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Committee on Financial Services  
Subcommittee on Monetary Policy and Trade

Examining Results and Accountability at the World Bank  
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Written Testimony of Sasha Chavkin  
Reporter, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ)

Chairman Barr, ranking member Moore, and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify about the World Bank.

I am a reporter for the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, or ICIJ, a nonprofit news organization that conducts investigative reporting on global issues of public interest. We work through large collaborations with media outlets around the world, such as our project last year The Panama Papers.

I was the lead reporter in a global ICIJ investigation entitled Evicted and Abandoned, published in April 2015, which examined forced displacement caused by projects financed by the World Bank. I began researching this subject when I noticed a series of complaints by communities around the world, recorded in NGO, media and World Bank ombudsman reports, saying that they had been forcibly and sometimes violently evicted, or lost their lands and livelihoods, because of projects funded by the bank.

ICIJ launched an investigation to identify the scale of this problem and the systemic reasons that the same kinds of stories were emerging over and over. Ultimately, we built a team of more than 50 reporters from outlets in 21 countries, we reported on the ground in affected communities in 14 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe, and we analyzed more than 6600 World Bank documents that tracked what the bank calls “involuntary resettlement” associated with projects.

We found that over a decade spanning from 2004 to 2013, projects financed by the World Bank physically or economically displaced an estimated 3.4 million people around the world. This means that these people either lost their homes, their livelihoods were damaged, or they lost some or all of their land. This figure was drawn from the bank’s own documents tracking resettlement, and includes projects funded by the IDA and IBRD but not the bank’s business-lending arm, the IFC.

We also found that the bank regularly failed to follow its own safeguards for protecting displaced communities. These commitments include resettling communities in equal or better conditions than they lived in before, restoring lost livelihoods and avoiding violent evictions. They are broadly summarized by the

principle of “do no harm” toward poor communities living in the path of bank projects.

We found instead that the bank repeatedly funded governments that not only failed to adequately resettle communities, but in some cases were accused of human rights abuses such as rape, murder and violent evictions associated with bank projects. We found in several cases that the World Bank continued to bankroll these borrowers even after evidence of these abuses came to light.

One of the most significant cases we examined was the bank’s support for the Protection of Basic Services program in Ethiopia, an initiative known as PBS that supported the provision of education and healthcare across Ethiopia. We investigated allegations that some of this money was diverted to an Ethiopian government program called villagization that violently evicted a minority tribe called the Anuak from their traditional farmlands, which were then turned over to investors.

I met with Anuak refugees from Ethiopia in a camp in South Sudan, where they had fled despite the ongoing civil conflict because it was safer for them there than remaining in their traditional homeland in Gambella State in Ethiopia. I encountered a devoutly Christian community whose members described being beaten, raped and seeing family members killed by Ethiopian soldiers who were driving them from their lands. I also spoke to the former Governor of Gambella who was in charge at the time of the evictions, now living in exile in the Philippines, who described to me how he personally diverted \$10 million in World Bank funds to the villagization program.

Despite the evidence presented by refugees, human rights groups and others, the World Bank refused to acknowledge that its funding had supported these evictions. I spoke to the Ethiopia program director at the bank who had met with Anuak refugees face to face, but because their stories did not match the bank’s internal assessments, said he had to “agree to disagree” with the refugees’ accounts of the abuses they had suffered. The World Bank not only continued to fund the Ethiopian government, but last year announced an extension of a similar initiative under a different lending mechanism that will now make it impossible for communities to file complaints to the World Bank ombudsman.

The Ethiopia case was one of a number of IDA projects that our team investigated – which included the stories of indigenous people in the forests of Kenya whose homes in were burned in a bank-funded conservation project, and slum dwellers in a World Bank redevelopment zone in Lagos, Nigeria who awoke one morning to find bulldozers bearing down on their homes.

There are three findings from our reporting that seem most relevant to the work of the committee today.

One is that the World Bank has serious problems with enforcing its safeguards and holding its borrowers accountable for following its rules. The bank has repeatedly been unwilling to admit errors, responded to negative consequences of its projects with public relations and spin rather than taking responsibility for them, and failed to listen seriously to the voices of the poorest people in the world, whose wellbeing is at the heart of its mission. These shortcomings have real consequences, as large sums of aid flow to regimes and to projects that violate the bank's rules and principles.

I would like to clarify, however, that these failures of safeguard enforcement do not negate the fact that the same projects may also contribute positively to development. For example, in the case of the PBS program in Ethiopia, the bank said its investments had helped slash child mortality in half and increase primary school enrollment by 13 percent in less than a decade.

The second point is that the bank can be responsive to pressure, in the form of negative publicity and the influence of donor countries, particularly the United States. Shortly after ICIJ shared its findings with the bank, the bank announced a resettlement action plan that boosted funding for safeguards enforcement by 15 percent, hired 11 new safeguard specialists and created new oversight procedures for resettlement. The resettlement documents and ombudsman reports that allowed ICIJ to conduct our investigation existed because the bank had previously created an ombudsman called the Inspection Panel and adopted an open records policy at the insistence of the United States.

Finally, despite its shortcomings, the World Bank still has the highest standard of accountability among multinational development banks. It offers greater transparency and oversight than regional development banks in Latin America, Africa and Asia and the new China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which do not keep sufficient records to allow similar investigations of displacement. Similarly, for all of the bank's problems with their enforcement, the World Bank's safeguards remain a benchmark for development banks around the world and the governments and the companies that they finance to do the hard work of development in impoverished countries.

