

Written and compiled by:

Leilani Farha and Karina Thompson

Research undertaken and written by:

Lysa John, Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action (India)

Joy Ngwakwe, Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (Nigeria)

Fatmeh Qassem, Arab Association for Human Rights (Israel)

Photographs courtesy of:

Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action

Social and Economic Rights Action Centre

Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions

COHRE wishes to express its sincere gratitude to UNIFEM for its generous support of this project.

Table of Contents

| | | |
|----------|-------------------------------|----|
| 1 | Introduction | 2 |
| 2 | Understanding Forced Eviction | 5 |
| 3 | The Research Design | 9 |
| 4 | Study 1: Palestine | 11 |
| 5 | Study 2: India | 28 |
| 6 | Study 3: Nigeria | 56 |
| 7 | Synthesis and Analysis | 71 |
| 8 | Recommendations for Action | 76 |

Introduction

Thirteen bulldozers had turned my world upside down - we lost our employment, we lost our shelter, and we lost our self-confidence. For a good fifteen days, I thought to myself, "I will never get back my life again. I will have to keep living like this forever."

Indian woman evicted from her home in Bhabhrekar Nagar

For many women the home is the single most important place in the world. Beyond basic shelter, it is a place of employment where income is generated; it is a place to care for children; and it provides respite from violence on the streets.¹ For some women, the home may be the only place where they can participate in social activities.² For most women, the state of one's housing is integrally linked to basic survival. The interconnectedness and particular relationship women have with housing suggests that a practice like forced eviction – the involuntary removal of a person from his or her home or lands – will have an acute and disparate impact on women's lives. This report elucidates this idea by focusing on three groups of women who have experienced forced eviction in Palestine, India and Nigeria.

The phenomenon of forced eviction is very common in every region of the world. Each year, The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) becomes aware of millions of women, men and children throughout the world who face forced eviction.³ Forced eviction is implemented for a number of reasons: as a strategy of war (often ethnic conflict); to make room for large-scale development projects such as dams and other infrastructure; to accommodate city beautification programmes; to host world events such as the Olympic Games, world conferences and economic forums; and because- in certain contexts- marginalized persons, most often women, are not entitled to own or inherit land or property which makes them particularly vulnerable.

Forced eviction involves the forceful removal of people from their homes, often by the military, armed police and/or hired thugs, and is explicitly or implicitly sanctioned by the State. Forced eviction commonly involves physical violence such as beatings, rapes, sexual assaults, gun shot wounds and death, and the physical destruction and demolition of homes by bulldozers, tanks and brute force. Psychological and economic violence are very much part of the forced eviction experience. And, it is almost always the poorest segments of society, many of whom live a subsistence existence, and those with the least security, who are targeted: "squatters," renters, the landless, migrants, the displaced and ethnic minorities. For the economically marginalized, the psychological and financial impact of forced eviction cannot be overstated. Imagine watching your

1 This is not to gloss over the fact that for many women the home can be the site of oppression through, for example, male violence and gendered roles based in patriarchy.

2 L. Farha, "Women and Housing" in *Women and International Human Rights Law, Vol. 1*, ed. K. Askin and D. Koenig (Transnational Publishers, 1999) 483 at 486.

3 Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, *Global Survey No. 7 on Forced Evictions: Violations of Human Rights* (1998).

own home – where you may have lived for more than 10 or 20 years and possibly your family for generations before you – being turned, in just a few minutes, into nothing more than rubble, and along with it, your life savings, your economic livelihood, and your social space.

Non-governmental organisations around the world are documenting and monitoring specific forced evictions. A number of international and regional organisations document forced evictions and issue periodic reports on incidents that have occurred around the world or in particular regions or countries.⁴ Many also undertake fact-finding missions to investigate particular instances of forced eviction and to assist those who have been evicted in implementing human rights norms and developing future plans of action. Many of these reports have been presented to the United Nations human rights system to draw international attention to the practice of forced eviction. As a result of these efforts internationally, regionally and domestically, there is a growing understanding and appreciation of forced eviction. In addition, NGOs are learning more about the root causes of eviction and their ramifications. Through these processes and activities, NGOs are also learning about the ways in which evictions violate international human rights law and about effective means of resistance.

While it is generally recognized by those working on the issue of forced evictions that women are disproportionately and adversely affected by the practice,⁵ surprisingly little energy has been spent developing a more thorough analysis of what this actually means. We often hear that women are on the front-line of the forced eviction process, but we rarely read or hear detailed descriptions of how the experience of eviction impacts the lives of women in both the short and long-term. What does the role of women in the forced eviction process entail and what toll does it exact upon them? To answer these and related questions, COHRE commissioned three research studies - one each in Palestine, India and Nigeria - to examine the types of violence women experience during the forced eviction process.

“I saw my home, which my husband and I had built with labor and love across ten years, pulled down to rubble in 10 minutes. We had invested our life savings...in the house.”

Indian woman evicted from her home in Bhabrekar Nagar

COHRE believes that this type of research and documentation is necessary to substantiate and contextualize claims that forced eviction is a violation of human rights, and of women’s human rights more particularly. Moreover, a comprehensive understanding of the impact of forced eviction on women and what women experience throughout the eviction process can assist in the development of strategies aimed at preventing forced eviction and ameliorating its effects in a manner that both reflects and addresses women’s realities. It is COHRE’s understanding that the research carried out for this report is the first of its kind. In turn, this report is presented with the acknowledgement that, though preliminary in nature, it is a useful starting point for the development of a fuller understanding of women’s experiences of forced eviction.

⁴ For example, Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions, Eviction Watch Asia and the Urban Resource Unit.

⁵ See for example, *Report of the Secretary General to the Commission on the Status of Women*, UN Doc. E/CN.6/1994/3, at para.5, *The Right to Adequate Housing: Report of the Special Rapporteur, UN Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 47th Sess*, UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/1995/12, (1995), at para.47 and UN Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities Resolution 1997/19, “*Women and the right to adequate housing and to land and property*”, UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/Res/1997/19, at preambular para. 11.

“...[I]n every aspect of life, whenever there is a problem the women suffer more, if marriage breaks, the woman suffers the cultural stigma that accompanies divorces/separation as well as economic hardship. So the same thing goes for forced eviction because immediately [when] it happens, the woman becomes solely responsible for the welfare of children.”

Nigerian woman

and present the three studies from Palestine, India and Nigeria respectively. Each of the studies provides background information on the particular community or communities that were studied, an overview and analysis of the findings, and recommendations for future action. *A Synthesis and Analysis* section looks at the three research studies as a whole and assesses and compares women’s experiences of forced evictions and draws some final conclusions for consideration. These conclusions are then used to inform the final section of the report, *Recommendations for Action*, which provides suggestions for future activities aimed at a variety of actors from governments to NGOs operating at different levels, from local to international.

Following this introduction, the report opens with a short section, *Understanding Forced Eviction*, which uses international human rights law and principles to define and situate the practice of forced eviction. This section references where, in international human rights law, protection against forced eviction can be found. It also highlights instances in international human rights law where women’s experiences of forced eviction have been documented and suggests that these references beg a more detailed analysis. Next is a section entitled *The Research*, which provides an overview of the research design and methodology, used in this project. The following three sections make up the heart of the report,

Understanding Forced Eviction **2**

Definition

Forced eviction is the involuntary, permanent or temporary removal of a person from their home or lands, directly or indirectly attributable to the State, without the provision of, or access to, legal and other forms of protection.⁶ In effect, forced eviction prohibits an individual or group from living in a particular house, residence or place, and requires the movement of the individual or group to other areas.⁷

Forced eviction is increasingly recognized as both a strategy and weapon of war, especially in ethnic or racially motivated conflicts.⁸ In South Africa during Apartheid, the forced removal of millions of so called “Black” and “Coloureds” from their homes stands as a stark example of the use of forced eviction as a strategy of subjugation.⁹ The entry of the term “ethnic cleansing” into our collective vocabulary, during the Balkan wars spawned by the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia, stands as the premier example of the use of forced eviction as a strategy of war. In cases of forced eviction such as this, one ethnic or racial group uses any number of means – discriminatory laws, destruction of homes, violence, intimidation, threats – to drive another racial or ethnic group off their land. Other reasons for, or causes of, forced eviction include development and infrastructure projects such as the Armada dam project in India, prestigious international events such as the Olympic Games, and urban redevelopment, gentrification and city beautification projects that occur in many cities across the world. The causes of forced eviction can also be gender specific, for example, domestic violence which drives women out of the home, discriminatory inheritance laws or customs which result in the eviction of women from their homes and lands and discriminatory laws- and other policies and customs- which prevent women from being granted title to a home or land upon marriage dissolution.

Forced evictions are most often, though not always, carried out and explicitly sanctioned by governments. Alternatively, the link can be more subtle and implicit. There are invariably elements of *force*, violence and coercion involved. Physical violence is common during the actual eviction. The human cost and trauma of forced eviction on individuals, families and communities cannot be overemphasised. Evicted people not only lose their homes and neighbourhoods (in which they have often invested a considerable portion of their life savings); they are commonly forced to relinquish personal possessions, as often no notice is provided before the eviction. Evicted people also frequently lose critical social relationships, those that provide a safety net or survival network, which foster a sense of community and allow many daily tasks to be shared.

6 Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 7 (1997), The right to adequate housing (Art. 11(1) of the Covenant): forced evictions*, UN Doc. E/C.12/1997/4 (1997).

7 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Fact Sheet No. 25, Forced Evictions and Human Rights*, at p.3 (Geneva, 1996). Available at: <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu6/2/fs25.htm>

8 This is not to say that forced eviction occurs whenever a person is compelled to leave their home during war or an armed conflict situation. It is to say, however, that on occasion warring parties will use forced eviction as a means of defeating its opposing forces and so, when the involuntarily removal of a person from their home is used as a weapon or strategy in war, it can be considered an act of forced eviction.

9 During apartheid, under the *Group Areas Act*, at least 3 million Black and Coloured South Africans were forcibly removed from their homes and herded into “racially pure” *Bantustans*, resulting in 87 per cent of the population living on 13 per cent of the land and allowing the white minority (13 per cent of the population) to occupy 87 per cent of the land.

Needless to say, the people most vulnerable to forced eviction are those with the least economic and political power in society, those whose rights are commonly violated: i.e. women; low-income social groups; indigenous populations; ethnic, religious and racial minorities; occupied people and others lacking security of tenure.¹⁰ Since women in many cultures have a particular and close association with housing and the home, it can be further surmised that forced eviction has a disproportionate adverse impact on women.

International Human Rights Law

The United Nations Commission on Human Rights has deemed the practice of forced eviction a “gross violation of human rights, in particular the right to housing”.¹¹ To begin with, forced eviction undermines security of tenure, the cornerstone of the right to housing under international human rights law. A person or household can be said to have secure tenure when they are protected from being involuntarily removed from their home or land, except in exceptional circum-

“Unlike the others who had their husbands to help them pack to carry their belongings, and herd their children away from the site, I knew I would not be able to save anything in my house. The best I could do, being on my own, was to gather my children and take them a few metres away from the house, out of harm’s way, or so I thought.”

Indian woman evicted from her home in Prakash Nagar

stances, and then only by means of a known and agreed upon legal procedure, which must be objective, accessible to all, contestable and independent.¹² Forced eviction violates security of tenure, and hence, the right to housing. It also violates a number of other human rights protected in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),¹³ such as rights to health and education, and several rights protected in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) such as the right to life, the right to security of the person, the right to non-interference with privacy, family and home and the right to the peaceful enjoyment of possessions.¹⁴ It is for this reason that the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has stated unequivocally that instances of forced

eviction are *prima facie* incompatible with the requirements of the Covenant and can only be justified in the most exceptional circumstances, and in accordance with the relevant principles of international law.¹⁵

In 1997 the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights¹⁶ (hereinafter, “the Committee”) adopted General Comment 7, which elaborates State obligations with respect to the practice of forced evictions. The Committee indicated that the “State itself must refrain from

¹⁰See below for a definition of security of tenure in international human rights law.

¹¹United Nations Commission on Human Rights, Resolution 1993/77, *Forced Eviction*, UN Doc. E/CN.4/Res/1993/77.

¹²United Nations Commission on Human Settlements, Global Campaign for Secure Tenure, see: <http://www.unhcr.org>.

¹³Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966, entry into force 3 January 1976, in accordance with article 27. Available at: http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_ceschr.htm.

¹⁴General Comment 7, *supra* n. **Error! Bookmark not defined.** at para. 5.

¹⁵Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment 4, “The right to adequate housing (art. 11(1) of the Covenant)”*, UN Doc.E/CN.4/1991/4, at para. 18.

¹⁶The UN CESCR is responsible for monitoring State party compliance with the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which includes the right to housing (Art. 11(1)). The right to be free from forced eviction has been read into the right to housing. See: CESCR, General Comment 4, on the right to adequate housing, *ibid*.

forced evictions and ensure that the law is enforced against its agents or third parties who carry out forced evictions”.¹⁷ The Committee also indicated that legislation against forced evictions is an essential basis upon which to build a system of effective protection. Such legislation should include measures which provide the greatest possible security of tenure to occupiers of houses and land, conform to the ICESCR and be designed to strictly control the circumstances under which evictions may be carried out. In view of the recent actions of many governments which greatly reduce their responsibilities in the housing sector, States Parties must ensure that legislative and other measures are adequate to prevent and, if appropriate, punish forced evictions carried out by private persons or entities. States parties should therefore review relevant legislation and policies to ensure that these are compatible with the obligations arising from the right to adequate housing and should similarly repeal or amend any legislation or policies that are inconsistent with the requirements of the Covenant.¹⁸

“Since I was five years old I worked, grazing the sheep, sometimes with my older brothers, sometimes with my older sister. Today we can’t make our living. There is no security. The men are unemployed, and the women are staying at home. I know how to make everything. I like to do these things but I can’t anymore.”

Bedouin woman on life after being evicted from her home in Tal El Meleh

According to the Committee, procedural protections which should be applied by States prior to an eviction include: an exploration of all feasible alternatives with affected persons,¹⁹ adequate and reasonable notice for all affected persons prior to the scheduled date of eviction, and accessible and complete information on the proposed evictions.²⁰ Where evictions can be justified and do occur, States are obliged to ensure that:

- The eviction is carried out in strict compliance with the relevant provisions of international human rights law and in accordance with general principles of reasonableness and proportionality,²¹ and that legal recourses and remedies are available to those affected;²²
- No forms of discrimination are involved;²³
- All individuals concerned have a right to adequate compensation for any property, both personal and real, which is affected;
- Evictions should not result in rendering individuals homeless or vulnerable to the violation of other human rights. Where those affected are unable to provide for themselves, the State Party must ensure that adequate alternative housing, resettlement or access to productive land, as the case may be, is available.²⁴

¹⁷ CESCR, *General Comment 7, supra n. Error! Bookmark not defined.* at para. 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, at para. 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, at para. 14.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, at para. 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, at para. 15.

²² *Ibid.*, at para. 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, at para. 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, at para. 17.

Women's Experiences of Forced Eviction

While the practice of forced eviction is now understood as a human rights issue, references to women's experiences of this phenomenon have only slowly begun to emerge in international human rights documents. For example, several documents now recognize that women are disproportionately affected by this practice.²⁵ The Committee has taken this a step further by recognizing the particular and disparate impact of forced eviction on women. The Committee has asserted "women are particularly vulnerable due to the extent of statutory and other forms of discrimination they experience in relation to property rights (including home-ownership) or rights of access to property or accommodation as well as women's particular vulnerability to acts of violence and sexual abuse when they are rendered homeless".²⁶ The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women has addressed women's experiences of forced eviction most explicitly, recognizing the gendered dimensions of this phenomenon and demonstrating the various types of violence women may experience during the eviction process.²⁷ At paragraphs 55 and 57 of her 2000 report the Special Rapporteur stated:

While the entire family is affected by forced eviction, again it is the women who suffer most. Women will have to cope with the new circumstances, will have to fulfil their responsibilities as before, but with more limited means, and will need to work harder to make ends meet. Single women are at a major disadvantage, as is illustrated by the case of the Narmada dam in India, where cash compensation for the land and property lost is offered to men only. Often the land assigned for resettling does not enable the people to continue their way of life. Such disruption interferes with and prevents women from exercising traditional responsibilities. It has been shown above that this leads to the devaluing of women and often to increased violence against women.

...

Violence occurring in relation to forced eviction starts before the eviction process. Psychological stress on learning about the eviction can destabilise the family atmosphere and cause emotional trauma. Sometimes, rape is used by the evictors to break resistance. During the eviction, verbal abuse and beatings, rape and even killing are common. The destruction of the home and the destruction of property are further traumatic experiences. The destruction of the home is often equivalent to the destruction of life; everything that was accomplished so far is destroyed. Coping with injuries, the death of family members, inadequate housing or even homelessness, poverty, lack of community support when relocated away from the home town are all possible burdens that have to be taken on by women after eviction.²⁸

²⁵ See documents cited above at n. **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

²⁶ *General Comment 7, supra n. Error! Bookmark not defined.* at para.11. Similarly see: "The Practice of Forced Evictions: Comprehensive Human Rights Guidelines on Development Based Displacement" UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/1997/7 at para. 18, which stipulates that, "[t]he home and its occupants shall be protected against any acts of violence, threats of violence or other forms of harassment, in particular as they relate to women and children."

²⁷ Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, *Economic and social policy and its impact on violence against women*, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.5, 24 February 2000 at paras. 52, 57.

²⁸ *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, submitted in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1997/44*, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2000/68/Add.5 (24 February 2000); Reference to these sections of the Special Rapporteur's report are also included in Commission on Human Rights Resolution 2001/34, *Women's Equal Ownership of, access to and control over land and the equal rights to own property and to adequate housing*, UN Doc. E/CN.4/Res/2001/34.

Participating Organisations

COHRE commissioned this research from three NGOs in three different countries where forced eviction is a fact of life: Palestine, India and Nigeria. The NGOs who participated were: The Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA, Israel), Youth For Unity and Voluntary Action (YUVA, India) and the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC, Nigeria). These NGOs were selected based on five criteria: (1) a long-time commitment to, and expertise in dealing with, forced eviction; (2) a basic understanding of the relationship between forced eviction and human rights; (3) a serious commitment to advancing women's human rights; (4) their regional location; and (5) an established working relationship with COHRE. The study benefited by the selection of NGOs established in three different countries with very different geo-political realities. As a result, research was conducted in communities that experienced forced eviction for very different reasons. In the case of Palestine, Bedouin women were evicted as part of an act of ethnic war. In India forced evictions took place as a result of city beautification/slum clearance programmes. In Nigeria at least one of the evictions focused upon was as a result of a large-scale development project sponsored by the World Bank.

The Research Question

While the context of forced eviction varies from place to place, this research maintains a central focus in that it attempts to answer the question, *'what types of violence do women experience during the eviction process?'* The starting point for the research was the common belief or understanding that women do experience violence during evictions. A holistic definition of violence was used, one that understands violence as having physical, psychological and "structural" dimensions. It was agreed that violence may extend to: the damage done to a woman's livelihood, the destruction of her relationships and social support mechanisms, the emotional strain and stress imposed directly on her and within her family, the disruption of her interaction with her community, and the harm to her identity. As J. Oloka-Onyango suggests:

... the term "violence" ... must be viewed not only as a series of commissions, but also omissions, which amount to a failure to recognise the existence of fundamental human rights of women. The structural, as opposed to physical violence, can produce several different effects on women and thus on the exercise or realisations of their human rights. Structural violence, extending from poor nutrition, inadequate health care (including a lack of contraceptives, coerced sterilisation and forced abortions, to mention only a few factors) to limited access to education and other resources, combine to create a situation of severe discrimination against women which international law has yet to address in a forthright fashion. While all of these are problems common to a situation of stability, they are doubly problematic in conditions of flight and displacement.²⁹

²⁹ J. Oloka-Onyango, *The Plight of the Larger Half: Human Rights, Gender Violence and the Legal Status of Refugee and Internally Displaced Women in Africa*, 24 *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 349, at 382-383 (1996).

“We wanted to live where we could cultivate our land and make our living. We now live here in this town where the young men are unemployed. Nothing is safe here. We have lost our food source and our freedom.”

*Bedouin woman evicted from her home
in Tal El*

The researchers also started from the premise that forced eviction is a *process*. That is, forced eviction does not start and stop with the physical removal of a person from her or his home and lands. There may be some lead-up to the physical eviction, be it formal notice of the eviction, threats or rumours, and the ramifications and repercussions of forced eviction are felt long after the physical eviction takes place.

Purpose of the Research

This research is intended to highlight the various types of abuse women suffer as a result of forced eviction by focussing on women’s actual experiences, and to identify those abuses as violations of human rights. By studying forced eviction in three different countries, this research also highlights the similar and dissimilar aspects of women’s experiences of forced eviction across borders. It is hoped that the findings of this research will be used to inform the work of all those concerned with preventing forced evictions at local, national and international levels.

