

Demolitions in Sabon Lugbe, Abuja, Nigeria

Report of a field visit Thursday 12 March 2009

Team that visited the place:

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Sabon Lugbe is a settlement near Airport road. The demolitions started on the 9th of March 2009 and will continue until all the non-indigenous houses are destroyed. On Friday 13 march it was still continuing. Two weeks before the demolitions started officers from FCDA came to the settlement to announce that the demolitions would start on the 9th of March. Members of the community then went to the court to call for an injunction. While they were waiting for a court injunction to stop the demolitions; the Development Control Department¹ already gave the go-ahead and the demolitions started on Monday the 9th of March, 2009. On Wednesday morning the 11th they still had not heard from the lawyer.

Reports from community members in the field while the demolitions were taking place:

Different people tell different stories. One person mentioned that Sabon Lugbe used to be an indigenous village which existed before the creation of Abuja. He and other people moved in. People that originally were living close to the site where airport road was constructed were resettled to Sabon Lugbe. The government provided them with alternative houses in the settlement. Also other settlers from the city, who were evicted there moved in as well as settlers from outside that migrated into Abuja. Non-indigenous people obtained permission and a certificate from the chief to settle in Sabon Lugbe. In 2005, under El Rufai (Minister of FCT at that time), there was an enumeration of indigenous and non-indigenous² in the settlement undertaken by the government. In 2006 El Rufai stated that 39 settlements were going to be demolished in FCT. There was a second enumeration executed by the government in 2006. (We were not able to confirm the number of settlers). According to people we interviewed, the number of non-indigenous was 3000, figures for indigenous are not known. At some point a private developer came to Sabon Lugbe, he approached the chief and informed him that he had bought the land from the government and he was planning to build a hospital there. Therefore the settlement had to be removed. The community did not agree upon that and the private developer approached the government to evict the community.

¹ Development Control comes under the Abuja Metropolitan Management Council AMMC, which is under the Federal Capital Territory Administration, who is in charge of demolitions.

² The terms in indigenous and non-indigenous are used to make a distinction between the original inhabitants who lived in the area before the establishment of Abuja and the migrants who moved into the area after the creation of Abuja.

Isa Musa, indigenous inhabitant of Sabon Lugbe

He was resettled to Sabon Lugbe under the Shagari government. He approached the AMAC (Abuja Municipal Area Council) chairman at that time. FCDA made a layout for the new settlement in Sabon Lugbe. Because the community was small and there were many robberies taking place, they allowed non-indigenous to settle in Sabon Lugbe to beef up their size. The private developer that had bought their land threatened them to move off the land, he came with guns and he was making a lot of trouble.

The indigenous houses in Sabon Lugbe, which are a few, will not be demolished. All the other houses are being destroyed. The community went to court; they contributed money to hire a lawyer to get an injunction. Now, on Friday 13 March the lawyer says he has obtained the injunction but he is only handing it over to the community when they reimbursed him the full amount of his costs. In the meantime the demolitions continued.

One man went to the office on Monday 9th of March and when he returned, his house was gone. His wife and others managed to save some of their personal belongings but the house was completely demolished. Others explain that they are public officers that had to be in the office at the time the demolitions were taking place. With their salaries they can not afford a proper house in Abuja so they have no other option to reside where they are. Being government employees still does not prevent their houses from being demolished.

Where will they go: people have no options, no compensation is paid, no alternative housing is provided so they will end up squatting somewhere else, but then under even more deprived conditions.

One of the persons we spoke to was a beneficiary of the 1000 houses scheme.³ But since the house eventually was allocated to someone else he ended up building his house in Sabon Lugbe.

To get access to land people have to register and to fill in an application only costs already NGN 21.000⁴, which is difficult for those whose house and belongings have been destroyed.

One person mentioned that he had just paid school fees for his children. So on top of the house that is destroyed he also loses the school fee money, he had just arranged for his wife starting a small business selling food that was destroyed and he had just paid the rent for his brother, whose house was also destroyed. Wednesday 11 March the exams started so education is seriously affected.

³ A Presidential Committee on Affordable Housing submitted a report to the president in 2007 on social housing targeting the poor. UN-Habitat was asked by FCDA to be in charge of the task team in order to develop a participatory plan. The NGO Women Environmental Programme (WEP) and mortgage banks also joined the team. The team was to address the problems faced by the poor who were displaced as a result of the demolitions taking place in Abuja, and find housing solutions for those affected by demolitions. The team advised the FCDA on a social housing scheme called 'The Abuja at 30 housing scheme'. Initially 1000 units were planned, but in November 2007 only 500 units had been built for those affected by the evictions.

⁴ Was brought down from NGN 52.000 to 21.000.

Pictures made during the visit







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