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It's Time To **Take Stock**





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Social and Economic Rights Action Center

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Dear Reader,

SERAC is happy to present the first edition of 2010 e-newsletter. We thank you for all the feedback and support for our work especially throughout the past year.

In this edition, we are fulfilling our promise to keep you regularly updated about the work we do and the various communities that we serve. We look forward to receiving more of your observations, comments, contributions and suggestions. We can always be reached via info@serac.org.

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It's Time To Take Stock



Every corporate entity gets to a point where it pauses to take stock of its past operations, and then repositions itself to adequately respond to the challenges of a dynamic world. Taking stock requires one to take time to ask, ponder and answer pertinent questions: what has been accomplished? What difference and impact have been made? How can work done be taken to scale? What

needs to be adjusted to improve program/service design and delivery?

The Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC) sought answers to these questions in a strategic planning staff retreat held from April 6 – 10, 2010 at Protea Hotel, Lekki Peninsula, Lagos. During those days, the organization shut down its offices and corporeal operations and had its entire staff members participate in the reflection. Dr. Joseph Mba, a director of the Strategic Business School (SBS), Lagos headed the team of frontline strategists and consultants that facilitated the diagnostic lecture sessions.

First off, the retreat was a prelude to the series of introspective activities lined up to commemorate SERAC's 15 years of service. Exactly on May 15, 1995, SERAC emerged on the human rights scene with a unique mandate: to secure greater social and economic rights protections for the excluded, and marginalized populations in Nigeria. At that time, human rights was practically understood and pursued only through the prism of civil and political rights. Fifteen years after its establishment, SERAC has not just helped to widen the understanding and practice of human rights, but has equally contributed in establishing solid jurisprudence regarding social and economic rights in Nigeria and beyond. In addition, SERAC has worked, and is still continuing to advance and protect the rights of the poor and those that are least able to defend themselves.

Against this backdrop, the retreat aimed at assessing the organization's stewardship and capacity to reach stated institutional goals, mission and objectives. The strategic planning lectures' curricula were specifically designed to distill important lessons, weaknesses, and best practices from both the organizational processes and programming, and inform the development of a five-year strategic plan that will run from 2010 - 2015. In this regard, staff members benefitted from an array of instructive lectures and solution-



Dr. Mba of the Strategic Business School facilitating one of the lecture sessions.

oriented courses such as “Strategic Thinking and Analysis”, “Strategic Priority Setting”; Effective Leadership and Strategic Governance”; “Building Organizational Congruence”, Strategic Staffing; “Maximizing Revenue Growth Opportunities by NGOs” and so forth.

The plenary sessions that followed were like a gathering of peers: no experts, no senior or low-level executives, and no resource persons! It was simply a no-holds-barred arena that afforded everyone an opportunity to speak out, appraise and apply the lessons learned to day-to-day organizational operations. In addition, the relevance of the organization’s mission, vision, corporate goals and services to the target beneficiaries of its interventions; and the effectiveness of projects’ strategies, tools and methods were also subjected to critical examination.

The week-long retreat was not all about strategizing; it provided a rare occasion for



Fun time! Even children shared in the excitement.

staff members to deepen collegial relationships and to know themselves beyond the usual office environment. It was also a time to worry less about the routine community engagements, fact-finding missions, court attendance and the ever tight reporting schedules and deadlines. Families and children of staff members also shared in the excitement as they united under one lodging to engage in social and physical activities like swimming, gymnastic and other games.

One important lesson that was deeply planted in the hearts of all staff members is that it is important to always think about the

future. They also understood that worrying about where the organization will be five years from now transcends a formal strategic planning process. The direction to a brighter future is best interpreted in terms of improving the organizational capacity to deliver innovative programs and services, acquire new and improved alliances with diverse collaborators and stakeholders who exude the esteem and mission SERAC aspires. By looking at ways in which the past shapes the future, SERAC is even more determined to respond to the changes that they hope to influence.



SERAC staff members pose with facilitators at the end of the retreat.

Maroko Community Hosts Ford Foundation’s Representatives

On January 20, 2010, the Maroko community, Lagos Nigeria hosted a delegation of local and international representatives of the Ford Foundation. Social and Economic Rights Action Center’s (SERAC’s) program officers and community organizers joined large numbers of Maroko community members assembled at the Maroko Information Center (MIC) to welcome the visiting Ford Foundation team. The attendees were so numerous that the capacity of the MIC had to be extended through the addition of four tents in order to hold the nearly 500 community members in attendance.

The delegation led by Ford Foundation’s Representative for West Africa, Adhiambo Odaga comprised Shruti Pandey – Program Officer, Human Rights - New Delhi India; Judy Barsalou, Representative - Middle East & North Africa; Monette Zard, Program Officer, Human Rights - New York; Nicolette Naylor, Program Officer, Human Rights - Southern Africa; Martin Abregú, Representative for Andean Cone and Director - Chile; Alice Brown, Representative - Southern Africa; Abdel Basset Ben Hassen, Program Officer - Cairo, Egypt; and Joseph Gitari, Program Officer, Human Rights - West Africa.

All over the world, the Ford Foundation is famed for its commitment to support and take on innovative projects that advance both the public good and that can have an important impact on society. In keeping with this character, the Ford Team visited Maroko to witness the transformative processes and best practice example of community activism that SERAC’s Nigeria Social Housing Initiative is leveraging. The event went beyond a formal presentation of the Maroko struggle, but also highlighted the ways the NSHI is offering an inclusive and self-help approach to rectify the wrongs done by the Lagos Government twenty years ago.



Maroko leader, Prince Aiyeyemi welcomes the Foundation’s Adhambo Odaga and her colleagues to the community.

The program began with a tour of the Ilasan Housing Estate where many July 1990 Maroko evictees are currently housed, to afford the visitors an opportunity to see for themselves, the deteriorating living and environmental conditions in which the evictees live. While the tour

lasted, Maroko leader, Prince Samuel Aiyeyemi chronicled the circumstances that propelled the Lagos Government to allot the structurally defective estate's flats to Maroko's evictees, and how they are organizing to overcome the associated tenure security-related challenges. In Aiyeyemi's words, 'by the time we moved in, the government estates consisted of structures at varying levels of incompleteness. Many "houses" were at foundation level while other structures had no plaster, doors, windows, roofs, electrical fittings, toilets or plumbing of any kind. In addition, some of those purportedly allocated housing were given flats that had not yet been built. All told, about 2,600 evictees out of the approximately 2,900 receiving allotments were allocated either non-existent or structurally incomplete, deficient and unsafe flats"...