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P O S T

W O R L D

Evicted & Abandoned

H U V F F

P O S T

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## How The World Bank Broke Its Promise To Protect The Poor

By Sasha Chavkin, Ben Hallman, Michael Hudson, Cécile Schilis-Gallego and Shane Shifflett

With reporting from Musikilu Mojeed, Besar Likmeta, Ciro Barros, Giulia Afiune, Mar Cabra, Anthony Langat, Jacob Kushner, Jeanne Baron, Barry Yeoman, Blaž Zgaga and Friedrich Lindenberg.

Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 8:01 pm EDT

Beneath a gloomy white sky, more than 100 armed police poured into the slum of Badia East in the teeming megacity of Lagos, Nigeria.

As they advanced, they cracked their batons on the unpaved streets and against the ramshackle walls of the shanties.

“If you love your life, move out!” the officers shouted.

Thousands of people grabbed what belongings they could carry and fled.

Then a line of hulking excavators moved in, using their hydraulic claws to smash homes into pieces. Within hours, the neighborhood was a ruin.

Bimbo Omowole Osobe, a former resident of the Badia East slum who was evicted in 2013 when her neighborhood was demolished, sits in the clinic where she now sleeps at night in the reception area. Osobe joined with volunteers from Justice and Empowerment Initiatives, an NGO where she works with other slum dwellers to fight demolitions. A child in the slums of Orisunbare Ijora Badia in Lagos, Nigeria. George Osodi / International Consortium of Investigative Journalists

Bimbo Omowole Osobe briefly lost track of her children in the chaos. When she returned to the community hours later, her concrete-block home and two small shops were gone.

“It’s like when a woman goes in for labor, and the baby comes out dead,” she said. “That’s how it felt to me.”

The Lagos state government flattened Badia East in February 2013 to clear land in an urban renewal zone financed by the World Bank, the global lender committed to fighting poverty. The neighborhood’s poor residents were cast out without warning or compensation and left to fend for themselves in a crowded, dangerous city.

Evictions like the one in Badia East aren’t supposed to happen in the middle of projects backed by the World Bank.

For more than three decades, the lender has maintained a set of “safeguard” policies that it claims have brought about a more humane and democratic system of economic development. Governments that borrow money from the bank can’t force people from their homes without warning. Families evicted to make way for dams, power plants or other big projects must be resettled and their livelihoods restored.

### Key Findings

- Over the last decade, projects funded by the World Bank have physically or economically displaced an estimated 3.4 million people, forcing them from their homes, taking their land or damaging their livelihoods.
- The World Bank has regularly failed to live up to its own policies for protecting people harmed by projects it finances.

- The World Bank and its private-sector lending arm, the International Finance Corp., have financed governments and companies accused of human rights violations such as rape, murder and torture. In some cases the lenders have continued to bankroll these borrowers after evidence of abuses emerged.
- Ethiopian authorities diverted millions of dollars from a World Bank-supported project to fund a violent campaign of mass evictions, according to former officials who carried out the forced resettlement program.
- From 2009 to 2013, World Bank Group lenders pumped \$50 billion into projects graded the highest risk for “irreversible or unprecedented” social or environmental impacts — more than twice as much as the previous five-year span.

The bank’s commitment, it says, is to “do no harm” to people or the environment.

The World Bank has broken its promise.

Over the past decade, the bank has regularly failed to enforce its rules, with devastating consequences for some of the poorest and most vulnerable people on the planet, an investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, The Huffington Post and other media partners has found.

The World Bank often neglects to properly review projects ahead of time to make sure communities are protected, and frequently has no idea what happens to people after they are removed. In many cases, it has continued to do business with governments that have abused their citizens, sending a signal that borrowers have little to fear if they violate the bank’s rules, according to current and former bank employees.

“There was often no intent on the part of the governments to comply — and there was often no intent on the part of the bank’s management to enforce,” said Navin Rai, a former World Bank official who oversaw the bank’s protections for indigenous peoples from 2000 to 2012. “That was how the game was played.”

In March, after ICIJ and HuffPost informed World Bank officials that the news outlets had found “systemic gaps” in the institution’s protections for displaced families, the bank acknowledged that its oversight has been poor, and promised reforms.

“We took a hard look at ourselves on resettlement and what we found caused me deep concern,” Jim Yong Kim, the World Bank’s president, said in a statement.

The scope of “involuntary resettlement,” as the bank calls it, is vast. From 2004 to 2013, the bank’s projects physically or economically displaced an estimated 3.4 million people, forcing them from their homes, taking their land or damaging their livelihoods, ICIJ’s analysis of World Bank records reveals.

The true figure is likely higher, because the bank often fails to count or undercounts the number of people affected by its projects.

A team of more than 50 journalists from 21 countries spent nearly a year documenting the bank’s failure to protect people moved aside in the name of progress. The reporting partners analyzed thousands of World Bank records, interviewed hundreds of people and reported on the ground in Albania, Brazil, Ethiopia, Honduras, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Kenya, Kosovo, Nigeria, Peru, Serbia, South Sudan and Uganda.

In these countries and others, the investigation found, the bank’s lapses have hurt urban slum dwellers, hardscrabble farmers, impoverished fisherfolk, forest dwellers and indigenous groups — leaving them to fight for their homes, their land and their ways of life, sometimes in the face of intimidation and violence.

