

Marginal Settlements in Port Harcourt, the Garden City: The Geography of Horror

Kio-Lawson Datonjo

Department of Geography and Environmental Management, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract This paper takes a clinical study of the geographical spread of Marginal Settlements in Port Harcourt, the Garden City of Southern Nigeria. The work was concluded after intense days of field research coupled with the residual knowledge of the researcher as well input from past works of previous scholars. Primary data were collected through face-to-face interview with residents of Marginal Settlements as well as their community leaders. Putting the information together, this paper was able to prove that housing famine at the city centre was primarily responsible for their emergence and spread. It was also established that poverty as well as the geography of the place were the fertilizing factors responsible for the 'horror' associated with the settlements. This paper therefore suggests that one way in which this 'horror' can be conquered is by introducing some element of development control in Marginal Settlements. Secondly, including the settlements in the distribution of urban infrastructure can also help in improving the face of these settlements.

Keywords Marginal, Settlement, Port Harcourt, Horror

1. Introduction

The housing problems of the astronomically expanding garden city, the administrative and commercial capital of Rivers State, one of the oil rich deltaic states of southern Nigeria has assumed a horrifying dimension. The horrifying rise in the population of Port Harcourt within the last twenty years was not surprising being host to a bulk of the administrative headquarters of the major oil players in the country. With a favourable business climate (heavily industrialized), beautiful natural environmental conditions and improved transportation network (road, rail, water, air etc), it is common to see new faces tramping into the city daily with a common purpose at heart; to get a piece of action from the oil economy. With a government ready to do little or nothing in the area of housing provision left almost completely in the hands of the private sector who are intoxicated by the desire to make profit, housing demand in the city has shut up into the heavens. The city today stands out as one with the highest rent in the country beside Abuja, the nation's capital. The implication is that a bulk of the population have been shuffled out of the city centre; that is already out of space for residential land-use and where rent is outside the reach of the low and medium income bracket. Those who have been pushed out of the city centre has found a "roof" over their head at the periphery of the city

where land is less desirable (susceptible to flooding) and which was before now (in the 70's) only functioned as transit camp for the Okrika fishermen from the creeks south of the city[1]. The initial growth of these informal settlements were of little concern to the government since they were said to house only an insignificant proportion of the urban population (Urban poor) who has no voice in the polity of the city. It was not until the early eighties when the government realized her error in allowing these informal settlements to grow without any form of intervention. Today these settlements have become a shelter to a significant percentage of the population in the city. Today, about 200,000-500,000 persons out of the city's population of over 1.5million people live in marginal settlements[2]. The inhabitants of these settlements had succeeded in creating an identity for themselves and had progressively played themselves into relevance in the political, social and economic stream of the city. As Dr Awolibo, a one time youth leader in Rex Lawson marginal settlement, now a medical doctor puts it;

"Their greatest asset is their cohesiveness, unity of will and internal solidarity. Any politician who recognizes these elements and cashes on it has scored a plus in his political ambition"

In the past some intervention programs have been carried out by government to heal the social problems arising from this manner of settlements but none had ever recorded any appreciable success. The recent program being planned by the administration of Hon. Ameachi to transform the area (total clearance and redevelopment) has attracted a volcanic response from the people who are out to stop the

* Corresponding author:

Livestones.assembly@yahoo.com (Kio-Lawson Datonjo)

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government. How far they can go against the machinery of government is a matter for the future. But some vital questions which as scholars of development literature we cannot ignore are “who are these people? What do they want?”

2. Method and Technique

Port Harcourt is the capital of River State geographically located south of Nigeria. It is one of the industrialized cities in the deltaic region of the country. It has the highest agglomeration of oil producing companies in the country. With a population of over 1.5million people[3], the city stands out as one of the fastest growing cities in the country both in commerce and human population. The city is popularly referred to as the “garden city” of Nigeria because of her richness in greenery.

There are 34 major marginal settlements spread across the original geographical area of the city. This geographical area was segmented into four zones; north, south, east and west. From each zone, four marginal settlements were randomly selected for the study. The target population for which this research study was directed at were members of the Community Development Committee (CDC); highest decision making body in marginal settlements. Others were property owners who had resided in the settlements for a period not below twenty five years. Attempt was also made to reach out to some members of the youth groups in the settlements as well as some repentant militant and cultist. A bulk of the information gathered came through personal interview. Some documented information also came from the Nigerian police and the press.