In the past twenty years since the



Excited Maroko evictees gather to welcome Ford Foundation's visitors.

demolition, the evictees have never been provided with any adequate resettlement, nor have they been given any assistance by the government to remedy or ameliorate the squalid conditions of the estate. Despite the many years of governmental neglect and failure to improve habitability in the estate, the Lagos State government recently unveiled plans to take over the estate and relocate current occupants to distant sites around Ibeju and Epe. This move forms part of a grandiose plan by a state agency, the Lagos Building Investment Company (LBIC), to evict the Maroko people again, from those estates in order to turn the land to high profile developers. "The Maroko community has

clearly opposed this move, and we shall exhaust every legitimate and democratic opportunity to forestall a repeat of what happened in July 1990", says SERAC executive director, Dr. Felix Morka.

Beyond Maroko community's relative cohesiveness, strong structures of community organization, past successes with advocacy and gender mainstreaming initiatives, their unrelenting quest for housing justice informed the NSHI initiative. Under the pilot phase, the initiative seeks to construct and deliver new houses for an initial 500 Maroko families out of the 7500 former Maroko house owners who have yet to be compensated for their losses in the July 1990 forced eviction by the military government of Lagos State. The NSHI hopes to reduce the cost of the houses by directly training and boosting the skills base of Maroko youth workforce who would in turn provide direct labor and services during the planning and construction phases of the project.



Prince S.A. Aiyeyemi explains the dilapidated state of houses within Ilasan housing estate to the visitors.

After the tour, the Ford team engaged in an interactive session with the evictees where community members shared their individual and common experiences regarding the impact of the July 1990 evictions on their families and livelihoods. The high point of the program was the series of presentations by the youth trainees on the various skills they had acquired in plumbing, electrical wiring, masonry, brick laying, and iron welding training conducted under the auspices of the NSHI. The training was accomplished through a strategic partnership between Urban Spaces Innovations (USI) and Yaba College of Technology (YABATECH). USI is the new organization that was established to take over the implementation of the NSHI initiative from SERAC.

The Maroko community's evident cohesiveness combined with their burning desire to partake in the process of building themselves a new community signaled to the Ford Foundation that the NSHI is an initiative that is worth supporting. Praising the evictees for their unwavering commitment to their struggle to overcome, an excited Adhiambo Odaga noted that Maroko people's shining example of exceptional community activism has gained



A trainee electrician exhibits a model of an electrical wiring system created during the skill acquisition program.

global recognition and admiration. The persistence of their fight against the July 1990 injustices, combined their willingness to challenge government policies and practices they deemed as injurious to their rights are clear pointers to that commitment. She assured the evictees of continued partnership and support to SERAC, as the vehicle for extending their solidarity to the evictees. Ms. Odaga also expressed deep regrets for the Foundation's vice president, Maya Harris' inability to make the trip to Lagos.

In his closing speech, Felix Morka thanked the Foundation representatives for their keen interest in SERAC and its partner communities, along with their desire to strengthen the organization's field of work. On the Foundation's part, learning more about the work of their partners has been especially useful as a way of upscaling its humanitarian gestures in a style driven by trust, cooperation, civility and public benefit.

Research on Public Participation in Urban Development Begins

Beginning from February 2010, the Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC) initiated a comparative research project on *Citizen Participation in Urban Development Projects in Nigeria and South*



Settlements on Kennedy road, Johannesburg,

Africa. The research team is led by SERAC's executive director and intern, Felix Morka and Nse Umoh respectively, with additional assistance by Victoria Ohaeri, the program coordinator. A key objective of this action research is to use selected case studies to identify best practices and strategies that promote and institutionalize the participation of marginalized populations in urban planning and development.

In order to meet the above objectives, SERAC is undertaking a comparative analysis of urban development policies, programs and interventions in informal settlements in Nigeria and South Africa (at the national, provincial, and local levels of government) and critically reviewing two case studies, one of slum upgrading and the second of urban renewal in each country. In Nigeria, the research is profiling

two case studies: the Federal Government's Badia East Urban Renewal Project and an aspect of the World Bank-funded Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance Project both focused on Ijora Badia; and the Rivers State Government's Urban Renewal Programme especially the urban renewal initiatives around Abonnema Wharf waterfront community. The South African urban renewal case studies are focused on the Abahlali baseMijondolo (AbM) movement in Kennedy Road, Durban and the Alexandra Renewal Project in Johannesburg.

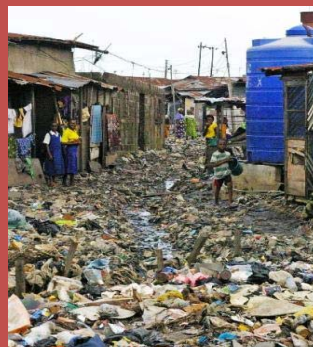


Overview of Alexandra community, Johannesburg, South Africa.

The research process has had three distinct but interrelated phases: the review and analysis of relevant documents (i.e. academic literature, policies, legislation, plans, official reports); primary investigations and the analysis of results (i.e. surveys, interviews, site visits), and finally the synthesis of all findings into a final report. Under the auspices of the literature review, SERAC examined an array of theories behind citizen participation in urban planning and shed light on the factors that inhibit the effective employment of participatory mechanisms. The review saw SERAC compare and analyze the works of various authors: Sherry Arnstein's *Ladder of Citizen Participation*, Gyorgy Enyedi's *Public Participation in Sustainable Urban Development*, Patsy Healey's *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies* as well as Judith Innes and David E. Booher's *Reframing Public Participation: Strategies for the 21st Century*.

Both the theoretical and analytical findings affirm that the best methods of addressing major challenges of urbanization, urban planning and development are increasingly seen in the strengthening of community resources, while building on their institutions and social capital. The interviews conducted with key stakeholders in Nigeria and South Africa, as well as the surveys administered in Badia, Durban and Johannesburg reinforce this conclusion. In all the case studies, key distinctions have been observed between participatory spaces created by the government or other body responsible for project implementation, and participatory spaces that communities have created on their own and that have a much less formalized relationship with government or other project implementing bodies. This difference in the context in which participatory spaces emerge greatly influences their legitimacy, the level of citizen control that is possible and intra-community relations.

