



COLLABORATING FOR CHANGE

IMPACT STUDY OF THE 'FORCED EVICTIONS AND THE RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING' CAMPAIGN IN NIGERIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of an impact study on Amnesty International's role in the Forced Evictions and the Right to Adequate Housing campaign in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, between April 2010 and December 2011. The campaign is part of the wider Human Rights Live Here – Stop Forced Evictions in Africa project, funded by the National Postcode Lottery (Netherlands), which focuses on eight African countries. The aim of the project is to end human rights violations experienced by people living in slums and enhance the capacity of residents to claim their rights.

In Nigeria, the campaign focuses on Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State, where more than 40 waterfront communities are facing the threat of demolition of their homes, without due process, by the Rivers State government. Residents from different waterfronts have been mobilizing to prevent further forced evictions and to demand justice for the human rights violations they have faced.

Working in collaboration with the slum residents, and local and national organizations, the main goal of the campaign is to stop forced evictions and ensure that any evictions carried out comply with international and regional standards.

The main purpose of the impact study was to draw lessons to improve future initiatives in Nigeria, and more broadly, to inform Amnesty International's wider campaigning work. The study was conducted by Maneesh Pradhan and Alexandra Hernandez-Moreno from the Learning and Impact Unit at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International, with significant contributions from staff members from the Africa Programme at the International Secretariat and partners in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The impact study team adopted a participatory approach that involved engaging with diverse groups of stakeholders using a range of tools and techniques. From the outset, the study methodology was developed in consultation with relevant teams at the International Secretariat, key partners in Nigeria and with representatives of waterfront communities.

The study involved visits to and discussions with five waterfront communities, participatory review and reflection exercises with partners, focus group discussions and interviews with waterfront residents, partners, government authorities, journalists, other civil society actors and Amnesty International staff.

KEY CHANGE AREAS

The impact study identified the following key areas of change.

Increased rights awareness and confidence of waterfront residents: Waterfront residents are increasingly able to understand and articulate forced evictions as human rights violations and to demand due process from the government in any demolitions. This greater awareness is reflected in higher levels of engagement and participation in campaign events. However, the level of awareness and confidence is not uniform across all residents, with the more significant disparities related to geography and gender.

Increased sense of security and hope for the waterfront residents: A large number of waterfront residents considered this as the most significant change, largely due to reduced threats of demolitions. Increased visibility of the housing rights issue through the campaign, and the national and international solidarity it generated, has further contributed to increase the sense of security and hope for the waterfront residents. However, the threats from the government remain and not all waterfront residents share the optimism. Many women in a number of waterfronts still feel insecure as sexual violence is prevalent and police harassment persists.

No further demolitions: Since the demolition of Njemanze in 2009, there have been no further demolitions of entire waterfronts contrary to earlier government plans. Although it is difficult to attribute this to the campaign alone, many waterfront residents and partners acknowledged the contribution of the campaign in making the issue visible, which has created difficulties for the government to go ahead with outright demolition.

Government more cautious in its rhetoric and actions: With its rhetoric and actions under scrutiny, the government now uses the term “urban renewal” as the reason for waterfront demolitions whereas previously the emphasis was largely on “checking criminal activities”. The police escorted the demonstrators during the World Habitat Day 2011 event in complete contrast to previous years when they used to shoot and harass them. However, there has been very limited change in the government’s attitude or institutional policy and position regarding the waterfronts.

Increased media interest: The campaign has helped to generate more media interest in, and support for, different problems faced by the waterfront communities, including forced evictions. More journalists covered the different campaign events and there was a shift away from largely negative reporting with stereotypical representation of the waterfronts as “criminal dens” to more balanced news and commentary.

Increased visibility, profile and recognition of housing rights as human rights: The campaign has significantly contributed to highlighting forced evictions as a human rights issue in Port Harcourt. The higher profile of forced evictions has led to more support and solidarity from the diplomatic community in Nigeria. However, while increased visibility of the issue has contributed to the growing support from more like-minded institutions, it has not translated into significant change in the perception of the issue among the general public.

Emergence of community activists and increased trust and acceptance from waterfront residents to work with civil society organizations: A number of waterfront residents have emerged as community activists in the process of the campaign and they are playing an active role in organizing different events and in community mobilization, supporting community members on housing rights concerns as well as on police harassment issues. Moreover, residents have been more willing and able to strategically engage with different civil society organizations to advance their case.