Methodology

A feminist action research model was used in designing each of the studies. Feminist action research is informed by women’s experiences of the world. Accordingly, women’s experiences are sought and respected as a valuable source of information. Feminist action research gives authority to women’s voices in the research process itself, and it is meant to benefit women as well as to contribute to social change.³⁰ In keeping with the feminist action research model and the objectives and uniqueness of this research project, this research relies primarily on qualitative research methods. Quantitative research relies on the collection of information which can be reflected in statistical terms and which can be reported in terms of quantifiable trends. The purpose of this research, however, is not to establish trends per se, but rather to illuminate in a more detailed way why forced evictions change women’s lives and how the process of forced eviction is subjectively interpreted by women. These questions are somewhat unsuited to statistical analysis. Qualitative research, as deployed in this study, facilitates a more in-depth and descriptive analysis of information, and is grounded in real life experiences.³¹ Within the parameters of qualitative research, each of the researchers chose a methodology that most suited the particular forced eviction under study. The study in Palestine of Bedouin women used semi-structured interviews as the primary research methodology to elicit women’s stories because women’s voices are so often unheard or silenced within Bedouin communities. The research in India relied upon focus groups and interviews because the communities studied had already met as a group on previous occasions with the researchers, and the Nigerian researcher administered a questionnaire to gather general information and then used follow-up in-depth interviews because the researchers had already developed a close relationship with a number of the women in the community.

³⁰ The Centre for Research on Violence Against Women and Children, “*Designing a Feminist Action Research Project*,” at: <http://www.uwo.ca/violence/design/design.htm>.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Forced Evictions in Palestine: Bedouin Women in the Negev

Arab Association for Human Rights, *Researched and Written by: Fatmeh Qassem*

Introduction

Forced eviction has been used by the state of Israel since its inception in 1948 as a means of expanding territory and minimizing the Palestinian presence. The Bedouin in the Negev have been particularly targeted for “resettlement” and still do not have any agreement with the Israeli authorities who want them to move to designated planned settlements. Despite the fact that this practice has occurred for so long, and still occurs today, and despite its potentially devastating implications, research into the effects of forced eviction on Bedouin communities, and more particularly on Bedouin women, has yet to be undertaken.

When the Arab Association for Human Rights (HRA) and the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) approached me to undertake this research, I was very enthusiastic because, though I had never experienced forced eviction myself, it had touched my life in two very meaningful ways. First, my mother is a Palestinian woman who experienced a type of eviction when she lost her home in Sabalan during the 1948 war. As a result, she lived her life as a refugee in Hurfish until her marriage to my father. Her experiences had a great affect on me. Hearing about her suffering, her longing to return to her home, to the fields she used to roam, motivated me to undertake this research and bring these voices, that had never been heard or listened to before, out into the open. Second, during the early 1980’s when I was a student at Ben Gurion University, the Israeli authorities started to pressure the Bedouin from Tal El Meleh to leave their land. Along with other students from the college — most of them Palestinians from the north — I demonstrated and protested against what I perceived to be an unjust eviction of the Bedouin from their land. The process by which the eviction of the Bedouin occurred was unique. The evictions were authorized by a special law named the Shalom Law (Peace Law) passed by the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) permitting the eviction of Tal El Meleh Bedouin, and set up a special authority to enforce this law. It was a law directed at Bedouins only, who were forced to leave the Tal El Meleh to make room for the Nivatim air base. The government of Israel ostensibly entered resettlement/compensation negotiations with the Bedouin and ultimately offered them compensation for their forced eviction. The so-called negotiations between the Israeli authorities and the Bedouin evictees were, however, by no means an equal two-way exchange because the Israeli authorities had total control over the evictees. It was clear to me at that time that the forced removal of minority and indigenous peoples from their homes and lands is a serious issue that requires in-depth study and research. Since women as a group tend to be marginalized within society, and because Bedouin women in particular suffer due to political and traditional factors, this research is vital.

“I lived with my sister in law in one small room in the beginning. Later the men built for her a small room. For six or seven years I lived in this small room with three kids and she lived with her kids in the other room without water, gas or electricity. In the winter it was so cold I was so afraid for the children.”

Bedouin woman on life after eviction from her home in Rainbow Town

And so, for these reasons, I agreed to participate in the research project to examine the impact of forced eviction on Bedouin women. To conduct this research, I returned to the Bedouin communities I once knew to speak to women whose stories had never been told. I asked them to talk about their experiences of forced eviction, to describe how they felt once forced from their homes and off their lands. What did they remember from the eviction? How had their lives changed as a result of the eviction? Did they experience violence, and if so, how, and in what ways?

Background

Bedouin Palestinians have lived in the Negev since the sixth century. Until recently, the Negev Bedouin population made their living by herding sheep, goats and camels and by growing winter barley and wheat. Prior to the establishment of Israel in 1948, there were an estimated 50,000 - 70,000 Bedouin Palestinians in the Negev. During the war of 1948 many Bedouins were forced to leave their land. They fled the area for Egypt and Jordan and became Palestinian refugees. Approximately 11,000 remained and became Israeli citizens.



Children from an 'unrecognized village' in the Negev collecting water. Photo: Peter Fryer, Association of Forty Archives

Today, the Bedouin population in the Negev accounts for 23 per cent of the population of the region as a whole. Many Bedouin in Jordan, Syria and Egypt are being resettled in agricultural villages but the government of Israel is attempting to resettle Bedouin in towns. It has become increasingly difficult to live a traditional life, since much of the Negev has been taken away by the Israeli State and used for Israeli agricultural settlements, industrial and urban developments and closed military areas. Official government policy aims to relocate the Bedouin to designated concentrated areas in order to use the land for the establishment and expansion of

Israeli towns. At the present time, 45 per cent of the Bedouin in the Negev live in planned settlements, and 55 per cent still live in what are deemed by Israeli authorities as “unrecognised villages.”

Despite the fact that these Bedouin tribes still dwell on their traditional land in homes that have existed prior to the establishment of the State of Israel, the communities have been declared illegal by the Israeli National Planning and Building Law. This law prohibits national utility companies from connecting a building to the national electricity, water and telephone services. The communities are afforded no official status and thus they are excluded from government maps and receive no basic services. Many of the Bedouin communities have little in the way of educational or health facilities. Furthermore the government refuses to allow any development of physical infrastructure, and prohibits the building of paved roads in these communities.

Israel has occupied the Sinai since the 1967 war, but under the 1978 Camp David Accords an agreement was made between Israel and Egypt regarding Israel's withdrawal of troops and settlers from the region. Two areas that were uninhabited by the Bedouin were chosen as the site on which to relocate Israeli airfields. However, land was also expropriated at Tal El Meleh as a site for the Nivatim air base. The plan was presented as an unforeseeable necessity, an unfortunate situation for the Bedouin, having arisen from the peace treaty with Egypt. However, the master plan for the

Negev drafted in 1976, two years before Camp David, clearly specified “an airport is to be located between Ara’ad and Beersheba” an area heavily populated by Bedouin tribes. About 8,000 Bedouin would have to leave their lands, “but then their ... claim to ownership of vast areas was and is considered by the Government as inimical to the present and future development of land resources” (Falah).

Those residing in Tal El Meleh lived in tents and tin sheds, little more than “shanty towns.” There were no official records reflecting the numbers of Bedouin who were living in Tal El Meleh at the time of the eviction. Bedouin sources estimate that between 30,000 and 50,000 people were evicted. Israeli authorities officially recognized just 750 Bedouin family dwellings in Tal El Meleh. The absence of any concrete figures of the number of Bedouin who lived in Tal El Meleh reflects the neglect of the authorities toward the Bedouin in the Negev. The following tribes lived in the area: Elsaraiia, Abu-Jwee’d, Elzabarga, Abu-Arar, Abu-Maamar, Abu-Hamid, Elehmer, Abu-Jameh, Abu-Sahloq, Abu-Kush, Abu-Shuldum and Elnasasrah. All told, the Bedouin of Tal El Meleh were evicted and thus lost 65,000 dunams of land (4 dunams: 1 acre).

Most of those who were evicted live now in Ksaifeh (Elhemor) and Aroueir and others reside in Rahat, the biggest Bedouin town in the Negev. Some of them left the area and went to Kufur Qassem village, where they have relatives and still others relocated to Lod. In these dispersed towns they attempted to start their new lives, without any infrastructure, development or industrial arteries. These areas have the highest rates of unemployment across Israel.

Research Question

Forced eviction is not just the use of physical violence to force people to move from their homes. Bedouin women from Tal El Meleh experienced violence in a much wider sense. Women lost their economic independence and became more reliant on the men in their community. This transition also caused women to lose their “living space,” the economic, social, material, and psychological center of their day-to-day lives, and this loss directly influenced their emotional and mental health. The evictions also caused a deterioration of the position of Bedouin women within Bedouin society, and consequently lowered the self-esteem of many of the women. In Bedouin society, women took on traditional roles that were important and provided them with a defined purpose, an identity. Most importantly they had economic, emotional and physical security.

The evictions, which resulted in the loss of security in all these diverse areas, can, therefore, be seen to have inflicted violence in the broadest understanding of the word. These women were violently uprooted from their homes, their land and their resources without any consideration from the government as to how they would integrate into a new and unfamiliar way of life. They were left alone to cope with the difficulties and the losses. No support was offered. At no point was research undertaken to find how the forced eviction experience affected them nor on how their lives could be improved. As such, descriptions of their lives prior to, during and after the eviction have never been collected. This is the first time the voices of these women will be heard.



Palestinian community. Photo: Sijmen Hendriks

To understand women's experiences during the forced eviction process, this research posed the following questions:

1. What do Bedouin women remember of their eviction from Tal El Meleh?
2. What types of violence, if any, did they experience before, during and after the eviction?
3. How has forced eviction affected women's lives?

Methodology

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used as a tool for gathering information. Eight women were interviewed using this method. I conducted the interviews with the assistance of two students, both of whom are Bedouin but not from Tal El Meleh in the Negev. I asked my assistants to identify women who might be willing to be interviewed for the purposes of the research being conducted. I then spoke with the women and each provided me with the name of one other woman who might be interested in participating (a method otherwise known as "snowball" sampling). After initial interviews with sixteen women, eight were selected to undergo more in-depth questioning. The major criteria for selecting them were that they were sufficiently able to express themselves clearly. To elicit a breadth of experience, it was also important for the women to come from different tribes. Two were chosen from each of the following tribes: Elnasara, Elehmar, Elzabarga and Abu Gameh.

Finding eight women to participate in the in-depth interviews was not easy. First, they needed to seek permission from their husbands. As a result, three women originally selected declined to participate. Those who did agree to participate would only do so on the condition that full confidentiality was maintained throughout, so as to prevent them from being identified. For this reason, all the women's names in the report have been altered. The eight women who participated in the study were married with children. Out of this group, four were mothers to young infants, the children of three of the others are now adults (the mothers being grandmothers also) and the final participant was very elderly. The women participating in this study were aged between 44 and 75, and none of them had received a formal education. Two of the women I interviewed had poor language skills, and their vocabulary was rather limited. I did not interview those who went to Lod and Kufur Qassem. I only interviewed those who stayed in the Negev.

The objective of the interviews was to find out how Bedouin women remember the experience of being evicted from their homeland. Specifically I wanted to discover what the impact of the forced eviction was on women and how it has influenced their lives. In addition, I was interested in learning about the types of violence that women experienced during the forced eviction process. The logic behind this type of interview was to ascertain both the situation of the women and to determine the interviewee's perceptions of their eviction, while presenting the same questions to most of the subjects. The principle interviewer was to open and discuss the same topics with all of the interviewees. With semi-structured, in-depth interviews, the interviewee continuously conducts her own negotiation with the interviewer regarding the content of the questions and the types of answers, as well as the extent to which she is willing, prepared and able to relate to the questions. The interviewee may even choose to expose and delve into various topics. The negotiation process also involves clarifying the questions' content and meaning.

I started the interview by thanking the participants for agreeing to be interviewed. I introduced myself and gave my age, family status and number of children, workplace and place of residence, and then my assistant introduced herself. I asked permission to tape the interviews, which they all refused. I then asked them if they had any objection to their responses being written down. For that we gained their permission.

It was very important not to pressure the participants into having their interview taped because it could have resulted in their refusing to continue. As none of us were members of the tribes that we were interviewing, it was vital that a feeling of mutual trust be built between the interviewee and the researcher. Such trust is the first step in building a positive rapport between the researcher and the interviewee. Introducing myself helped particularly as I am married, have children, live and work in the Negev, and have done so for many years. Bedouin are very suspicious of foreigners, fearing that they are colluding with, or are representatives of Israeli authorities. As I speak Arabic fluently and was careful about how I introduced myself to the group, a relationship of trust was built from the outset.

I started each interview with the following question: Tell me about yourself and how you came to live here? Speaking freely, the interviewee chose what to reveal and what not to, and how she would tell her own story. When I discerned in her answer points pertaining to the research question, I asked the interviewee to expand upon the subject. For example, when interviewees pointed out that they had been evicted from their land, I asked them to specify how they were evicted or moved. If they mentioned that they had encountered difficulties, I asked them to specify the nature of these difficulties and provide examples of the types of problems they had come across. I also asked how these problems affected them and what they felt now about the experience. The issue of domestic violence was approached by asking the same question of all the participants. The interviews lasted for approximately two hours and attempted to capture each interviewee's personal experience. The interviews were coordinated in advance with the interviewees, and conducted at their convenience. The research was conducted over the course of four months, from August to October 2000.

Procedure for Analyzing the Interviews

The in-depth interviews were transcribed in Arabic. The interviews were then translated into English. It was sometimes difficult, however, to find the English equivalent for the original Arabic word. In these cases, an English transliteration for the Arabic word is provided.

I regard the interview results as a subjective reflection of Bedouin collective reality in the case of the eviction from Tal El Meleh. Each interview was reviewed several times, after which central themes (or "units of meaning") were drawn out. Once all the interviews were studied, they were found to share common themes, with some elements appearing in at least five of the testimonies taken. These themes were defined as dominant categories and it is these themes which will be presented during the course of the analysis. The analysis was completed after all eight interviews had been thoroughly studied.

Research Findings

Pre and Mid-Eviction Violence

Since the establishment of the state of Israel, the Israeli government's aim has been to minimize the amount of land occupied by the Bedouins in the Negev. From 1976 onwards, when the evictions in Tal El Meleh began, the government's policy has been to "settle" the nomads. The government planned to concentrate the Bedouin in specific areas and pressured them to move off their traditional lands to permanent, planned settlements. During this period of time the Egyptian-Israeli Accord (Camp David Accords) only increased the pressure to evict the Bedouin from Tal El Meleh. The authorities demolished unlicensed homes, confiscated flocks of sheep and destroyed the crops.

Hajeh Wadha summarized how she perceived the government's policy toward the Bedouin formerly living in Tal El Meleh:

We wanted to live where we could cultivate our land and make our living. The government wanted the land and they didn't give a damn for our lives. We now live here in this town where the young men are unemployed. Nothing is safe here. We have lost our food source and our freedom. Before the eviction the official negotiator used promises that we learnt after the eviction they didn't mean to fulfil.

Before and during the process of eviction, the agencies of the government used different methods to intimidate and threaten the Bedouin to leave their homes and lands. Tactics included: noise (aircraft and helicopters flying over living areas, shooting), bulldozers destroying crops, etc., arrests (especially of the children who were protesting), and a general disregard for the environment and its inhabitants. This intimidation had particular affects on the women.

Broken Promises

Unkept promises were one of the tactics employed by the Israeli authorities to remove the Bedouin from their homes and lands.

***Aeisheh:** We were eight tribes (Ashaiar) living in Tal El Meleh. When peace came the Jews said we want Tal El Meleh to build an international airport. They said, you should leave and we will give you land on which to live and compensation like we gave the Jewish settlers who were evacuated from Yameat. They deceived us. Those who were evicted from Yameat lived there for 13 years. We have lived here more than 130 years.*

Threats and Intimidation

The Bedouin women interviewed for this research relayed memories of the terror and fear that they were exposed to during the process of eviction: worrying about children being injured or killed from bombs in the area or from the contact with the soldiers, seeing a son in front of a bulldozer trying to prevent damage to crops and then being arrested. The women were anxious for their children's health because of the dust and the noise from the aircraft. This was the kind of tension that Bedouin women had to cope with on a daily basis while the men left their homes to go to town to obtain work.

Wadha: *My son is now thirty-five, and I remember how he laid himself down in front of the bulldozers, and how the bulldozer proceeded towards him. I was scared to death. They caught him and arrested him because he tried to prevent the army tractors and bulldozers from damaging our property and the crops in our fields.*

Um Marei: *We heard that this is a military area, and a large force consisting of police and border guards were roaming the area in jeeps. We started to worry about our children and ourselves. I was afraid that my children would be near to the area where the army was conducting its exercises. They used to leave bullets and some areas had bombs and weapons.*

Naifeh: *The army was around our homes. They exercised and used their weapons around our homes. I was very scared for the children. It's very dangerous for the children. The patrols used to come to our homes. They would request to drink water and tea. The strange thing was that my father-in-law ordered me to make tea. With my mentality today I would not make anything for them. The border guards ruined our crops with their military jeeps (Wadha). I went out with my husband to buy 'kash' for the animal. Suddenly a big jet flew over our heads, it was too low. My son was with me, he was five years old and was terrified. He lay down on the ground and started to scream and shout loudly while he dug in the sand. When the jet disappeared, my husband went to the officer and he asked him "As the sky is so big, and so high why are you flying so low over our heads? The noise drives us crazy and it's killing our children."*

Um Shareif: *Sometimes the planes flew over our houses for four or eight hours and they landed the planes near our house. The children were screaming and then some of my children started to have breathing difficulties. My husband asked me to move with the children. Today I feel very sorry because I listened to him. How we left our homes, I don't understand. We shouldn't have done that.*

Ameineh: *The Jews affected our life in a bad way. We were living safely in our land (Bladna), and then they came and drove us from our land. When we refused to leave they flew over our homes with a helicopter causing noise and spreading the dust all over the area. I can't forget one morning when the army came and evicted our neighbors.*

Khadra: *They made army camps with caravans and lived very close to us, so they were living in our land. The soldiers would come to talk with my young brothers and sisters. The soldiers used to say to my sisters, "From where do you have this blond hair and green eyes?" They asked us in their Arabic accent "Are you really Arab? We don't believe that there are such beautiful Arabs."*

Economic Violence

The Israeli authorities used the destruction of economic resources as a means of driving the Bedouin peoples from their lands.

Aeisheh: *The green patrol followed us if we went to graze our sheep and would chase us if we were looking for grazing areas. They would expel us from the grazing land if we didn't have permission. Sometimes they would take the sheep and we would have to pay money to release them.*

Wadha: *They destroyed our food. The army jeeps drove over our crops every season. We didn't have the power to prevent them and when the young tried to stop them they started to shoot toward them, and some of them were hit.*

Ameineh: *Daily the tractors would ruin our crops. Last summer the tractor [while they were still on their land] ruined our wheat field. Our children started to throw stones toward the tractors and bulldozers. Some of the young tried to lie down in front of the tractors, but the drivers shot towards the children. The tractors uprooted our trees too. They made our life a misery.*

House Demolition

The policy of the Israeli government has been, and continues to be, to relocate Bedouin residents to designated concentrated areas in order to use the land for the creation and expansion of Israeli cities and towns. Therefore, the government refuses to allow residents of the unrecognised villages to build new homes or repair old ones; nor can they erect permanent or temporary homes. If they do (as the population increases), the government accuses the Bedouin of not respecting the law and demolishes the houses that they have built. In Tal El Meleh the government demolished houses to drive the Bedouin from their homes. This is another way in which the authorities continued to terrify the Bedouin.

Ameineh: *No one should have to leave his land in this way. They forced us to leave. I remember when they brought the tractor, they started to work around our houses, and they started to dig streets and put down water pipes. Years we had lived here without running water. Now for the soldiers they have pipes. Nobody asked us or talked to us. I will not forget when they demolished our neighbour's house in order to force them to leave, and also threatened us and told us to leave or they would demolish our home too ... The land we live in today is not ours ... it's for "xxx" (name not disclosed for reasons of anonymity). It is a limited land, with just one house so the people are annoyed because there is no freedom. When we were in our land we lived freely and no one asked us what we were doing.*

Um Sharief sums up the confusion that the authorities created in order to deprive the Bedouin from Tal El Meleh of their land and rights:

Um Sharief: The people were very simple because they took orders from the old people or the Sheikhs, who were supposed to protect the land of the tribe. Today the young say that the old people destroyed us when they signed the transfer. I know people whose Sheikh refused to sign the transfer order ... we have maps for our land and also we have the Taboo [register documentation of their names as owners of the land]. I know every inch of our land, my father's land and my father-in-law's land. My father-in-law gave the Taboo documentation to my husband before he passed away.

Um Shareif: In May of 1983, the Jews threatened us and asked us to leave or they would demolish our homes. My father-in-law was afraid. He forced my sister-in-law and I to take our kids and leave. So we came to this land and the men stayed there. I lived with my sister-in-law in one small room in the beginning. Later the men built for her a small room. For six or seven years I lived in this small room with three kids and she lived with her kids in the other room without water, gas or electricity. In the winter it was so cold I was so afraid for the children.

Um Marei: One day, early in the morning, my children were still sleeping, I heard noise outside so I went to look. I saw military jeeps, tractors and a bulldozer and one of the soldiers holding my brother's hands behind his back and strongly restraining him. I saw his wife and his children who were crying. The bulldozer started to demolish his house in front of our eyes. Until now we have been refused any compensation.

The government still uses the same policy against all Bedouin in the Negev to force them to leave their homes and to move to designated areas. In the case of Tal El Meleh, government authorities were more strict and violent with the Bedouin. Bedouin women in Tal El Meleh stood by and witnessed their homes being demolished. As a result they testify to feelings of anger, sadness and despair.

Post-Eviction Violence: Transformation of Women's Socio-Economic Roles

The removal of traditional economic resources and “living space” as a result of the forced eviction from Tal El Meleh has affected Bedouin women's economic and social status, self-esteem as well as their emotional and mental health.

