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**PRESS RELEASE: VOICES FROM THE SLUMS:
LAGOS COMMUNITIES CRY OUT FOR SECURITY
OF TENURE**

**JUSTICE & EMPOWERMENT
INITIATIVES – NIGERIA**

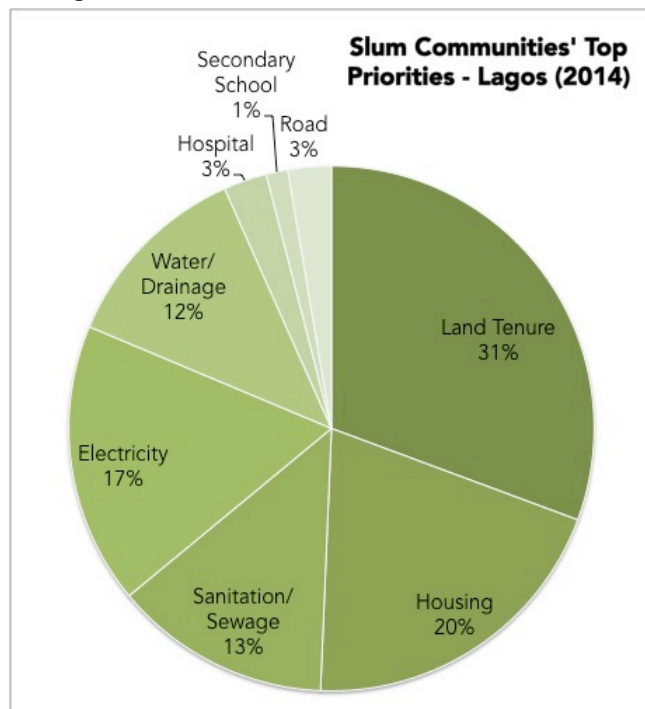
As Nigeria celebrates this year’s World Habitat Day, the theme of which is “Voices from the Slums,” slum communities across Lagos are facing an uptick in threats to their security of tenure – meaning occupation of land or housing in such circumstances as ensure a secure home and enable one to live in security, peace and dignity.

Recent months have seen violence and mass arson meted out on communities such as Otto/Ilogbo Extension in Ebute Metta and Otodo Gbame in Lekki. Other communities, such as Ajeromi in Ijora Badia East, face threats of eviction aimed at coercing them to pay extortionate “ratification fees.” Behind these threats is the resurgence of land-owning families, whose quest for control of valuable Lagos real estate knows no bounds.

Thus far, the Lagos State Government, the police, and the judiciary have done little to curb such threats, protect lives and properties, and ensure security of tenure for the State’s most vulnerable and marginalized residents.

Justice & Empowerment Initiatives (JEI) works closely with a federation of over 40 slum communities called the Lagos Slumdweller Federation, which have come together in solidarity to face down such threats and promote their mutual goals for security and development.

Among other actions, since August 2014, Federation member communities have embarked on a community-led, citywide slum profiling exercise in Lagos, which captures key data from slums and helps them identify shared priorities. From the profiling completed thus far, “land tenure” has been the number one priority for 60% of slum communities. Overall, it ranked the highest priority over all other key issues, including electricity, housing, water/drainage, sewage/sanitation, schools, etc.



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The reasons behind the high ranking of land tenure are very clear. Indeed, many residents of such communities explain that lack of security of tenure is the reason the areas they live in are “slums” at all. Without secure tenure, it is impossible to make long-term investments in housing and infrastructure to make up for government neglect.

A chief from Ajeromi, a community that was resettled by the Federal Government when it built the National Arts Theater in 1973, explains: “We are trying our best; but Government is playing games. If they give us the go ahead, we know what we can do. All these ‘shanties,’ we can use our money and do them in the very modern way. But if they never give it to us with all documents, they can come and break the place at any time!”

For more perspective on the tragedy of insecurity of tenure and forced eviction in Badia East, see: www.justempower.org/strategic-advocacy-and-litigation

Pervasive lack of security of tenure is not a matter of residents failing to comply with the law – instead it is a product of a legal and policy framework that fails to provide ways for “regularization” of tenure. For instance, a resident of Otumara community in Ebute Metta bought his land in the early 1980s and has tried for more than two decades to obtain a certificate of occupancy, first from Lagos State and then from the Federal Government. During all this time, he has continued to pay land-use charges and other fees and taxes that are demanded by the state and local governments. His is not an isolated case.

Lack of secure tenure leaves residents of such areas vulnerable to exploitation from all sides, including landowning families who can use their financial position and influence with government, the courts, and police to advance their interests in valuable land.

“On World Habitat Day, we take this opportunity to remind Government of its obligation to ensure security of tenure and adequate shelter to all citizens, not least of all the poor,” says Ishola Agbodemu Musbau, a leader of Otto/Ilogbo Extension community.

For more on the violence and arson used to forcefully evict Otto/Ilogbo Extension community, see: www.justempower.org/urgent-petition

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