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Ogunpa Market demolition: Our members are dead; we are stranded -Traders (/ogunpa-market-demolition-our-members-are-dead-we-are-stranded-%E2%80%94traders)

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It's high time we modernised the market —Olatunbosun, ex-LG boss

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Oluwarotimi Agunbiade looked pinned, emasculated. As a trader at the Ogunpa Market in Ibadan, he obviously never imagined that the year would start on such note for his family, nay his business. He appeared unkempt as he struggled to wipe a tear or two from his eyes. There was a woman by his side whom he later identified as his wife. The patch of earth that he stood on was once where his makeshift shop sat. The bulldozer which had started work on Monday continued its frenzy of demolition. The popular Ogunpa Market had become, by Tuesday, a terribly huge mass of rubble.

"We don't want any developer"

The Oyo State government began demolition of the market made up of over 2,000 shops with the intent to raise modern outlets. But for Agunbiade and his co-traders, "this was not the agreement that we had with the governor." Lamenting his loss, he told Nigerian Tribune that "I wonder how I will take care of my wife and children." With a shaky voice he continued, "I have been trading here in the last 30 years. The government has a tradition of repeatedly harassing and destroying our shops. This is the sixth time that such would happen since I got here. We have been constantly told that there are plans to modernise our shops but our fear has remained that all of us won't be able to afford the cost of the newly built shops. We don't want a developer to handle the modernisation of the market. It will not be in our interest. The government should handle it, not a developer."

"My mother's health in the balance"



Another trader, Adeyemo Oluwaremilekun bitterly said that her mother's health was in the balance considering the demolition of her shop. "I have trading here in the last five years with my mother. She was the owner of the shop that was here before the demolition. As I speak with you, she is at home. She has been ill since her blood pressure rose as a result of this. She has been crying. She has paying for this shop. They told us that they would destroy this place but the question has been that what other alternative do we have. There are thousands of people here. We have many graduates here. Where do we go? We don't want any developer," she said.

"We took loans; our creditors are after us"

For one of the women leaders of the market, Mrs Aduke Iyiola, nothing was more callous. According to her, "The government did not tell us that this demolition would take place. We met the government repeatedly and this demolition has taken place repeatedly. Many of our co-traders have been hospitalised. Some are even dead. Things were not this bad. It was when Wasiu Olatunbosun took over as caretaker chairman that things degenerated for us here. He demolished the market on January 10, 2012. It is exactly four years after that exercise.

"We don't know where to go. We are ready to do whatever the government wants as long as we are allowed to stay here. We took loans. Many of our creditors were here yesterday. But how do we service those loans? We cannot survive without our trade."

Adebayo Abdul-Ganiyu, another trader, also condemned the action of the government. "When the demolition started on Monday, this place was flooded with our creditors. Our children are in school. Where do we go? The people who are behind our predicament are the ones who will benefit from the modernisation of the shops. I pay rent on this shop. I am penniless as I speak with you. Many goods have been destroyed. There is frustration everywhere. Many have not recovered from the demolition of year 2012," he said.

With a pained look, Dada Samuel, trader, cursed his luck as he spoke. For him, "We never expected this from government. We have families. On Monday when the bulldozer arrived at the shop of one of us, he started pleading that he should be allowed to pick his wares but they refused. He collapsed and later died. We are begging the government. We don't want a developer. We would rather that the government builds the shops and not the developer. There is no data base to ascertain those of us who are here. After the modernization of this place, it would be difficult to identify the original shop owners of this market. The new shops will then go to other people."

"We don't want to go into crime"

Abdulakeem Daud clearly in his early thirties feared that for young traders in the market, it would be difficult to curb crime after the demolition. "There are many young men and women here. Should this exercise continue, there will be a huge army of the unemployed in the state and then the crime rate will increase. I have been a trader here for a long time. We don't want to resort to crime. We are pleading with the government," he said.

The Iyalaja of Ogunpa, Hamdalat Seriki, told Nigerian Tribune that the former chairman of the local government area should be held accountable. According to her, "When the caterpillars came, they destroyed our goods. We were not allowed to pick our wares. The former chairman started all this. We are very many here. They accused us of being politicians. We are not politicians. Many people have been hospitalized. Where do we go? We are not going to benefit from the modernisation of the market. How do we offset the loans that we took? Many goods have been destroyed."

"We are over 10,000 traders here"

Abiodun Folorunsho, chairman of the Ready-made Clothes Traders Association Ogunpa, told Nigerian Tribune of the traders' dilemma. According to him, "Ogunpa Market is volatile. In 2012, this place was demolished. But the governor later said that he never said that this place should be demolished. What we later saw was that Wasiu Olatunbosun who was the then caretaker chairman told me that his family owned the land and that he had been asked to collect another payment. I told him that it was not true and that his family had no claims on this land. Since then he has been doing all sort to frustrate us here. We are over 10, 000 traders here. They told us that this place has been handed over to a developer who will build this place in 6 months. But where do we go in the next six months? How will we benefit from the modernization? We have lost two co-traders since the demolition started."

It's a lie; nobody died—Olatunbosun

In a swift reaction, Wasiu Olatunbosun, former caretaker chairman of Ibadan North West Local Government Area, argued that "Why would they say that they lost their members? Did anybody attack them? It is a lie. Nobody died. The security operatives were there. Before the demolition started, they had already removed their properties. That place belongs to the government. It is not their property. In the last five or six years, they have not been paying their rent to the local government. They took us to court and the court ruled about three years ago that the land belongs to the local government and that the local government could do whatever it likes with the land."

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