Between 2004 and 2013, the World Bank and its private-sector lending arm, the International Finance Corp., committed to lend \$455 billion to bankroll nearly 7,200 projects in developing countries.

Over the same span, people affected by World Bank and IFC investments lodged dozens of complaints with the lenders’ internal review panels, alleging the lenders and their borrowers failed to live up to World Bank and IFC

safeguard rules.

In Lagos, the World Bank's ombudsman, the Inspection Panel, said bank management "fell short of protecting the poor and vulnerable communities against forceful evictions." Bank officials should have paid better attention to what was going on in Badia East, the panel said, given Lagos authorities' long history of bulldozing slums and forcing people from their homes.

One year after the evictions, the bank loaned Lagos authorities \$200 million to support the state government's budget.

The World Bank said it was "not a party to the demolition" and that it advised the Lagos government to negotiate with displaced people, leading to compensation for most of those who said they'd been harmed.

Cases involving evictions have drawn the most attention, but the most common hardships suffered by people living in the path of World Bank projects involve lost or diminished income.



A fisherman near Mundra, India, prepares the net for an overnight fishing trip. Locals say a World Bank Group-backed project in the area has depleted fish stocks. Sami Siva / International Consortium of Investigative Journalists

On India's northwest coast, members of a historically oppressed Muslim community claim that heated water spewing from a coal-fueled power plant has depleted fish and lobster stocks in the once-fertile gulf where they make their living. The IFC loaned Tata Power, one of India's largest companies, \$450 million to help build the plant.

The U.S. and other global powers launched the World Bank at the end of World War II to promote development in countries torn by war and poverty. Member countries finance the bank and vote on whether to approve



roughly \$65 billion in annual loans, grants and other investments.

In 2014, the bank financed initiatives as varied as training for chicken farmers in Senegal and sewage system upgrades in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

World Bank President Kim said in March that the demand in struggling regions for infrastructure spending — to provide clean water, electricity, medical care and other vital needs — will mean the bank will finance an increasing number of big projects likely to remove people from their land or disrupt their livelihoods.

The World Bank also put out a 5½-page “action plan” that it said would improve its oversight of resettlement.

“We must and will do better,” said David Theis, a World Bank spokesman, in response to the reporting team’s questions.

Yet even as it promised reforms to its procedures, the bank has proposed sweeping changes to the policies that underlie them. The bank is now in the middle of a rewrite of its safeguards policy that will set its course for decades to come.

Some current and former World Bank officials warn that the proposed revisions will further undermine the bank’s commitment to protecting the people it was created to serve. The latest draft of the new policy, released in July 2014, would give governments more room to sidestep the bank’s standards and make decisions about whether local populations need protecting, they say.

“I am saddened to see now that pioneering policy achievements of the bank are being dismantled and downgraded,” said Michael Cernea, a former high-ranking bank official who oversaw the bank resettlement protections for nearly two decades. “The poorest and most powerless will pay the price.”

The bank says it has listened to the feedback and will release a revised draft with “the strongest, most state-of-the-art environmental and social safeguards.”

## **Unsettled History**

A man-made disaster in eastern Brazil in the late 1970s helped prompt the World Bank to adopt its first systematic protections for people living in the footprint of big projects.

Rising waters upstream from the Sobradinho Dam, built with World Bank financing, forced more than 60,000 people from their homes. Their relocation was poorly planned and chaotic. Some families fled their villages as water began pouring into their homes and fields, leaving behind herds of animals to drown.

The fiasco gave Cernea, the World Bank’s first in-house sociologist, leverage to convince the bank to approve its first comprehensive policy for protecting people whose lives are upended by the bank’s projects. Cernea based the new rules, approved by the bank in 1980, on a simple premise: People who lose their land, their homes or their jobs should get enough help to restore, or exceed, their old standard of living.

Under the World Bank’s rules, governments seeking money from the bank must put together detailed resettlement plans for people who are physically or economically displaced.

Current and former bank employees say the work of enforcing these standards has often been undercut by internal pressures to win approval for big, splashy projects. Many bank managers, insiders say, define success by the number of deals they fund. They often push back against requirements that add complications and costs.

Daniel Gross, an anthropologist who worked for the bank for two decades as a consultant and staff member, said in-house safeguards watchdogs have “a place at the table” in debates over how much the bank is required to do to protect people. But amid the push to get projects done, they’re frequently ignored and pressed to “play ball and get along,” he said.

In an internal survey conducted last year by bank auditors, 77 percent of employees responsible for enforcing the institution's safeguards said they think that management "does not value" their work. The bank released the survey in March, at the same time that it admitted to poor oversight of its resettlement policy.

"Safeguards are irrelevant for managers," said one staffer who was surveyed for the report.



Albanian authorities used a World Bank-backed project to clear the way for a planned seaside resort, partly or completely tearing down 15 homes in the impoverished village of Jale. Andon Koka's home was flattened, and half of his brother's home (in background) was demolished. Besar Likmeta / BalkanInsight.com

## No Consolation

In 2007, residents of Jale, a tiny Albanian beach hamlet on the Ionian Sea, found themselves in the path of a coastal cleanup effort backed by a \$17.5 million loan from the World Bank. More than a dozen poor families lived in Jale, many in homes with add-ons and extra floors they rented to vacationers.

Albanian authorities had other plans for the seaside.