3. Historical Background to Marginal Settlements in the Garden City

Oral history from some of the early settlers on these marginal lands reveals that the origin of marginal settlement dates back to the period when Nigeria was operating a regional structure. The same source explained that “Housing famine” in the city was the greatest factor that contributed to their birth and expansion.

“Waterside” settlements as they are traditionally referred to were initially used as transit camps by fishermen, timber millers, wood sellers, etc. The existing structures then were make-shift tents made from woods and raffia palm to provide temporary sleeping place while the business last. Permanent residential accommodations emerged immediately after the civil war. In Afikpo marginal settlement (one of the oldest waterside settlements) history has it that Paa Giles was the first man to build a permanent dwelling unit in October 1969. The Gbundu settlement (the largest waterside in the city) has Mama Gbundu whose real name was Tarinafigha on record as the first person to settle permanently with her family.

The devastation left behind by the civil war did not help matters. Those returning back to the city after the hostility were faced with two major problems; getting a job to enable them feed and provides shelter for their families. Income level was very low, and so most people could not afford to pay for accommodation at the city centre. The “waterside” therefore provided an immediate answer for them. For Paa Jenewari Abel, seventy nine years old retired civil servant and a proud owner of five buildings scattered across three marginal settlements in the city;

“The initial settlers didn’t find it easy because of the swampy nature of the area, coupled with the seasonal flooding. These and other factors made the erection of physical structures very difficult.”

Then how were they able to overcome these problems?

“Through our own localized mechanism we were able to push back the water and prepare the land to carry physical structures through the use of mud dug from the creeks and domestic waste from the city centre.”

With more industrial activities crawling into the city daily, more human heads were also attracted to the city. For Paa Jenewari, though there was nothing attractive about these settlements in the eyes of the urban rich, but for the uneducated and urban poor, it provided the serenity and naturalness typical of the rural areas. Therefore, adjustment to the pattern of life in these settlements was not difficult for the urban poor. The usual picture of seasonal tidal overflow, the make-shift bathrooms, the pier toilets, the shouting and screaming from the voices of children playing their games, the tales by moonlight, the cock-crow-at-dawn and the absence of basic infrastructure common with these settlements, were all a true reflection of a typical deltaic rural settlement.

According to Elder Elijah Amachree, seventy three years old retired canoe builder at Prison Waterside and a former member of the CDC;

“Life at the city centre then was far becoming too complex for those of us that lacked basic education, who were born and raised within the rural environment. Therefore it was safer for us doing business and living with our families at the waterside. At least here you won’t have to look far to get someone speaking the same language with you. It gave us some sense of security then”.

For the early settlers like Elder Amachree, life at the waterside then was not as bad as the outsiders painted it to be; at least at the waterside then they were free from the insecurity and criminality associated with the city centre after the civil war. For Elder Amachree, the overall population of those living at the waterside then was very minute in relation to the over all population of the city.

4. Reasons for the Sudden Population Explosion at the Marginal Settlements

“Those at the city centre thought that we could barely

survive the ugly environmental conditions at the waterside. We were looked upon as poor, illiterates and insane people, but with our hands and brains we survived, gradually pushing the water backward and making the place habitable. Secondly, we enjoyed the luxury of sleeping with our eyes closed. We changed the perception of the people towards the waterside settlements”.

These were the words of Elder A machree.

Towards the close of the 70's, it was clear that one of the horrifying nightmares facing the garden city was housing famine. The geographical location of the city made it a heaven for the Igbo and Hausa traders. Her growing industrial prowess made it a fertile ground for the highly educated Yoruba's from the west. With a well developed rail and road network running through the east and west linking the north, coupled with an array of creeks surrounding and connecting it to the deltaic coastal communities, migration into the city was without any difficulty. Thus it was clear that by the end of the 70's, land space in the city was already over stretched by the competing land uses[4]. The initial pressure for land was towards the south because of the desire to remain close to the CBD of the city. Availability of land space south of the city was limited by the array of creeks forming walls of boundary. For Mr. Wariboko James, a tailor and owner of two properties at Bishop Johnson marginal settlement, south of the city;

“When it was clear that residential accommodation at the city centre was increasingly becoming scarce, and the available land price outside the reach of our people who were not in control of the economy of the city, some of us had to move out to join our kinsmen at the waterside. Land space then at the waterside was not for sale. The area of land you are able to reclaim becomes your property. Dwelling units then too were strictly owner occupier”.

