

**SQUATTER RESETTLEMENT/RELOCATION  
PROGRAMME IN ABUJA, NIGERIA AND THE ISSUE OF  
LAND TITLE SECURITY**

PRESENTED AT  
**FIG WORKING WEEK 2009  
(SURVEYORS KEY ROLE IN ACCELERATED  
DEVELOPMENT)  
EILAT, ISRAEL, 3-8 MAY 2009**

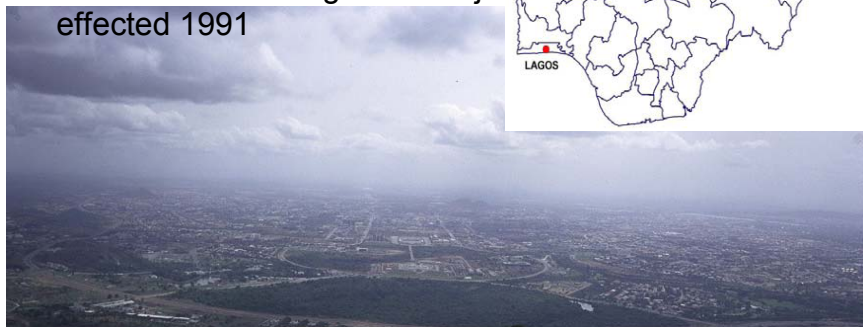
BY  
**IBRAHIM USMAN JIBRIL,  
DEPARTMENT OF LAND ADMINISTRATION, FCTA,  
ABUJA – NIGERIA**



**SQUATTER RESETTLEMENT/RELOCATION  
PROGRAMME IN ABUJA, NIGERIA AND THE ISSUE OF  
LAND TITLE SECURITY**

**INTRODUCTION**

- Abuja the capital of Nigeria created 1976
- Final shift from Lagos to Abuja effected 1991



Massive development and resettlement programme

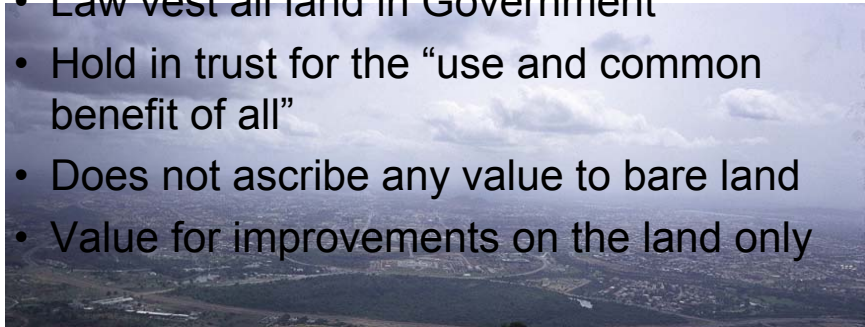


Massive development ...programme



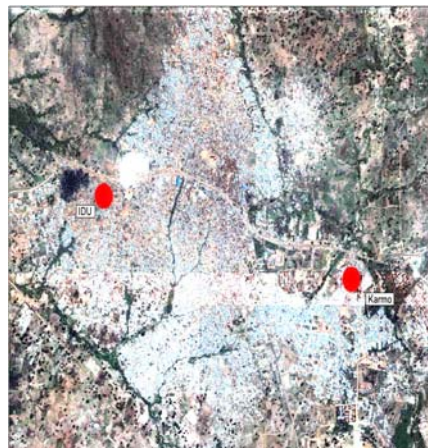
## Land policy in Nigeria

- Land use Act 1978, principal law guiding land administration in Nigeria
- Aim at equitable land redistribution
- Law vest all land in Government
- Hold in trust for the “use and common benefit of all”
- Does not ascribe any value to bare land
- Value for improvements on the land only



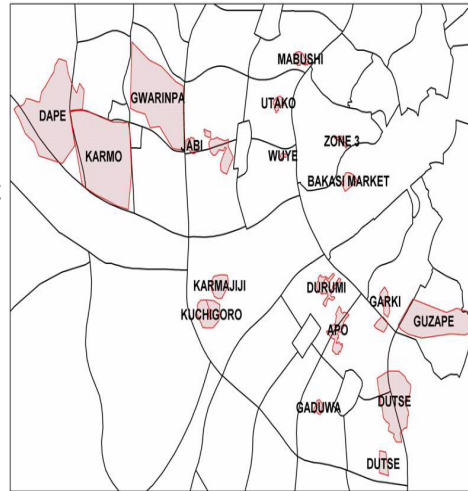
## Land Policy In the FCT

- FCT Act ,1976 vest all land in the government of the Federation
- Original policy of resettlement was changed
- Policy inconsistencies