The loss of their homelands transformed the Bedouin in general, and women in particular, from producers to consumers who are now dependent on the state's economy. Moreover, the women in this study were left wholly reliant on their husband's incomes after the eviction. This transition had a direct and immediate impact on their lives. Without an economic role or resources, women's status within Bedouin society changed dramatically, and for the worse. Moreover, due to the loss of land, the “living space” that the women were accustomed to was drastically reduced. Women became limited to a new space, which consisted of the area within the walls of the house in which

they were living. Women, and their families, were left alone without any support. Government institutions made no effort to provide any care, support or assistance to help them adapt to this drastically different way of life. These experiences are described in more detail below. Where possible and relevant, direct quotes from the participants in the study are provided.

Loss of Economic Resources and Sense of Self

Prior to the eviction, traditional Bedouin life provided economic resources to Bedouin women. They had “living space” and land, from which they could harvest food. Wadha described this reality by saying “If there is land, there is work. Here there is no land and no work.” This sentence expresses powerfully the importance of land in Bedouin women’s lives. It can therefore be assumed that the sudden loss of their land and their way of life had serious implications. The women’s knowledge of life and how to make their living is based on a traditional way of existence, which has been practiced for generations. This knowledge, and their economic resources, provided them with status and independence, which in turn gave them a sense of worth and self esteem. The families’ existence was dependent on their own hard work and effort. They owned livestock including hens, which produced eggs, and they kept herd animals including sheep and goats, which could produce meat and cheese. They had the land itself to cultivate seasonally.

***Amineh:** You know I dreamt several times that I am standing on our land, Ard’na, between the plants or with the sheep. I liked the harvest time. We harvested barley and wheat. Also, in the winter we would plant lentils and we cut them down in the summer. We owned a big orchard, which had grapes, figs, pomegranates, peaches and almonds, and till today our orchards are still there, but, the Jews have put their chairs in our orchard now.*

***Um Shareif:** In the summer we planted summer vegetables in the “Siddeh.” We had more than one “Siddeh.” This Siddeh’s land is low, and the size is not so big. We gathered the soil around it in order to fill it with water (in the winter). In the summer we would plow the land, using the donkey, twice at least, and we planted the seeds of okra, cucumber, eggplant and watermelon. We didn’t need to irrigate the crops because they grew solely from rainwater. We were eating natural foods, not artificial foods like today.*

***Sara:** In Tal El Meleh there were three water-springs, two of them were near to us. We would drink from them and our sheep would be watered there too.*

***Um Marei:** We lived with the Arab tribes [Bedouin], and our living was natural, from the meat and vegetables that we grew and nurtured ourselves.*

Access to and control over land was the way of life for the Bedouin, unlike today where everything has to be purchased from shops. Women repeatedly expressed the wish to have access to their land and water. Bedouin women saw the land as essential to the security of their economic resources. Bedouin women were hard workers, and they felt protected and secure within the traditional existence patterns of the Bedouin in their homeland. This is not the same protection and security that modern Western women would perceive, as their understanding is connected to free choice and behavior. The female evictees talked about their satisfaction and the feeling of impor-

tance from their lives before the eviction in contrast to a feeling of worthlessness and depression after they started their new lives. Their descriptions and understandings of eviction, however, touch on much more than the loss of their families' economic security.

Loss of Sense of Security

Ameineh: *There is no freedom (Hurieh) in this neighbourhood (Blad) and there is no security.*

Bedouin women who were evicted from Tal El Meleh felt that they were neglected and abused by the authorities. In their eyes, no one cared for them. For many of the women the land was regarded as a form of protection, closely related to their individual and collective identities. Without it, the women felt vulnerable, as if they had no security, particularly not in the face of the powerful Israeli authorities.

Khadra: *The Jews don't care about the Bedouin - they just wanted the land. We don't have power to prevent them (Ma Fe Lena Heleh Elhum). No one can defend us. That is the situation. No one can protect us from them. My father-in-law refused to leave his land. "We have plants and sheep," he said. He said to us that he would never leave his land. "I have to harvest and thrash my land," he said to the Jews who tried to force him to leave. They refused to listen to him. In the end he requested that they allow him to stay until the end of the summer. When he left our land in August of 1983 he brought the sheep with him, despite all our efforts to convince him that there was no new place to graze the sheep and he should sell them. Most of the sheep died and those that didn't were eventually sold.*

The Emotional and Social Impact of Forced Eviction

Bedouin tribes used to live within defined borders. Every tribe knew their land and its borders. The tribe's area was the private property of that tribe, and strangers were not allowed to enter it. Every tribe knew their neighbor so they could move within the space and enjoy the freedom. They felt safe within their environment, living within their traditional structure. When the tribes were moved into new, purpose-built settlements, the women found that they had lost all of the freedom that their "living space" had afforded them as well as the feelings of safety experienced within their traditional lifestyle. The walls of the houses were oppressive to them, a marked contrast to the freedom they had experienced on their land. They were no longer meeting with other women and interacting with them socially. This section will deal with the emotional and mental health of these women as they described it, in relation to their experience of forced eviction.

Um Marei: *Since I was five years old I worked, grazing the sheep, sometimes with my older brothers, sometimes with my older sister. My mother and my sister made butter, yoghurt and "afig," our Bedouin cheese, which we kept for the fall. We drank milk. Today we can't make our living. There is no security. The men are unemployed, and the women are staying at home. I know how to make everything. I like to do these things but I can't anymore. You see why?*



Azmeh unrecognized village.
Photo: Peter Fryer

Um Marei described the loss of the economic resources that she had before the eviction. She described it as her “professional” work. She has the skills and the knowledge, but, now she cannot work. As a result of this loss she feels deprived of her heritage and feels worthless.

Um Marei: I feel sorrow for the days when we went to graze our animals. We took our bread from the house, and in the summer we would take with us yoghurt, tomatoes and a bottle of water. We got the water from the well. You know that in Tal El Meleh we had three wells with pure water. These days I think the wells are dry. The Jews have pumped it to the settlements. *(These wells were not owned by individuals but were in fact public property.)*

Um Marei feels sorrow and a longing for what she has lost. She feels angry too, because she used to enjoy the social gathering at the well where she met with her friends. The well that Um Marei described is public property. It is different from Haraba (a rain water well which is private property). The Well was a meeting place for different Bedouin tribes and important for social as well as business interaction and contact. As a result of the eviction the women felt alone, uprooted, without support and were left to cope with their own feelings of agony and longing.

Aeishah: A few weeks ago I was sitting in the medical center alone. Suddenly a woman approached me and looked at me, embraced me and started to kiss me. She looked at me and said, “You are Aeishah my friend from Elbihera. My neighbor, how many years have passed since I last saw you? How are you? Where are you these days?” I miss the days that we were together in our free country (Elhuria fi Bladna). I felt so sad again about ourselves and our lives and started to cry.

Amieneh: I miss the days I spent going to the pasture, with neighbors and relatives and with the flocks of sheep and goats. Most of the day I spend here between the walls. If I am bored, I don’t have any place to go. I feel depressed.

Sara: Spring today is different from spring 18 years ago when the Jews drove us away from our land. I remember that day when we left in the beginning of spring. We went to graze the sheep in the mountains. I was staying at our home taking care of my sibling and sometimes I would ride our horse to the mountain to take things to my mother... I loved those days. I loved the freedom. Today I feel sad at home, it’s like a prison and even when you are angry there is no place to go.
Um Shareif: As I told you several times, I dream that I am on my land and I wish to return and live there. On the holidays (Ei’d) I went to visit the tombs with the family. The soldiers accompanied us, but they didn’t allow us to visit our land. I feel so sad that I couldn’t visit.

Um Shareif, also expressed feelings of worthlessness since she moved to the planned settlement in contrast to her sense of self prior to the eviction, which she describes as follows:

We lived in a tent. I helped my mother and my sisters clean the house. We had two horses. My father used them as a means to go from one place to another. I loved to ride the horse, and sometimes I would follow the sheep while I was riding the horse. I would go to Hara'abeh (a well were the rainwater gathered) to water the sheep.

In addition to the traditional Bedouin life, which gave them protection and economic security, they also describe that they lost their Hurieh (freedom). The disappearance of pastoral life and “living space” caused feelings of depression and worthlessness. In their previous lives, their physical efforts, knowledge and contribution to daily life were essential to the family. It is not only the loss of a traditional lifestyle that affects the Bedouin women from Tal El Meleh, but also the way the authorities forced them to leave their land. Women expressed their feelings of worthlessness after the eviction, and compared it to their life before the eviction, relating it to how they would previously spend their day as part of a family unit. They expressed their longing to return to their previous life and what it offered them.

Domestic Violence

Seven of the eight women reported that they suffered from types of domestic violence that they had not experienced before the eviction. This violence was physical, verbal and emotional. They expressed how difficult it is for them to talk about their memories of the eviction and their struggle with their families to stay in their land. Few of them talked about the violence and for some it was all they could do to confirm that violence does exist.

***Amineh:** I am not used to talking about what happened in my house. In our culture we do not talk about these kinds of things, especially not with strangers. While we were in Tal El Meleh I collected the children's national allowance. I used to spend it all for the benefit of my family or me. These days he [her husband] is unemployed so he takes it and gives me only 100 Shekel (\$25). It's not enough at all. I can't buy anything with this money. If I dare to say anything or ask for more he will start shouting at me and hit me.*

For some Bedouin women the link between lack of economic resources and domestic violence is direct. In Tal El Meleh the living space and the land supplied them with economic resources, which allowed them a certain amount of independence from their spouses. The eviction, which took place without the provision of any support or replacement of resources from the authorities, caused the women to become very dependent. As women became more dependent on their husbands, their exposure to physical violence increased.

***Sara:** In Eid El Adha my husband hit me because I refused to go to the bank to collect the children's allowance, and when I collected it he told me that the money was missing two Shekels (\$.50). “Where is it?” he asked. I told him “I don't know,” so he started hitting me again.*

The importance of the national allowance in the family's life is expressed strongly by **Khadra**:

The national allowance is the only financial resource for my kids and me. Even my husband has tried to take some of this and he thinks I receive a lot from the insurance. Sometimes I gave him some, but from time to time he wanted me to go with him to the bank and to authorize him to receive the allowance instead of me. I refused and he started to beat me. He wants to take the insurance from me. Because of that we separated and I came here to my mother and now live in my mother's house.

Most of the women used to collect the children's allowance before the eviction and they used the money for their own benefit without any interference. After the eviction they testified that their husbands started to ask for the allowance for themselves.

The professional skills that Bedouin women have, such as the knowledge of cultivating land, grazing sheep and producing food, etc., shows a close connection to the land. After the eviction the women were left without any source of income. The children's allowance became an essential source of income for these families, but it has also become a cause of tension. The men need the money because of the very limited resources and the high rate of unemployment. Before the eviction the Bedouin were not a cash-oriented society, but now, both men and women are compelled to live in a cash-based society where money is very scarce.

Analysis

The forced eviction in this study was a long and protracted process with different types of pressure being employed. In the case of Tal El Meleh, the planning for the eviction of the Bedouin took place long before the Egyptian - Israeli Treaty. In 1973, Shimon Peres (then the Transport Minister) presented plans for an international airport in the area. In addition, the master plan for the Negev of 1976 (drafted two years before Camp David) had already specified that an airport was to be located between Arad and Beersheva, including the Tal El Meleh area. Since 1976, the eviction of the Bedouin inhabitants of Tal El Meleh was foreseen and planned. It was implemented in 1979. The process of evicting people from the area lasted for more than four years. During this period of time Bedouin women and their families experienced different types of violence.

Bedouin women in this case suffered oppression twice. In the first instance it came from the authorities, in the second from their own communities and families. The eviction deprived Bedouin women of land and of resources, and exposed them to situations where they were threatened by soldiers, saw military tractors and bulldozers destroy their crops and homes and take away their grazing land. During the eviction no one asked Bedouin women from the tribe about their opinions regarding the eviction, nor whether they were ready to be evicted or not. Bedouin women were ignored by government institutions, women's organisations and Bedouin society.

After the eviction Bedouin women had to cope with their loss of land and tradition. In particular, they faced the loss of the economic resources, which influenced their lives and their self-esteem. Bedouin women today feel deprived of their skills and knowledge of land cultivation. Being taken from their traditional lifestyle without any replacement with new knowledge or skills, or any support to help them cope with their new life has been devastating.

The testimonies of Bedouin women from Tal El Meleh teach us how these women experienced the eviction process personally, but also their feelings towards others in the family. They felt the pain of their children and their parents. They also experienced the eviction in the many roles that they play as women (mothers, wives, etc.). As women are often the emotional centre and stabilizing force in the family, they often find themselves having to simultaneously cope with their own anxiety while caring for others.



Children and the kindergarten of Arab El Naim, an unrecognized village in Palestine.
Photo: Peter Fryer, Association of Forty Archives.

The resettlement of the Bedouin in towns, against their wishes to remain in their traditional agricultural villages, left women without resources and without skills to deal with a new life. This in turn exposed them to domestic violence and led to (sometimes) violent disagreements with their spouse over the scarce resources available to them. According to their culture, Bedouin women have a tribal system to protect and support them from violence. Now they are living without this traditional protection and are also without any protection from the authorities. This lack of protection exists because the Israeli police are perceived by the Bedouin to be an enemy. If a Bedouin woman were to complain to the police, she would be punished by her family, bringing shame on them.

Bedouin women testified that they lost their freedom and security. They described the emotional stress of watching their homes and all of their worldly possessions being destroyed. Bedouin women have had to stand-by and watch their economic, social, cultural and emotional lives being shattered. It is very important for Western oriented women to hear accounts from the Bedouin women about their lives and the freedom - “Huriah” in their language – that they enjoyed. Bedouin women felt secure and protected in their traditional life before the exposure to a Western way of life in Israel.

Their “Huriah” is derived from their own world and culture. It is different from what our understanding of “Freedom” is. The Bedouin women enjoyed riding horses, roaming the land and grazing or working with their animals. The eviction left them exposed to a modern life without any means or skills that enable them to enjoy it. The women’s testimonies demonstrate that for these women their freedom is curtailed. The resettlement into an unfamiliar life has left Bedouin women depressed and unhappy, with deep feelings of loneliness and worthlessness. Most of the women sounded very angry about their situation. Their anger is toward the Israelis who deprived them of their home. They said that because the Arabs lost the war with the Israelis, there is no hope for them to have their justice. They see themselves as belonging to the people who lost the war.

***Wadha:** If all these Arabs around us couldn’t do anything and retain their rights ... what can we do? We don’t have any means to get our rights.*

The above quote represents the sadness and depression seen, not only at the personal level but at the collective level as well. Women also demonstrated anger against their leaders. They were careful when being critical of the Sheikhs of the tribes, but I certainly heard questions about the role the leaders had played during the negotiations with the government officials. It is interesting that throughout their testimony they did not mention the negotiating process with the Sheikhs. Only one woman mentioned that the Sheikhs were a problem. The 1980 “Peace Law” was not men-

tioned at all. This reflects their personal outlook, which is concerned with their daily lives, and existence. Their role was to look after the family, harvest and tend to the crops and animals. They were not involved in the decision making process of the tribe. One can see how strong the desire of the authorities was to move the Tal El Meleh Bedouins from their land by the means employed to evict them whether they were using “legal means” or the extralegal “harassment” the Bedouin women describe. By destroying the crops, the authorities worked in a way that obliterated everything that existed in the area. By terrifying the Bedouin using military force, the lives of Bedouin women have been forever altered for the worse.

All the Bedouin women who were interviewed were above the age of 44. They are women who have had and still are undergoing difficulties due to this forced eviction. They have bitter memories about the loss of their homes and the feelings of deception because of the Israelis. In addition to the new way of life that they have had to adapt to, there is also the question of what they are now passing on to the next generation. Previously, in their life on their homelands, the women would pass their skills and knowledge onto their children, equipping them for a pastoral lifestyle, which had seen little change for generations. Now, living in new and unnatural (to them) environments, and having been subjected to a variety of abuses (both physical and mental) they are concerned that the skills and knowledge that they previously possessed will be lost. It would be interesting to continue this research and learn exactly what these women do, in fact, pass on to their children. Will it merely be bitterness concerning the events experienced in the past or will there be an attempt to keep alive the knowledge of generations of Bedouin?

Recommendations

- The HRA should hold a special day for the women who participated with the research to thank them, and to share with them the findings of the research. While this alone may be empowering, the HRA should discuss with the women how they might work with them in the future to improve their situation.
- Palestinian human rights organisations and women’s organisations should work together with Bedouin women who have been evicted and other women who have survived forced eviction to assist them in realizing that they are not alone in these experiences and to provide them with information regarding their human rights. These organisations should determine strategies to assist Bedouin women in claiming their rights. In keeping with this, Palestinian organisations should work with international human rights organisations to determine how international human rights law might be used in promoting and protecting Bedouin women’s rights.
- HRA and other Palestinian organisations should ensure the findings of this research are used to inform programmes and activities designed to prevent and redress forced evictions.
- HRA and other non-governmental organisations should consider hosting seminars with other Palestinian and Israeli organisations who might not be aware of the suffering of the Bedouin of the Negev, and of Bedouin women in particular.

- The research should be disseminated amongst Palestinian women's organisations, and perhaps to progressive Jewish women's organisations. Using the findings of the research these seminars could enhance solidarity and awareness about the means the authorities have used since the establishment of the Jewish state to deprive Arabs of their land and resources, and how this policy adversely influences women's lives.
- The findings of this study should be published in book format in Arabic, English and Hebrew.
- Further research should be conducted which documents and monitors other Palestinian women's experiences of forced eviction as forced eviction continues to be practiced by successive Israeli governments.

Violence against Women and Forced Eviction: a study of three communities in India

Youth for Unity and Voluntary Action, *Researched and Written by: Lysa John*

Introduction

For decades now, security of tenure for the poor has been an issue of great contention in the dynamic city of Mumbai (formerly known as Bombay), India. Responses to the issue have varied from sporadic evictions in the 1970s to mass and brutal evictions carried out by the State government in the 1980s. This was followed by a period of respite from forced eviction and the initiation of planned resettlement in the early 1990s - a result of concerted action by housing rights groups. Since 1998, however, the threat of revival of the 'demolition era' has been looming large over several cities. The need for new and comprehensive strategies to protect what has been fought for and achieved is being recognized as critical.

Youth For Unity And Voluntary Action (YUVA) is a voluntary development organisation that has been working to prevent forced evictions and to protect and promote the housing rights of slum and pavement dwellers in India since its initiation in 1984. YUVA's role in this context covers the spectrum of interventions in relation to housing rights - from organizing and capacity building at the level of communities, to contributing to the development of international norms on housing and forced eviction such as through participation in forums such as the Second World Conference on Human Settlements, Habitat II and related processes.

Although the level of awareness regarding forced eviction has increased tremendously amongst policy makers, civil society and communities, no specific attention has been given to understanding the actual experiences of women in forced evictions. Similarly, insufficient effort has been devoted towards collecting empirical evidence intended for developing a better understanding of how women, because of their gender, are affected by the physical and social implications of forced evictions.

The motive to study women's experiences in forced eviction arose from the belief that not only do women suffer disproportionately, but that the inattention to their experience has been disproportionate, in terms of being under-represented and under-acknowledged at all levels. Women's experiences of violence are often narrowed down to individualized 'casualties' of physical or sexual threat or abuse, usually just before, during or just after the event of eviction. The word 'casualty' is appropriate because even these experiences do not gain the attention of the larger community, and often not even of the immediate family, as an issue for redress in any larger plan of action against the eviction.

This study thus serves as an opportunity to gather together observations of women's experiences of forced evictions, in a manner that does justice to their specific experiences and their struggle to preserve the fabric and dignity of their lives. It also serves as a means to refine and improve YUVA's responses to women faced with forced eviction and/or resettlement, thus enhancing the quality of our work in the area of housing rights.

In this context, the objectives of the study are identified at two levels; short-term and long-term. The short-term or immediate objectives that we seek to achieve through this research include:

- To document experiences of violence faced by women in forced evictions - where the term 'forced evictions' is understood as more than the event of the physical demolition and includes the violence faced in relation to security of tenure before and after the incidence of removal from their homes/land;
- To identify types of violence experienced by women in forced evictions - where 'violence' is understood in a comprehensive sense to include its physical, psychological, sexual and structural dimensions;
- To compare the experiences of women in resettlement, on the assumption that it is a humane alternative to forced eviction.

The longer-term objectives of the study are:

- To educate relevant groups to ensure they understand the violence faced by women in forced evictions - this includes the women themselves, communities, policy makers, NGOs, the media and academic institutions;
- To promote among such groups the need to seriously understand and address the impacts of forced eviction on women in practice and policy;
- To promote the need to assess the relevance, for women and for communities, of resettlement as an alternative to forced eviction.

The study itself deals with the experiences of women in the differing contexts of three communities.

The main body of the study focuses on the experiences of a pavement community, Prakash Nagar. Pavement communities have been and continue to be the highest risk group in relation to forced evictions. The reasons for this include that their very existence is regarded officially as a direct contravention of civic regulation, depriving "tax-paying citizens of their right to walk on the pavement." Their degree of visibility (additionally perceived as an "eye-sore") is also much higher than an organized slum community as is their vulnerability because of their scattered nature and their limited opportunities for "regularization."³² In fact, pavement dwellings were recognized as 'communities' only as recently as 1995.

The second community studied in this research is that of a typical 'slum community,' Bhabrekar Nagar. In contrast to the pavement communities, Bhabrekar Nagar experienced a high degree of security of tenure, complete with the possession of legal "proofs," until the unannounced and brutal eviction of this community in June 1998.