From Mr. Wariboko's explanation, it was not too long when more inhabitants of the city turned their search lights for shelter to the waterside. This was when the waterside settlements began to gain respect in the city.

5. The Changing Face of the Marginal Settlements in the City

The birth of the second republic in 1979 came with her attendant benefits. There was a huge flow of cash among the populace. The level of corruption among the ruling class turned them and their friends into financial Mongols. More beautiful edifice emerged in the Government Reserved Area (G.R.A), same springing up in the medium density areas (D-line axis and main Port-Harcourt Township) replacing old structures. The resultant implication was that land and house value catapulted further into the sky. While medium and high income housing provision recorded an increase, it was not to be the same with low income housing. Though the NPN led government of Melford Okilo attempted to close this gap by initiating the low income housing scheme in all the local government headquarters in the state,

including Port-Harcourt, no appreciable impact was made by the scheme when compared with the demand for low income housing in the city. With the absence of any form of development control on the part of government coupled with the low cost of building materials used at marginal land, it was not difficult to put a roof over one's head at the marginal settlements. Thus marginal lands became heaven for the low income earners who could not pay for residential accommodation at the city centre. By the end of the 80's, these settlements had succeeded in building an identity for themselves not easy to ignore. They developed their own form of governance to protect lives and properties. The responsibility of administering law and order was saddled with a central committee; Community Development Committee (CDC). The duties of this committee among others were the maintenance of law and order, settlement of disputes, allocation of land to potential developers. To ensure that the crime wave at the city centre does not crawl down into marginal settlements, the youths were organized into vigilante groups to police the areas. In return, residents were made to compulsorily part with a token from their income to service the vigilante groups. This was also the period when cult activities in the two tertiary institutions in the city were making headline news in the media with the University of Port Harcourt located north of the city gaining more popularity with this evil monster. Contest for sphere of influence between fraternities from the 80's often resulted in violent clashes with small arms and light weapons freely used to the extent that most universities have been turned into a battle field. The University of Port Harcourt has been more engulfed in this wind of violence blowing across the Nigerian Universities[5]. It was also clear that most of these cult groups were the pet babies of some notable lecturers and politicians craving for relevance and supremacy against their perceived enemies in the profession. The most influential among the cult groups were Vikings, Pirates, Black axe. The hunger to exact superiority and control within the university environment resulted into frequent violent clashes among the various cult groups. It was not too long when the desire to spread her popularity and swell her army took the cult groups to the streets of the city and into the collages. The Rivers State government in response to the conflict banned boarding for colleges in the city of Port Harcourt[5]. The use of the instrument of “rustication” by the university authorities against those caught in the web of cultism somehow also yielded some positive result. The university campus and the colleges soon became unsafe to carry out these unhealthy activities for fear of being caught. Marginal settlements in the city with her ugly geographical and spatial nature provided the right environment and shelter for the fleeing cult students to relocate their operational base. With the army of jobless youths in the marginal settlements it was not difficult for the epidemics to gain solid root in these settlements. As the 1983 general election got closer, the signals were clear that the ruling NPN government in the state was not going to have it easy through the ballot box considering the chains of allegation of fraud hanging on her

neck. The hand writing was clear that it was going to loose significantly to the opposition; the Unity Party of Nigeria, the strongest opposition party in the state. Only one way was opened to the ruling NPN; the use of political thugs to intimidate the opposition and hijack the election. In the city of Buguma, south of the state, there was a recorded case in 1983 by the police of NPN supporters shooting sporadically with light weapons at UPN supporters during their political rally injuring some of them. With so much cash in hand the NPN strategy paid off successfully. Five marginal settlements provided the bulk of the army used to actualize the plan; Abonema wharf/Nzemeze, Elechi-beach, Ibadan / Bishop Johnson, Enugu, and Marine base. At the end of the 1983 election it became difficult to discard these boys as some of them metamorphosed into personal soldiers to some political heavy weight in the ruling party. But this was not to be for too long when the military sacked the NPN led government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari in December of 1983. This was the beginning of another problem for residents of marginal settlement. The sacking of their political god fathers from office also meant a halt to the crumbs falling from the "Masters table". However to keep up with the slogan "man must eat" most of these boys who were beginning to build up a new lifestyles for themselves took to criminality as an avenue for survival. For Mr. Ipalibo, forty nine years old repentant thug and a former tenant at Afikpo marginal settlement;

"Violence was lucrative then, the politicians carried us along and most of us with some sense made something good out of it. But the military came and spoilt everything and never had anything for us in their programs yet we have to survive. It was not the best alternative but for those who could not resist the temptation, they yielded to it. The geography of the place provided a good cover for criminals. At that time no security officer would take the risk of chasing a criminal into any marginal settlement in the city. That may be your last day on earth. The process was simple; hit your target and run back to the settlement for cover."