They saw Jale as an ideal spot for a high-end resort to lure tourists to the country. They decided to use the coastal restoration project — which was managed by the son-in-law of Sali Berisha, Albania's prime minister at the time — as a vehicle for turning the plan into a reality.

Before dawn one April morning, dozens of police officers streamed into the beach community, heading for structures previously identified in photos taken during aerial surveys paid for by the World Bank. The police roused residents from their beds and forced them from their homes. Demolition crews leveled entire houses or tore down additions that the government said had been put up without proper permits.

Sanie Halilaj cried as work crews pulled down half of the house she had shared with her husband for more than half a century.

“When you lose a loved one, someone consoles you,” the 74-year-old said in a recent interview. “But when you lose your home, there is no consolation.”

Bank officials initially denied the evictions were connected to the bank-financed coastal initiative. But a year later, the bank’s Inspection Panel found “direct links” between the project and the demolitions. The panel slammed the bank for embarking on a “systematic effort” to obstruct its investigation, providing answers “at times in total conflict with factual information which had been long known to management.”

After the panel’s report was released in 2008, then-World Bank Group President Robert Zoellick called the bank’s actions “appalling.” Zoellick vowed that the institution would swiftly “strengthen oversight, improve procedures and help the families who had their buildings demolished.”

“The bank cannot let this happen again,” he said.

Seven years later, little has changed. In Jale, most residents still haven’t received payment from the government for what they lost, even though the World Bank has covered their legal costs. At the bank, oversight remains weak.

A 2014 internal World Bank review found that in 60 percent of sampled cases, bank staffers failed to document what happened to people after they were forced from their land or homes.

Seventy percent of the cases sampled in the 2014 report lacked required information about whether anyone had complained and whether complaints were resolved, indicating the bank’s mechanisms for dealing with grievances were “box-checking” exercises that “existed on paper but not in practice,” the in-house reviewers wrote.

These “sizeable gaps in information” indicate “significant potential failures in the bank’s system for dealing with resettlement,” the report said. “The inability to confirm that resettlement has been satisfactorily completed poses a reputational risk for the World Bank.”



Victor Mendoza, the president of a farming co-op near the sprawling Yanacocha gold mine in northern Peru, with his 10-year-old son. The mine, built two decades ago with the financial backing of the International Finance Corp., the private-lending arm of the World Bank, is deeply unpopular in this region. Farmers like Mendoza claim it is polluting their water supply and threatening the health of their families and livestock. Read the story [here](#). Ben Hallman / The Huffington Post

## ‘They Abandoned Us’

Most World Bank investments do not require evictions or damage people’s ability to earn a living or feed their families. But the percentage of those that do has increased sharply in recent years.

A 2012 internal audit found that projects in the bank’s pipeline triggered the bank’s resettlement policy 40 percent of the time — twice as often as projects the bank had already completed.

The World Bank and IFC have also been boosting support for mega-projects, such as oil pipelines and dams, that the lenders acknowledge are most likely to cause “irreversible” social or environmental harm, an analysis by HuffPost and ICIJ found.

A big project can upend the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Since 2004, World Bank estimates indicate that at least a dozen bank-supported projects physically or economically displaced more than 50,000 people each.

Studies show that forced relocations can rip apart kinship networks and increase risks of illness and disease. Resettled populations are more likely to suffer unemployment and hunger, and mortality rates are higher.

The World Bank acknowledges that resettlement is difficult, but says it's often impossible to build roads, power plants and other much-needed projects without moving people from their homes.

“We stand by the need to continue financing infrastructure projects, including those that entail land acquisition and involuntary resettlement,” said Theis, the World Bank spokesman.

The bank says it strives to make sure its borrowers provide real help to people pushed aside by big projects. In Laos, the bank says, authorities built more than 1,300 new homes with electricity and toilets, 32 schools and two health centers for thousands of people forced to move to make way for a World Bank-financed dam.

“Through careful project design and proper implementation, land acquisition and involuntary resettlement have resulted in people's lives improving significantly,” Theis said in a statement.

In a drought-haunted region of Brazil, farm families pushed aside by another World Bank-backed dam say that their lives haven't been improved.

Thirty-five families live in a tiny, government-built relocation village called Gameleira, named after the dam and reservoir that forced them to leave their homes along the Mundaú River.

In their old homes, they could take water from wells and the river itself, but the relocation village has no fresh water source. A World Bank report acknowledged a delay in getting water access for the new village, but said the village's water issues had been solved by late 2012.

The villagers say that's not true. They are still waiting, four years after they were forced to relocate, for local authorities to keep their promise to build a small pipeline to draw water from the new reservoir to the relocation village. Meanwhile, water from the reservoir is being piped to urban areas.

A well in the village produces salty water and, even with desalination equipment, each family is limited to 36 liters of water a day. Families supplement their supply by buying from commercial vendors, sometimes spending as much as a third of their modest incomes.

These purchases provide them enough water to irrigate small gardens of yuca, beans and corn. If they want to plant cash crops — such as cashews — they have to wait for rain, which hardly ever comes.

“We feel that we are suffering so that people from the city can have water,” 39-year-old Francisco Venilson dos Santos, a farmer and father of four boys and two girls, said. “They abandoned us here.”