³² Regularization is the legal recognition as a community with the right to basic amenities and protection from forced eviction. In Mumbai, the possession of individual 'photopasses' (see footnote 37) and, more recently, their inclusion in the voters' list before a specified date (currently 1 January 1995) are pre-requisites for such recognition.



Evicted community, India

The third community that formed part of this research is Shivaji Nagar, which was resettled under the social housing scheme of the government. This community was included in the research as a means of exploring the differences and similarities between women's experiences of forced eviction and their experiences of the proposed solution to forced eviction, that is, resettlement.

Taken separately, each of the case studies provides insight into the experiences of women as influenced by the different nature of their communities. Taken together, they highlight that these experiences are bound by a deeper structural origin. The experiences also reflect the roles that women have played at the individual and community levels in coping with and managing the effects of forced eviction.

Research Question

This research study focused on the following two questions:

1. What types of violence have women in Prakash Nagar, Mahim and Bhabrekar Nagar, Malad faced in forced eviction?
2. Does planned resettlement, as an alternative to forced evictions, protect women from violence and safeguard their right to housing?

Methodology

This paper explores the experiences of women in three communities of Mumbai. The communities are representative of the diversity in the nature of settlements and the nature of administrative responses within the context of forced eviction in the city.

The method of data collection has been primarily through focus group discussions with women in each of the three communities. This has been supported by documentation, legal papers, photographs and added information by community workers who work in the communities under study.

COMMUNITY I: PRAKASH NAGAR

Introduction

Few experiences can match the desperation and pain that accompanies forced eviction. The accompanying chaos and helplessness often work to overshadow the extent of violence to which women are subject. This case study demonstrates how women disproportionately bear the brunt of class and gender violence that precedes evictions and continues through and beyond the physical destruction of the housing. Women are also at the forefront in the resistance, often performing the role of a buffer between evictees and evictors: putting themselves up against the persons carrying out forced evictions and protecting men, children and the elderly so that these members of the community have better opportunities to escape the eviction unharmed.

Methodology

This paper is based on the findings from a focused discussion group held with a community organizer and 17 female members of the Prakash Nagar pavement community of Mahim, Mumbai. These women braved torrential rains on Sunday 9 July 2000 to speak to us about their experiences of eviction. Participants in the focus group were representative of diverse regional groups: Maharashtrian, Tamilian, Kannadiga and Nepali, and diverse age groups: ranging from 24 to 58 years. All of the women had lived in Prakash Nagar for at least twenty years. They were either born into the community or entered it through marriage.

The willingness of this group of women to talk about their obviously painful experiences was based on their long-standing relationship with, and trust in us. YUVA had been working with them since 1991 to prevent demolitions and to develop community-based mechanisms for social and economic development such as children's education and the formation of women's self-help groups.

Initially YUVA was reluctant to ask the women to talk about their experiences of forced eviction because we wanted to give them something tangible in return for their participation in the study. We did not want them to feel that we were going to "poke and prod" at them only to walk away at the end of our study. In turn, we decided that one of the chief objectives in our research with the women of Prakash Nagar would be to identify specific community needs - which could be met through capacity building programs that could be implemented soon after the research project. This would enable the exercise to be solution-driven rather than problem-driven, a process of mutual learning. Unfortunately, in the context of pavement communities, the problems related to security of tenure itself are so overwhelming that there seemed to be little that could be offered that would actually make a difference in these women's lives. Although pavement dwellers with proof of residence in the city prior to 1995 have been legally recognized as 'citizens' of the city and as such entitled to state sponsored housing and amenities provided by the Maharashtra State government, the achievement of such status has not been easy to obtain. Prakash Nagar itself has been "notified for resettlement" twice in four years. Each time the proposal has been followed by a flurry of activity within the community - collection of proofs, training in co-operative building, enhanced collection of housing savings - and each time the proposal has been shelved without explanation

'Dealing with the present is hard enough for them,' remarked a community organizer, 'to add to this the burden of anticipation that may never be realised would be a further cruelty.' The women of Prakash Nagar, however, expressed an encouraging response to our plainly stated proposal for a discussion that had little chance of yielding any immediate, tangible benefits for them. "Let the others know our story," said Saraswati. "When they know, then something may change."

Background of the Community

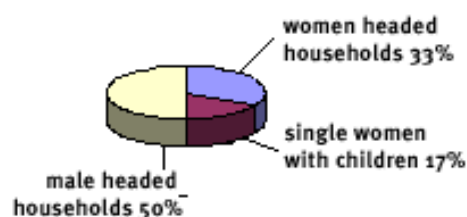
The community of Prakash Nagar was formerly located on a stretch of land, about a kilometer long, placed between the Police Colony, Mahim, on the left and about twenty-five feet from the railway tracks of the Western Line on the right.

The community originated 35 years ago when approximately 10 families working on the construction of the Police Colony cleared the untended, vacant land near the site of construction and built

their huts or 'jhopdas' on the site. Gradually more people came to stay, and in 1998 there were 300 families residing in the community.

The community is made up of different ethnic groups. Families from Tamil Nadu, a state of South India, comprise 35 per cent of the population. Families from Maharashtra form the second largest group of 25 per cent. Other communities such as those from Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Nepal and the Pardhi tribe together comprise the remaining 40 per cent of the community (see figure below).

Structure of families in Prakash Nagar



The community also has a significant number of women-headed households - that is households which may contain men, but within which women bear the primary economic responsibility. The participants of the discussion identified that half of the 300 families were headed by women. Fifty of the families within the community are headed by single mothers. In other words, one in every two families is headed by a woman, and one in every three families is headed by a single woman.

The families eke out a meagre livelihood through daily wage based activities such as construction and domestic work. The average daily income of a family ranges between Rs.20 and Rs.50.³³ Formal

education has been traditionally absent in the community. However while the adults have never been to school, the child population may attend the local municipal school. Most children study until Standard five or six (primary school). Two children have completed Standard Ten (secondary school). To date, no member of the community has had a college education.

The families in Prakash Nagar have been facing demolition since 1985. On an average, demolitions were carried out (by the municipality) three to four times each year. The demolitions were carried out in a sudden and violent manner and involved the destruction of their makeshift houses and the confiscation of belongings.

The final dispossession, however, occurred on 12 February 1999. The demolition was motivated by the construction of a new fly-over for the highway at Mahim. The fly-over was one of fifty-five whose construction was announced by the then State government (the Shiv Sena-BJP combine) under the World Bank supported Mumbai Urban Transport Project (MUTP).³³ The open plot on which the community was established was deemed necessary for the storage and generation of construction equipment for the fly-over.

The bulldozers came unannounced. It was afternoon and less than half the community was at home. Taken by surprise, the first reaction was that of flight. The male members of the community were immediately 'sent away' by the women in the community to take refuge in safer places where they could escape brutal harassment at the hands of the police. There was a desperate

³³ 1 USD: Rs. 42.

³⁴ Ironically enough, the MUTP includes a rehabilitation plan for those who are displaced by its activities. The Rehabilitation Plan is considered a very progressive plan and is often quoted as a precedent.

attempt to salvage as many of their possessions as possible, round up the children and run for safety. Single women were at a distinct disadvantage since they lacked the support required to simultaneously rescue their belongings, their children and themselves.

Possibly realizing the finality of this eviction, the community struggled to retain their foothold. A tense drama that lasted nearly a week unfolded between the authorities and the residents that included violent exchanges between the two groups. At one point, members of the community resorted to stone throwing in order to defend themselves against the onslaught and battering from the police. This enraged the authorities further. The police responded by firing bullets into the air to disperse the group and issued arrest warrants for community leaders and NGO representatives intervening in support of the community.

Findings

The location of their community has had a distressingly significant influence on the lives of the residents of Prakash Nagar, particularly women. On the face of it, there is nothing untoward in the appearance of the community – if you can take poverty for granted, that is. Otherwise it seems to be a pavement community like any other: small, dark houses made of uneven plastic sheets precariously arranged on wooden poles, with children and the occasional woman at the entrance. On the left are the pastel-shaded buildings of the “Police Colony,” the anonymous countenance of rows of identical houses silently towering over the patchwork of shanties.

However, the underbelly of this unobtrusive scene is revealed in our discussion with seventeen women residents of Prakash Nagar, the youngest of which has spent twenty years in the community. Some of them were born there; some came into the community through marriage. All of them have an unnerving story to share.

As far back as they can recall, the families in Prakash Nagar - particularly women - have been subject to verbal, physical and sexual intimidation by the young men of the Police Colony. One woman reported,

“They come to our houses in the night, drunk, and force us awake with shouts and kicks”, says Sonabai who has been a resident of the community since its inception. “They order us to get them a glass of water, sometimes tea and other things that we cannot even talk about.”

Other members of the women’s group corroborate the shared experience of verbal, physical and sexual violation.

“Our husbands dare not intervene for fear of being beaten to death,” they reply when asked if there has been an attempt to resist. “We had gone to the local police station, but it is manned by the same people who exploit us. They don’t even let us enter.”

“If we protest too loud, a demolition follows. They file a complaint with the municipal corporation of the nuisance we are causing to them and the demolition squad and police (of the same Colony) follow,” says Saraswati, explaining the relationship between their experiences of exploitation and dispossession.

The culture of violence has been handed down for generations.

“Each set of youth in the Colony takes up from where the previous set left. Earlier it was their fathers, now there is a new group,” says Anajmani. “Everyone knows but no one cares.”

Ironically, many of the women of Prakash Nagar are employed as domestic workers in the same Police Colony. They reported that they do not face any harassment in the course of their duties, undertaken in various apartments of the Colony.

“Some of the families (employers) are quite nice,” the women mention. However their support extends only till their doorstep. “They are aware of what we are being subjected to by members of their own community, but they just ignore the issue.”

The community has never been provided a ‘notice’ with regard to the demolitions.

“Only once in all the years were we given a notice by the BMC³⁴ that we would be evicted,” recalls Padma. “We all panicked. Many of us did not go to work for four to five days after that, both men and women. We collected our possessions and waited for them to come. We could not sleep at night with the anticipation. But nothing happened. Slowly we gave up waiting. We had to get back to work to survive. Days passed and we assumed that it was a false call. And then one fine day, almost a month later, when all of us were away at work, the squad came along and razed everything to the ground.”

The community also adapted its lifestyle to the incidence of demolitions. Besides living in a state of continuous anxious anticipation, they also refrained from acquiring any possessions or assets. It made no sense to invest in their housing or community, even if they could afford to do so, because it would either be destroyed or confiscated (never to be returned) in the next demolition.

“We have lost so many of our things in the past that we fear acquiring anything new or substantial for ourselves now.”

Besides the event of demolition, the gang of male oppressors in the Police Colony acts as a voluntary censor of their lifestyle, particularly targeting women.

³⁵ Bombay Municipal Corporation, now the “Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai.”

“If any of us wears a new sari or a necklace, bangles even, they mock us with abusive language that suggests that we are inviting sexual interest by wearing a new dress or any accessory. We avoid doing it in order to escape the pressure. If I want to wear a new sari, I go to my relatives’ house in another part of the city and indulge myself there.”

Women were at the forefront of the attack and its resistance, says community leader, Durga-bai:

“In the event of evictions, our first reaction is to get the men out of the way. We fear that if our men get into the hands of the police they will be arrested and taken away. Once they are in the hands of the authorities we have no control over what may happen to them. They may be beaten to death.”

“In the case of the last eviction,³⁵ the police had realised that the women were organizing together to resist the evictions and decided to crack down on us as well. I hid in the marshes behind the railway tracks (the Mahim creek) for three days to escape them. There were others from the community with me as well. We were in a state of desperation. Along with the NGO workers we went to meet the local MLA, Baburao Mane and the local MP, Ramdas Athavale. We asked them to stop the demolitions and help us regain our houses. They assured us of their support. But eventually they could not take up our issue against the strong political and economic interests behind the implementation of the fly-over project. They said they could not do anything against the World Bank project.”

“We also approached the press. The BMC and the police, who claimed that we had started the violence by stone throwing, countered our stories. There was much publicity given to the two policemen who were injured in the event. In fact, one of them was hit by the police, firing on itself. No importance was given to the serious injuries sustained by women and even children on our side. Even though we had proofs of residence and were included in the electoral list of 1995, the State government was determined to move us out in order to use that land for construction activities. The Police Colony was only too happy to support this move.”

Mallika’s Story: Vulnerability of Single Women in Evictions

Mallika’s experience described below clearly brings out the vulnerability of women-headed families in coping with the emergencies and violence of forced eviction.

“At the time of the demolition I was attending to some chores in the house. My three children were eating their lunch at the doorstep. When the police were first sighted there was a sudden commotion as people ran helter-skelter to save their belongings and themselves. Unlike the others who had their husbands to help them pack to carry their belongings, and herd their children away from the site, I knew I would not be able to save anything in my house. The best I could do,

³⁶ 12 February 1999.

being on my own, was to gather my children and take them a few metres away from the house, out of harm's way, or so I thought. We squatted at a distance and watched as the police and the BMC men broke down the houses and came down upon any of the residents who were in their way.

Suddenly I found that two of the policemen were standing in front of me. Spewing filthy language, one of them kicked the plate of rice out of my son's hand, then, pushing the children out of the way they began to beat and kick me. They called me a bitch and a prostitute and said they would teach us a lesson for our audacity (of residing in that area). By the time they were done I had bruises all over my body, a broken rib, hand and teeth. I lay there bleeding till the demolition activity abated and some of my neighbours and the community worker had arrived to take stock of the damage.

I was taken to the Bhabha hospital, the local municipal hospital, but the doctors refused to look at me without the permission of the police, and the police of course would not even entertain my case. The police were also there and they instructed the hospital to deny us. Along with others, I also went to Sion Hospital (a municipal hospital in another locality), they too said that they would attend to me only after a police statement declaring violence by the police has been made. As if the police would lodge a complaint against themselves!!! Finally we obtained treatment, but only by attributing our injuries to domestic injuries. My case paper for instance only declares that I have been hit by a 'lathi' (stick) without mentioning who used it against me.

My health has never been the same again. I am now half the size I was before the demolition. My health is precarious and till a few months ago I even had difficulty breathing. I cannot do continuous or strenuous work, even around the house. I cannot afford the medicines and doctor's fees. How will I work? How will I feed my children?

Mallika has been raising her children single-handedly ever since her husband deserted her. Her weak condition does not make it possible to engage in physical labour. Before her injuries, she used to earn her living as a construction worker. Today she has resorted to begging to get by.

When the land on which the Prakash Nagar community had resided for more than three decades was no longer available to them, they looked for a resettlement location.

"Initially the families were scattered on the sides of the road itself for several days. We tried to regain normalcy in our existence. Since we could not afford a disruption in our work, most residents, especially men, returned to their activities soon after. School for children was affected for much longer. Besides they had lost their uniforms and school materials in the demolition."

The worst part of the ordeal, however, was obtaining the basic necessities of water and sanitation. These were opportunities for the youth in the Police Colony to make women's lives more miserable than they already were. Women were responsible for collecting water and as a result, women bore the brunt of the violence.

“We used to collect the excess water from the overhead tanks that ran down off the walls of the buildings of the Police Colony to meet our daily requirements. After the demolition they would not allow us to collect water. They used to wait in gangs near the water source and we dared not go near for fear of being beaten up. But how could we survive without water? We used to wait up all night until all activity ceased in the Colony and sneak in at 2 and 3am, while they were asleep, to collect a bucket of water each. It was at great risk to ourselves for had we been sighted by those men, that would have been the end of us.

And yet, water can still be collected once a day. What about our other requirements like going to the toilet? We used the cover of the marshes for this and even this was fraught with danger for us. The youth would follow our movements from their balconies, catcall and throw bottles on us while we were defecating. In addition to the humiliation of being watched and verbally abused during our private functions, we also had to face the risk of being hit by the bottles. It was hell for us. They wouldn't even spare the young girls.

Once a girl went into the bushes alone and suddenly realised that a man was following her. However, she made her way back to the community safely. After that we go to the toilet in small groups.”

Currently the community has re-housed itself in an open plot behind the local hospital. Their occupation on this private land is perhaps more tenuous than before. The women, however, say that they are forced to remain in the vicinity to sustain their livelihood. Indu-bai explains:

“Our options are limited. We are all employed on a daily wage basis. We get work here because the contractor knows us, a credibility built over decades. Even those who work as domestics continue to be employed because of the factor of familiarity. If we moved to a new area we would not be able to compete with the older residents who have the advantage of familiarity. We would have to start from scratch and would starve to death in the process.”

With the restoration of normalcy, old patterns of relationship with their 'oppressors' have also returned. The youth gang of the Police Colony has taken over some houses in the resettled community and 'rented' them out for commercial purposes such as a garage. Another plot has been converted into a den for their nocturnal drinking and gambling.

“They bang on our doors and shout for us to serve them tea and water to go along with their drinks. Now that they have made a place for themselves in the community we dare not let our daughters out in the evening. I lock my doors at sundown itself and keep my children in,” says Narasamma.

Fortunately, to date, there have been no incidences of sexual coercion as experienced at the earlier site.

While the struggle to rebuild shelter and livelihood continues at the individual and family levels, there is a larger struggle to access basic infrastructure and security of tenure at the community level. A hundred and eighty-five residents have filed for a ‘photopass’³⁷ in order to validate their residence in the community since 1994. Others have applied for ration cards³⁸ and successfully added their identification onto the voters’ lists.

The National Human Rights Commission is currently investigating a complaint against the police brutality during the demolition. The community is also counter-claiming at the local courts and the NHRC with charges of violence against them by the police. Their hopes, however, are pinned on initiating a process of dialogue with the local MLA and Ward Officer towards securing permission to resettle in their original land, which is due to be vacated by the construction company following the completion of the fly-over. They also hope to be able to obtain legitimate infrastructure such as a water pipe, to begin with, that will afford them a better standard of living.

The women have gradually formed a collective as a basis for support. However, a shared recognition of their own vulnerability in the midst of inadequate and insecure housing as well as their susceptibility to violence on one hand, and their position in the forefront of resistance on the other, has yet to be fully understood by all members of the community. All too easily, for those within the community and outside it, the specific detriments of women are overshadowed by the ‘larger concerns’ of the community. As a result, the violence in women’s experiences remains invisible.

COMMUNITY II: BHABHREKAR NAGAR

Introduction

There is an aspect of forced evictions, beyond the larger legal, political and economic issues, in which organisations working to resist forced evictions are largely absorbed. This is the dimension of human emotions – the fear, the anguish and the pain that is inflicted on individuals and families who have been evicted. And beyond the trauma, there is also their determination and the strength to pick-up the pieces and move ahead, movement that is also propelled by the demands of survival.

This case study seeks to find answers to the question that is at the crux of this research: “How do women experience forced eviction?” The significance of the psycho-emotional consequences of eviction has been an important aspect of YUVA’s post-eviction work with women in Bhabrekar

³⁷ The ‘photopass’ is a legal document issued by the government declaring and validating the period and place of residence in Mumbai. Families with proof of residence before 1 January 1995 are recognized as legal residents of the city, giving them protection from eviction and access to housing under social schemes.

³⁸ The ‘ration card’ is a book given to each family and functions as a proof of their eligibility to access the Public Distribution System. It is perhaps the most widely demanded and recognized ‘proof of being,’ as it is required to be shown in almost every government or commercial transaction where proof of identity is required.

Nagar. We realise that the process of community rebuilding after evictions has to be deeper than just physical reconstruction. Such processes are especially significant in relation to women given that they often play the role of an emotional anchor in the family.

This case study thus aims to recognize the personal consequences of forced eviction on women, which are often unspoken, and undocumented in community or public discourse. It also aims to shed light on the approaches that should be developed in dealing with such psycho-emotional consequences, as well as building on the strength of the role that women play in the emotional rebuilding of the self, family and community.

Methodology

As mentioned above, the focus of our interaction with the women of Bhabrekar Nagar for the purposes of this study was on emphasizing the personal experiences of women in forced evictions. This, in the form of first person accounts, was obtained from a meeting with the ten women members of a self-help group in the community. The interview with one of them, Shakuntala, is presented in detail. Her story is largely representative of the physical and psychological trauma experienced by the other women. The accounts of three other women corroborate the eviction experience and add further detail to Shakuntala's account. Shakuntala's story is also singular³⁹ in the light of the role that she played in leading the process of the community's negotiation with the State and its resultant resettlement.

In turn, the following personal accounts do not serve only to relive the trauma, but also to recollect the 'victory' that was achieved in acquiring a landmark⁴⁰ rehabilitation of an evicted community by the State.

Background of the Community

Bhabrekar Nagar, situated in the northwestern suburb of Kandivili in Mumbai was razed to the ground between 13 June and 19 June 1997. The area affected by the demolitions was approximately 40 hectares, of which 30 hectares belonged to the Collector, Mumbai Sub-Urban District and 10 hectares belonged to Maharashtra Housing and Area Development Authority (MHADA).

A total of 12,842 families who had collectively been living there for more than twenty years were displaced and almost 65,000 people were rendered homeless. The demolitions were made without any prior intimation and residents lost not only their houses but also their belongings.

The demolition, apart from pulling down the houses and structures, disrupted the entire social, cultural and economic fabric of the community. Children were forced to drop out of schools, as they could no longer commute to their earlier schools, and were refused admission in adjoining

³⁹ This singularity may also have been enabled by her regional origin, Maharashtra, as opposed to the other women who are from the Uttar Pradesh or Tamil Nadu. That the latter may be restrained by cultural, linguistic or economic factors is a factor worth consideration, though it has not been explored further in this study.