This was when the government woke up from her sleep to the error of allowing these settlements to grow without any form of checks. Two major problems were already confronting the government at this point; (1) the growing army of criminals which the settlements were already brewing (2) the incessant flooding of the city occasioned by the development of marginal settlements on some natural drainage channels. The military government of Anthony Ukpokwu took some urgent steps to address these problems by adopting the instrument of "total clearance and redevelopment" of these settlements in order to introduce some element of modernity and sanity. Three marginal settlements were marked out as a test case to see the workability of the government approach. They were the Ndoki, Aggrey and Marine Base marginal settlements. Even though the government succeeded in implementing the scheme in these settlements (by erecting low cost housing estate in the affected areas), in terms of goals achievement, the government was never close to success. The reason being

that, the government failed to plan adequately for everyone that was displaced. The so called low cost housing schemes were only targeted at housing less than thirty percent of the displaced residents. Secondly, forty percent of the houses were budgeted and manipulated by those in charge of the project to rest in the hands of civil servants and politicians. Thus it was not too long after the commissioning of the project that new marginal settlements resuracted adjacent to the government new housing estate. The return of democratic process in 1999 brought in fresh breath of life for the bad boys of marginal settlements in the city. One high point of note in the democratic process that took off in 1999 was the high level of betrayal and back stabbing among the political class in the state. One thing was clear to the eye, it was not a government of the righteous ruling the people. The level of distrust among the political class made it imperative for the "big boys" in government to build private armies for their security. The fertile areas to easily get the needed soldiers were the marginal settlements in the city. The crumbs started falling again from the "Masters table" and it was not too long when some of these boys metamorphosed into "big boys" commanding the respect of their peers. With cash flowing from the "Masters table" it was not difficult for these "big boys" to raise their own private army for their own protection and that of their masters. With such dreadful army at their disposal some politicians in the ruling government were quick to metamorphose into "lords" using the instrument of violence to shut the mouth of perceived enemies. During this era, Dr. Peter Odili, the governor of the state found a proposal on his table one morning written by the United Graduate Organization (UGO), an umbrella body of unemployed graduate youths from the state. The proposal advised the governor to build his own internal security outfit to be made up of unemployed graduates from the states to help him keep surveillance on security matters in the entire state and to report directly to him any where there is a threat to the peace of the state. The governor fell in love with the proposal. The then Commissioner for Economic Empowerment and Employment, Mr. Eremie and the Chief Security Officer (CSO) were anointed by the governor to look into the workability of the plan. The two gentlemen gave their nod to the proposal and were requested to work out the details for their implementation. Under the arrangement, ten unemployed graduates were to be employed from each local government area and were to be given military training at a base outside the state capital, thereafter, they were to be posted to government establishments through out the state as civil servants in the payroll of the government but undercover they were to work as "spy" for the governor to report any threat to the peace of the state. The arrangement was to be a top secret. While the CSO was to head the "spy" force, the Hon. Commissioner was to act as the bridge between the governor and the group. But the plan never saw the light of the day. Some security boys working around the governor soon got wind of it through the CSO and viewed the arrangement as a threat to their job in the "Brick House". It was these boys who leaked

the plan to some political “big boys” working in the cabinet of the governor. For this group the idea was a good one except that it was an indirect way of transforming Commissioner Eremie into the most powerful member of Odili’s cabinet. The conspiracy between the politicians and the security boys landed a false menu on the table of the governor. The menu has it that about eighty percent of the boys on the list of Eremie were cultist from different higher institutions across the country with different dangerous track records and that, having such educated army under the control of Eremie may be detrimental to the second term project of the governor. And secondly, since Eremie was not a member of the “inner caucus” of the government he may not buy the idea of the second term project. His loyalty to the caucus according to them could not be trusted. An alternative menu was quickly prepared and pushed forward to the governor; the use of the uneducated and school drop out instead of graduates for the same job. The reason advanced for this choice was that it would be easier to control this group of persons than the graduates. The menu was accepted by the governor. Eremie was swept aside, and the “big boys” of the cabinet were given the nod to work out the details. At this period, a greater percentage of the marginal settlements in the city were already having in place effective youth wings that were saddled with the responsibility of maintain not only internal security but also resist any likely attack from the bad boys from another settlement; a common phenomenon making the headline then in the press among marginal settlements in the city. The project had no difficulty taking off, the settlements provided a bulk of the rugged youths needed for the project but the objective fell miles away from that initially put forward by the UGO.