Other salient issues illuminated by this research include, the role of protest in facilitating



Badia

participation, the importance of engaging communities in conversations about project timelines, and the intermediary function that NGOs can play in facilitating participation. In addition to bringing these larger thematic issues to the forefront. Distinct best practices have also emerged from the case studies. For example, when the Federal government's Ministry of Works, Housing and Urban Development commissioned Molaj consultants to develop an urban renewal plan for Badia community in Lagos, they used a combination of different strategies that community residents and leaders have identified as being particularly effective. These include, repeated community consultative fora, the establishment and

participation, the importance of engaging communities in conversations about project timelines, and the intermediary function that NGOs can play in facilitating participation. In addition to bringing these larger thematic issues to the forefront. Distinct best practices have also emerged from the case studies. For example, when the Federal government's Ministry of Works, Housing and Urban Development commissioned Molaj consultants to develop an urban renewal plan for Badia community in Lagos, they used a combination of different

regular meeting of a stakeholders committee, the establishment and regular meeting of a technical committee and the use of community labor in the data



Aerial view of Abonnen Wharf waterfront community, Port Harcourt.

gathering process. This research has been useful in identifying both the tensions that exist in participation in urban development projects and in distilling some best practices for moving forward. SERAC served as a member of the Badia East Urban Renewal Project's technical committee that provided independent oversight, monitoring and advisory support during the project's planning and implementation phases.

All the data gathered during the survey, desk studies, field missions and interviews are currently being synthesized into a full report. The research information throws its weight behind the growing calls for the strengthening of citizen involvement in urban planning, along with a shift in the role of all levels of government from being key decision-makers and service providers to being facilitators of community-driven urban governance processes. SERAC is grateful to the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development & Peace and the Ford Foundation for generously supporting this research.

Towards Greater DEVELOPMENT and PEACE around the World

At a seminar held on February 5-7, 2010, in Montreal, Canada, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (D & P) brought together their staff, members of various committees and

partners from the South and North to reflect on their programming in Canada and the South, and work jointly on developing the next five-year integrated program that will run from 2011–2016. Recognizing that partners from the global South are the main actors of the development they want to support, the D & P invited the Social and Economic Rights Action Center's program coordinator, Ms. Victoria Ohaeri to be part of the reflection.

For three whole days, about 100 seminar participants from different continents explored ways of strengthening the Development and Peace's contribution to international cooperation. They began by reflecting on the changing context in which Development and Peace works, and especially considered the implications of the current context for Development and Peace's (D&P) programming in the South and in Canada. Corresponding to the D & P's usual practice of integrating the voices and perspectives of their partners from the South in their programming arrangements, the detailed presentations and experiences shared by Southern partners provided input into the emerging program directions for Development and Peace 2011 – 2016 Strategic Plan. Simultaneous interpretations ran concurrently in English, French and Spanish.



Ms. Victoria Ohaeri and Ms. Julie Perrault at the seminar.

On the first day of the seminar, participants discussed the multiple crises arising from the neo-liberal economic policies and their impact on people living in the Global South and the North. The lead papers and presentations argued that "the ultra-liberal development model has inherently promoted multiple forms of inequality, with each form of inequality having specific consequences—between North and South, between classes and social strata, between ethnic groups and between men and women, with these inequalities benefiting the small minority that dominates the global economy. This model has also meant that there has been a net shift of power from the democratic political field towards the field of economics and international bureaucracies". On this note participants considered the development models that can help to overcome these crises but more importantly, also build a better world.



Series of workshops were held on the second day to delve deeper into five selected areas of the D & P's core programming: Peace and Conflict, Control of Land and Management of Resources, Environmental and Climate Justice, Democracy and Citizen Participation and Women Empowerment. As the resource person in Workshop Four focusing on Democracy and Citizen Participation, SERAC's Ms. Ohaeri cited the organizing and community

engagement activities of the Lagos Marginalized Communities Forum (LAMCOFOR) to demonstrate how the informed participation by the poor can confer development with some type of legitimacy that it otherwise would have lacked. LAMCOFOR is an umbrella association of slum and evicted communities in Lagos State working together to find developmental remedies to the common urban deprivations facing their communities. Through popular organizing, reflexive advocacy, networks of relations and the cooperation of participating local organizations, LAMCOFOR's interventions validate the growing recognition of the organized urban poor as the infrastructure through which development investment is made.

Plenary sessions were held on the last day of the seminar to sum up the workshop discussions' findings and resolutions. The summing up activities aimed at identifying the most promising courses of action for D & P's 2011–2016 programming. Strategic programs for consideration were analyzed within the context of two dominant



Ms. Ohaeri shared SERAC's experience with other participants.

paradigms of international development: the fight against poverty and aid effectiveness. Consensus was reached among participants that future D & P programming should focus attention essentially on the reduction of social inequalities, forging of alliances and building networks that will enable the organization to become a social force capable of influencing decisions in favour of the social projects they are promoting.

Days after the seminar, Ms. Ohaeri held project meetings with D & P officers and representatives for West Africa, Ms. Julie Perreault and Ms. Sarah Poulin where they discussed the progress of SERAC's D & P-supported projects: Project to Reinvent Democratic Engagement in the Niger Delta, and the Right to the City projects respectively. She also granted interviews with the D and P's Communications Bureau and the Development and Peace Just Youth team led by Genevieve Gallant and Natasha Halpin.

Established in 1967, Development and Peace is the official international development organization of the Catholic Church in Canada and the Canadian member of Caritas Internationalis. It has financed projects worth over 500 million dollars in more than 70 countries and has

mobilized hundred of thousands of Canadian citizens in support of its international work.

Itomaro Community Protests 'Purposeless' Acquisition

Located on an island in Amuwo Odofin Local Government Area of Lagos State, Itomaro, Onisiwo community is bordered by Ogogoro, Itu Agbon, Agara 1 & 2, Oko-Ata, Takwa Bay Light House communities in Lagos State. The community's over 25,000 inhabitants are mainly fishermen, coconut farmers, low-cadre public servants and self-employed artisans actively engaged in the informal sector business undertakings.

The organized existence of this community on the island dates back to January 1942 when the Federal Government moved them from the Old Itomaro to their present abode to give way for the construction of a naval armoury. Since then, they had enjoyed exclusive and quiet possession of the Island without any interference.

Their peaceful possession suffered a blow in October 2009 when a notice pasted at the palace of the Baale of Itomaro/Agbagbo, Chief Moshood Onisiwo purportedly signed by the Executive Governor of Lagos State, Babatunde Raji Fashola (SAN), indicated that the "parcel of land (with the improvement thereon) at Ogogoro Light House Area, Itomaro Village at Apapa Local Government Area of Lagos State covering about 84.267 hectares have been acquired by the Lagos State Government for overriding public interest". The public interest purpose was not specified as required by law. By that notice, the Lagos Governor revoked the existing right of occupancy in the said land, and directed "all holders, owners or occupiers of the land or part of it to yield up possession of the land".