⁴⁰ Based on the recommendations of the NHRC, the Urban Development and the Revenue and Forest Departments of the Government of Maharashtra allocated a resettlement site and a sum of Rs. 9,000,000 (approx. \$191,489) to fund civic amenities for the displaced people. The resettlement has been the first of its kind in Mumbai, where the government has accepted that not only was there a violation of its own rules, but also recognized that housing rights as a human right had been violated.

schools, as the classes were in mid-session. Men and women lost their livelihoods. In the absence of the provision of infrastructure, families were left to fend for themselves. Women and children would spend hours walking to collect water, and people were forced to defecate in the open due to lack of sanitation facilities, which inevitably created health problems.

Findings

***Shakuntala:** I was a very content woman of 42 years with four healthy children and a loving husband. I had lived in Bhabrekar Nagar, Malad for the last fifteen years. My husband had a semi-skilled job in a private company and I used to sell vegetables in the local market. We had a 2-room house with access to all basic amenities (water, sanitation, and electricity).*

My entire world came to a standstill, between June 13th and June 16th, 1997. Ironically enough it began when, in the period of heavy monsoon, the BMC gave us a notice to deposit all proofs of residence with the government so that they could provide us with better housing.

We were all caught unawares when they arrived. I was cooking when I heard the hostile sound of the bulldozers. I thought to myself, “I am imagining this, this cannot be for real.”

As the bulldozers came closer, I tried to collect whatever belongings I could gather. I felt angry with the government and felt like beating up the policemen, but I was helpless. ... I dared not oppose them.

The police entered my house, and asked all of us to vacate at once. At the first instant I thought I would resist, but one look at my children melted all my courage.

I saw my home, which my husband and I had built with labour and love across ten years, pulled down to rubble in 10 minutes. We had invested our life savings, almost Rs. 200,000⁴¹ in the house.

There were many political sympathizers who came on site pretending to be with [the] people. I hated the sight of all these politicians. Each one was making a different set of promises to us.

Some families had put up plastic sheets to protect them from the rain. But the municipal authorities would come and tear these down as well. Some private groups had organized blankets and food. But the more influential families in the community who had suffered relatively little loss consumed these. The poorest and most helpless received nothing.

⁴¹ Approx. US\$4255.

My family stayed on the road for more than a month. Each day was a fight for survival. I had to safeguard my adolescent daughters from the devious intentions of many.

Thirteen bulldozers had turned my world upside down - we lost our employment, we lost our shelter, and we lost our self-confidence. For a good fifteen days, I thought to myself, "I will never get back my life again. I will have to keep living like this forever."

It was my sister-in-law, who lived in the same community but had escaped having her house demolished, who brought me back on my feet. She pushed me to find a way out. Together we made rounds of the various government offices for respite. We sat outside the Collector's office for eight days before we were given a hearing. Through our rounds of these offices we collected information about the possibility of resettlement under the provisions for Project Affected Persons (PAP). I spoke to the larger community about this in a public meeting. The local MLA saw my initiative and began encouraging me to play an active role in organizing the community. However, I did not want anything to do with the politicians. My main concern was for us. For, how we could put our lives back in order.

Along with YUVA, an NGO, we began to put pressure on the Collector and the State government to rehabilitate us. I played an active role in the public enquiry into the demolition led by the National Human Rights Commission. Our efforts bore fruit and the State government agreed to take responsibility for our resettlement.

We were taken to see several sites that were being offered for our relocation. Each seemed worse than the other. Finally we agreed upon a site that was in fact a marshland, almost inaccessible and with no form of basic amenities whatsoever. But we had little choice, so we agreed. Our only demand was to get a pitch of land that would be legally ours, and where we would never have to face the horror of demolition again.

Initially few families of our community were even willing to shift into the new site. It looked frighteningly wild and barren. Mine was among the first five families in October 1998 who actually began work on clearing the dirt and shrubs to make a place for construction.

Gradually families followed us to the site. There we began another struggle - against the natural predators like snakes, scorpions, and crabs who thrived in abundance in the marshes. And this was not all. Another slum community, called Ambujwadi, which was located a kilometre or so away from us began attacking us, and our belongings. They feared that the police would follow us here and they would be victims of demolition as a result. It seems when you are "evicted," no one is your friend.

Today there are more than five hundred families in this community. We have a strong women's group that has initiated several social processes in the community. Yesterday we had an election of our Managing Committee in which we demanded that fifty-percent be represented by women. The memories of demolition still haunt us, for some it is too painful to even recollect. The experience has hardened us, but as a group we have also become stronger. The demolitions and its aftermath have made me a fighter; and I believe we will be successful in our struggle for our rights.

MORE WOMEN SPEAK...

Shyama

I was at home with my six-month old son. The police stormed into my house and they would not even give me time to gather my belongings.

After we lost our house, my husband, our children and me went to stay in my brother-in-law's house. We remained there for three months before moving to our village in North India where we stayed for a year, until we became a burden on our family who told us they could not support us any more. What could we do?

We had no option but to come back to Mumbai where we rented a house in Malad before we learnt of the resettlement scheme and after two years received a plot in this site.

Prema

Three days before the demolition we had completed the renovation of our house. My husband was saying to me, "Having completed this, we do not need to worry about any other major investment besides educating our children." How wrong we were! The demolition devastated us.

A few weeks earlier the BMC had issued a notice that all those who had proofs of residence before 1995 should deposit this at the local ward office. If we had known that there was a demolition to take place we would not have invested in the renovation of the house.

My husband was completely disillusioned and lost interest in everything, even my children and me. A few months later he moved in with another woman, leaving me to fend for my children on my own.

Today all I have is this plot of land. If this is taken away from us, we will surely die.

Mehmooda

I had just put my child to bed when the police broke down the door. I pushed my husband out of the house through the backdoor to save him from their violence. They searched for him and questioned me in a rough manner. They then went next door to our Tamil neighbors and beat the men in the house black and blue. In other houses they did not even spare the women. They would barge into the houses and beat us up indiscriminately.

One woman went into labor as a result of the chaos. They did not even bother about her condition and continued the battering. She lost the child. She does not live here anymore. We do not know where her family went after the demolitions. There are many others like her who left the community for good.

The police would fire bullets in the ground towards us if we tried to get into groups or resist them. Then a fire broke out. We do not know if it began by accident or if they were responsible for it. There were two fire engines standing by the side but they did not lift a finger. We just watched our homes, our everything, burning to the ground and there was nothing that we could do.

We do not know why this happened to us. Some said it was politically motivated. Today there are some fancy buildings in the place of our earlier community. They have been built by the Housing Authority and are up for sale. For some rich people I suppose. This patch of land in the middle of nowhere is all that we have now.

COMMUNITY III: SHIVAJI NAGAR

Introduction:

Resettlement implies a planned relocation; a humane alternative to the forced eviction which communities of the poor have traditionally been subject to in the name of development. However, the case of Shivaji Nagar, located in central Mumbai, India shows that resettlement processes can be as unsettling and oppressive for women as evictions, particularly when principles of participation and transparency are flouted. Unequal access to information and collusion by the authorities responsible for the resettlement replace the sticks and bulldozers as instruments of suppression.

Women are particularly vulnerable because their relegation to the fringes of planning and activity is a cultural norm and their demands for inclusion are met with intolerance or apathy across the board. The experiences of women in Shivaji Nagar illustrates that while participation may, in principle be accepted in resettlement planning, implementation can be very different, and in the case of women, most are excluded or ignored.

Methodology

The findings of this study are based on a focus group discussion with six women, all of whom are members of the 'Mahila Mandal' (women's group) that has emerged as a result of their struggle for the right to information and participation in the resettlement of their community, Shivaji Nagar.

The women in this group include those who have lived in the community for more than thirty years, as well as younger women who have come to the community through marriage five years ago. One among them is also a member of the new 'Managing Committee' of the Co-operative Society. The women spoke of the history of the community, its initiation into the resettlement scheme sponsored by the State government and the dynamics within the community, particularly in relation to their own experience and action, in the course of its resettlement

Background on the Community

The history of the Shivaji Nagar community of Sion,⁴² Mumbai can be traced back forty years. In approximately 1960, the first settlements were erected by the labourers/gatekeepers of the adjacent Christian cemetery. Gradually more people settled into the strip of land that was partly cemetery land and partly pavement. The municipal corporation owned this strip of land.⁴³ By 1975 there were between 50-60 houses in the community.

A large number of the early settlers came from the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. A second group was of the local Maharashtrian community. By 1985 there were 170 households in Shivaji Nagar. Families from Andhra constituted close to half of the community's population, followed by the Maharashtrians, who formed 30 per cent of the community. The remainder was formed by an ethnic mix of communities from the north and south of the country. There has been no further increase in the population of the community since 1985.

The Andhra community is engaged in providing door-to-door food and milk vending services. Some members of the Maharashtrian community are (or have been) employed as Class IV employees in government hospitals, private companies and the former mills. Some women also work as domestics in nearby buildings. Liquor vendors who asserted their domination over the community also inhabited the old Shivaji Nagar.

Between 1960 and 1975 the community experienced repeated demolitions by the local authority, then known as the Bombay Municipal Corporation (BMC). The residents were not aware of the exact reason for the demolitions. One assumption was that they were carried out against the nefarious activities of the liquor sellers, primarily on the behest of Church authorities whose property was attached to the land on which the community was situated. Another opinion is that the demolitions were in fact motivated by the liquor vendors in order to intimidate the residents into paying them protection money and to break any resistance to this practice.

The demolitions finally came to an end with the legal recognition of the community in 1975 when the government first issued 'photopasses' to individuals as proof of their (legitimate) residence. Thereafter, the community was 'named' after the legendary and popular Maharashtrian king, Shivaji. The name was selected and accorded by a small group of men, evidently from the Maharashtrian community, who were at the forefront of community affairs at the time.

⁴² The city of Mumbai can be broadly classified as the Island City, the Western suburbs and the Eastern suburbs. Sion is located in the Island City.

⁴³ Public land in Mumbai may belong the State government (Collector), the local authority or to autonomous bodies such as the Railways authorities and the Bombay Port Trust.

A more ‘practical’ transition for the community, however, was the initiation of service charges payable to the BMC. Women recall, “Earlier we used to get water and other amenities for free. After the photopass we began to pay for these services.” Initially, the families paid Rs.11 per month to the BMC as service charges, which increased to Rs. 20 by 1985. They also paid the billed charges for water and electricity.

Findings

Resettlement

In 1985, an attempt to form the community into a Housing Cooperative was led by the resident slumlord, a Narayan-seth who collected Rs.300 from each of the 170 households. He had assured them that once they formed a cooperative society they could engage a private builder to develop their plot and allocate them flats in the new buildings. However nothing came of this proposal.

The community’s involvement in the State scheme for resettlement from row houses into apartments was initiated in 1988 and led by a man called Barnabas. Although he was not a resident of Shivaji Nagar, he owned a printing press in its premises and, more importantly, he was an active member of the local Congress Party - a significant factor towards his familiarity with the scheme under the then Slum Rehabilitation Act.

Barnabas informed the residents that they would be able to own apartments measuring 180 square feet if they made an initial payment of Rs. 5000 and a second instalment of Rs. 10,000 upon possession of the flat. The latter would be available to the families through bank loans. The people, however, were not provided with any details of the SRA scheme. “We did not even know the name of the scheme,” remarked one woman.

A Housing Cooperative Society was formed in 1991. Two or three meetings were held with the General Body to explain the procedure and benefits of the proposed resettlement. All the families attended these meetings. Although attendance was voluntary, the participation of women was limited to 10-15 as compared to 200-250 men. The women attribute this imbalance to the traditional exclusion of women from community affairs. “Few of us understood what happened in these meetings, so we were not interested in attending,” says Anita.

“In the first meeting the Managing Committee of the Society was elected”, recalls Vasanthi, one among the few women who has regularly attended the meetings of the Cooperative. “Two among the ten members [of the Managing Committee] were women. However these were the spouses and relatives of the male community leaders, and not really representative of the larger group of women, though at that time we as women, did not even have a sense of being a group of any sort.”

Most people were in agreement with the proposal, primarily because it involved ‘in situ’ redevelopment. That is, the buildings were going to be built on the original site of the community, during which period the families were going to be accommodated in a transit camp not far from the site.

The people reasoned that even if the buildings were not built they could simply move back onto the site, minimizing the risk of losing their place of residence. A few families were opposed to the transition, but they were coerced into agreement by propaganda labelling them as detrimental to community progress, which resulted in hostility generated against them in the larger group. Other, more direct, methods of intimidation were also reported.

The newly elected Committee discussed and finalized the plans of construction amongst themselves. The larger community, including most women, was not aware of the discussions or their negotiations with the government and the builders. The plans were made public only after they were finalized. In 1992, the Committee organized a grand party to exhibit the model of the proposed buildings. “It was a grand affair,” recalls Anita, “the whole place was lit up and there was free food and cold drinks going around. In the middle of it all was the model of the new buildings. It was very impressive.”

The laying of the foundation stone was set for a date in 1994. Ironically enough, the man who had directed the community towards resettlement, Barnabas, died the day before the ‘Bhoomi Poojan’ or inauguration.

Transit Camp

The Committee also discussed with the General Body the procedure for the allotment of houses and for shifting to the transit camp. In the camp, families were provided shelters made of asbestos sheets. The community was informed that this arrangement would last for a year, by which time the construction of the building would be completed.

The families had been provided with a receipt for the Rs. 5000 that they had paid to the Committee before moving into the Transit Camp. The receipt bore the name of the Cooperative and stated that, the money had been paid by the families as ‘Anudaan’ or ‘voluntary contribution.’ It did not state any purpose for the contribution.

“Our stay in the transit camp was the worst period of our lives, God knows how we survived there,” say the women. “The asbestos sheets provided little protection from the extremities of the weather. In the summer, the shelter was a veritable furnace. Besides, electricity was not available between 9am and 12pm. The heat was unbearable.”

The women reported that the health of the residents, particularly children and the aged, deteriorated severely due to the poor conditions of the Camp. One resident, an aged man, is even reported to have succumbed to the heat.

The rains were as bad as the summers. The severe “water-logging”, and absence of adequate drainage and sewerage systems gave rise to widespread health problems.

“Our costs of living increased in the transit camp. We paid more for fewer services than we obtained in our stay in the slum, and besides we had to continually invest in health services as a result of the problems faced in the Camp. Water and toilet facilities were also located outside the camp.”

The community remained in the transit camp for three years. Progress was slow. In 1997, the inadequacies of the infrastructure of the transit camp took its ultimate toll.

Indu recalls, “We began to observe instances of short-circuiting in the Camp. My first knowledge of this was when my children were playing in the house and suddenly screamed that they were stuck to the wall! At first I thought they were fooling around, but when I touched them I could feel the current. I immediately took up an implement and separated them from the wall. I then ran to the wireman who was supposed to service the Transit Camp. He said that it was not his job, as it is he was hardly getting paid for anything here. I then ran to inform some of the other men in the community. After this incident the short-circuiting happened two or three times again. We reported it to the Committee but nothing was done about it. Finally the worst happened, a huge fire broke out in the Camp on the evening of 31st December [1997].”

The fire in the camp broke out at around 8:30pm. In the same month, all the houses had received their new gas connections. Each house had one or two full gas cylinders. This greatly increased the hazard of the fire. The first collective action of the community was to bring out the cylinders from the houses close to the source of the fire. The fire was put out before it could reach the cylinders, but in the two hours that it took to quell the fire, 15 houses were completely gutted.

“They lost everything. One family had just taken a loan of Rs. 40,000 in cash for his daughter’s wedding. He had also made a gold necklace for her. All this was reduced to ash. It was so tragic,” recounts Ratnamala.

Shifting Into the Building

Ironically, it was the fire that gave impetus to the otherwise delayed transfer of the families into the proposed buildings. The media highlighted the tragedy and the plight of the families languishing in the transit camp. This brought pressure on the Committee and the policy makers.

On 6 August 1998 a hundred and twenty families moved into their new houses in the seven-story building (the first of two reserved for the community). Besides the keys to houses, the families were provided with no other form of ownership over their flats. To date, they have not received any titles or papers proving their ownership over the houses in which they reside. Twenty shop-owners that were part of the scheme are also still to receive their rightful spaces on the site.

The residents soon realised that moving into the flats did not ease many of their problems, including costs of living and the harassment from the Managing Committee. The maintenance charge for the building itself was Rs. 200.00, a substantial figure in light of their modest incomes and far more, it seemed to them, than what they needed to spend while they resided in the slum. Staying in the building, where resources were centrally managed, made them more vulnerable to harassment. When one family living on the seventh floor protested against the demand for Rs. 25,000.00 to be paid for the allotment of their house, when in fact the scheme involves the free provision of

housing, the Committee broke their resistance by cutting off water and electric supplies to their house. Disabling the lift is another form of harassment, particularly to two families in the building with handicapped members, who in spite of being allotted houses on the ground floor in the planning stage, have been housed on the fifth and seventh floors respectively.

Women's Protest

The fire in the transit camp led to the first instance of collective resistance to the excesses of the Managing Committee. People began questioning why they paid for houses that had been declared free under the new housing scheme. A public meeting was organized to raise these questions. However, the Committee diverted this agenda item by demanding that the families pay maintenance charges for their stay in the transit camp amounting to Rs. 800-1000 per family. One person was also beaten up. As a result the men and women were scared to voice their opposition. The Committee also 'bought out' the local youth who began to function as the 'arm' of the oppressor, ensuring that there was minimal resistance among other members of the community.

The need to unite for change arose among the women after their shift into the buildings in December 1998. "It began with the realisation that we were suffering a shared injustice. The holding back of facilities like water, electricity, etc. was also hitting us hard. While in the slum, we could collect water from another tap if one did not work, but in a building we cannot carry buckets of water up several storeys to our houses!" says Indramati.

"We came into contact with an NGO worker who was involved with the women's groups in a neighbouring area. With inputs from her, some of us were able to come together and uncover the legal discrepancies and social injustice in the existing situation. However, we wondered how we could convince the larger community to act as one. It took us another year to bolster morale and additional support. The opposing camp would monitor our movements, send collaborators to find out what we discussed in our meetings, and even threaten us with dire consequences if we came together."

One of their first actions was to get hold of a copy of the guidelines of the housing scheme and publicize these from house to house, thus making others aware of the existent legal deviations. As a reaction to their activities, the Committee hired goons to assault Shashikala's son. However, this attempt was averted. Despite submitting appeals for intervention to both the local police and the MHADA, there was no definitive action against the offenders by either agency.

The women decided to organise a Haldi Kumkum ceremony in January 2000 as a strategy to confront the opposition. The Haldi Kumkum is a traditional event among the Hindu community where women celebrate their married status. The Haldi Kumkum is one of the few social events that is not only widely attended by women but also exclusive to them.

Shashikala says, “We did not breathe a word about our plans before the Haldi Kumkum. And to the utter surprise of those present, we announced the formation of our ‘Mahila Mandal’ (women’s group). The family members of the Managing Committee were particularly taken aback. Had this been pre-planned there would have been attempts to build opposition against us, but they were caught unawares.

They asked us, “How can you claim to represent all the people here?” and we replied, “We have learnt it from you!”

Greater efforts to mobilize support and obtain legal and other documents to prove the injustice were undertaken. Their efforts bore fruit when the MHADA declared re-election in September 2000. The Mahila Mandal organized its members to participate, and in the elections against the members of the former Managing Committee won a clear majority. However, the direct representation of women was restricted because the ownership documents for most houses stand in the name of the male head of the household, thus restricting the women, who have otherwise played a prominent role in the affairs of the Society, from contesting elections. Thus currently only two women, Vasanthi Jadhav and Karkare-bai, hold direct posts in the new Managing Committee. The others are men who have played a supportive role to the Mahila Mandal or husbands of women members. While celebrating its first milestone in the journey for inclusion in decision-making, the women of Shivaji Nagar are preparing for a more effective involvement in managing the community. This includes a proposal for training in the management of co-operative societies and perhaps a larger agenda of influencing a joint ownership policy that would allow more women to play direct roles in the management of the community.



Indian Women

Chronology of Events:

- 1960 First settlers in the community
- 1975 Residents receive ‘photopasses’ as proof of residence;
Community begins to pay service- charges to BMC
- 1985 First attempt to form a Cooperative Society
- 1985 Community population of 170 families
- 1985 Slum Rehabilitation Act
- 1988 Barnabas initiates community involvement in SRA scheme
- 1991 ormination of Cooperative Housing Society
- 1992 Display of model of buildings to be constructed
- 1994 Laying foundation stone; half of the community shifts into transit camp
- 1997 Fire catastrophe in transit camp
- 1998 Police Colony building families move into constructed buildings; Women begin to organize
- 1999 Managing Committee members resign their posts
- 2000 Elections held in the Society; Women’s group supporters win majority

Analysis of Findings

The following findings specific to the experiences of women in forced evictions emerge from the study of the three communities:

1. Violence against women is used to intimidate the marginalized community and reinforce the relationship of power in relation to security of tenure

Caste, class and accompanying male privilege are intimately connected with women's experiences and access to housing and infrastructure and informs the relationship between the pavement community and the "settled" community. In Prakash Nagar, for example, the power of the settled community over the informal settlement is taken for granted. This is reflected in the explicitly abusive behaviour that is engaged in by the youth from the Colony. Not only have these youth barged into the homes of the pavement dwellers in the night unannounced and uninvited, they feel entitled to restrict women who live on the pavement from engaging in even the most basic form of self-indulgence such as wearing new clothes or ornaments. The basis of this domination lies in the difference in their tenure status, as well as in gender inequality.