## Squatters within the FCT

- Massive influx of people, unplanned squatter settlements
- Between 1976 and 2003, (a period of 27 years) there has been about four major policy changes affecting resettlement within the FCT.
- ‘...These series of inconsistencies and changes on Government resettlement policy has led to the springing up and massive development of squatter settlements within the areas earmarked for the City and other areas within the FCT, particularly those very close to the City’



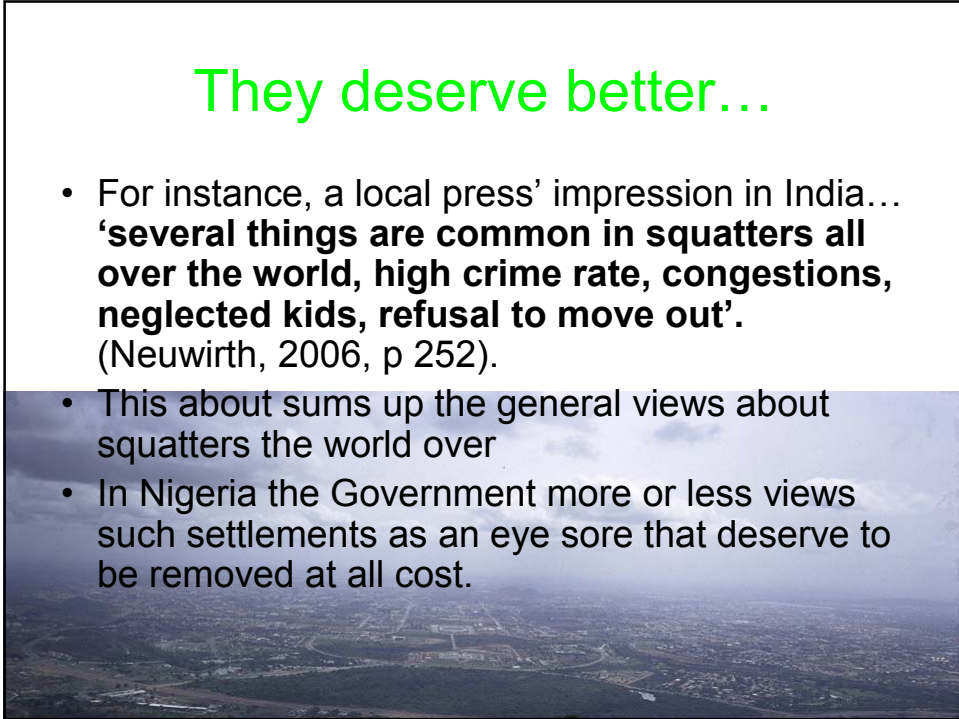
## They deserve our sympathy...

- Until very recently, Squatters all over the world tend to receive little sympathy from government circles.
- Many of these settlements are perceived as problem areas – i.e. areas prone to crime and lot of vices.



## They deserve better...

- For instance, a local press' impression in India... **'several things are common in squatters all over the world, high crime rate, congestions, neglected kids, refusal to move out'**. (Neuwirth, 2006, p 252).
- This about sums up the general views about squatters the world over
- In Nigeria the Government more or less views such settlements as an eye sore that deserve to be removed at all cost.



## ...Squatters can be ... creative...

- **'...the very same squatters who are driving them to work and cleaning their houses and hauling the materials for new building rising next to their clothes, and taking care of their kids'**. (Neuwirth, 2006, p 252.).
- De Sato is of the view **'that if squatters gain legal title to their land they can be a creative and energizing force in their economies'**.
- Similarly Neuwirth expresses the sentiments that **'squatter communities may be illegal, but that doesn't make them criminal'**.

## ...squatters are interested, hard-working...

- 'the true challenge is not to eradicate these communities but to stop treating them as slums – that is, as horrific, scary, and criminal – and start treating them as neighbour hoods that can be improved'.
- The idea of 'knocked down and build new' in most cases produces housing that is not affordable to the people who are living there
- ... 'squatters are interested, hard-working, and responsible adults, who can make decisions for their communities.
- They can equally 'define the trade-offs, that will be acceptable and without them, any work to upgrade their communities will be doomed to fail'. (Neuwirth, 2006)

## WHAT WENT WRONG?

- The haste with which the Government went about implementing the relocation... contributed significantly to the failure of the programme as far as issuance of land title security is concern.
- Despite the initial good preparations Government at the end decided to abandon it...and rushed into the demolition of all the affected houses in the old location

...the old location was completely wiped out before the new location could be developed...



..the Government rushed...