Mr. Igbaniho Allwell, a civil engineer and one of the founding members of UGO has this to say:

“The original intention for which the governor gave his nod to the project was swept aside (internal security). Those anointed to implement it saw it as an avenue to make themselves “lords”. With such army in their control, it became a tool to intimidate those who were not in love with the leadership style of the governor or his second term ambition.

Beside military education, these boys were rewarded handsomely for their loyalty. The flow of cash from the brick house into the hands of these boys soon transformed them into a dreadful lot. While the settlements provided civilian soldiers for the project, the creeks provided the terrain for training. With cash flowing regularly from their political godfathers and some degree of military intelligence injected into their blood, these boys returned with a new “face of terror” thereby changing the atmosphere in these settlements. Drugs and arms gradually found their ways into these settlements. The leadership of the older folks in these settlements was gradually pushed aside by a new generation of leaders from among the youths backed up by money and the powers from the top. This was also the era when oil bunkering was having flourishing season in the deltaic region with the powerful PDP cartel solidly behind the

steering wheel. It was reported that between 1998 and 2003 oil losses resulting from oil theft amounted to \$1 billion annually[6]. These armed gangs also became ready made tools in the hands of powerful oil bunkers to provide security for their illegal business against predators in the business. Beside the monetary reward, some of these boys providing security cover for the oil thieves were also settled with some drums of the black gold. The poverty stricken marginal settlements began to produce some rich big boys that paraded the streets of the city with wealth and a handful of personal soldiers that does their dirty jobs. In each of the marginal settlement, it was clear to point out which “big boy” was in charge. The second term agenda of Peter Odili and his political cohort in the PDP created more atmosphere of relevance for these boys. Towards the end of the governor’s first tenure, it was evidently clear that his performance was below average. There was a huge cry for change of baton even within the PDP family in the state. The governor and those beating the drums for his second term agenda were aware of this. The migration of the governor’s godfather Dr. Marshall Harry from the ruling PDP to ANPP was the climax of the disagreement in the ruling party arising from the governor’s style of administration and overall performance. The manuscript of the NPN second term election strategy in 1983 was adopted as the only way forward; use of iron fist against the opposition. Murder, intimidation, arson, kidnapping, bribery etc became the readily available options to shut the mouth of the opposition. The strategy paid off and the PDP returned to power in the state but not without casualties; Dr. Marshall Harry was one of the heavy casualties recorded at the end of the political hostilities[7]. Soon after the election, dissatisfaction and suspicion crept in within the civilian soldiers that were used by the ruling PDP. It was discovered that some of the “big boys were getting more carrot from the brick house than the others. It was a deliberate strategy from the brick house to weaken some of the big boys whose loyalty could not be trusted. Huge financial settlements were granted to those gangs in the good books of the government to increase their prowess and ensure their continual loyalty to the brick house[5]. Those who were left out felt cheated and betrayed by their friends and the government they laboured for. Split and formation of alliances and counter alliances among gangs emerged and battle lines drawn. Soon it was clear to point out which group controls which of the marginal settlements. The settlements under the control of the “government bad boys” were constantly protected by government soldiers while those under the control of the boys in the bad books of the government at the other end were frequently invaded by the Joint Military Task Force under the pretence of flushing out bad eggs from the city. These angered the boys who now vowed to make the state ungovernable for the PDP government. A full scale war was therefore declared against the government and the “bad boys” enjoying the shelter of the government. The streets of the city became a constant battlefield for the two groups. The matter was made worst by the emergence of two power blocks at this period; Asari

Dokubo, a former president of the Ijaw Youth Council and leader of the Niger Delta People Volunteer Force and Ateke Tom, leader of Niger Delta Volunteers. It was stated that both men were once friends and worked together for the actualization of the PDP second tenure project. But soon after the election, Alhaji Asari criticism of some of President Obasanjo policies towards the deltaic region painted him as an enemy in the eyes of the brick house. Thus the door of the governor was shut against him. Dr. Odili who was at this time planning to take a shot at the presidency at the end of his second missionary journey, saw Asari's posture towards President Obasanjo as an act capable of pitching him against his Aso Rock godfather. Ateke Tom whose tribesman, Dr. Abiye Sekibo, a key actor in the government of Peter Odili became the golden bride of "brick house" This was an indirect way of pitching Asari against Ateke. Both men were big boys among the Niger Delta militant groups and well respected. Besides their romance with the PDP led government, they also share in the economy of oil bunkering with a strong and well armed foot army. The warring armies in the marginal settlements across the city divided along two separate lines by the same government had no difficulty pitching their tents with the different camps.