SERAC's Eyong Sunday, Emmanuella Ukozor-Isaac and Emmanuel Nwaghodoh on a boat ride to Itomaro community.

Months after the notice was pasted, the Lagos State government has yet to take any serious step to engage nor establish processes for effective consultations with the affected local people regarding the adequate compensation and resettlement of families whose lands and homes would be acquired for the project. Nigeria's history of compulsory acquisition of lands by the government through forced eviction of the people, fortified the concern that thousands of people would be removed from their ancestral homes without recourse to due process of law. Sensing that their homes and livelihoods were under serious threat of dispossession, the community representatives approached SERAC on November 4, 2010 for legal assistance.

An exploratory mission to the community undertaken by SERAC's housing team, Sunday Eyong, Program Officer, Emmanuella Ukozor, Community Organizer and Emmanuel Nwaghodoh, Staff Attorney on November 18, 2009 revealed that the non-disclosure of project-related information and the lack of community consultation preceded the revocation. Information regarding the actual land mass and delineation of the areas required, and including the compensation, relocation and resettlement regimes designed for the affected populations were also unavailable. Till date, the locals have not been provided with relevant information on the precise nature, scope and content of the public purpose project for which their lands were acquired.

At an advocacy meeting held with key



Community members gather at Baale Moshood Onisiwo's palace for the sensitization exercise.

officials of the Ministry of Lands on February 23, 2010, SERAC learned that the revocation was done for a "public purpose that is yet to be conceived". Under Nigerian law, it is an established legal principle that the public purpose for which land is revoked must be disclosed to the person/community whose property is to be taken, since the public purpose is properly information that belongs to the public as a whole. Furthermore, although the law permits the taking of private/communal property for public purposes, it carefully circumscribes the government's authority. The government is explicitly prohibited from taking any property unless prompt compensation for such takings are paid and aggrieved persons have access to a court of law for a fair valuation of the property.

To compound the situation, community members were for the most part, unaware of the various state and national laws and including recourse procedures that afford safeguards against unlawful takings of communal lands by state actors. It was on that premise that SERAC convened an issue-based community sensitization workshop on February 4, 2010 to enlighten the Itomaro community members on the provisions of the law regarding the powers of the Governor to revoke freehold interests in land, and including the underlying due process provisions that the State must comply with in order to validate a revocation. Community members made up of representatives of youth groups, men and women as well as religious organizations participated in the event.

Key sections of Nigeria's land use policy, the Land Use Act, 1978 such as sections 5, 28, 29 and 44 bothering on the right of occupancy, the governor's power to revoke such rights, the conditions for revocation, the procedure and the consequences of non-compliance with due process regulations were developed into informative, educational and communication materials in English and Yoruba languages. These materials were freely disseminated among participants and to residents to deepen their understanding of their individual and collective rights, and how they can use the law to demand protection against unlawful acquisitions and evictions.

The people of Itomaro community may be poor, but they are now fully aware that their government has an obligation to be concerned about their shelter needs and livelihoods, rather than displace them without providing alternatives. Regardless of the false starts that attended the communal land acquisition process, SERAC hopes that the Lagos State Government will learn from history and do the right thing by launching credible consultation and development processes, supported by the cooperation of the affected community.

Jos Boils Again!

Warning: This article contains horrifying pictures!!!

Ironically, Jos, Plateau State, is popularly known as Nigeria's "*Home of Peace and Tourism*" but contrary to its name and promise, the capital city has been the locale for recurrent violent conflicts, insecurity and massive destruction of lives and property. Precisely on Sunday, March 7, 2010, the capital city, yet again, witnessed the most bizarre human massacres in Nigeria's history. In the dead of the night, hundreds of residents of three villages: Dogon Nahawa, Ratsat and Zot Foron were butchered by Fulani herding populations in the deadliest fashion. About five hundred persons, mostly women and children reportedly lost their lives and homes during a raiding operation that lasted only three hours. Families of deceased persons buried their dead even before the deaths were registered, bringing the official death toll into question.



A woman and her baby were burnt beyond recognition during the massacre.

Not long ago, Nigeria's Niger Delta region gained global popularity for resource-related violent conflicts. Then, the mere mention of the Niger Delta evoked images of restive youths abducting foreign oil workers and other influential personalities. It also stirred up images of masked men boldly displaying AK-47 rifles with the look of death in their eyes. As various levels of the Nigerian government unveiled an array of programmes designed to restore lasting peace and sustainable solutions to the crisis, Jos, Plateau State opened a much more tragic chapter of communal crisis, bloodletting and chilling violence that left many Nigerians wondering in disbelief.

Seeing that the scale and intensity of violent conflicts is gradually shifting from the Niger Delta to the north and middle-belt regions, the Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC) beamed its torchlight on Jos under the auspices of its project to profile the Niger Delta crisis as an urgent national issue. Under that project, SERAC advocacy interventions had warned that if unchecked,

the increasing protests of other region's minorities and communities against their political, economic and environmental disenfranchisement will in due course, snowball into vicious ethnic tensions, with even more catastrophic consequences.

True to that prediction, Nigeria was thrown into deep mourning and confusion on Sunday March 7, 2010 following a reprisal



Some children slain during the crisis...

attack by Fulani Muslim herdsmen who unleashed the deadliest and goriest massacre ever told. In the wake of the mayhem, SERAC's program officer, right-to-housing, Eyong Sunday, embarked on a scoping mission to Jos on March 10-11, 2010, to show solidarity with, and extend condolences to the affected families. The mission also sought to ascertain the actual figures of the human casualties and fatalities; determine and document the scale of displacements, including the loss of livelihoods and human settlements that the incident engendered; and to meet with various stakeholders to learn more about



government and civil society responses to the recurrent crisis in the state.

Going by the interviews with some affected families and residents, SERAC established that the reprisal attack was unjustified and



What did they do wrong? These innocent children were burnt alive...

assailants who effortlessly macheted and axed them to death. So tragic and despicable were their actions that a baby strapped on a fleeing mother's back had its head severed off from the body, leaving the headless body firmly in place. The woman made this shocking discovery only after she got to a safe place. All this happened without any form of intervention from either the local vigilante or any of the formal security formations in the state.

