

# Demolitions, tears, deaths, no compensation

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came out, they would have even demolished his palace fence," he said.

Micheal Olusunmade, the Chairman, Olorunsogo Community Development Association, border town between Lagos and Ogun State-Itoki area in Ife Local Government Area of Ogun State also said: "We appeal to government to help us with other alternatives or compensation. Some of the landlords here are hypertensive; so to prevent cases of stroke and sudden deaths, government should come to our aid with alternatives."

Mary Aina, a landlady in in Ope-Ilu area of Agbado railway line, Lagos told *New Telegraph* that her building had undergone two phases of demolition. Her property, which had shops lining both front and backyard, stands just in between the way of the rail project by the left and the Ijoko-Agbado road construction by the right. While the ongoing road construction undertaken by the Ogun State government saw Mrs. Aina's shops in front of her residential home cleared off the way, the rail project by the left also saw her shops rented out at the backyard demolished just as another red-painted marks indicating further demolition were newly applied on the standing structure. "We have never been compensated by the government, never!" Mrs. Aina blurted out when asked to confirm if there had been any form of compensation by the Ogun State or Federal Government. Another neighbouring landlady, who identified herself as one Akinyele, also confirmed Mrs. Aina's claims of no compensation.

Reacting to the fresh demolition marks that the NRC applied, a man, Ade Ola, asked frustratingly, "Do they want to build rails on the demolished parts?"

He stressed that the space for the railway as it were, would suffice without further demolitions even if two railway tracks were to be built. "We do not know how soon they are going to come with their tractors. They brought the Caterpillars five days after the first marking in April," Mr. Ola lamented.

"The authorities in the NRC have refused to listen to our pleas that our properties should be valued and owners given the necessary money to start a new life. In this harsh economic condition, is it right that property owners along the Lagos-Ibadan rail line expansion be thrown out of their homes without a penny?"

"Please, help us tell the government that we will be needing compensation if



A vast area of lands retaken and buildings demolished



Children playing on the rail track at Itoki

our properties have to give way for the rail line. Without compensation, it is as good as asking many aged landlords like me to go to our early graves over the rail line expansion," Mr. Funsho appealed.

## Wider demolitions at Ijoko railway station

*New Telegraph* went around to see the demolitions around Opo Suru Railway Station in Ijoko. The ruins in Agbado were a child's play compared to this community's. Properties standing 90 meters in way of the rail station had to go, consuming tens of whole mud-built shanties and buildings in the community, with another stretch of buildings marked for total demolition.

In the vast area badly touched in the ongoing expansion in Ijoko, the only standing structures are the few derelict homes with their rooftops removed – many homeowners

have turned tenants and some homeless.

## Hypertension and stroke-related deaths

When *New Telegraph* reached out to villagers, they wore sadness on their faces laced with aggrieved voices. They revealed that the rail project has not only raised evacuation concerns, but also led to the death of many landowners in the area following the first demolition in April. According to them, many residents turned hypertensive while some were attacked by stroke – out of fear for the lost properties and the impending losses as many buildings still stand in demolition range of the NRC's destroyer tractors.

Mrs. Bayo "Eleja" (fish seller), a landlady whose 8-room building stand right in the middle of the demolition span with tenants still living in, emphatically told

*New Telegraph* that "no compensation has been paid to any homeowner. We were only asked to provide photographs and other details of our properties for compensation. We do not know how feasible the compensation plans are.

"Many people have collapsed, fallen ill and eventually died due to the fear of the impending loss of property to the rail project."

George Abiona Alaka, another landlady also confirmed that some homeowners in the area marked as right of way of the train tracks have slumped to their deaths in recent weeks.

"People have died. We did not receive any penny at all in form of compensation. We were told to fill a form which would be used in compensating affected landowners," she said while providing a copy of the form to *New Telegraph*.

An hotelier, who identified herself simply as Mrs Ayorinde, whose property stands some meters away from the Oposuru rail line, wailed: "Won't I die of hypertension as I don't know if the demolition will get to my property."

"I have heard of 50 feet. I have also heard of 15 meters to the right and to the left. But you know my hotel is close to the Oposuru train station, and for stations, we also hear the distance to be measured for demolition will not be defined. So, I have been sleeping in my church since last week.

"This hotel is my only means of livelihood. It is from the proceeds I feed, and pay my bills which include school fees of my children. If it is demolished, then my world has ended. Please, help me talk to the NRC to spare my hotel. It's not even a standard one. It's just a small building which I converted to a hotel when I lost my job." At commencement of the Lagos-Ibadan rail project, the NRC, during a press briefing had said all properties within 50 feet of the rail tracks will be demolished.

According to the NRC Managing Director, Mr. Fidat Okharia, any property within this range would be mowed down because the corporation did not grant the owners such lands for use.

"We are going to demolish all properties within 50 feet of the rail lines because those properties are sitting on illegal space and land. Except properties that were given out to owners by the corporation on lease, and such property owners must show us documents backing up their lease agreement with the NRC.

"Aside this, every property within 50 feet radius will have to give way to the Lagos-Ibadan railway expansion project," Okharia stated during the press briefing.