The Colony operates from a sense of moral authority based on their status as legally and socially recognized inhabitants of the locality, whereas the pavement dwellers are seen as 'encroachers' who have no right to be located where they are and must be either removed or punished for staying where they are. This moral authority plays itself out in the behaviour of the men. The response of the pavement community too is diminished by their basic insecurity in relation to housing, insecurity that is experienced most acutely by women. It is unlikely that the residents of the Police Colony would repeatedly and confidently enter into the premises of another housing colony with the same legal and social status as their own and assert their domination over the women residing therein.

Moreover, the continuous violence against Prakash Nagar over decades – and not randomly at any pavement community in the city - denotes that the violence is spurred on by the tensions created as a result of the fact that Prakash Nagar occupies the space adjoining the Colony. The structure of houses on the pavement does not offer the security that a house or flat made of concrete walls and a solid door would provide to its inhabitants.

2. The settled community only tolerates the informal community when being provided with women's services

The case of Prakash Nagar presents a strange but not surprising contradiction. While the pavement community is shunned for being located near the Police Colony, there is complete acceptance of women's domestic labour within the Colony in the form of the domestic services. Thus on one hand, atrocities are meted out by the youth in the premises of the pavement community at night, but when the women have to enter houses to work within the Colony during the course of the day, they are not disturbed or harassed.

3. Women act as a buffer between the authorities carrying out the demolition and the community

In the cases of Prakash Nagar and Bhabrekar Nagar women report that in the incidence of a violent demolition the first reaction is to get the men out of the reach of the police. Although this is intended to protect the men from the danger of severe, disabling or life-threatening violence from

the police, it is also true that women are then left vulnerable to being beaten up during the demolition with similar consequence, as in the case of Mallika of Prakash Nagar.

Even when this negative impact on women was pointed out during the discussions, the women maintained that it was necessary for them to stand in for the men at the time of eviction because the chances are that they would be beaten less severely than the men. One also assumes that a confrontation between the two sets of men from the police or State authority and the community could be anticipated to be far more aggressive and volatile. For instance, the chances that the women would resort to reasoning and negotiation with the authority rather than counter-violence is higher than in the case of men. However, men do not seem to play an intermediary role when violence is perpetrated specifically against women, as in the instances of sexual harassment experienced by the women of Prakash Nagar.

It is also true that many workingmen are often not present in the house at the time of evictions, which are carried out during the day. Thus women are, to a large extent, left to their own devices to withstand the onslaught of evictions.

4. Disparate impact on single women

As the community studies indicate, the most common and immediate response to an attack on one's family, home and possessions is to pick up whatever possessions one can, remove members of the family from danger and move away as quickly as possible. For a single woman and single mothers with no support within the household, taking immediate flight is extremely difficult. Thus as Mallika described, she was unable to move away, let alone protect her possessions, because she has to first attend to her two children and make sure they are out of harm's way, even at the cost of her own safety.

5. Women experience increased insecurity when rendered homeless by evictions

The Prakash Nagar and Bhabrekar Nagar studies indicate that women experience a greater physical insecurity and exposure to sexual violence when communities are left to fend for themselves on the streets after demolition. Shakunatala expressed her fear for her own physical safety and that of her daughters and her attempts to safeguard them against violence. The harrowing experiences of the women of Prakash Nagar to simply meet their personal sanitation needs bear testimony to this.

6. Women face the responsibility of meeting the survival needs of the evicted community, placing themselves at risk

Even when rendered homeless and on the streets after an eviction women have the responsibility to ensure that they gather water and food to keep their families nourished. The experience of women from Prakash Nagar who wait until 2 and 3 am to collect the excess water from the drain pipes of the Police Colony shows the lengths to which the women go and the personal risks they incur to sustain their families and communities.

7. Women play a major role in rebuilding their community

Women's roles in rebuilding communities often take place squarely within the public domain. For example, in Bhabrekar Nagar two women took the initiative to negotiate with the authorities for their entitlement to rehabilitation. At the same time, every woman also undertakes a variety of

activities in the private realm to lay the foundation for the resettlement of their community. In both Prakash Nagar and Bhabrekar Nagar, women have had the onus of providing the family with amenities and services to fulfil their basic needs of food and water. They were also instrumental in getting their families/communities settled into the wasteland that is their alternative location. The marshy region of Bhabrekar Nagar and the slush of the temporary settlements of Prakash Nagar were both daunting landscapes on which to rebuild a home. A woman, by virtue of her responsibility for activities related to the home, and consequently the longer period of time that she spends in the house, is continuously called upon to respond to the difficulties of the new environment. Women in Bhabrekar Nagar spoke of having to continually protect their children and themselves from dangerous creatures like scorpions and snakes in the site provided to them for resettlement.

The case studies also reveal that the women have to protect themselves and their families not only from the physical hazards of the eviction process but also from its emotional repercussions. Thus, women like Prema not only have to come to terms with the separation from their spouses, but also brace their children from the absence of their parent. The support and encouragement to act that Shakuntala received from her sister-in-law is also indicative of the role that women play in emotional support and rebuilding. The culturally defined role of the woman as the emotional anchor of the family also supports the assumption that women are significantly involved in providing such support to the family unit, such as children, the spouse and aged members – although the woman herself may not receive such support.

8. Women may experience increased economic instability and poverty due to familial breakdown caused by the stress of eviction

Women like Prema describe that the instance of eviction can have a devastating effect on the integrity of their relationship with their spouse. In the event of a breakdown of the family (i.e. separation), the woman is left with little resources or capacity to suddenly fend for herself. In Shyama's case, the loss of property in the eviction left her with nothing but the pitch of land allotted to her in the resettlement process to support herself and her child.

9. Resettlement without established mechanisms to ensure the genuine and equitable participation of women does not enhance women's access to housing or infrastructure, although it may enhance the tenural status of the community as a whole

The experience of the women of Shivaji Nagar demonstrates that women have been traditionally excluded from playing a real role in the decision-making processes of the community and continue to be sidelined during resettlement. Thus women face double discrimination. They are isolated from taking part in determining standards or their rights to housing during the resettlement process, and legally they are discriminated against with respect to home ownership since the new resettlement units are in the name of the 'head of the family.' Although schemes for resettlement post-1995 include provisions for joint ownership of dwellings and an indication that women should be consciously included in the resettlement process, there is an ongoing need to be cautious, to ensure that such provisions are actually implemented.

10. Centralized control of infrastructure in resettlement communities may increase the hardship on women in their efforts to fulfill the basic needs of the family

Women from Shivaji Nagar report that while they resided in the slum they had relatively unrestricted access to the community water taps and other shared infrastructure. The control over infrastructure was generally shared between several households and managed directly by the municipal corporation.

In the resettlement building, the ‘Managing Committee’ of the housing Cooperative manages the water connections, on the assumption that it will work to represent the interests of the larger community. However, the study in Shivaji Nagar indicates that this management or control of infrastructure is open to abuse. In the case at hand, the Committee used its power to penalize the women who had protested their control of infrastructure. Whereas the row-house structure of the slum community provided women with the option of walking to the next community tap, in the resettlement building water collected from an alternate source would have to be carried up seven flights of stairs to their homes (as operation of the lift was also suspended as a means of punishing the women for their resistance).

11. The consequences of forced eviction on women and women’s resulting needs remain unrecognized

Responses to forced eviction on behalf of the ‘community’ do not take into consideration the specific problems of women. Even among the women participants of the research study, the need to address specific issues of violence against women, and the vulnerability of single women during the eviction process was discussed as an issue pertaining to particular individuals rather than as a group issue. Community action or opinion in relation to evictions is focused on the larger issue of gaining a piece of land, of winning political support to protect their cause which then seems to overshadow the need to recognize and formulate a specific response to ‘violence against women.’ Thus there does not appear to be a collective, consistent concern within the community for this issue, at the level of discussion, let alone action.

Recommendations

- The key issues that must be addressed in order to alleviate the violence that women experience in forced evictions can be summarized as follows:
- It must be recognized that insecure tenure has implications for the community beyond the inadequacy of shelter. It is a key determinant in the community’s attitude towards itself and its relationship with other sections of society, particularly reinforcing the relationship of power that traditionally exists on the basis of caste, class and gender. Women are especially vulnerable to the consequence of insecure tenure, the power imbalances between formal and informal communities, and resultant discriminatory attitudes and behaviour.
- It is the responsibility of the State to formally recognize these implications and work towards achieving security of tenure for all sections of its population. Any programme concerned with housing or a related area must include special and specific provisions for women to ensure that women are entitled to legal title to land, property and housing. Women must be made aware of these entitlements and encouraged to exercise their rights in this regard.

- The State must also recognize and be guided by the fact that the informal settlements in the city function as service providers and provide labour required by the general population. A discriminatory approach wherein the labour of the poor is acceptable but their residence in the city is not must be eliminated. It must also be recognized that women constitute a large segment of the informal labour force of the city. In turn, their contribution to the city's economy and their right to access resources, including housing, must also be acknowledged by ensuring their security of tenure.
- This can be achieved by the introduction of policies that are responsive to the contribution of informal communities to the city and by establishing the rights of women to social infrastructure. For instance, assistance can be provided to informal settlers so that they can 'buy' the land that they have developed (all three communities have been the first settlers in the land that they occupy and have spent years making the area habitable before it became "commercially viable" property). Schemes and policies could be developed to protect and promote women in the informal sector, such as hawkers and domestic workers. The economic contribution of women in the informal sector to the city must also be recorded in all economic assessments so as to 'legalize' their right to public resources.
- The use of physical force and all types of violence during evictions by the police, municipal authorities and developers and others responsible for carrying out evictions must be strictly prohibited. Those who engage in these activities must be sanctioned. Special attention should be given to gender specific violence and to the lack of protection of women from violence, particularly single women who lack familial or community supports to resist violence or rebuild their lives. Such supports must also extend to women who face desertion after the eviction.
- At a minimum, the municipal authorities or agency carrying out the evictions, in the face of the increased vulnerability that women face "on the streets", should provide temporary or emergency shelters. Such shelter must include the provision of basic amenities necessary to the survival of any human being in order to reduce the risk that women face in meeting the survival needs of the community.
- The critical role women play in preparing the community for displacement and resettlement must be reflected in the decision-making processes as well as in the substance of the decisions that are made. In turn, communities must ensure that decision-making structures are designed to accommodate and integrate women in a meaningful way. Meetings must be scheduled when women are available, free from childcare responsibilities. Special efforts must be made to provide women with relevant information and to promote a culture of women's participation in larger community affairs. Issues specific to women must be identified and discussed. Women must also be consulted in determining the structure and design of the new community since they are essentially involved in the responsibilities related to the household. Mechanisms for their involvement in the management of community infrastructure, based on their role as the primary users of this infrastructure, must also be developed in order to ensure democratic access to resources.

- Organisations involved with the rehabilitation of groups affected by forced eviction also have a special responsibility to inform the community, and indeed the women themselves, about the specific nature and the seriousness of the violence that women face and equip them to deal with these experiences at the individual, familial and community levels. This could include providing opportunities and the support for emotional catharsis and building women's self-help groups to identify and address issues of healing the wounds of eviction and building a platform for their participation in community rebuilding.⁴⁴
- Processes to educate communities on their right to secure tenure and their rights in relation to eviction are essential. Since women are at the forefront of the resistance at the time of evictions it is critical that they be provided with the necessary information and skills to prevent forced evictions. In addition, community education would help ensure that when evictions cannot be avoided, that they are carried out in accordance with human rights norms. This involves the creation of 'animators' who are able to understand and educate the community on its actual tenural status, strategize and act towards acquiring secure tenure and defend the community against inhuman forced evictions.

⁴⁴ YUVA is engaging in such processes in its involvement with the rehabilitation of Bhabrekar Nagar.

Disaggregating the Displacement Experience: Forced Eviction, Violence & the Nigerian Woman

Social and Economic Rights Action Centre, *Researched and Written by: Joy Ngwakwe*

Research Overview

This research report examines how forced eviction translates into gender-specific violence which affects women in Nigeria. It has been generally held that women are disproportionately affected by forced evictions. Yet, the notion that the displacements by nature and design impact Nigerian women more than, or differently from, Nigerian men has heretofore remained unclarified. The present research aimed to define and clarify such disparate-impact anticipations, bringing into clear focus the specific violence which women suffer as a result of forced evictions in Nigeria.

The research was undertaken by the Social and Economic Rights Action Center, (SERAC). Established in May 1995, SERAC is a non-governmental, nonpartisan organisation concerned with the promotion and protection of social and economic rights in Nigeria. Through its three programs – the Monitoring and Advocacy Program (MAP), the Community Action Program (CAP), and the Legal Action Program (LAP) – SERAC seeks to build awareness about economic, social and cultural rights and explore strategies for securing their realisation. In addition, SERAC aims to broaden the access of individuals and communities to, and strengthen their participation in the design and implementation of, social and economic policies and programs that affect them.

Forced evictions are inherently violent, and in the context of gender inequality, this violence invariably affects women more adversely than men. The following studies were conducted in three slum communities that have witnessed major forced evictions. A diverse pool of women interviewed shared their experiences of various forms of displacement-linked violence. Their testimonies revealed that gender-specific violence against women during the forced eviction process is perpetrated by state and non-state actors; and perpetuated by legal impediments, and cultural and sociological factors which subjugate Nigerian women. Our findings show that 90 per cent of the women interviewed for this study were home alone or with their children when the eviction occurred. Coupled with gender specific acts of violence, such as rape and sexual assault, the evidence suggests that forced eviction is especially violent for women.

Background Information

Forced eviction is one of the most vicious weapons used by governments, transnational corporations and others, in the name of modernization and development, despite the fact that this practice clearly violates the full enjoyment of human rights in general, and the right to adequate housing, in particular.⁴⁵ Forced evictions destroy communities and dismantle material and social structures that are necessary for the realisation of basic human needs.⁴⁶ In Nigeria, the consequences of forced evictions are enormous. When basic infrastructure such as homes, schools, hospitals, clinics, and markets are indiscriminately destroyed, countless people simply never recover. Forced evictions often result in an environment where primary social services are held ransom from those who most need them, and public entitlements are simply unavailable.

Forced evictions in Nigeria are usually implemented in contravention of international, regional, and local laws; i.e., they occur without the provision of adequate notice, resettlement, rehabilitation, and compensation to those affected. Forced evictions are targeted against the most disadvantaged in society, those with the fewest resources and the least power. Forced evictions commonly involve many forms of violence including gender-specific violence.

As such, the practice of forced eviction violates Nigeria's 1993 ratification of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, in particular Article 11, which "recognises the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate ... housing," and Articles 2(1) and 3 recognizing women's rights to be free from discrimination and to equality with men. Also, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), ratified by Nigeria in 1995, states in Article 13, that State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, the same rights, in particular: the right to family benefits... Although the *African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights* makes no specific mention of the right to adequate housing, its protection of related rights such as the right to life (Art.4) and the right to physical and mental health (Art.16) arguably provide a basis for the assertion of the right to housing, and by extension prohibits forced evictions. The *Charter* also includes rights to be free from discrimination based on sex (Article 2) as well as the right to equality for every individual (Article 3). Taken together these rights in the African Charter can be read to imply women's equal rights to housing without discrimination. Although the Nigerian Constitution classifies economic, social and cultural rights under the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy and are thus non-justiciable, the African Charter is justiciable in Nigeria's local courts by statute,⁴⁷ and evictees may make enforceable claims of their right to be free from forced eviction.⁴⁸ Further, Nigeria's Constitution states in Section 34(1); "Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly (a) no person shall be subject to torture or to inhumane or degrading treatment..." However, the practice of forced eviction persists in Nigeria with its subsequent degradation of human dignity despite its contravention of relevant local, regional and international laws.



Group of Nigerian Women

45 The United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, defines forced eviction as the "permanent or temporary removal against the will of individuals, families and/or communities from their homes and/or land which they occupy, without the provision of, and access to, appropriate forms of legal or other protection." See: *General Comment 7, supra n. Error! Bookmark not defined.*

46 In view of this, on 10 March 1993, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights unanimously adopted resolution 1993/77 which labels forced evictions, wherever they occur, as a "gross violation of human rights, in particular the right to adequate housing," *supra n. Error! Bookmark not defined.*

47 African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Ratification and Enforcement) Act, Chapter 10, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990.

48 For example, in *Farouk Atanda vs. The Government of Lagos State & 4 Others*, SERAC is asking the court to determine whether the housing provided as resettlement to less than three percent of evicted families is adequate and habitable as required by applicable human rights standards. Second, in *Akilla vs. Lagos State Government and Others*, SERAC is challenging the denial of the right to primary education to over 9,000 pupils of the eleven Maroko schools demolished alongside the community. The suit seeks to compel the Lagos State Government to institute a remedial educational program to address the needs of the displaced students. It hinges on the government's obligation to provide free and compulsory primary education as guaranteed under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and other human rights instruments ratified by Nigeria.

The Research Question

Despite the fact that forced evictions violate human rights and Constitutional laws, they continue to be perpetrated in Nigeria. In order to develop better strategies to address the repercussions of forced eviction, SERAC undertook research to examine the impact of forced eviction on women seeking to highlight their experiences of violence, if any, during and after the eviction process. Our central research question was: what are the different types of violence experienced by women throughout the eviction process? To answer this question, women in three evicted communities – Maroko, Badia and Rainbow Town – were interviewed. The research primarily focused on gender-specific violence perpetrated by security officials during evictions, husbands and other family members after the physical eviction, government officials in resettlement processes, and other types of and perpetrators of violence, which were revealed in the course of the research.



Women in Lagos, Nigeria

The Communities Studied

Popularly known as the “Giant of Africa,” Nigeria is the continent’s most populous country with an estimated population of over 110 million. Approximately one out of every seven Africans is Nigerian. Nigerians generally practice one of three major religions: Islam (50 per cent), Christianity (40 per cent) and indigenous beliefs (10 per cent). Cognizant of Nigeria’s sheer bulk and diversity, SERAC elected to focus its research on three slum communities that have experienced forced eviction at different times: Maroko, Badia and Rainbow Town. Jointly, the three communities reflect a decade of large-scale forced evictions. Maroko and Rainbow Town were

specifically chosen because geographically they are in very different locations. While Maroko is located in Lagos, in the south of Nigeria, Rainbow Town is in Rivers State, located in the eastern part of the country. Badia community was studied because the forced evictions there were arguably linked to international financial institutions. Viewed together, SERAC expected that the three communities studied would provide a good overview of the impacts of violence against women during the forced eviction process in Nigeria.

COMMUNITY I: MAROKO

The former Maroko community was once one of the largest slum communities in Nigeria, with an estimated 300,000 residents. Located between kilometer markers 8 and 13 of the Lagos-Epe Expressway in southwestern Nigeria, Maroko was comprised mainly of poor people who served the Lagos elite as drivers, cooks, stewards, and traders. There were also a fairly large number of government workers (especially those in the lower cadre of civil service), and even a fair number of lawyers and doctors who lived and/or owned real estate in Maroko. According to Prince S.A. Aiyeyemi, Chairperson of the Maroko Evictees Committee, on average five to seven people lived in one room in Maroko. Like in many other slum communities, population growth in Maroko was astronomical, placing added pressure on the limited infrastructure of the community. Many were drawn to the community because of its relatively affordable rental housing and modest infrastructure, which included schools, a bank, a public library, and a police station. These facilities were,

more often than not, community-sponsored because the government failed to provide basic social services to Maroko.⁴⁹ Water supply was erratic, and residents were forced to adopt generally outdated methods to acquire water, such as digging water wells. Further, hygiene and general health care were far below acceptable standards.

On 14 July 1990 the Lagos State Military Governor, Colonel Rasaki, ordered the complete demolition of the community, providing only 7 days notice. Between 14 and 21 July 1990 an estimated 300,000 residents were forced off their lands and from their homes without being provided any alternative accommodations. Shortly after the forced eviction, some evictees took up residence in abandoned government buildings in three communities that were located several kilometers away from Maroko. Following public outcry and condemnation, the Lagos State government allocated a number of building structures in various stages of dilapidation, with some buildings having no roofs and windows, to about 2.5 percent of the affected residents. In several cases, people were allocated open fields without building structures at all. Today, more than ten years after the demolitions, less than three percent of the evictees have been resettled.

Since 1995, SERAC has worked with members of the Maroko community to sustain their struggle and advocate for just compensation, resettlement and rehabilitation. In 1999, SERAC built an information center in Ilasan-Lagos, one of the three communities where the Maroko evictees are temporarily resettled. SERAC discovered that Maroko evictees were completely cut-off from receiving information, even on issues that directly concern them, because they do not have access to television sets or radios.⁵⁰ SERAC equipped the center with a television set and now funds the daily supply of newspapers.

Following SERAC's intervention and mobilization of members of the Maroko community, the Lagos State government recently initiated discussions with members of the former Maroko community. In the interest of resettling the Maroko evictees, SERAC is actively involved in these discussions and is attempting to facilitate the rehabilitation and compensation processes. In May 1999, SERAC introduced a micro-credit project to benefit Maroko women and to sustain the women's participation in the larger struggle.

COMMUNITY II: BADIA

Badia, a sprawling slum community in the Lagos main metropolis, has been the subject of several major forced evictions spanning nearly a decade. As part of a slum clearance exercise, officials ignited fires at strategic locations in the district in 1982. Members of the community were prohibited from taking their belongings away and were ordered to refrain from erecting houses in the future. No provisions were made for resettling members of the Badia community after the arson. Faced with no alternative accommodations, the evictees returned to Badia and rebuilt their houses with no assistance from the Lagos state government who had ordered their evictions.