FACTORS OF CHANGE AND AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL’S CONTRIBUTION

The study identified five key driving factors, related to Amnesty International’s work, for the changes generated by the campaign.

Diverse campaigning initiatives made possible due to National Postcode Lottery (Netherlands) funding: One of the campaign’s key strengths and an important contributing factor of change has been the ability to generate and sustain engagement with different constituencies using a range of influence channels and mechanisms. Sustained engagement at such levels required significant resource investment, much of which Amnesty International contributed through the Dutch Postcode Lottery project.

Community activism and mobilization: Increased participation and leadership of the waterfront residents in different campaign events highlighted the community as a core agent behind the change process. Amnesty International and partners have contributed to building community capacity through different trainings, providing opportunities for participation at different national and international lobbying and advocacy initiatives, mentoring community activists, and creating spaces that promote community mobilization and leadership.

Visibility of the waterfronts issue: Different campaigning tools and platforms used by Amnesty International and partners made the issue visible at both local and international levels. Amnesty International’s contribution in introducing a rights language ensured the recognition of forced evictions in Port Harcourt as a human rights concern. This helped to attract media interest and solidarity from different actors at national and international levels. Amnesty International’s credibility and reach also contributed to globalizing the issue.

International solidarity: International solidarity contributed to influencing the government and the support of people from different parts of the world helped in building residents’ confidence to mobilize. Amnesty International, and key sections such as Amnesty International Netherlands, Amnesty International Switzerland, Amnesty International France and Amnesty International UK, played a crucial role in enhancing international solidarity through signature / postcard campaigns, media work and participation in local campaign events.

Collaborative actions of partner organizations: Multiple resources and skills generated as a result of the engagement of different partners have been a significant factor behind the campaign’s success. The campaign provided a platform for various community-based organizations and local and national NGOs with different expertise to join forces and resources, which enabled them to link activities at different levels for greater impact.

LESSONS LEARNED

The impact study identified the following areas of the campaign that would benefit from further consideration for the purposes of improvement and for generating further impact

Understanding community: Campaign partners emphasized the need to consider communities as single social entities in order to minimize the risk of creating internal divisions. However, it is equally important to recognize that communities usually comprise different social strata, often with different interests. A campaign that emphasizes community agency and empowerment as part of the change process, must understand the intricacies of community dynamics so as to ensure campaign interventions do not benefit only the more powerful sections of the community and lead to further marginalisation of more vulnerable strata.

Community mobilization: Whilst the turnout for campaign events is an indicator of successful community mobilization, it is necessary to assess the extent to which communities are able to self-mobilize – not only as an emotive reaction but also as a strategic action. It is important to ensure that mechanisms for community mobilization promote community capacity for self-mobilization rather than create dependency on partners or Amnesty International. Community self-mobilization is often easier when community structures already exist and are employed, but it is important to understand the extent to which these structures are representative and inclusive.

Active participation and campaign ownership: A strong, positive correlation was observed between the level of residents' participation in decision-making processes of different campaign events and community mobilization. Emphasizing mechanisms of active participation of the wider community in different stages of the campaign is one possible way of enhancing community ownership of the campaign. Partnership with organizations that have a better understanding of the community is crucial in ensuring and enhancing the active participation of the community. "Internationalization" of the campaign should complement and strengthen the local campaign and not shift ownership away from local actors, in particular the communities.

Women's participation: The campaign approaches the housing rights issue in a gender-neutral manner. Women's participation is largely seen as a desirable rather than an integral component of the campaign. Such a generic approach, particularly in a highly patriarchal setting, can contribute to limiting women's meaningful participation. Although limited participation of women in strategic discussions and decision making may reflect women's limited role in local civil society it is important to consider the extent to which the design and delivery of different campaign activities can advance their capacities and their role. Effective gender integration in the campaign requires developing awareness of the concept and process of gender mainstreaming among partner staff and community activists.

Media engagement: Increased media reporting on the issue of waterfronts and a shift towards more neutral reporting indicate a positive impact on media, although this has not translated into a critical mass of local journalists who proactively champion the issue. Achieving this requires strategic engagement with the media beyond sporadic interaction during campaign events. Strategic media engagement involves carefully choosing the message and medium that the campaign uses; producing evidence and facts that generate more media interest; and improving the capacity of local journalists to understand and engage on the issue. Another important dimension would be to build the capacity of the communities to be more media proficient.