- At the time of this action more than 90% of the affected people were yet to take effective possession of their plots of land in the new relocation site.
- This single action contributed significantly to the derailment of the programme



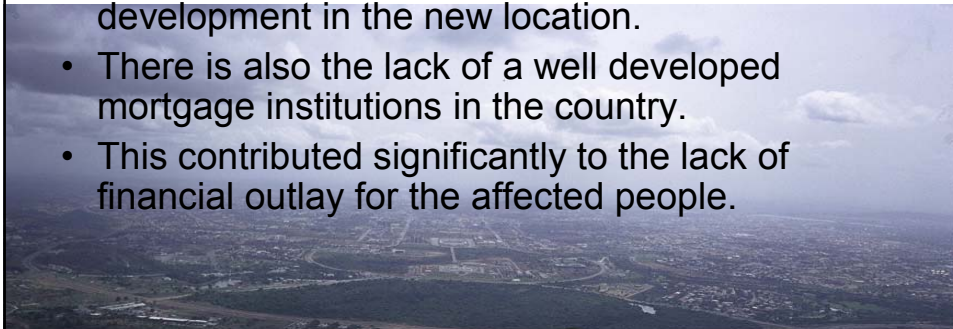
## ...the people became jittery...

- Many could not develop in the new location because they had to use the meager resources at their disposal (which they could have utilize in the construction work in the new location) to rent new accommodation at exorbitant rates elsewhere.



## ...fall out to Government action...

- As a fallout to Government action...virtually all the financial institutions withdrew from participation.
- Very few people were able to negotiate for facilities to enable them commence development in the new location.
- There is also the lack of a well developed mortgage institutions in the country.
- This contributed significantly to the lack of financial outlay for the affected people.





## ...fall out to Government action...

- Even if these institutions were well developed, the people were also very reluctant to take mortgages. They see such facilities as something oppressive as a result of the high interest rates.
- The NGOs that could have served as pressure groups on the side of the affected people suddenly lost their voices and kept mute.

## ...fall out to Government action...

- On the part of the 'victims' their lack of understanding of the whole issues at stake also contributed significantly to the failure of the programme.
- They were reluctant or too disorganized to protest and protect their interest.

## **GOVERNMENT was more interested in getting rid of the squatters ...**

- ...affected people lack the level of organizational skills that would make them mobilized in order to defend their collective interest.
- Fear is also a significant factor because most of the affected people were operating from the perception that the Government has no responsibility for their housing needs.
- Because of the way and manner that they acquired their earlier titles in the old location they were more concern about getting new shelter elsewhere than pursuing the title documents in respect of the plots in the relocation site.
- It is apparently clear that the GOVERNMENT was more interested in getting rid of the squatters in order to free what is perceived in Government circles as prime urban land for elitist development programme.

## **The need to help...**

- Government does not seem to have much interest in helping the urban poor to obtain a secured title and have a property of their own. This is most reprehensible.



## ...even the Government realised its failure

- Even the Government did realized its errors and apparent failure of the project...
- at the end of the year 2006 it ordered the construction of 1000 units of low income houses at the new site.



## ...even the Government realised its failure

- This was aimed at assisting those who lost out during the massive demolition exercise.
- In the end 527 units were constructed and fully ready for habitation.
- However none of them were allocated to anybody. In other words the houses are still empty.



## The Way Forward...

- Squatters need both a secured title to land and a very good understand from their Government and its officials.
- Government needs to reactivate the programme now.
- Though old taskforce was disbanded, there are three key Departments that can handle this issue – Land Administration, Development Control and Resettlement & Compensation.
- These departments need to pull their resources together, co-operate and co-ordinate the processing and issuance of title documents to the affected people.
- The reduce land rates/charges should remain in order to assist the people

## The Way Forward...

- **527 units of houses constructed should be sold as quickly as quickly as possible to the affected people**
- **and ensure that title documents are also issued at the point of sale.**
- **Should also complete the remaining 500 units.**
- **development of infrastructural facilities like roads and other services should continue at the site.**
- **Serious and concerted efforts need to be put in place in order to re-sensitized the affected people on the need to process their allocations to a logical conclusion in order to obtain a valid and secure title documents over their holdings**

## CONCLUSION

- In conclusion may I quote Robert Neuwirth that we don't need to crush squatter 'communities with our hard-nosed conception of property right.' He believes and I share his views that squatters the world over needs 'more focus groups, more debate, more discussion, more conversation.'
- **They could also do with valid land titles in addition to understanding.**
- ***Governments all over the world ( and the Nigerian Government in particular) ought to be ready for that please.***

THANK YOU  
FOR YOUR  
ATTENTION PLEASE