In a written statement, the World Bank said it is satisfied the village was provided an adequate supply of water “both in terms of quantity and quality.” The bank said it is helping Brazilian authorities deal with northeast Brazil's prolonged drought by helping “to increase the resilience of small rural communities,” giving them advice on drilling emergency groundwater wells and creating “drought preparedness plans.”



World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim at a Berlin press conference. Tobia Schwarz / Getty Images

## Shortcuts

In July 2012, an unconventional leader took over as the World Bank's new president. Jim Yong Kim, a Korean-American physician known for his work fighting AIDS in Africa, became the first World Bank president whose background wasn't in finance or politics.

Two decades before, Kim had joined protests in Washington, D.C., calling for the World Bank to be shut down altogether for valuing indicators like economic growth over assistance to poor people.

Human rights advocates and bank staffers working on safeguards hoped that Kim's appointment would signal a shift toward greater protections for people affected by World Bank projects.

In March, Kim said he was concerned about "major problems" in the bank's oversight of its resettlement policies. He announced an action plan calling for greater independence for the bank's safeguards watchdogs and a 15 percent funding boost for safeguards enforcement.

But while Kim and other bank officials have acknowledged general shortcomings, they have consistently denied that the bank shares blame for violent or wrongful evictions carried out by its borrowers.

In Ethiopia, the World Bank's Inspection Panel found the bank had violated its own rules by failing to acknowledge an "operational link" between a bank-funded health and education initiative and a mass relocation campaign carried out by the Ethiopian government. In 2011, soldiers carrying out the evictions targeted some villagers for beatings and rapes, killing at least seven, according to a report by Human Rights Watch and ICIJ's interviews with people who were evicted.

Daily life in a refugee camp in South Sudan. Some of the camp's residents fled Ethiopia to avoid brutal evictions carried out by government forces. New evidence suggests the government's actions were funded by the World Bank. Read the story [here](#). Andreea Campeanu / International Consortium of Investigative Journalists

Kim said that while "we could have done more" to help the evicted communities, the bank was ultimately not at fault.

In India, the IFC's internal ombudsman found that the lender had breached its policies by not doing enough to protect the large fishing community living in the shadow of the coal power plant it financed on the Gulf of Kutch. With Kim's approval, IFC's management rejected many of the ombudsman's findings and defended the actions of its corporate client.

In both Ethiopia and India, the World Bank Group declined to direct its clients to fully compensate the affected communities.

In response to complaints about the Badia East evictions in Nigeria, the World Bank embraced a shortcut that fell short of its promise that people affected by projects will be fully compensated for their losses.

Typically, a community that claims it has been harmed by a bank project can file a complaint that will trigger an investigation by the bank's Inspection Panel.

But when three Badia East residents submitted a complaint, panel staffers held off launching an investigation. Instead, they guided the residents into a new pilot program for handling disputes. The program put the community into direct negotiations with the Lagos state government.

Megan Chapman, then a lawyer for the Social and Economic Rights Action Center and now a co-founder of Justice & Empowerment Initiatives, represented the evicted residents. The Inspection Panel promised Chapman that the Badia East community could demand an investigation at any time if it wasn't satisfied with the outcome, according to emails reviewed by ICIJ.

Negotiations didn't go well for the evicted residents. The Lagos government insisted they had been illegal squatters, even though some of them had lived there for decades. It gave the group an ultimatum: Accept a small payment and sign away any legal rights, or get nothing.

Chapman believed that the government's offer violated the bank's resettlement policy because it didn't provide new homes for the displaced or compensation equal to what they'd lost. The payments that Lagos authorities offered for larger demolished structures, for example, were 31 percent lower than what the World Bank's own consultants said they were worth.

"It was like David and Goliath. There were these little people fighting against this giant," Chapman said. The bank "really left vulnerable people on their own."

The government's ultimatum divided the community. The leader of Chapman's organization said it was the best offer the evicted people were going to get. He said he was satisfied with the deal. Many residents and their advocates — including Chapman — objected.

But they had nowhere to turn for help.

Internal emails obtained by ICIJ indicate that by early 2014, the Inspection Panel's chair, Eimi Watanabe, was already pushing to make sure that the panel would not investigate the World Bank's role in the case.

After hearing that the leader of Chapman's group was satisfied with the outcome of the negotiations, Watanabe urged her staff to issue a formal notice shutting down the possibility of any investigation before the fragile agreement fell apart, according to internal emails obtained by ICIJ.

"Pl[ease] issue notice soonest before it unravels," Watanabe wrote on Feb. 6, 2014.

Watanabe's directive didn't immediately kill the investigation, but over the following months the panel made it clear that it didn't want to dig deeper into the World Bank's actions.

In July 2014, two of the three residents who had filed the complaint told the panel they were unhappy with the deal and that they wanted to go forward with an investigation. The panel rejected their request and shut the case down with an official notice that said, as an aside, that the bank had fallen short of its own resettlement standards.

Chapman and other advocates say the bank misled them about how the pilot program would work and abandoned the people of Badia East.

Watanabe did not respond to ICIJ's questions about the Lagos case.

Gonzalo Castro de la Mata, the Inspection Panel's current chair, said the panel "deliberated carefully at every stage of the case" and did not seek to arbitrarily shut down the investigation before it could start.

He said that although the Lagos government had agreed to follow World Bank rules for resettlement in Badia East and other neighborhoods, the evictions weren't done under the official umbrella of the bank's urban renewal initiative. Because of this and other factors, he said, the panel determined that "a lengthy process of investigation would not at the end of day necessarily yield better outcomes" for residents who lost their homes.



