seem to have lost out was incurring cost of dismantling shop and building or acquiring new shop (94.52%) which require bulk money. Still, some find it difficult to acquire new shops or change business (28.77%), and many trainees, journeypersons or shop assistants became jobless overnight. Finally, there was the psychological implication of the custodial centre authorities refusing evictees to remove the debris (91.78%), which they needed in their new locations to set up new structures.

Table 6: Losses suffered due to vacating premises

Variables	Freq.	%
(a) Lost almost all my perishable goods	18	24.67
(b) Loss of business/customers	36	49.32
(c) Lost rent paid in advance	11	15.07
(d) Spent a lot in dismantling existing structure and/or acquiring new one	69	94.52
(e) Recovered materials became unsuitable for new structure/location	18	24.67
(f) Became an IDP	3	4.11
(g) Became jobless	17	23.29
(h) Inability to acquire new shop/business	21	28.77
(i) Correctional Centre refused my removal of debris	67	91.78

Discussion of findings

The removal of shanties in urban towns has become a continuous process, yet all governments give some time of grace prior to evacuation knowing that for whatever reasons behind such action, it may throw people into homelessness, as the 24-hour notice given to the Correctional Centre premises shop owners was barely insufficient for the people to make alternative arrangements, and act accordingly. This forced demolition had socioeconomic and psychological implications on the people.

The evictees cover all religious affiliations even though Christians were mainly affected because this region of Nigeria is predominantly Christian faith adherents. The evictees were predominantly of the South-South and South-East stock because of nearness to the people.

Through the evictees represented several trades/occupations, yet hairdressing, eatery/drinking parlours, and mini-banking services (POS) were most prominent. It was also revealed that the directive to remove the structures came from the state government, an order that was beyond the maneuverability of the Controllers of Prisons in the State, and the Deputy Controller in charge of the Okaka Custodial center. It was also intended to avert possible attack from underworld men following the experiences elsewhere in the country (Premium Times, 2022; Nwaogu, 2022).

The duration of the quit notice did not give shop owners/operators room to make alternative arrangements before dismantling shops. The respondents are of the view that a 3-month notice would have been adequate or better still, a dialogue with shop owners to arrive at a collective decision to vacate the land. Generally, no responsible government can compulsorily acquire, demolish, or take over any property without compensation.

Many of the displaced quickly secured alternative spaces along Okaka road adjacent the custodial centre to reconstruct new shops for fear of losing their customers/clients, even though a good number dismantled their structures, sold off usable properties, and left the area for other ventures. The few who were offered alternative spaces near the prison seem to have some filial or informal relations with some senior officials of the Correctional Centre.

The custodial authorities gave out and collected rents, but never gave official receipts because they knew it was against urban laws, and informed the shop owners that their stay was temporary as they could be asked to leave any day. The evictees lost in many fronts,

rent paid in advance could not be recovered. There was also the cost of dismantling and acquiring new space, as well as the oppressive order that they must not remove the concrete or sand-filling which the shop owners provided at their expense. The authorities needed to abide by the prevailing rent legislations on quitting tenants.

Conclusion

It takes time and resources to dismantle, source for a new shop, and raise money to pay for a new shops/premises to continue in business. Therefore it would have been better that the evictees were given reasonable time to quit. The removal of the shanties was necessary as the area became an eye saw, and not looking like the premises of such an important government security institution. To avoid the re-occurrence of such shops, the Correctional Centre should build a see-through iron fence to prevent unauthorized parking of cars, erections of similar structures, and use by miscreants to avoid possible jailbreaks.

Forced demotions and evictions not only make large number of urbanites at the margins of society homeless but also exacerbate urban poverty. Erection of temporary structures for residential and/or commercial purposes is incident on the fact that such people have no access to land and affordable shelter. The ease with which such structures emerge shows not only lack of regulatory control and enforcement but also that the people have been pushed to the wall and need survival. Targeting such structures for demolition itself is discriminatory, and pushing the poor away from the city could also create other problems.

Demolitions have multiplier effects on the displaced. People develop emotional and psychological attachment to their places of habitation and ownership of structures. Such actions by the authorities make the affected people to have emotions – knowing which lasts long. Demolished structures have far more psychological effects on the people, although passersby only see the rubbles, but behind it lies, much agony, pain, and misery (Bello & Nwosu, 2011).

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