⁴⁹ In spite of the government's routine neglect of slum communities, members of the Maroko community were made to pay utility bills such as water rates. The community existed in spite of this neglect, with people still paying taxes and registering purchased lands. Landlords were issued Certificates of Occupancy duly approved and signed by the local government. Despite the payments, services such as water and electricity supplies were almost non-existent or at best extremely erratic.

⁵⁰ Ilasan was not a part of the national electrical grid until very recently. Prior to that time, the evictees had no access to electricity.

Members of the Badia community have been the targets of other state-sponsored fires and demolitions, including another major forced eviction in 1986. The main threat to the existence of Badia, however, came in 1996 when the Lagos State government demolished portions of the slum under the World Bank-assisted Lagos Drainage and Sanitation Project (LDSP). An estimated 2,000 persons in Badia and Ijora Oloye lost their homes, shops, schools, health care and child care centers. Backed up by official bulldozers, heavily armed police officers and other security forces harassed, beat, and extorted money from residents who tried to salvage their properties. The World Bank project and resultant evictions were designed to drain the community of excess water by rehabilitating storm water drains. Ironically, the evictions and demolitions blocked pre-existing drainage channels, exacerbated flooding and worsened the area's already deteriorating health and living standards. As a direct result, Badia's economic functioning was adversely affected and its people were further impoverished.

In June 1998, having exhausted all available means of establishing effective communication with World Bank officials, and the Lagos State Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, SERAC filed a "Request for Inspection" based on substantive breaches of the World Bank's Operational Directives and human rights laws. Upon review of SERAC's Request, and after its own site investigations, the Inspection Panel found that the Bank had "failed to provide for resettlement and compensation for some affected people" as stated in the cover letter to its 6 November 1998 report. The Panel recommended that the World Bank and the Lagos State Government provide adequate compensation to the affected populations. Concurrently, the Panel "acknowledge [d] the concern and efforts of SERAC for exhibiting such courage in defending the rights of the affected people," adding that "[SERAC's] presence in the situation has made it possible for the Requesters to develop better dialogue with International Development Association (IDA)⁵¹ staff in the resolution of outstanding issues."

Tragically, the continued threat of forced eviction (paired with the dire consequences of the 1982, 1986, and 1996 displacements) has added to the already overwhelming spirit of tentativeness in the slum community. Based in no small part on this tentativeness and their poverty, members of the Badia community primarily reside in wooden, makeshift shacks. At the same time, there is a growing number of substandard hotels⁵² being maintained in the area. These grossly inadequate hotels are often the only housing available to young girls who turn to prostitution to pay for their meager lodgings and to earn a living.

On 29 April 2000 SERAC introduced a micro-credit project for the women of Badia community to rebuild their hopes for redress and to ensure that their struggle for just compensation is sustained. The project has been very successful as loans are promptly paid. In addition to providing economic assistance to the women, the micro-credit project has also strengthened and sustained women's participation in the communities' struggle for compensation and has also increased collaborative efforts between the men and women's Community Development Associations (CDAs).

⁵¹ IDA is an arm of the World Bank which extends assistance to the poorest countries on easier terms mainly from resources provided by its wealthier member nations.

⁵² The wooden hotel buildings are owned and repeatedly rebuilt by a few relatively wealthy members of the community who utilize the high demand for shelter in the community to their own advantage.

COMMUNITY III: RAINBOW TOWN

Rainbow Town was so named because it was one of the most beautiful areas in the nation. Rainbow Town was acquired in 1964 by the then Eastern Government of Nigeria through the region's Housing Corporation. The land was officially set aside for the construction of low-cost houses.

Tragically, Rainbow Town quickly deteriorated into one of the country's most embattled communities during Nigeria's Civil War. When the Civil War started in 1967, the community became a choice hiding-place for soldiers in the Biafran Army. In what would serve as the genesis of military dominance over the area, Rainbow Town was demarcated as "occupied territory" when the Nigerian Army overpowered the Biafrans in 1969.

In the years following the military occupation, the Rainbow Town community grew in size and population. Soldiers 'acquired' land and assumed the position of landlords, primarily targeting poor people as their tenants. In exchange for rented lands, the prospective tenants generally paid token amounts of money to the soldiers and gave them soft drinks, alcohol and live goats as gifts. The soldier-landlords would then grant permission for the tenants to erect shanties (typically constructed from zinc and wooden scrap) on the land. Monthly rent for one room ranged between 600 - 700 naira (approximately US\$6-7). In many cases, up to eight adults lived in a single room, with the average room measuring less than 8-10 m². Commonly, soldier-landlords owned up to 42 houses each.

Poor people flocked to Rainbow Town by the droves chiefly based on the low cost of accommodation. Coined the '*Centre of National Unity*' by Mr. Owosho Jude Kayode (Public Relations Officer for the Rainbow Town Association), the highly metropolitan community of 1.2 million residents (based on a 1999 community-sponsored census) was drawn mostly from ethnic groups that were not indigenous to Rivers State, including: Ibibio/Efiks, Igbos, Yorubas, and Hausas. Rainbow Town was organized into five densely-populated sub-communities: Small London, New York 'A', New York 'B', Mami Market and Tiv Quarters.

Prior to the forced eviction, Rainbow Town residents were recognized by the State government as legal occupants and paid several categories of taxes, including: Development Tax levied monthly at 100 naira (US \$1) per person, monthly sanitation fees of 20 naira (US\$0.20) per room, health fees, and utilities. Rainbow Town contained numerous privately operated nursery and primary schools, several health clinics, religious and cultural centers and thousands of residential and commercial buildings constructed from zinc, wood, brick and/or concrete building materials.

Rainbow Town evictees trace the eventual successful demolition of their community to a March 2000 verbal quit notice that was issued by youths of the neighboring Mkpogu community. Ownership of the Rainbow Town land had been at the center of longstanding and often heated disputes between the Mkpogu and Abloma ethnic groups (each Rivers State indigenes). In search of the government's protection, the Rainbow Town Association tried in vain to meet with the Speaker of the House of Assembly and petitioned legislators, the Commissioner of the Police, and the governor. On 24 April 2000, Mkpogu youths attacked Rainbow Town, burning several houses and assaulting residents with cutlasses and machetes.



Women participate in the micro-credit project, Nigeria

In response to the attack on Rainbow Town, the Rivers State Government issued radio and television announcements instructing all residents to vacate their houses within one month, arguing “it is the policy of [the] Rivers State Government to acquire any land under dispute and later compensate legitimate owners on presentation of certificates of ownership.” The Land and Housing Bureau further justified the government’s decision on urban development grounds. The evacuation ultimatum was extended to 30 June 2000 after the Rainbow Town Association made a series of oral and written appeals to the Rivers State Government.

Following a formal petition filed by the Rainbow Town residents, Justice Abdullahi Mustapha granted a court injunction against the Rivers State Government, thereby enjoining them from implementing the demolition on 30 June 2000 as scheduled. Shortly thereafter, the Bayelsa State Government filed a lawsuit against the

Rivers State Government, claiming ownership of the Rainbow Town land and consequently further frustrating the forced eviction plans. On 20 July 2000, the court found that it had no jurisdiction to rule on the matter, leaving eight days for the Bayelsa State Government to appeal its ruling to the Supreme Court.

Less than twenty-four hours later, however, the Rivers State Ministry of Works released five bulldozers at 6:00 a.m. on 21 July 2000 to level Rainbow Town. Rainbow Town residents awoke to find bulldozers and approximately one thousand armed police officers and operation squad members occupying their community. Moments before the eviction, some residents hurriedly packed their belongings, while others pleaded for leniency. Despite their pleas, demolition officers blocked most people from removing their property, family heirlooms, and documents establishing their ownership or tenancy. A considerable number of residents were absent from the community at the time of the demolitions and, as such, were unable to salvage their belongings. Thousands of residential buildings, nine private nursery and primary schools, a commercial Secondary School (along with desks, typewriters and filing cabinets inside), several health clinics, and countless commercial establishments were destroyed. The forced evictions continued for four days, reducing real and personal properties worth millions of naira to mere rubble.

During the demolitions, security agents beat and flogged Rainbow Town residents indiscriminately. One woman who was cooking food on a campfire left her frying to flee and avoid being assaulted. An unidentified demolition crewmember shot tear gas into the campfire and the subsequent flares burned down several neighboring homes. Two families, comprised of eighteen people, were killed when a truck they had hired to take them to Akwa-Ibom State⁵³ was involved in an accident. To verify that Rainbow Town was leveled, Rivers State Governor Peter Odili reportedly patrolled the area during the demolitions in a helicopter. In the end, more than one million people were left homeless as a result of the forced eviction.

⁵³ Akwa Ibom State is also located in the Eastern region of Nigeria, about three hours away from Port Harcourt.

Research Methodology

To determine the specific impact of forced eviction on women, two communities, which had experienced forced eviction, Badia and Maroko, were initially selected. SERAC works with members of these communities to sustain their struggle for a just and adequate compensation for their homes destroyed during the eviction process. During the course of this research in Badia and Maroko, the eviction of Rainbow Town occurred displacing an estimated 1.2 million people. SERAC decided to interview a number of the evicted women from Rainbow Town. This decision was informed by two central issues: (1) the eviction experience was still fresh in the minds of the evictees, and as such they were able to give vivid descriptions of their experiences of forced eviction, and; (2) the evictions had taken place in different regions of the country, which would be especially useful for comparative purposes.

Women in Badia and Maroko communities were interviewed by way of questionnaires and in-depth interviews. Women in Rainbow Town were sought and interviewed one-on-one as a result of the state of confusion that existed within the Rainbow community at the time the research was conducted. Specific research activities undertaken are listed below:

Step One

In July 2000 SERAC invited executives of the Maroko Women Cooperative Multi Purpose Society and the Good Women Society of Badia for an “enlightenment meeting” at SERAC offices. At the meeting, SERAC’s project staff introduced the research idea, explained its purpose, objectives and expected results. Before the meeting ended, it was jointly agreed that representatives of SERAC would also visit the communities and that cooperative society members and their networks would serve as entry points for the research.

Step Two

SERAC held a series of on-site meetings with members of the Maroko and Badia communities. Women in the communities were told about the research and were encouraged to narrate their experiences anonymously. Twenty-eight women from Maroko and thirty from Badia volunteered to participate in the research. A timetable was drawn-up scheduling an interview period for every participant. The women to be interviewed were permitted to choose the time and venue most convenient for their first interview.

Step Three

Six test questionnaires were administered to ensure that questions were properly phrased and suitable for the planned research. At the end of the test, a few of the questions were rephrased to elicit better responses. For example, question 5, originally, “how long have you been married?” was rephrased to “when did you get married?” This question was altered because many women could not remember, off hand, how many years they have been married but they could easily indicate the year in which they were married. In addition, the questionnaires were further modified to meet specific needs of the two communities. For instance, while the Maroko evictees have undergone an inadequate and discriminatory form of resettlement, members of Badia community have been evicted several times from the same community without ever being resettled.

Step Four

SERAC distributed the revised questionnaires within Maroko and Badia. At that time, research participants interested in participating in in-depth interviews were identified. Respondents who exhibited ability and willingness to recall and narrate their eviction experience were asked to participate in the in-depth interview.

Step Five

During the course of the Lagos research, the Rivers State government ordered the demolition of Rainbow Town. SERAC staff traveled to Port Harcourt, Rivers State to document the eviction and, in the process, interviewed a number of women who had been evicted from their homes. These women narrated their experiences during the eviction and identified the challenges they were facing.

Step Six

SERAC staff members next prepared in-depth questionnaires for the women participants in Badia and Maroko. This stage of the research/interviews encouraged women to give in-depth narration of their personal and general experiences of forced eviction. It also provided time for the women to keep speaking as long as they focused on the issue of forced eviction and its impact on women. In addition, the in-depth stage sought to follow up on the answers, which had been given during the general interviews. Five women from each community (Badia and Maroko) participated in the in-depth interviews.

Step Seven

SERAC staff members synthesized and analyzed the research findings. The questionnaires were first analyzed according to the differences in experiences between the communities, and then the similarity of their circumstances and experiences. The questionnaires were also analyzed to determine the age distribution of women, highlighting the age bracket of women most affected.

Statistical Analysis

A broad cross-section of women evictees were interviewed in order to ascertain the various ways in which forced eviction impacts on women of all ages. Out of the sample, almost all of the women interviewed were married (93 per cent), with only 7 per cent of the total interviewed persons reporting that they were either widowed, separated, or divorced women. Only one unmarried single parent was interviewed.

Nearly all of the women (98 per cent) claimed to have suffered a decline in their living status. Women who had once been landlords were reduced to tenants, and, in some cases, to squatters. Women who had been employed were left jobless. Students became street hawkers. Out of the sample of young women, at least 70 per cent who were students at the time of eviction⁵⁴ testified that their formal education was permanently halted in order that their brothers could continue going to school.⁵⁵ After the evictions, about 20 per cent of these young women enrolled in craft centers, while the rest were forced into marriages.

⁵⁴ The ages of these girls ranged between 9 and 15 at the time of the eviction.

⁵⁵ This trend may be attributed to the traditional belief, which considers girl-child education a waste of family resources, which ought to be reserved to educate male children.

More than 90 per cent of the women interviewed testified that at the time of the eviction, they were at home while their husband had left the house early in the morning. Of the women interviewed, 29% reported having been beaten by security officials, who are often assigned to implement forced eviction orders. Although none of the women admitted during the research that she personally had been raped, more than 90 per cent of them claimed that some women (and young girls) were raped by security agents during the eviction process. Approximately 98 per cent of the women witnessed destruction of their property and 43 per cent watched helplessly as their properties were stolen or vandalized by thieves. Eighty per cent claimed to have suffered serious economic setbacks, and 25 per cent suffered emotional anxieties resulting in health problems such as hypertension. Thirteen per cent of the women lost members of their families. Although the number of deaths that occurred as a result of the evictions in the three communities under study was not officially recorded, the evictees consistently testified that several people died during or as a result of the forced eviction process.

Almost all of the women interviewed reported that they were extremely ill shortly after the evictions. At least 80 per cent of the women claimed that they suffered malaria and diarrhea resulting from exposure to an unhealthy environment surrounded by unclean water. Many required hospitalization, but could not afford to pay medical bills. According to the women, although their husbands were shocked at seeing the ruins of what was left of their properties and homes, they did not suffer illnesses.

All the women claimed that the eviction led to temporary, and sometimes permanent, separation from members of their families. Sixty per cent have been able to reunite and live in one- or two-room apartments. About 40 per cent reported that, in some cases several years after the evictions, their families are still unable to live together as result of a lack of availability, suitability, and affordability of apartments on the market.

One hundred per cent of the women claimed that the living conditions in their communities before evictions were far better than their current living conditions. When asked what they required to improve their living conditions, 45 per cent said they desired capital to upgrade their business, 28 per cent wanted new laws that protect security of tenure, 32 per cent wanted better housing provided for them, 10 per cent wanted to be gainfully employed and 8 per cent wanted every available assistance.

Findings

In accordance with the social order of the Nigerian slum,⁵⁶ women work less frequently outside of the home, and are expected to dutifully take care of their husbands, children and extended families. During the course of the research, one of the first revelations was that women, more than men, are present during the forced evictions because the demolitions are often timed when the men are away at their workplaces. This suggests that the agents of forced eviction use women's

⁵⁶ In a home in a typical Nigerian slum, the man leaves the house in the morning to his place of work while the woman remains at home. At the very most, she is involved in small-scale business, the content of which does not exceed a little table placed in front of her home. The woman is discouraged from extending her business beyond her home to ensure that she is available at all times to perform her duties as wife, mother, daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law. Ironically, even though the men leave every morning to earn money, in many cases, the entire family survives on the little profit from the woman's trade.

vulnerability at home to ensure a successful eviction. As such, women are the targets of forced eviction on the front lines, and thus bear witness to the destruction of their families' real and personal property.

Women's over representation at the time of demolition translates to women being disproportionately targeted for gender-based assault. Security agents assigned to the demolitions have been implicated in perpetrating severe violence against the women, including raping the women and beating them with impunity. According to members of the Badia community, several women and young girls were dragged into hotels and raped by security agents during the process of forced eviction.

Rapes and other forms of assault continue well after the demolitions. Following the destruction of Rainbow Town homes, female evictees resorted to sleeping in open fields, leaving them open to all forms of hazards and risks. One woman narrated how she and her children have been sleeping, cooking and eating outside even when it is raining. Many women have been left to wait in the field while their husbands seek alternative accommodations. In the meantime, several women have been raped by youths from neighbouring communities.

The incidence of prostitution is disproportionate among female evictees. This is because, shortly after the eviction, women in dire need of housing and other necessities may take to prostitution in order to meet their basic needs. Adding to the problems already experienced by evicted women, commercial sex workers (who are almost exclusively women and girls) are exposed to increased risks of rape, physical abuse, and sexually transmitted diseases.

The research findings also indicate that there may be a link between the practice of forced eviction and increased incidences of forced marriages and pregnancies as a result of rape. At least two out of every three women who were students at the time of eviction claimed that their parents forced them out of school shortly after the eviction while their brothers (both older and younger) continued. Their parents were of the opinion that, when faced with the dilemma of educating just a few of their children as a result of economic constraints, the natural thing to do is to get the daughters married and expend the remaining scarce resources on the sons. The traditional, but often factually erroneous, explanation for this is that boys grow to become men burdened with the financial responsibility of taking care of their homes.

Incidents of pregnancies resulting from rapes have been attributed to forced evictions in situations where young girls are raped when wandering at night in search of a place to sleep, or are compelled to take up residence in unsafe places. One of the interviewed girls who was withdrawn from school while two of her younger brothers continued their education said, "I strongly believe that if my parents' house was not broke (sic), I would not have been pregnant at that time. When they broke our house, members of my family had to stay in three different places. I was staying with a distant relative who did not really take care of me and I got pregnant. I was forced to marry the man."

Ironically, the divorce and separation rates increase alongside the marriage rates after forced evictions in Nigeria. This is especially true in the case of the Marako community, which had undergone an incomplete resettlement process and where at least 40 per cent percent of the divorcees

blamed forced eviction for their separation/divorce. In Badia, the occurrence of eviction-related divorce is lower perhaps because members of this community have repeatedly returned to rebuild the community after each eviction. Stories of abandonment by husbands were received from women in each of the three communities. At least five women admitted that shortly after the eviction, their husbands left in apparent search of alternative housing arrangement but never returned. These women have since taken up the responsibility of taking care of the children. At Rainbow Town, for instance, several women claimed not to have seen their husband since the eviction occurred. According to Ms. Funso, “when the bulldozer broke (sic) our house, my husband told me to stay here with the children, that he was coming now (soon), but since more than one week I have not seen him.”



Nigerian Woman and child

In response to the question regarding the specific impact of forced eviction on women, one participant replied, “my sister, you know that in every aspect of life, whenever there is a problem the women suffer more, if marriage breaks, the woman suffers the cultural stigma that accompanies divorces/separation as well as economic hardship. So the same thing goes for forced eviction because immediately [when] it happens, the woman becomes solely responsible for the welfare of children.” She continued to explain that many husbands take advantage of the physical separation of family and the destruction of sources of living to continuously evade their responsibilities to their families after the forced evictions. Another woman concurred, adding, “since they broke (sic) our house, whenever I ask my husband for chop money (housekeeping allowance) he angrily asks, ‘woman where do you think I will get the money from?’” A third woman reported that her husband always asks her, (in response to her requests for housekeeping allowances), “so, as old as you are, you still ask to be given money for food?”

In addition to the numerous challenges the evicted woman faces, she has to cope with her children’s emotional responses and experiences of forced eviction often including tantrums, frustrations and anger. Bearing the badge of the separations, divorces and abandonments, evicted children are too often raised in unfriendly environments where hailing from a ‘broken’ home transforms them into outcasts. More than 80 per cent of the women interviewed said that children often vent their frustration on their mothers when they are denied things, which they see other parents provide for their children. One woman – who said that all her children were withdrawn from school as a result of the evictions – reported that her first two children always cried to her each morning when they saw other children going to school. Another woman, Elizabeth Ike, summed up the situation as, “children will always run to their mother for their needs no matter the economic hardship. They don’t meet their father.”

Physically forced evictions affect women in many ways in which men are not affected. SERAC’s research revealed that pregnant and lactating women are especially vulnerable to forced eviction-linked violence. Several women who were pregnant at the time of forced evictions narrated their ordeals. Some went into spontaneous labour and delivered amongst the rubble in obviously unsanitary conditions. One interviewee said, “it is worse if you are pregnant, I was pregnant and went into forced labour as the evictions went on. One of my neighbors had to give me her blanket shortly after delivery as all my things were either destroyed or lost.” During the demolition of Rainbow Town, two women went into labour and delivered prematurely. One of the women gave birth to twins. All three babies died shortly after delivery. Another woman (who had tied her four

day-old baby on her back) ran away as the bulldozer approached her house. She accidentally dropped the baby. Her newborn died instantly. According to Ms. Nnachi, “I was at the hospital to deliver my third child while my husband went to work when the demolition took place. Everything that we owned was destroyed along with our house.”

During demolitions new mothers scramble for their children and belongings in spite of the fatigue and soreness that accompany birth. Lactating mothers also suffer disproportionately because they must balance their babies’ demands for breast milk with their reduced food intake. In the fray, nursing mothers must look for sufficient sources of nutrition, even as their lives are complicated by a dependent baby and a shattered household.