The scramble for the marginal settlements between the two camps because of their strategic importance for the business of oil bunkering soon metamorphose into the battle for the control of the soul of the city Residents of marginal settlements could no longer sleep with their eyes closed. The war between these groups was unending. It was usual to be woken up at the middle of the night by the sound from the barrel of the gun. Worst, the young men in these settlements completely lost the little romance they had for education. School was no longer in their agenda. The oil bunkering job was paying very well. Doing some dirty jobs for the "Masters" was also bringing into the pocket some good money. Teenage pregnancy, murder, rape, arson, kidnapping and violence became part of the monster that ravaged marginal settlements in the city at this point. The usual bubbling night life in the city gradually melted away. Churches adjusted their evening services to end before seven in the evening. An atmosphere of fear and insecurity took over the city. The police were helpless, the military were called out of the barracks to help the police to make the streets in the city safe again but like the police, they could not stop the war, their hands were tied as they were expected to dance according to the music played by the ruling PDP[8]. Even though the military boys were tutored to crush the camp of Asari Dokubo considered widely in the brick house as a "rebel", they came to realize too soon that, the job was not going to be a child's play. Asari's leadership role in the IYC had made him a god among the youths in the Niger Delta. His army of followers cut across the entire deltaic region and this was one advantage he had over Ateke Tom, the bride of brick house. Acting in line with the script from the government house, some spirited attacks were made by soldiers on some marginal settlements believed to shelter Asari boys; the attack was not without some casualties on

both sides. The geography of the settlements and the level of sophistication in terms of arms used by the boys made victory difficult for the soldiers.

The repeated attacks on marginal settlements controlled by Asari boys were intended to weaken the boys but rather it only succeeded in pushing them into the creeks to enable them prepare more for the battle ahead against the government of Peter Odili and his cohort in the PDP as the count down to the 2007 general election thickens. The 2007 general election that produced Odili's anointed son, Sir Celestine Omehia as the governor of the state also took the fashion of the 2003 general election[9]. Omehia who has a strong dislike for cult groups and armed gangs was quick to declare that he was going to destroy all marginal settlements in the city. But the court did not allow him to make good his promise. He was thrown out of the "Brick house" in the fifth month of his reign. When his kinsman Hon Chibuke Ameachi took over the mantle of leadership most people had seen a Messiah in him to save the city from the gang war ravaging the peace of the city. Their argument was that since his victory did not come through the barrels of the gangs' gun, he was not indebted to them and therefore could easily cut off their relevance in the politics of the PDP using the state security apparatus at his disposal. Those who belonged to this school of thought were not far from the truth. The governor's first step was to declare a war against the war Lords and their boys in the state. The luxury which Ateke Tom used to enjoy in "Brick house" came to an end. The Military Task Force empowered by the government took over the city completely, occasionally raiding the marginal settlements and making some arrest. The street became unsafe for the "bad boys". This was when some of them started relocating to the creeks and other deltaic states. The governor's next agenda was to inform the residents of marginal settlements that he was planning to role his "bulldozer" to clear all marginal settlements in the city and to redevelop marginal lands to accommodate modern low cost housing estates. The governor's explanation was that marginal settlements had become a heaven for gangs and criminals. The governor's vision on paper was sound but his failure to provide answer to the question of 'displaced residents' worked against him. Secondly, for such vision coming from an "Ikwerre" man, the traditional ethnic group that shares ownership of the land housing the city with the Okrikas', it was interpreted along ethnic line. The fact that a bulk of these marginal settlements were located south of the city; the portion of land belonging to the Okrikas', the riverine communities in the state were quick to interpret the governor's intention as an "Ikwerre agenda" to deprive the Okrikas their ownership status of marginal lands in southern Port Harcourt. A consortium of property assessors sent by the government to assess the properties at Bundu settlement in 2010 in order to effect payment of compensation to landlords resulted into a bloody clash between the people and soldiers leaving several casualties behind. Despite the mounting oppositions against the governor's agenda, his bulldozers had gone ahead to bring down two marginal

settlements; Abonema wharf and Nzemanze. While the governor is still threatening to continue with his bulldozers, observers are watching to see how far he can go. Several factors are already working against him; the lean finances of the state occasioned by the countless uncompleted projects,

the catalogue of court cases intended to stop his bulldozers, the first lady who is an indigene of okrika, his failure to redevelop Nzamanze settlement two years after bringing it down and his dwindling romance with Aso rock in Abuja.