The Jos conflict has its roots in historic supremacy tussles between the *indigenes* and *settlers* in the state. Whereas the indigenes comprising the Asizere, Anaguta and Beroms are seeking increased local control over political power and more economic resources, the Hausa-Fulani settlers, emboldened by their commercial astuteness and industry are also demanding a greater presence and voice in the state's affairs. Not only that, while the indigenes are favourably disposed to state institutions and state-controlled power negotiations, the settlers have greater confidence in Federal Government-led interventions. These ingrained socio-political divisions and the conflicting allegiance to federal and state institutions constantly erode opportunities for peace building.

Originally, the rationale behind the official distinction between indigenes and non-indigenes (settlers) was to guarantee that the country's more than 250 ethnic groups preserved their unique identities – their culture, traditions and traditional institutions of governance – by maintaining some cultural distance between themselves and other Nigerians. However, these best intentions have been twisted beyond recognition and now pose legitimate problems due to prevailing practices and dangerous trends that have marginalized and excluded non-indigenes in ways that have nothing to do with the preservation of cultural identity or autonomy. For instance, even after decades of significant contributions to the social and economic development of the state, the non-indigene Fulanis are routinely denied indigeneity certificates. The possession of the indigeneity certificate qualifies the holder to benefit from the state scholarships and priority placements for the state-owned university admissions. The implication is that non-indigenes were considered ineligible to compete for academic scholarships, and paid higher fees than indigenous students in State schools. Further, they are unable to compete on an equal basis for available employment and educational opportunities at the state and federal levels.

The mission also noted a culture of hate and deep-seated mistrust among the populations. This mistrust is fuelled by many years of government's indifference and paralysis to adequately deal with previous crises, through the implementation of recommendations of the various commissions of enquiry that probed past incidents, and the lack of the political will to prosecute and punish indicted persons. The

characterized by excessive violence. The Fulani herdsmen invaded the three villages in the Jos-South local government area of the state in the early hours of Sunday armed with machetes, guns, axes and other dangerous weapons. They shot sporadically into the air and then set some houses and properties ablaze. In the pandemonium that ensued, fleeing villagers, mostly the women and children scampered in different directions for safety. As many that ran out from their homes rammed into the rampaging



Houses were burnt, properties destroyed and residents were rendered homeless...

March 7, 2010 incident is the second in less than two months and the fifth since 2001.

As with the Niger Delta crisis, SERAC finds that the scale of the human suffering arising from the Jos uprisings and more particularly, the potentials for escalation is so large that it would require multi-dimensional and strategic collaborative interventions to restore lasting peace in the state. Further investigations and field visits are equally required to understand and profile the issues in more depth, as would allow for the proper framing of a corresponding radical response and engagement with the key stakeholders involved.

Empowering Port Harcourt Communities To Overcome

United by the sheer determination to keep their homes, and a common expectation of increased government's attention to their priorities, more and more Port Harcourt communities targeted with demolitions are joining forces to unleash the power of solidarity and collective action. This is coming on the heels of renewed threats to demolish and forcibly evict the residents of



SERAC's Staff Attorney, Emmanuel Nwaghodoh facilitated the community sensitization exercise.

poor neighbourhoods and informal settlements under the banner of the Rivers State Government's urban renewal programme. In no unequal measure, the Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC) is scaling up its community organizing and outreach programs to energize and increase the capacity of these communities to assert their rights and demand accountability from institutions of

the government. SERAC has continued to work with and within these communities providing basic human rights education, and helping them to organize themselves towards strengthening their capacity to engage various institutions of the government on critical issues and urban challenges confronting them.

The March 19, 2010 community sensitization workshop co-organized by SERAC and the Stakeholders Democracy Network (SDN) represents one such bold effort to empower and embolden communities to resist unlawful evictions.

Over 80 representatives of non-governmental organizations, the local media and community members from various waterfront communities such as Okrika, Marine Base, Prison, Abuja, Tourisi, Bundu, Rex Lawson, Aggrey, Ogwu, Elechi, Beach, Ojike, Urualla, Afikpo, Abonema and Njemanze benefitted from the capacity-building sessions. The program was the third in the series of community-centered interventions initiated under SERAC's anti-eviction litigation campaign. Using community education, litigation, legal and policy advocacy as leading strategies, the campaign is determined to bring to an end, the State's practice of forced evictions carried out without adequate notice, community consultations and resettlement. The workshop was facilitated by SERAC's Staff Attorney, Mr. Emmanuel Nwaghodoh and SDN's Mr. Paulinus Okoro.

The community workshop brought into focus, the importance of community power as a dynamic approach to urban development. With the demolition of Njemanze community in August 2009, the failed attempts to demolish Bundu in October 2009, and the ongoing threats to demolish Abonema community and other waterfront settlements, participating communities learned that unorganized urban poor people have lower chances of resisting evictions. Through better organizing and mobilization, they can more effectively communicate and demonstrate that the era of traditionally centrally-led programs is gone when the government unilaterally dictated and manned the affairs of city development without recourse to popular participation.

In one accord, the representatives of the various communities and interest groups advocated for a modification of the urban renewal programme to accommodate *in situ* upgrading and rehabilitation of the waterfronts that is not based on demolition and redevelopment. In addition, they want to see more of institutional frameworks and mechanisms that are "inclusive of stakeholders and that put dialogue at their core."

A sprawling oil rich city located at the heart of the Niger delta region, Port Harcourt is the capital city of Nigeria's oil-rich Rivers State. Even with the stupendous oil wealth, housing is one of the city's major challenges. So tough is the housing challenge that more than two thirds of the city's populace hardly afford the cost of living in formal sections of the city.

Since 1999, the sight of bulldozers flattening houses and properties is now commonplace in Port Harcourt, River State, Nigeria. On the orders of the Rivers State Government (RSG), the densely populated Rainbow Town was reduced to rubbles in 2001, leaving several thousand persons without alternative shelter, compensation or resettlement till date. In May 2005, the Rivers Government demolished a popular settlement, Agip Waterside without taking any measures to ensure that people, many of whom had lived in the area for in excess of ten years, had been given adequate or fair warning about the scale and reasons for the demolition. Njemanze community was also felled by government bulldozers in August



Representatives of several waterfront communities benefitted from the sensitization program.

2009 despite an intense local and international appeal and advocacy urging the RSG to respect the basic right of all city dwellers to adequate housing and protection from forced eviction.