Joseph Kilimo Chebet, a father of five, standing next to the burned remains of his homestead in Kenya, destroyed only hours prior by Kenya Forest Service officers. Read the story [here](#). Tony Karumba / GroundTruth

## An Uncertain Future



As it enters its eighth decade, the World Bank faces an identity crisis.

It is no longer the only lender willing to venture into struggling nations and finance huge projects. It is being challenged by new competition from other development banks that don't have the same social standards — and are rapidly drawing support from the World Bank's traditional backers.

China has launched a new development bank and persuaded Britain, Germany and other American allies to join, despite open U.S. opposition.

These geopolitical shifts have fueled doubts about whether the World Bank still has the clout — or the desire — to impose strong protections for people living in the way of development.

United Nations human rights officials have written World Bank President Kim to say they're concerned that the growing ability of borrowers to access other financing has spurred the bank to join a "race to the bottom" and push its standards for protecting people even lower.

The bank's proposed changes to its safeguard rules would grant many borrowers greater authority to police themselves. In the current draft, governments would be allowed to hold off on preparing resettlement plans until after the bank greenlights projects. They would also be permitted to use their own environmental and social policies instead of the bank's safeguards, as long as the bank determines these policies are consistent with its own.

Some current and former bank officials say these changes would spell disaster for the people living in the growing footprint of the bank's projects — allowing governments to abide by weaker national standards and decide whether vulnerable populations need protecting after they have already received financing.

In December, the World Bank's biggest patron, the U.S. Congress, approved a measure directing the American representative on the World Bank board to vote against any future project that would be subject to weaker safeguards than the ones currently in place.

The bank says that the new rules would strengthen the protections for populations affected by its projects.

Theis, the bank spokesman, said that under the proposed rules, "a rigorous upfront scoping of the project is always required" and borrowers still must prepare plans to address resettlement and other adverse impacts of projects "well in advance of any construction activities."

World Bank officials are now writing a new version of the safeguards that they say will take into account the criticisms of their previous draft. They expect to release the new draft in the late spring or summer.

In the meantime, the bank continues to ramp up its investment in large infrastructure projects, like the one that claimed Bimbo Osobe's home in Badia East.

Osobe spent months after her eviction sleeping under only a net for shelter, she said.

As of mid-March, she was staying in a medical clinic, sleeping in the reception area after the clinic closes at night. She's been forced to send three of her children away to stay with relatives, she said.

"It is not a good thing for a family to be divided," Osobe said.

[Sasha Chavkin](#) is a reporter, [Cécile Schilis-Gallego](#) is a data journalist, [Mar Cabra](#) is a data editor and [Michael Hudson](#) is a senior editor at the [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#). [Ben Hallman](#) is a senior writer and [Shane Shifflett](#) is a data reporter at The Huffington Post. [Jacob Kushner](#) and [Anthony Langat](#) are Kenya-based reporters for the GroundTruth Project, a nonprofit global news service headquartered in the U.S.

[Ciro Barros](#) and [Giulia Afiune](#) are reporters at [Agência Pública in Brazil](#). [Musikilu Mojeed](#) is managing editor at the [Premium Times](#) in Nigeria. [Besar Likmeta](#) is Albanian editor at [BalkanInsight.com](#). Jeanne Baron is a U.S.-

based radio journalist. [Barry Yeoman](#) is a reporting fellow with the Investigative Fund. [Friedrich Lindenberg](#) is a data journalist with the [African Network of Centers for Investigative Reporting](#). [Blaž Zgaga](#) is an investigative journalist based in Slovenia.

Produced by Hilary Fung, [Alissa Scheller](#) and [Shane Shifflett](#).

Video editing and production by [Hilke Schellmann](#).

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By Sasha Chavkin

Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 8:01 pm EDT

The soldiers pointed their guns at Odoge Otiri and led the 22-year-old student into the forest outside his village in western Ethiopia. Then, he says, they began pounding him with their nightsticks, leaving him bloody and unmoving.

“I was unconscious,” he recalls. “The reason they left me is they thought I was going to die.”

That night, soldiers arrested his wife, Aduma Omot.

“The soldiers took me to their camp,” she says. “Then they mistreated me, they raped me.”

They held her for two days, she says, before they let her go.

The soldiers attacked them, Otiri says, because he opposed Ethiopian authorities’ efforts to force him and his neighbors from their homes as part of the country’s so-called “villagization” effort — a massive social engineering project that sought to move almost 2 million poor people to newly built sites selected by the government.

Otiri and Omot are among thousands of Anuak, a mostly Christian indigenous group from the rural Ethiopian state of Gambella, who have fled from Ethiopia’s mass relocation campaign.

The Ethiopian government financed the evictions in part by tapping into a pool of aid money from the world’s most influential development lender, the World Bank, two former Ethiopian officials who helped carry out the relocation program told the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. The money, the former officials said, was diverted from the \$2 billion in funding that the World Bank had put into a health and education initiative.

The World Bank strongly disputes that its money supported the mass evictions in western Ethiopia. Even as Anuak refugees and human rights groups have publicly charged that World Bank money has been used to bankroll brutal evictions, the bank has continued to send hundreds of millions of dollars into the same health and education program.

“We are confident that the money was used for the purposes intended,” Greg Toulmin, the World Bank’s country program coordinator for Ethiopia, told ICIJ in March. “We remain confident that there was no link.”

