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Angola Bulldozers Give Slum Dwellers New Life Amid Oil Boom

By Colin McClelland & Manuel Soque - Oct 9, 2013 2:15 PM GMT+0100

Francisco Antonio, a 55-year-old bricklayer, smiled while his children removed furniture ahead of government bulldozers preparing to smash his concrete house. Then four youths mugged a reporter standing beside him. Antonio was being moved out of one of [Angola](#)'s most dangerous slums.



Office space in central Luanda is selling at about \$1,000 per square meter even after an eight-year construction boom and the global economic slowdown, according to Daniel Esteves, a real estate agent at Empreendimentos e Mediavso Imobilisria Lda.

Photographer: Stephane de Sakutin/AFP via Getty Images



More than two-thirds of residents in Luanda live in shanty-towns called musseques, according to Development Workshop, an aid group formed in 1981. Photographer: Stephane de Sakutin/AFP via Getty Images

“Crime is a big issue here,” said Antonio, a self-employed father of six who’s lived for 25 years in Sambizanga, a hillside settlement near the port that’s one of the poorest parts of Luanda, the capital. “Some people may not agree, but what the government is doing is good.”

The Angolan government has accelerated the razing of slums since the removals began in 2001, after rural people sought refuge during a 27-year civil war. It’s moving residents to the Zango development zone, constructed by [Brazil](#)’s Odebrecht SA about 40 kilometers (25 miles) inland. By doing so it’s also helping meet demand for prime real estate as the middle class in [Africa](#)’s second-largest crude oil producer expands. Mercer ranks the city as the world’s most expensive for expatriates.

Luanda, which had a population of 500,000 before Angola’s independence from [Portugal](#) in 1975, is jammed with more than 6 million residents. It’s Africa’s fifth-largest city after Cairo, Lagos, Kinshasa and Johannesburg; more than two-thirds of residents live in shantytowns known as musseques, according to Luanda-based Development Workshop, an aid group formed in 1981.

Office Space

The several thousand people living in Zango take a train or mini-bus taxis to work in Luanda if they work. The country’s jobless rate is estimated at more than 20 percent by the [Economy Ministry](#).

Office space in central Luanda is selling at about \$1,000 per square meter (10.76 square feet) for undeveloped land and between \$7,500 and \$10,000 for space in buildings even after an eight-year construction boom and the global economic slowdown, according to Daniel Esteves, a real estate agent at Luanda-based Empreendimentos e Mediavso Imobilisria Lda. Banks including Standard Bank Group Ltd. have established offices in the city.

The government is giving the slum residents the choice of a house elsewhere or cash, the equivalent of \$150 per square meter of their current accommodation, according to residents including Anitemia Fernandes, an unemployed 24-year-old who moved to a two-bedroom house in Zango from one half the size in Sambizanga. Her new one-story concrete home, which is painted purple, has indoor plumbing and a small yard. Each block has its own color.

Forced Evictions

The government shipped belongings and bussed in residents in a “process handled very well,” unlike the past when people were treated like “cattle in trucks,” Fernandes said.

Infrastructure to house more than 2 million people is under construction in a 54-square-kilometer (21-square-mile) area of the city including the neighborhoods of Cazenga, Rangel and Sambizanga, Bento Soito, director of the government’s Technical Office for Urban

Redevelopment, said in a May 23 interview with state news agency Angop. The process could take 15 to 20 years, he said. Soito declined to comment when called by Bloomberg.

The state has yet to fully meet a 2008 promise to build one million houses by 2012 because of slow implementation and the world economic downturn, Allan Cain, executive director of Development Workshop, said. Despite government pressure, banks are reluctant to provide mortgages because the poor lack land titles and collateral, he said.

‘Remain Here’

Slum clearances began in Boa Vista, after rainy season landslides killed residents. A road is only now being built in the empty space. Advocacy groups, such as New York-based [Human Rights Watch](#), criticized removals, saying they were forced evictions without warning or adequate compensation. Residents ended up in tents at Zango before houses were built.

“If I had a choice I would rather remain here than go somewhere else,” said Joao Carlos, 45, [a taxi driver](#) who’s lived in Sambizanga since birth. “Sambizanga is close to the city, it’s close to everything. I can’t believe I’m leaving.”

The government also leveled the slums of Dimuca and Campismo to expand a railway yard and a brewery drainage system.

Angola’s \$114 billion economy will probably expand 6.5 percent this year, according to the central bank, as companies such as [Total SA \(FP\)](#), [Chevron Corp. \(CVX\)](#) and [BP Plc \(BP\)](#) pump about 1.8 million barrels a day of crude from offshore fields.

The government is attempting to diversify away from oil, which makes up 97 percent of exports and 80 percent of [tax revenue](#). A dependence on oil worker expatriates contributes to prices such as the \$6,500 a month to rent a two-bedroom apartment in Luanda, according to Mercer.

School Classes

There’s been no census since 1970 and the [World Bank](#) estimates the population at 21 million. The elite steer Porsches and Range Rovers past slums like Sambizanga, which hold much of the 54 percent of the national population that the United Nations estimates live on less than \$1.25 a day.

Residents were given no choice about the timing of their moves. Their chief concern on reaching Zango were children missing classes and consistent electricity.

“The government should have waited for the school year to end in November,” Nini Tavares, an unemployed 30-year-old, said in an interview at her new two-bedroom house. “My 6-year-old daughter can’t go to school,” she said.

Property Deeds

Mara Baptista, Sambizanga district administrator, and Agostinho Silva, vice president of the Luanda administrative commission, were unavailable to comment after repeated visits to their offices and telephone calls over the past month.

Compensating slum residents with new accommodation is complicated because only 7 percent have formal property deeds and even the wealthy lack them after the war's turmoil, according to Cain. Titles are granted by provinces, a long, expensive process only available in the few areas with approved plans, Cain said in an e-mailed response to questions.

"Most urban residents with weak or non-existent tenure rights benefit little from increasing land values," Cain said. "They're susceptible to being forcibly removed." Authorities should consider informal occupation documents granted by local chiefs, known as sobas, to ease the process, while removals are less painful than they used to be, he said.

Back in Sambizanga, a reporter plucked his BlackBerry from the dust after thieves tossed it away as they tried, unsuccessfully, to escape police near Antonio's house overlooking dozens of ships and stacks of red, green and blue freight containers. Antonio said he's keen to move to a safer place with more space, plumbing and better sanitation. He said he expects to receive two small houses in Zango, just like his nephew got. "The cleaning-up process is going smoothly," he said. "I haven't seen any discontent or demonstrations so far."

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