

## Press Release: **WATCH!** Project Launch



## Giving Faces and Voices to the Urban Poor

**WATCH!** is a multi media project to strengthen the voices of the urban poor in Nigeria's capital city Abuja. It especially seeks to share the stories of women and girls, who tend to be hit hardest by the negative outgrowths of urbanisation.

### Urbanisation

Just like many countries across the world, Nigeria is rapidly urbanising. About half of the country's overall population is estimated to live in urban areas today.<sup>1</sup> Abuja and its rapidly growing satellite towns are spearheading the country's urbanisation rates: the capital city is estimated to be one of the fastest growing cities across the world.<sup>2</sup> According to the FCT Minister, Senator Bala Muhammed, the population of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) is expected to rise from five million in 2013 to 10 million in 2018.<sup>3</sup>

### Internally Displaced People

The influx of people in the FCT is accelerated by streams of internally displaced people running away from the continued severe violence in various parts of the

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<sup>1</sup> Urban population: 49.6% of total population (2011). Source: Nigeria Demographics Profile 2014 ([http://www.indexmundi.com/nigeria/demographics\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/nigeria/demographics_profile.html))

<sup>2</sup> See for instance: <http://www.wordsearch.co.uk/the-fastest-growing-cities-in-the-world-quanzhou-to-abuja/>

<sup>3</sup> Figures disclosed by the FCT Minister while addressing the National Working Committee (NWC) of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) at the Wadata House in Abuja in May 2013.

country – including Boko Haram-inflicted violence in Nigeria’s northern states and ethnic conflicts and tensions between agriculturalists and pastoralists in the east/middle belts of the country. The rapid growth of squatter settlements in and around the city is putting excessive pressure on public facilities across the FCT.

### **Infrastructure and Public Facilities**

Housing, water supply, and transport infrastructures are grossly inadequate to accommodate the excessive population growth in Abuja’s satellite towns. According to the Director of the FCT water board, the unexpected population growth has overwhelmed existing water infrastructure and ruined the careful plans for water service delivery in the territory.<sup>4</sup>

### **Social Tensions**

The WATCH project aims to flag up the urgent need to allocate adequate resources to improve the standards of living in low-income settlements across the FCT. Unless people’s basic needs are being met – including their basic rights to water, food, secure housing, health care, and education – social tensions soon may accelerate up in an around Nigeria’s capital city Abuja.

### **Economic Devaluation**

Current trends like the reducing oil prices and the devaluation of the naira are likely to severely hit Nigeria’s urban poor. While rural residents have access to commodities like farmland or can go fishing or hunting, urban residents merely rely on cash to meet their basic needs. The relative social calmness in the FCT may soon be history unless serious work is made of improving standards of living in Abuja’s exploding satellite towns.



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<sup>4</sup> Ameto Akpe, Abuja, for the Pulitzer Center, Published June 13, 2012: <http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/nigeria-abuja-urban-migration-population-boom-water-sanitation-infrastructure>

## Bottom-Up Media Stories

The **WATCH!** Project will hold Nigeria's soon-to-be-elected new government accountable for meeting the basic needs of the urban poor. It will do so through the production of bottom-up media stories. The project will enable residents of low-income settlements to share their stories and challenges with the world through radio, film, press, and social media. **WATCH!** will particularly highlight the stories and human right challenges of women and girls.

## Gender and Women's Rights

Global studies suggest that women almost invariably are amongst the poorest of the urban poor.<sup>5</sup> They tend to occupy the lowest-paid, least-secure jobs (e.g. petty traders, street cleaners, house maids, or messengers), and already have less time available to generate income as they typically are the ones in charge of unpaid childcare and domestic tasks. Inadequate public facilities accelerate this burden. Many women have to queue or track long distances to fetch water – which often needs to be bought at private boreholes or fetched from rivers and streams.<sup>6</sup>

## Gender Based Violence

Women's limited access to income - in urban economies that rely on cash - makes them vulnerable to sexual/ physical exploitation. Economically deprived women often are lured into sex work, or sexually harassed by superiors who can easily abuse their dependency. MIND's previous studies in the Niger Delta showed that sexual harassment in economically deprived urban areas is so rampant that it tends to be seen as a 'fact of life' that women simply have to cope with.

## Security Concerns

The daily commute for work from satellite towns to the city centre enhances women's exposure to gender based violence, especially if women have to cross neighbourhoods marred by poor lighting, infrastructure, or social cohesion. This risk is further aggravated by the inadequate public service provision in low-income settlements: the forced track to the nearest water supply/ sanitation facilities exposes women daily to unnecessary risks. Women's exposure to gender based violence accelerates if they cannot afford securely built accommodation or if their houses are demolished.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>5</sup> See for instance: IIED, 2012, "Urbanization, gender and urban poverty: paid work and unpaid care work in the city".

<sup>6</sup> Ditto.

<sup>7</sup> Muoghalu & Abrifor (2012), and: IIED, 2012 (see above), and: MIND (2011), FEMSCRIPT Research Report.

## Catalysts for Development

Women are not just victims, but also can be important catalysts for change. Evidence worldwide shows that investing in women's economic empowerment yields a "double dividend": it elevates not just women, but also their children and wider communities<sup>8</sup>. Women more so than men, tend to spend their earnings on their children's wellbeing and education, and on amenities that elevate the standard of living across communities like water supply, health care, and economic development.<sup>9</sup> That's why **WATCH!** especially seeks to strengthen women's public voices.

## Future Generations

**WATCH!** will urge Nigeria's elected officials to meet the basic needs of the urban poor, to prevent new generations of restless youth to grow up in Nigeria's capital city and beyond. Social tensions are likely to reduce if Nigeria's disillusioned urban youth – which tend to be shamelessly manipulated by politicians in their fight for votes and territory – would be educated and see their families being treated more fairly.



**The *WATCH!* Project is funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Nigeria and implemented by *MIND* (Media, Information & Narrative Development). The Project Team seeks to partner with media and civil society organisations across the FCT who want to join hands to combat urban poverty. Interested organisations can download a Partnership Form from *MIND*'s website: <http://www.mindng.org/projects/watch>**

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<sup>8</sup> UNICEF. "The State of the World's Children". 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Annual Report of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), 2007.