More recently, the waterfront communities where majority of the city's disadvantaged inhabitants live are the ultimate targets of state-sponsored forced evictions and other violations of housing rights perpetrated on a



"We have a right to the city..." says Mrs. Gift Jim-George of Abonema Wharf community.

massive scale. The target locations have in turn, become centers of protests and community activism, especially after months and years of unsuccessful appeals for assistance to those who were displaced from previous demolitions.

While capacity building initiatives like the regular sensitization workshops is not an end point, it represents an important milestone in a process involving a variety of actors and other players working together to produce outcomes.

WUF V: Stakeholders Converge to Bridge the Urban Divide

All over the world, city managers are grappling with the challenge of managing rapid urban growth, eradicating urban poverty and inequality, building and sustaining safer cities with higher levels of economic and infrastructural development. United by a profound commitment to find common solutions that squarely address these challenges, tens of thousands of urban stakeholders, world leaders, mayors, human rights activists, representatives of governments, the media, academe, civil society and community organizations from

different parts of the globe united at the 5th session of the World Urban Forum (WUF V) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from March 22 until March 26, 2010. Two staff members of the Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC) Mr. Eyong Sunday Eyong and Ms. Nwanye Dinma, along with the representatives of the Lagos Marginalized Communities Forum (LAMCOFOR), Mr. Samuel Aiyeyemi and Mr. Yemi Ogunyemi participated in the event.

From the beginning of the Forum, themed, *"Right to the City: Bridging the Urban Divide"*, the over 11, 000 Forum participants -- those from the largest national and international organizations to those from much smaller local and community movements – benefitted from the array of cultural displays, networking events, trainings, seminars, papers and speeches aimed at enabling cities to serve as engines of growth and development. The diversity of personalities, expertise combined with the high level presentations and engagements cutting across sectoral divides doubly reaffirmed the seriousness with which the United Nations Habitat (UN-HABITAT) and partners are working to enrich advocacy and policy work on sustainable urbanization through an open dialogue.



Prince S.A. Aiyeyemi (arrow down) recounts the Maroko struggle for justice at a networking event.

At most of the WUF V networking events, housing rights advocates and key players in the urban discourse teamed up to brainstorm and distill diverse best practices examples of dealing with problems associated with rural-urban migration, slum proliferation and climate change while proffering proven and tested recommendations to world governments regarding inclusive urban governance and civic participation of which decentralization and the empowerment of local communities are essential elements.

Going by the discussions, it was clear that urban stakeholders shared one troubling concern: the widespread penchant among city planners to exclude slum dwellers from participating in urban policy and program decisions that affect them. The compelling stories and experiences shared by the favela dwellers of Rio underscored the inability of the urban poor to influence local decision-making and exploit opportunities that cities have to offer. Stakeholders agreed that this trend could be reversed by strengthening the capacities of the poor to participate meaningfully in development, and on the responsiveness of urban planning and policy-making processes to the needs of the poor. To actualize this, developing the necessary framework for the creation of partnerships with communities, local governments, civil society actors and the private sector is imperative.



SERAC's delegates at WUF V.

Exploring innovative and sustainable approaches to the way we plan for disaster and offset climate change was the focus of a side meeting specifically organized to support rebuilding efforts in Haiti. In January, the country's capital Port au Prince was hit by a 7.3 scale earthquake, leaving thousands dead and wounded, and even more countless

persons, homeless. With a spotlight on Haiti, the meeting tabled the magnitude of the impact natural disasters would have on



“Right to the city is a human right” says SERAC’s Eyong Sunday during the panel on inclusive participation.

cities when not adequately planned for.

To match theory with and practice, SERAC’s Mr. Eyong and Ms. Nwanye, together with the community representatives took time out to tour the Favela Rocinha. Aside from being the biggest slum in Brazil, the slum paints a gloomy picture of the dynamics of global urban expansion. At the same time, it is comparable to a live broadcast of a final warning to cities in developing countries to pay more attention to urban planning in order to effectively plan for rapid urban growth. Touring these slums also enabled SERAC’s community representatives to gain a practical understanding of the similarity of the struggles and deprivations facing slum dwellers across the world.

The Forum ended on a very promising note. One remarkable outcome is the popular consensus among stakeholders that citizen participation in urban governance had become a primary developmental goal and a pre-requisite for sustainable development. In addition, officials and representatives of national governments expressed their verbal and written commitments to incorporating newer and more flexible approaches to urban planning, of course, with greater emphasis on “inclusive participation of stakeholders”. As Eyong Sunday aptly put it, “the right to the city is a human right that can be realized through equal access to shelter and other basic needs; participation and inclusion are key to the realization of that right!

Taking Collective Action More Seriously

On March 30-31, 2010, the Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC), in collaboration with the African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHR), with support from the Ford Foundation organized a sub-regional conference, “Pulling Together for Human Rights: Roles, Resources, Responsibilities” in Lagos. The conference is a component of the three-pronged activities of the Human Rights Spaces West Africa project.

The conference objectives were twofold: (a) to present the findings of a West Africa region-wide survey which sought to identify the challenges, opportunities, resources, strategies and support available to human rights actors and defenders in West Africa for improving the general human rights practice in places where they operate; (b) to bring human rights actors in West Africa together to brainstorm, share experiences and collaboratively explore strategies for improving the outcomes of their advocacy interventions in and around the sub-region. SERAC and the ACDHR conducted the survey between May 2009 and January 2010.



A cross section of participants at the conference.

The two day conference attracted 47 participants from diverse professional backgrounds and expertise from Congo DRC, Cameroun, Republic of Congo, Senegal, Gambia and Nigeria. The conference had four sessions in all, and between these sessions, all participants came together to hear presentations from a range of speakers. Professional translation services ran concurrently in English and French all through the meeting.



SERAC’s ED, Felix Morka welcoming participants to the conference. With him seated, is Amadou Ceesay of ACDHR.

their constituencies, and then use the insights gained from their interactions to learn about, and act together on the content, motivations and issues that attract interest, and or concern in West Africa.

Afterwards, Victoria Ohaeri, SERAC’s program coordinator and Ms. Musukuta Badjie of the Child Protection Alliance of The Gambia presented the findings of the West Africa survey conducted in Nigeria and Banjul respectively. Electronic and print versions of the Nigeria/West Africa reports had been included in the conference packages to ease participants’ following and identification with the issues in focus.



Victoria Ohaeri, SERAC and Ms. Musukuta Badjie of the Child Protection Alliance, Gambia presented the findings of the West Africa survey conducted in Nigeria and Banjul respectively.