New evidence gathered by ICIJ undermines the bank’s continuing denials that its money bankrolled the evictions.

One of the two former officials interviewed by ICIJ was well-positioned to know exactly how World Bank funds were being used: Omot Obang Olom, the former governor of Gambella, oversaw the resettlement program in his state.

Olom told ICIJ that he personally oversaw the diversion of some \$10 million from the World Bank’s health and education initiative, redirecting the money to finance mass relocations through the villagization program. He said senior officials in Ethiopia’s federal government instructed him to divert the funds, and this money was essential to conducting the resettlement program.

“If we were not ordered by the federal government to reallocate the World Bank budget for the program, the program would not be possible,” Olom said.

Olom, who left the country last year and is now seeking political asylum in the Philippines, has never before spoken to the news media about the eviction program. He now acknowledges that the mass evictions were carried out through threats and violence.

“The farmers came to me and they say, ‘Omot, we are not free because members of the defense force come and intimidate us,’ ” he said. “There are incidents of abusing farmers, even raping the women.”

Farmers who spoke out against the evictions, he said, “were beaten, were tortured, by the national defense forces.”

The evictions in Ethiopia fit a larger pattern.

Communities displaced amid World Bank Group projects in Nigeria, Honduras, Kenya, Indonesia, India, Guatemala and Uganda have accused the organization’s borrowers of committing human rights violations.

Governments and companies backed by the World Bank or its private-sector lending arm, the International Finance Corp., have bulldozed and burned homes and deployed soldiers or private security operatives who have arrested, beaten or even killed people, residents of affected communities have said in official complaints and in interviews with ICIJ.

Human rights experts say the bank is undercutting its mission of helping the world’s poorest people by failing to embrace international policies upholding human rights.

Philip Alston, the United Nations’ special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, has accused the bank of hiding behind a “sleight of hand” argument that it can’t fully engage in human rights issues because its charter forbids it from getting involved in politics. In December Alston and 27 other U.N. human rights officials wrote World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim to complain that the bank’s proposed revisions to its “social safeguards” policies for protecting people in the path of development “avoid any meaningful references to human rights.”

A spokesman for the World Bank said the bank takes communities’ reports of human rights abuses “very seriously,” and that “these cases show we must continually improve our approach to supervision.” He said the bank has been a leader for decades in setting strong safeguards for people living in the footprint of its projects, and that its proposed new rules go “as far as or further than any other multilateral development bank” to protect vulnerable populations.

The World Bank’s Ethiopia program director, Toulmin, said the bank’s mission is to support initiatives that fight poverty, not to police unrelated activities by its borrowers.

“We are not in the physical security business,” he said.

## **Fearing The Worst**

In Ethiopia, claims of human rights abuses associated with mass evictions in Gambella prompted neighboring South Sudan — a nation ravaged by a civil war — to grant group refugee status to Anuak who have fled Ethiopia.

Otiri and Omot escaped the violence in Gambella in the summer of 2011 by trekking across the Ethiopian border into South Sudan.

The young couple did not make the journey together.

When he awoke alone in the forest after his beating, Otiri faced a choice. If he returned home, he would likely put both himself and his wife in further danger. He decided the safest thing was to head for an Anuak settlement in South Sudan.

He hoped his wife would realize what had happened and follow him there.

Shortly after her husband disappeared, a neighbor told Omot that soldiers had taken him into the forest. She feared the worst.

“What came into my mind,” she says, “was that I was not going to see my husband again.”

Later that night, three soldiers arrived at her parent’s compound, looking for Otiri. They demanded, she says, that she tell them where her husband was hiding. When she said she didn’t know, she says, they arrested her and marched her toward their camp, at one point pushing her to ground because she wasn’t moving fast enough.

At the soldiers’ open-air encampment in the village of Gog Depache, they continued to interrogate her about her husband’s whereabouts. When she again insisted that she didn’t know, she says, the soldiers raped her.

“After those two days they set me free,” she says. “From there I decided to leave the country.”

She headed for South Sudan, not knowing what she would find at the end of her journey.

## **‘Friend Of The System’**

The World Bank has long made Ethiopia a top priority, funneling loans to its government to help the East African nation of some 90 million people move past its legacy of poverty and famine. In 2005, the bank cut off funding for Ethiopia after the country’s authoritarian leaders massacred scores of people and arrested some 20,000 political opponents following disputed elections.

A year later, the bank lifted its ban, launching a new strategy of funding local and state governments rather than central authorities. In 2006, the bank approved \$215 million in loans and grants to support a program, called Protection of Basic Services, that’s supposed to provide health care, education, fresh water and other support to rural Ethiopians.

In May 2009, the bank approved \$540 million to extend the program.

Soon after, the Ethiopian government began rolling out its ambitious resettlement campaign. The villagization program sought to relocate 1.9 million people in four rural states with large indigenous populations, moving them into larger settlements where authorities could provide schools and clinics.

The goal, according to a 2010 plan for the state of Gambella, was the “socioeconomic and cultural transformation of the people.”

The World Bank says Ethiopian authorities didn’t consult the bank when they developed the resettlement program, and it didn’t learn of the plan until October 2010. In January 2011, the World Bank and other foreign donors wrote the Ethiopian government warning that forced relocation “can impact negatively on the wellbeing and livelihoods of those who were intended to benefit.”