There are also a number of gender-specific legal and procedural impediments that women face after forced evictions in Nigeria. In the case of Maroko community, the government’s attempt to temporarily resettle house owners in another community, comprised of houses at various stages of dilapidation, was characterized by gender discriminatory procedures. Women whose husbands were allocated houses were not considered for allocation for their own houses even though they presented genuine Certificates of Ownership. More than 80 per cent of the widows interviewed were also excluded during the resettlement process. Further, single women who owned houses at former Maroko were not given any consideration in the resettlement processes.⁵⁷

Responding to one of the research questions, which were asked to determine the women’s level of understanding of government’s commitments to its citizens, the respondents acknowledged awareness of these commitments but emphatically displayed their lack of confidence in government’s willingness to fulfill these obligations. When asked, ‘who do you think should implement actions to remedy the adverse situations resulting from forced eviction?’ one participant responded, “My sister, I don’t even want to ask government to do anything for me, they might just come and evict us again just because we asked for something”.

Recommendations

This research brings to focus the multidimensional effects of forced eviction and the need for systems of collective response to demolitions and speedy intervention when illegal forced evictions are planned. This report will be widely distributed within and outside Nigeria to encourage key actors (especially the Nigerian government, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and civil society) to more closely monitor forced evictions in Nigeria in light of the gender-specific impact of forced eviction. This report will be used as a tool for sensitizing federal and state governments to the inhuman and degrading experiences of women when forced eviction is implemented without regard to due process. Specific recommendations are as follows:

⁵⁶ A large number of women evictees were excluded from the Maroko resettlement process even though women are legally entitled to own land under Nigerian law.

Local and National Activities

- **Implementation of Training Programmes:** Slum communities in Nigeria are vulnerable to forced eviction. Women in slums should be sensitized on issues relating to forced eviction and the right to housing. Non-governmental organisations working to promote social and economic rights should collaborate with members of Community Development Associations (CDAs) to provide education and training on forced evictions, housing rights and Nigeria's treaty obligations regarding all economic, social and cultural rights. In 1999, SERAC organized two focus group discussions titled "Education and Training on The Practice of Forced Eviction in Nigeria" in two different local communities in Lagos and Delta States. The objective of this program was to educate members of these communities on the existence of laws, which protect housing rights as well as tenancy. The training also focused on issues regarding effective and proper responses to eviction threats. SERAC recommends the implementation of similar programs (especially targeting women) by non-governmental organisations in order to reach a larger number of communities. In addition, training programs seeking to enlighten security/eviction officials on the gender specific consequences of their brutality during evictions, should be jointly organized by NGOs, government officials, and top security officers. These programs will aim to curb gender specific violence, which occur during evictions.
- **Workshops:** Convene a workshop, which will seek to educate and raise awareness among women's NGOs about the various types of violence women experience as a result of forced evictions.
- **Coalition Building:** Establish a national coalition of NGOs based in different parts of Nigeria that are involved in the promotion and protection of women's economic, social and cultural rights. Members of the coalition will be expected to work with national and state legislators to sensitize and educate them on the devastating impacts of forced eviction on women. Further, the coalition will collaborate with these officials to draft and enact bills which provide protection for women's right to housing as well as introduce a women's complaint commission to consider reports of rape and other assaults perpetrated against women during forced evictions. Member NGOs would also embark on nationwide enlightenment and advocacy campaigns to educate the general public on women's human rights as well their forced eviction experiences so as to further disseminate research findings.
- **Publicity and Literature:** Flyers, post-bills and other simplified reading texts depicting women's experiences in cases of forced evictions should be produced by national and international non-governmental organisations. These should be widely distributed within and outside the country.
- **Multi-media:** After evictions, implementing officers often deny the prior existence of habitable houses in affected communities. NGO's and CDAs should collaborate to videotape slum communities before evictions occur. These videotapes can then be presented as proof of existence/ types of houses during compensation campaigns and resettlement processes. In addition, introduce a radio and television talk show featuring women evictees invited to narrate their experiences, advising all levels of government to abolish the practice of forced evictions.

- **Community Networks:** Establish a network of slum communities across the nation made up of slum-based women's associations to provide assistance, exchange of relevant information and solidarity in cases of threats of forced evictions.

International/Regional Activities

- **Regional Instruments:** Advocate the inclusion of women and forced eviction issues in the Draft Protocol To the African on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. SERAC is currently working on this issue and advises other Women's NGOs to contribute to the process.
- **International Advocacy:** Regular submission of alternative reports to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on housing rights situations in Nigeria highlighting the consequences of forced eviction on women based on research findings. This should be done by NGOs jointly or organisationally.
- **International Coalition Building:** Establishment of an international coalition of NGOs working on women's housing rights issues to provide forums for exchange of ideas and other relevant information on forced eviction-related violence against women.

In view of its research findings, the Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC) plans to deepen its programs and activities aimed at specifically addressing issues concerning women and forced evictions. Its work will be geared towards ensuring women's meaningful participation in decision-making activities and encouraging them to pursue positions that allow them to speak and act for themselves on displacement issues.

After considering the research reports from Palestine, India and Nigeria, it should be evident that every situation of forced eviction is unique. While the three research reports provide a wealth of information regarding women's experiences of forced eviction within specific communities, they may also be read together to provide insight into the shared experiences of women faced with forced eviction. What follows is a synthesis of the types of violence women experience during the eviction process, irrespective of national boundaries. While each situation of forced eviction is unique, the studies presented in this report suggest that there are lessons to be learned which can be used to inform some general conclusions.

While there were different experiences between the three countries studied, there were also important similarities. Violence against women was clearly an entrenched part of the process of forced eviction. This violence manifested itself in a number of ways. COHRE recognizes that different types of violence intersect and are experienced as a totality. For example, physical violence often affects one's mental health as well as physical health. Violence is also related to social status and is often used to deny women access to resources. To facilitate our analysis, however, these different forms of violence have been separated into three broad types: physical, psychological/emotional, and structural/socio-economic.

Physical Violence

All three reports shared important similarities with respect to physical violence experienced by women both during and after evictions. While some women were very cautious about describing sexual assaults, it is evident that women in all the reported communities experienced some form of physical violence at the hands of those who carried out the eviction. They also experienced increased violence at the hands of others, including their own husbands. Violence against women was not only an important part of the actual process of eviction but it also increased as a result of the evictions.

The types of physical violence exhibited during the eviction ranged from low flying airplanes aimed at aggravating residents, increased noise, threats, and arrests described by the Bedouin women, to physical beating and rape by security forces as described by the Nigerian and Indian women. It is interesting to note the different focus on violence given by women in the different communities. The Bedouin women obviously felt the presence of the armed forces, jeeps, airplanes, and helicopters to be an extremely violent intrusion into their lives, affecting them physically. The manner in which their lifestyles were altered is clear in their stories as well as the violent nature of the acts. The Indian and Nigerian stories portrayed the physical violence they experienced more in terms of the tangible damage done to their persons. Through their descriptions, it is clear that women were often raped and beaten during the evictions and left with bruises and broken bones.

After the actual eviction occurs, women continue to be subjected to violence and in fact appear more susceptible to violence, albeit perpetrated by other actors. For example, the Bedouin women drew attention to an increase in domestic violence after evictions. The forced eviction decreases women's independence and diminishes their ability to leave a violent situation or to obtain assis-

tance (because, as they explain, the police are seen as the enemy rather than protectors). In the Nigerian report, while the women do not describe actual physical violence by their husbands, there was a definite increase in marriage breakdown and an obvious strain on the spousal relationship as husbands increasingly blamed their wives for their reduced standard of living. Women describe the verbal abuse they receive from their husbands when they are forced to ask for money because they can no longer provide the things that are needed on their own. The Indian women also referred to marriage breakdown as a consequence of the eviction and the increased burden this places on women to care for their children and themselves.

As well as increased violence and hostility from husbands towards their wives, women are exposed to additional violence from other men after the eviction, due to their increased vulnerability. In the India report, women are at risk of violence from security forces who guard the water sources and from men in neighbouring communities. In India, the women described increased exposure to sexual violence due to their lack of shelter. The reports from India and Nigeria also both highlighted the fact that women were sometimes forced into prostitution as a way to support themselves after eviction, where they also experienced a greater exposure to violence, and to disease. The Nigerian report also found a link between forced marriages of young girls and the forced eviction process. The increase in forced marriages is explained by the lack of resources available to families. In order to cut down on expenses, girl children are married-off in order that their new husbands provide for them, rather than their parents. Forced marriages can be regarded as another form of violence against women particularly given the health repercussions for young girls experiencing childhood procreation and given that at least some of these girls will be exposed to marital rape.

Psychological/Emotional Violence

In addition to the more tangible violence described above, women are subjected to intense psychological and emotional violence during and after forced eviction. This can be attributed, at least in part, to women's gender roles within their communities and households. The three studies showed remarkable similarity when it came to describing women's lowered self-esteem, their feelings of helplessness, increased tension, and fear.

The Bedouin women especially stressed the loss of status and feelings of helplessness that they experienced as a result of the eviction. Having their traditional way of life taken away from them caused them to be dependent on their husbands or the State for money. No longer being able to care for their family by themselves left them feeling worthless. They were given no support in trying to find new ways to make a living. Furthermore, their traditional structures of support disappeared once the land they had always lived on was taken away and their communities altered. The Nigerian and Indian women also described an increased dependence on their husbands and the strain it caused on their relationship and in their lives. They similarly described a loss of self-confidence and status as a result of their increased financial dependence since the eviction.

Women in all these communities are the primary caregivers for their children. They are responsible for the economic livelihood, health, safety, and happiness of their family. Once their resources are taken away and their social and economic conditions have worsened, women's stress levels and tension increase. Because of these responsibilities, the emotional damage that is caused by

the eviction process is particularly acute for women. They are responsible not only for themselves, but for their families as well. Single mothers may feel this stress even more acutely, but all the women referred to this loss of status or feeling of helplessness in some way.

Watching the destruction of one's house – a site of protection and security – and physical possessions undoubtedly causes enormous emotional distress. A number of the women interviewed in the studies attested to how painful this experience was. Women seem especially affected by this for two reasons. First, the home is closely connected to their responsibilities as a woman; the destruction of the home, therefore, is a destruction of a woman's identity and role. Second, in many instances, the eviction and destruction of the home occurs when women are alone at home. This means that in many cases women are compelled to confront their evictors, argue, negotiate, and defend themselves, their children and the elderly with little support.

Living in fear after the eviction also severely affects women's mental and psychological wellbeing. Women are fearful that their homes will be destroyed again – as in the case of India where they have adapted their lifestyle to the high incidence of demolitions. Women live in fear of being attacked or assaulted by security forces as they try to provide for themselves and their families, and they fear for their children's safety in communities that are guarded by police and, in some cases, filled with bombs. They worry about their family's economic and social livelihood, which is harder and harder to protect as resources like clean water become more difficult to obtain.

Structural or Socio-Economic Violence

The structural violence that occurs during forced evictions has dramatic consequences for women. Not only are houses destroyed but so are entire communities, including schools, health clinics, and the economic means by which to make a living. The loss of important infrastructure has multiple effects, the most significant of which is that it ensures women's ongoing poverty and their position of disadvantage within society. The loss of shelter, schools, health clinics, and access to clean water requires women to spend more time and effort to obtain these basic necessities. Consequently, they have less time or energy to devote to making a decent living. In this way, the forced eviction keeps women economically marginalized and powerless. In the Bedouin community, for example, the women were particularly affected by the loss of their land, not only for the home that it provided but also the resources. Crops were ruined and, with them, women's traditional way of life was taken away. As has been discussed, this has enormous impact on many other aspects of their lives, including their economic position and their mental and psychological wellbeing.

The women in all the communities in this study described an increase in health problems after the evictions. Access to clean water was a major issue in all three studies. In Nigeria, the lack of clean water caused large numbers of the community to suffer from malaria or diarrhea. While health problems affect everyone in displaced communities, women are especially affected because in these situations not only are the women themselves suffering with illness, but they also bear primary responsibility for the health of all family members. The destruction of health clinics and the creation of new health hazards have an enormous impact on women's lives. Health risks for women also increase if they are forced into prostitution or childhood marriage, as they were in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the destruction of schools also impacts on women in gender-specific ways. Most young women were prohibited from going to school. Many were required to find jobs or enter early marriage to help lighten the economic burden on the family after eviction. The male members of the family, however, were permitted to continue their schooling. Education for women was considered, in that community at least, to be a waste of resources. It seemed to be a common trend that when resources become scarce, women are forced to first make sacrifices.

Finally, the destruction of the community as a whole has a powerful effect on women. Places where they used to go to for support, whether they were schools, clinics, community centers, or communal fields, are destroyed. Without these spaces, support structures are harder to maintain. As people are displaced, they are separated from the communities who used to provide them with physical and emotional support. For women, this social network was a valuable resource and the negative affect of its destruction is apparent in all the studies.

An important point made in the India study was that women adapted their lifestyles to the practice of forced evictions, resulting in less investment in their own community. Women noted that even if they had the resources, they would not invest in housing or the community for fear that this would be destroyed in the next demolition. This shows the continued affect of forced evictions that result in a long-term situation of poverty and underdevelopment.

Conclusions

From these studies we can begin to draw out some general conclusions about the structures and ideologies that inform forced evictions. Forced evictions violate the human rights of all people: women, men, and children. As this research report highlights however, women have a very particular relationship to forced eviction. This relationship is informed by women's social and economic position within the household and within their communities. In turn, from the research we are able to draw three main conclusions: (i) forced eviction itself can be regarded as gender specific; (ii) forced eviction has gender specific effects; and (iii) women's experiences of forced eviction reveals the inter-relatedness of all human rights.

(i) Forced Eviction is Gender Specific

Though the proponents of forced eviction never declare that their intention in executing a forced eviction is to target women, the research studies suggest that women are central to forced eviction, and that traditional gender hierarchies makes forced eviction more likely as a strategy of aggression. In other words, gender inequality shapes and determines the manifestations of power such as forced eviction.

The centrality of women in forced eviction can be seen in the means by which forced eviction is carried out, and the fact that the home is under attack. To begin, the violence perpetrated during the course of a forced eviction can be gendered, with reports that women are raped, sexually assaulted and harassed during the eviction process. Further, it may be concluded that the home is considered an easy target precisely because it is associated with women, and because it is generally the women who are at home when evictions take place. Perpetrators of forced eviction, therefore, either regard the home and what it represents as of no importance because it is associated with women, or they regard the home as an easy target because women are powerless to defend themselves. Either way, the practice of forced eviction puts women at its center. As such, the act of forced eviction can be regarded as a form of gendered violence.⁵⁸

(ii) Forced Evictions Have Gender-Specific Effects

Although some of the violence enacted during forced evictions may not appear gendered, women are disproportionately affected by forced eviction, largely as a result of their traditional, gendered roles within the household and their communities. Women bear the brunt of forced eviction because they are responsible for the economic, physical, and emotional/psychological wellbeing of their families. Children, husbands, the elderly and disabled all rely on women for their security. In turn, when forced eviction results in the elimination of economic resources, in illnesses such as malaria, or dislocation from social support networks, the studies indicate that the women are primarily responsible to ameliorate the situation. This exacts a heavy toll on women, including a lower sense of self-worth, increased susceptibility to depression and fear, and reduced economic power.

(iii) Forced Evictions Highlight the Interdependence of Human Rights for Women

The research also highlights the interdependence of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights in relation to women's experiences of forced eviction. As we have seen, when women's houses are destroyed their health, education, standard of living, privacy, security of person, and freedom to marry whomever they so choose are also destroyed. These are only a few examples highlighting the holistic impact of forced eviction on women's human rights. This suggests that women's lives cannot be bifurcated into civil and political realms and social and economic realms. Further, it suggests that to adequately protect women's housing rights and the right to be free from forced eviction, a real understanding and meaningful implementation of the indivisibility of all human rights is necessary.

⁵⁷ These conclusions about forced eviction were suggested in email correspondence on the EvictionWomen list serve (October 2000).

8

Recommendations for Action

Based upon the research findings, COHRE offers the following recommendations:

Local and National

- In keeping with international human rights law, States must adopt legislation that promotes and protects security of tenure for all women and which prohibits forced evictions and promotes due process in those narrow cases where eviction is permitted.
- NGOs in every country in which forced eviction is a reality should undertake research of this nature, to identify the ways in which women are affected by forced evictions and to explore the various causes of forced eviction that most affect women. Additionally, forced evictions should be consistently and systematically monitored and documented in a manner that is sensitive to and includes women's experiences. In this regard, all types of forced eviction should be documented. Especially those, which predominantly affect women such as, forced eviction caused by domestic violence, or discriminatory inheritance laws.
- While the research studies included in this report are an important initial step toward better understanding women's experiences during the eviction process, more in-depth research is required to adequately inform NGO strategies and government laws and policies with respect to forced eviction.
- All women, especially those who are particularly vulnerable to forced eviction (e.g.: low income women, squatters, ethnic and racial minority women, aboriginal women, women without title to homes and lands), must receive training and education about their human rights and how these rights can be claimed using formal mechanisms such as courts (where appropriate) and informally through, for example, social action. These women must also be supported and encouraged to claim their rights and must work together to do so.
- In those countries where women's equality and right to be free from discrimination is protected in a constitution or other legislation, lawyers should explore all avenues of legal argument to determine whether a pending forced eviction could be challenged on the basis of sex discrimination.⁵⁸
- Those who carry out forced evictions and commit other gender-specific crimes, such as rape and sexual assault, must be criminally prosecuted by the state for their actions.
- NGOs working on forced evictions should establish relationships and collaborate with NGOs concerned with women's issues, such as violence against women, to exchange information and to develop complementary strategies to address violence against women in all contexts.

⁵⁸ In Canada, for example, certain rules used by landlords to screen out prospective tenants have been found to have a negative impact on all low income people, but a disparate impact on low-income women (who are the poorest people in Canada) and can thus be regarded as discriminatory based on sex.

Regional

- Regional entities like Eviction Watch Asia should be established in other regions of the world where evictions are prominent such as Africa, the Middle East, South America and even North America. Within these entities particular attention should be paid to the gendered character of and gendered violence associated with forced eviction. All types of forced eviction should be documented – especially those which predominantly affect women – such as forced eviction as a result of domestic violence, or discriminatory inheritance laws or land and property titling laws.
- Regional mechanisms such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights should be explored by NGOs and lawyers as possible forums in which to raise the issue of forced eviction and women’s particular experiences of forced eviction. Although the right to housing is not explicitly protected in either the African Charter or the American Convention, both contain anti-discrimination provisions⁵⁹ and other provisions⁶⁰, which could be used to assist women in making legal claims against their forcible eviction.

International

- The Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women should continue to explore the phenomenon of forced eviction within her mandate. To this end, she should investigate and examine specific instances of forced eviction in different countries and the violence suffered by women as a result. Working on the assumption that forced eviction is violence against women, she should also investigate gender specific causes of forced eviction such as domestic violence and inheritance and property rights laws, policies and customs.
- The Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing has indicated that he will be undertaking a review of forced eviction under international human rights law, that he will look at forced evictions in particular contexts such as ethnic war, and he will examine the disparate effects of forced eviction on women.⁶¹ NGOs must encourage these initiatives by, at a minimum, providing the Rapporteur with examples, case studies and information pertaining to women’s experiences of forced evictions. NGOs can also encourage the Special Rapporteur to examine the omissions in international law, which result in rendering invisible gender-specific types of forced eviction such as domestic violence.

⁵⁹ Article 2 of the *African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights* and Article 1 of the *American Convention on Human Rights*: “*Pact of San Jose, Costa Rica*.”

⁶⁰ For example, Article 11 (right to a healthy environment), Article 12 (right to food), and Article 15 (right to the formation and the protection of families) in the *Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* – “*Protocol of San Salvador*”; Article 21 (right to property) and Article 22 (freedom of movement and residence) in the *American Convention on Human Rights*: “*Pact of San Jose, Costa Rica*”; and Article 14 (right to property) and Article 24 (right to a general satisfactory environment favorable to development) in the *African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights*, as found in: United Nations, *A Compilation of International Instruments, Vol. II, Regional Instruments* (Geneva, 1997).

⁶¹ *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living*, UN Doc. E/CN.4/2001/51 (21 January 2001).

- There are a number of mechanisms available at the international level that could be used to raise awareness about gender-specific types of forced eviction and the impact of forced eviction on women. For example, NGOs could participate in the UN treaty monitoring bodies system by presenting reports to these Committees⁶² identifying the ways in which women's human rights – as laid out in the treaties – are being violated by forced eviction. NGOs working internationally, regionally and domestically could collaborate at the UN Commission on Human Rights to develop legal standards pertaining to forced eviction that recognize gender-specific types of forced eviction and that reflect women's experiences of this practice.
- The World Bank Inspection Panel has been used by a few NGOs like SERAC to protect economic and social rights of evicted communities and presents itself as another opportunity to highlight women's experiences of the forced eviction process.⁶³
- UN organisations such as the Centre for Human Settlements, the High Commissioner for Refugees, and the UN Development Programme should use their knowledge and expertise from the field to assist in the documentation and development of a more complete understanding of women's experiences of forced eviction.

⁶² For example: The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, and the Human Rights Committee. All of the treaties which these Committees monitor include non-discrimination and equality rights protections and other rights that could be used to defend women against forced eviction and protect their right to housing.

⁶³ -It should be noted that NGOs provide mixed reviews of the World Bank Inspection Panel as a viable and effective means of protecting economic and social rights.