The survey revealed that organizations working in the West African sub-region continue to endure an array of common (external and internal) institutional challenges, ranging from inadequate funding, staff capacity deficit, religious beliefs, distance to target groups and inadequacy of internal governance processes among others. On both days of the conference, the conference presentations and stimulating resource speakers proceeded to explore the general survey findings and other related issues in greater depth.

Lack of collaboration among NGOs was identified as one of the dangerous trends threatening human rights work in the sub-



Joseph Gitari, Ford Foundation during the plenary discussions on the second day of the conference.

region. The energy human rights groups dissipate in solo programming can be deployed to learning from each other's limitations, and recognizing areas of complementarities. In the words of Wahab Oyedokun of the National Human Rights Commission, 'we must create common spaces where voices connect, and establish a code of ethics for communicating with ourselves and potential audiences'.

If participants were asked to point to one significant result of the conference, it would probably be the strengthening of their collective optimistic conviction regarding the future of human rights protection and accountability in Africa. Individually, these professionals have long known that human rights and social justice work offers enormous potentials to turn the frustrations, mistrust and suspicion of government officials and institutions into sheer determination to engage and hold the

government accountable for its failure to uphold their human rights. In no small measure, the conference provided an auspicious opportunity for human rights advocates in West Africa to come together to plan towards unleashing the power of collective action.



The conference provided networking opportunities for advocates: Mr. Amadou Ceesay, Gambia, and Remi Akinmade, Lagos exchange addresses at the close of the meeting.

"Dreams come true" as Maroko Youths Complete Skill Acquisition Program

For the youth of Maroko community, Thursday, April 15, 2010 marked a turning point in their lives. On that day, seventy Maroko youth successfully completed the housing and construction skills training program conducted by the Yaba College of Technology, Lagos. Friends and families of the graduating trainees, Maroko leaders, media representatives, executive members of the Lagos Marginalized Communities Forum (LAMCOFOR), top officials of private construction companies, Yaba College of Technology (YABATECH) officials, including the Dean, Head of Departments and Lecturers of School of Environmental studies, staff members of Urban Spaces Innovation and Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC) attended the valedictory service held to commemorate the conclusion of the four-month long training course.



L-R: Japie Viljoen, Mrs. Ukabam (Dean School of Environmental Studies, YABATECH), Dr. Olatunde Walter, Project Director, Deux Project Limited, Mr. Adebakin, Director YABATECH Consult, Prince S.A. Aiyeyemi, Maroko Evictees Leader, Dr. Felix Morka, Executive Director, USI and other dignitaries during the opening ceremony.

The training on housing and construction is one of the strategic components of the Nigeria Social Housing Initiative (NSHI). The Nigeria Social Housing Initiative is a comprehensive social housing, community development program that uses integrated, innovative strategies to improve both basic housing conditions, as well as the social, economic and environmental health of slum communities in Lagos. With Maroko community as the target beneficiary in the project's pilot phase, SERAC and the Urban Spaces Innovation (USI) put together the construction skills training program to effectively utilize Maroko youth in the construction process and in order to expand their skills base as well as boost their economic and entrepreneurial capacity.



Graduants and guests at the valedictory program.

Indeed, the valedictory service was a joyous occasion for both the trainees, parents, sponsors and organizers of the program. All the seventy Maroko youth were trained in various housing construction skills ranging from carpentry to bricklaying, electrical wiring, plumbing and welding. A gleeful Mr. Christopher Udoh, YABATECH's Coordinator of the skill acquisition program informed that the trainees received rigorous practical and theoretical instructions from November 2009 to March 2010 in an effort to build their human and technical capacities in chosen fields. Recalling that the trained



Graduants of the Welding Department pose with SERAC's logo during the ceremony.

Maroko youth were affected by the infamous July 1990 Maroko forced evictions that rendered over 300,000 persons homeless, he urged them to take advantage of the knowledge and skill gained from the program to better their social and economic conditions.

Urban Spaces Innovation's (USI's) executive director, Dr. Felix Morka was also thrilled. In his opening remarks, he mused over the events leading up to the unlawful demolition of Maroko in 1990, and SERAC's decade-long efforts to overturn the injustices and untold suffering inflicted on the evictees by the Lagos State government. The NSHI project forms parts of such efforts to secure housing justice: adequate and affordable shelter for the evictees. He also recalled that most of the trainees were infants and children at the time of the demolition, and had their education truncated as a result of that inglorious invasion of their community. "Despite all the odds stacked against these Maroko youth, the former child-victims are

now proud graduates and holders of certificates of the prestigious Yaba College of Technology", says Morka.

While commending the trainees for their dedication to their studies, Dr. Morka reiterated that the skill acquisition training was integral to the success of the NSHI project. He was particularly optimistic that the youths will bring their experience to bear on the project's housing construction phase towards the actualization of the proposed 550 houses for Maroko evictees. On a final note, he expressed profound gratitude to the Catholic Organization for Relief and International Development (Cordaid) and the Ford Foundation for generously supporting the NSHI, and for making the dreams of Maroko youth come true.

In the same vein, Comrade M.O Lawal, the president of Maroko youth group, *Maroko Heirs* thanked SERAC and USI for giving them a second chance at education and empowerment. Speaking on behalf of the graduating trainees, he acknowledged that the training they received will go a long way in transforming their lives and that of their families. The Director of the Yaba Tech Consult, Mr. M.O. Adebakin, agreed no less with Comrade Lawal when he shared some useful examples and lessons coming out of the institution's artisan training programs. "If restive youths in the country are given the necessary support to acquire knowledge and be trained just as the Maroko youths, Nigeria would certainly, be a better place", an elated Mr. Adebakin concluded.

As the trainees prepare to face the challenges of Nigeria's labour market, wise counsel came from the officials of leading private construction companies. Dr. Olatunde Walter, Project Director, Deux Project Limited, admonished the trainees to conduct their actions through the four guiding principles of life, which are hardwork, discipline, humility and patience. Likewise, the Personnel Manager of the ITB Construction Company, Mr. Idongesit Inyang stressed the company's commitment to partner with USI to promote the social housing project, and particularly support the trainees in finding employment opportunities. He also unveiled ITB's plan to recruit or absorb some of the trainees with demonstrable high levels of competence. Under the partnership arrangement with USI, the ITB Company also plans to award sub-contracts to skilled trainees who show strong enterprise and industry.