Public perception: Although the campaign has been successful in making the issue visible, there has not been a significant shift in public perception in support of the waterfronts. Apart from reaching the wider public through different media campaigns, it is also important to target specific groups, in particular those who are crucial in forming and shaping public discourse such as architects and urban planners, academics and urban youth, and to engage with them more strategically on the problems faced by those who have been forcefully evicted and those who are under threat of eviction.

Engaging with the government: In order to influence government it is important to shift away from a one-off and reactive engagement to a more sustained and proactive approach. It is also critical that the partners and residents are involved in different platforms and processes that Amnesty International initiates in engaging with the government. Apart from direct engagement with the government's political leadership, options for involvement with other influence channels, such as the bureaucratic machinery, also need to be explored. It is more effective if the oppositional modality can be complemented with a solutions-based "constructive engagement" with the government.

Linking national and regional initiatives: Participation by residents and local partners in different regional platforms is an effective way of enhancing the relationship between local activism and international advocacy. Such exposures also contribute towards building the capacity of partners and residents. It is important to communicate regional and international information to partners and residents for use in their lobbying and advocacy initiatives at local and national levels. This can ensure that regional and international work is more strategically aligned with national goals.

Partnership: Collaborations between different local, national and international organizations has made it possible to address the issue using a range of influence channels and mechanisms. The collaborative approach contributed in building the capacity of partners through exchange of different ideas and skills. Effective collaboration in such a multi-organizational partnership requires strategic coordination, role clarity and effective communication among the partners, as well as flexible practices that allow partners to adapt the activities to fit the emerging context and retain their identity. It is important to build and strengthen institutional rather than individual relations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Community empowerment and mobilization

- Explore human rights education as a possible tool to reach wider sections of the community – in particular the more vulnerable groups – and build their human rights awareness.
- Develop mechanisms that allow more sustained interaction and solidarity between residents of different waterfronts. The Rapid Response Network could be a good example.
- Develop specific actions to mobilize the residents of Njemanze and to address their issues.

Women's participation

- Take steps to identify and initiate women specific concerns within the broader housing rights issue as a way to enhance women's interest, participation and leadership.
- Invest resources on building women's capacity and leadership in the waterfront communities.
- Raise awareness about the importance and modalities of gender mainstreaming among partners and community activists.

Media engagement

- Seek more sustained and strategic engagement with local media in order to generate a critical group of journalists that continuously champions the issue.
- Involve the local media in generating ideas for more strategic media engagement, particularly in developing the message and medium of different media campaigns.
- Explore ways of improving local journalists' understanding of human rights.
- Create spaces and mechanisms to enhance the capacity of communities to engage with the media.

Changing public perceptions

- Engage strategically with specific constituencies of civil society that could play a crucial role in shaping public opinions. Professionals like architects and urban planners, academics interested in the issue and urban youth could be the possible constituencies.

Engaging with the government

- Ensure more sustained engagement using multiple influence channels.
- Continue to support litigations and involvement of communities in such processes.
- Work out mechanisms for creating a platform where the government, civil society organizations and waterfront residents can come together to deliberate on each other's points of view.
- Make the government aware of good practices of slum upgrading in different countries.

Linking national and regional initiatives

- Encourage processes that involve communities and local partners in regional and international lobbying and advocacy initiatives.
- Support communities and local partners to enable them to understand and strategically use the information coming from regional and international initiatives to strengthen campaigns at local level.

Partnership

- Focus on strengthening institutional relationships with the partners and their capacities.
- Establish mechanisms for effective coordination, communication and role clarity among partners.
- Create platforms where partners can share information and experiences to complement each other's work and to inform joint decision making.

Project planning and monitoring

- Ensure all partners are informed of Amnesty International's "big picture" of the campaign and that there is agreement on their individual roles and contributions to it.
- Ensure strategic links between different strands of work, for example, policing and housing rights. Clarify such links with concerned partners.
- Create systems for logging the different project activities and their outputs at all levels. Ensure gender disaggregated information is captured to help inform the level of women's participation.