Table 1. Venomous attack by rival gangs from other Marginal Settlements between 2001 and 2009

S/N	Marginal Settlement	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
1.	Abuja	2	1	3	3	5	5	4	2	2
2.	Abonema Wharf	1		2	3	4	4	3	2	3
3.	Afikpo		1	3	2	4	3	2		1
4.	Andoni			1		1				
5.	Awkuzu	1		2	1	2		1		
6.	Bishop Johnson		1	2	3	3	4	2	1	1
7.	Bundu	1	1	3	2	3	4	2	2	1
8.	Baptist	2	2	3	3	4	2	2	2	1
9.	Captain Amangala	2	1	4	2	3	2	2	1	2
10.	Cemetery		1	1	2	1	1		1	
11.	Egede	2	2	3	1	2		1	1	
12.	Emenike		1	1	2	1		1		
13.	Etche		1	2		1		1		
14.	Enugu		1	2	1		1		1	
15.	Eastern By-pass			2	1	1				
16.	Elechi Beach	2	2	3	1	1		1		
17.	Ibadan	2	2	3	2	1	2	1	1	2
18.	Igbukulu			2		1				
19.	Marine Base	2	1	3	2	1	2	2	1	1
20.	Nzamanze	1	3	2	4	2	1	2		
21.	Ndoki	1	3	4	2	2	1	3	2	3
22.	NEPA			2		1		1		
23.	Nanka	2	1	2	2	1		1		1
24.	Nembe		1		1		1			
25.	Orupolo	1	1	2		1		1		
26.	Ogu			1	1					
27.	Okrika	1		1			1			
28.	Ojike	2	2		1			1		
29.	Prison		1	2			1			
30.	Rex Lawson	2	3	3	1	2	1	1		1
31.	Timber		1		1					
32.	Tourist Beach	1	2		2		1		1	
33.	Udi	1	2		1			1		
34.	Witt and Bush	1	2			1				

Source: Police report

6. Conclusions

Investigation reveals that violence and criminality resides in these settlements. The prevailing poverty in marginal settlements has forced the youths to take to criminality and violence as a trade to survival. Housing famine in the city has also been identified as the major contributing factor to the birth and geographical spread of marginal settlements in Port Harcourt. Therefore as the city continually experiences daily migration of human population into it, the geographical expansion of marginal settlements and the horror associated with them also appears limitless. The 'total clearance and redevelopment' strategy proposed by the government of Hon Ameachi to deal with the problems may appear beautiful on paper but in reality it will at the end generate more social and economic problems in the city. Since his proposal is silent on the issue of 'displaced residents', it is believed that this project will rather worsen the already horrifying housing famine associated with the city. Based on the interview with residents in the settlements, there seems to be a general consensus that any attempt to improve the security and living conditions of the people will be highly welcomed without first subjecting them to the rigours of homelessness. One way we can achieve some positive result in our attempt to introduce some environmental sanity into these settlements is by applying some measure of development control. Secondly, including the areas in the distribution of urban facilities on the part of government will also help to bring some measure of life into the settlements. Electricity and water supply in these settlements are far below average. Health services and educational facilities are miles away from the people. Chasing the criminals out of these settlements has been the government agenda for now but our investigation has revealed that giving a more positive and meaningful attention to the developmental and economic challenges confronting the people will be more helpful in dealing with the horror associated with these settlements. With the countdown to the 2015 general election, questions have started emerging from the lips of residents of the city concerning these settlements. In a state where past records

have shown that elections are hardly won through the ballot box, fears are already being expressed that it shall not be long when the political gladiators in the state will start shopping for foot soldiers in these settlements to fight the dirty war of politics again. Perhaps, another study is necessary to show the humanitarian and economic tragedies recorded in these settlements in the last two general elections in the state.

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