At the close of the event, the graduating trainees were presented with certificates which bore the Yaba College of Technology and USI's logos respectively. What is more, their successful outing signifies a tremendous step forward in the realization of housing justice at last for the Maroko families, while also creating a replicable model with the potential to mitigate the low-income housing shortage and bring social, environmental, economic, and public health benefits to slum communities throughout Lagos.



Elated Andrew Oretan receives his certificate from Prince S.A. Aiyeyemi during presentation of certificates to the graduants.

Taking NGO Accountability and Responsibility A Step Higher

For an unprecedented three days, fifty activists, leaders and representatives of human rights groups, global institutions and community organizations from different parts of Africa gathered at the Walnut Room of Panari Hotel, Nairobi, Kenya to explore collaborative solutions to the shared human rights and institutional challenges facing human rights and

civil society groups working in Africa. The occasion was the 2nd All Africa Conference (AAC), "Human Rights Actors: Accountability and Responsibility in Africa" convened under the auspices of the African Human Rights Spaces (AHRS) project on April 15 – 17, 2010. The Social and Economic Rights Action Center's (SERAC's) Ms. Toyin Gbadegesin, and Chief Benson Oketola, a representative of its partner community, Maroko participated in the conference.

Building on the outcomes of the 1st AAC held in Cairo between December 16 – 18, 2007, the human rights stakeholders came from Gambia, Egypt, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Mozambique, Morocco, Swaziland and South Africa to review the progress of the various activities implemented under the AHRS project across the five African regions; and to explore ways human rights defenders can deepen skills transfer, exchange of ideas and information and sharing of experiences on initiatives that will further strengthen



Some participants at the conference.

human rights protection and promotion in Africa. At the opening ceremony, Ms. Salwa El Gantri, the AHRS Program Coordinator reiterated that the conference will provide an opportunity for human rights experts and decision makers to discuss and deliberate on how best to consolidate and promote the AHRS as a continental platform for solidarity action. The outcomes of the conference deliberations will inform the recommendations that will be presented at the end of the AHRS project.

Setting the Human Rights Spaces project on a solid ground of practice requires

innovative civil society action at various levels and the strengthening of NGO watchdog obligations. "NGOs play a crucial role in demanding and holding their respective governments accountable for their official actions that undermine the rule of law" says Commissioner Pansy Tlakula, Special Rapporteur on Freedom and Expression in Africa, during the morning session discussing "African NGOs Accountability and Responsibility: the Role of Human Rights Defenders". She noted that one way NGOs can accomplish this objective is by increasing their utilization of the reporting and adjudicating procedures created under the various treaty monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Other effective strategies include litigation; rapid response to threats or actual human rights violations; setting up blogs for advocacy purposes; drafting and presenting joint statements to attract the attention of the international community as well as conducting fact-finding research and missions across the continent to obtain accurate and reliable information.

The second day of the conference was devoted to reviewing the progress of the various activities implemented under the AHRS project across the five African regions. At a session chaired by Joseph Gitari, Program Officer, Ford Foundation – Nigeria, and empanelled by Amadou Cessay of the African Centre for Democracy & Human Rights Studies, The Gambia), Mr. Joseph Schecla of Habitat International Coalition – Housing & Land Rights Network (Egypt), Blessing Gorejena-Chinawa of Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (Zimbabwe) and Ms. Emma Bowa of Urgent Action Fund – Africa (Kenya), SERAC's Ms. Toyin Gbadegesin shared the reports of the various activities conducted under the *AHR Spaces West Africa* project in the Nigeria/West African region. Under the project, SERAC conducted a sub-regional survey, implemented a range of multi-sectoral advocacy initiatives and convened a sub-regional conference as part of a broader regional effort to stimulate solidarity, collaboration, and intra-organizational learning.



"SERAC conducted a sub-regional survey, implemented a range of multi-sectoral advocacy initiatives and convened a sub-regional conference..." says Ms. Gbadegesin.

In the following sessions, participants mutually identified the constraints that impede the progress of human rights work within the continent, and consequently, repress the roles civil societies play in the promotion and protection of human rights in Africa. Noting that human rights defenders in North, South, West Africa and East-Africa were encountering similar challenges in the pursuit of human rights ideals in Africa, the following were identified as major constraints: lack of collaborative culture among non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society groups; competitions for funds and inadequate staff capacity to implement human rights initiatives, the ineffectiveness of regional accountability mechanisms.

Ms. Gbadegesin also served as the Rapporteur in the 4th working group that brainstormed and provided recommendations on ways of realizing indigenous peoples and land/housing rights. Members of the working group from Nigeria, Egypt, Angola and Burundi recognized that forced evictions, demolitions, urbanization and dispossession of indigenous lands under the guise of development were major problems affecting the continent. They however recommended that the right to adequate housing is more likely to be realizable, holistic and sustainable when the national, regional and international community and governments takes concrete measures to develop national shelter strategies and settlement improvement programmes.

Maroko leader, Chief Benson Oketola



L-R: Mbuta Pascoal, Joseph Schehla, Chief Benson Oketola (Representative of Maroko community), SERAC's 'Toyin Gbadegesin, Paulinus Okoro and Davinder Lamba during an interactive session of the working group on indigenous peoples and land/housing rights .

facilitated a plenary session on the last day of the conference wherein working groups made presentations regarding the outcomes of their various working group deliberations. The potpourri of resolutions from the various groups harped on the need for the AHRs project to scale up its interventions as would allow for its transformation into a leading human rights movement in Africa.

Ford Foundation's Ms. Nikky Naylor's closing speech reechoed the importance of having a framework for discussion, a forum for articulating grievances and a platform for working together to overcome the common challenges that slow down the effectiveness of civil society interventions. The Human Rights Spaces project holds that potential and beckons on human rights defenders across the length and breadth of Africa to match their enthusiasm, skills and expertise with the *Spaces* visions to make that platform succeed.

ABOUT SERAC

Established in May 1995, the Social and Economic Rights Action Center (SERAC) is a Lagos-based non-governmental, non-partisan and non-profit organization concerned with promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights (ESC rights) in Nigeria. Through its four highly-intergrated models -- the Monitoring and Advocacy Program (MAP), the Community Action Program (CAP), the Legal Action Program (LAP) and the recently introduced Policy Advocacy Program (PAP) -- SERAC seeks to create awareness about specific rights and integrated economic, social and cultural rights issues. Through research, education, advocacy and community mobilization, SERAC's projects explore strategies for broadening individuals' and communities' participation in the design and implementation of policies and programs that affect them. SERAC's work is predicated on the standards contained in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) that was ratified by Nigeria in 1993, other human rights instruments, and local legislation.

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