Othow Nyigwo, then an education administrator in the state of Gambella, says that in February 2011 superiors summoned him and other local health and education officials to a meeting with Olom, Gambella’s governor at the time.



Othow Nyigwo, a former education official in Gambella, sitting in a school classroom in the Gorom Refugee Camp. Andreea Campeanu / International Consortium of Investigative Journalists

At the meeting, Nyigwo says, Olom ordered him to divert some \$1,500 in World Bank funds intended for primary school classes into the relocation program. Olom gave the same order to divert funding to all the officials assembled at the meeting, Nyigwo says.

“This money which was given from the World Bank had to be given to the villagization program,” says Nyigwo, who is now living in a refugee camp in South Sudan.

As a local supervisor for villagization, Nyigwo heard repeatedly from Anuak villagers who complained they were being forced to give up fertile farmland in exchange for small, barren plots at the new government sites. When he reported these complaints to his superiors, he says, they told him he should stop causing trouble.

Olom, the former governor, confirmed Nyigwo’s account of the February 2011 meeting. Olom says federal officials directed him to divert the funding after it became clear that the government didn’t have enough money to fully finance the relocation program.

By the second year of the villagization effort, Olom says, top officials told him he needed to tap other sources of funding, including money coming in from the World Bank’s health and education initiative. He says he diverted 90 million Ethiopian birr — roughly \$5 million at the time — in each of the next two years.

He says higher ups assured him that he wouldn’t be blamed for diverting money from the World Bank and other funders — and worked with him to obscure the money trail.

“They knew that the way we allocated the budget was illegal,” Olom said in a telephone interview in March from the Philippines. “So they made it very secret.”



Olom is a controversial figure. An Anuak himself, he is reviled by many Anuak for his role in carrying out the mass relocations. He has also been accused of corruption and of complicity in a 2003 massacre of his fellow Anuak when he was Gambella's security chief prior to becoming governor.

Olom denies these allegations. He claims he fell out of favor with Ethiopia's federal authorities after more than a decade as a public official, including as a governor and federal minister, because he raised questions about the government's treatment of the Anuak.

Olom maintains that he initially believed the relocation program would help poor people in Gambella, so he went along with federal authorities.

"I was a good friend of the system," he says.

Felix Horne, a researcher with Human Rights Watch who focuses on Ethiopia, said that while Olom may be seeking to repair his reputation, his allegations are credible.

"It's very clear that he wants to make himself out as another victim of the regime," Horne said. But "his statements definitely seem plausible. Everything we've heard from former government officials in Gambella matches up with what he said."

The Ethiopian government did not respond to ICIJ's inquiries directed to its embassy in Washington, D.C., its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or its country office at the World Bank.

Asked about the Nyigwo and Olom's accounts, a World Bank spokesman said the bank was "not aware of these specific third-party allegations" and urged ICIJ to call the bank's fraud and corruption hotline "and report the matter without delay."

## **Land To Foreign Investors**

As Olom and Nyigwo were helping to carry out Ethiopia's resettlement push, the World Bank was conducting an assessment of the program.

Concerned after learning about the campaign in late 2010, bank staffers visited western Ethiopia in February and March 2011 to see how relocations were being carried out. The team traveled to Benishangul-Gumuz, a state north of Gambella that was selected for the relocation program but didn't have an Anuak population.

Based on the team's reports from the field, World Bank officials concluded the relocations in that region "appeared to be voluntary and not a direct consequence of bank-supported investment projects."

In late February 2011, even before the review team had finished its work, the bank approved another extension of the basic services program, sending another \$420 million to Ethiopia. Much of the money went to Gambella and other states that were taking part in the resettlement program.

Toulmin, the bank's Ethiopia coordinator, said the bank also relied on field visits by other foreign donors who went to Gambella and shared their findings. He said that, like the World Bank's review team, these missions did not encounter any evidence of violence or forced evictions.

Even as the field visits soothed the bank's concerns about villagization, the Ethiopian government had turned over large tracts of land in Gambella to private investors in exchange for leasing fees.

The Anuak, who lack legal title to their ancestral lands, received nothing in return, Anuak refugees say. In Ethiopia, the government officially owns all land, but occupants are supposed to retain some customary rights.

Forty-two percent of land in Gambella was being leased or marketed to investors, according to a 2011 report by the Oakland Institute, a U.S.-based advocacy group that's critical of widespread transfers of land to corporations

in developing countries.

Among the largest leaseholders in Gambella is Saudi Star, a conglomerate owned by Ethiopia's richest man, Saudi dual citizen Sheikh Mohammed Al-Amoudi.

Land previously occupied by Anuak is now being used by Saudi Star for commercial plantations, according to two Anuak elders interviewed by ICIJ and reports by the Oakland Institute and Human Rights Watch. The government cleared small villages within what became the Saudi Star lease area and relocated the residents as part of the villagization program, the Oakland Institute's report said.

A spokeswoman for the sheikh confirmed that Saudi Star has leased 10,000 hectares in Gambella, but denied any of the land had been occupied by Anuak. "No people or farmers were relocated from the land on which Saudi Star is operating," she said.

She said any suggestions the company improperly benefited from the government's land-use decisions are fabrications fueled by "advocacy groups with a political agenda."



An Anuak refugee tilling the land in the Gorom Refugee Camp in South Sudan. Andreea Campeanu / International Consortium of Investigative Journalists

## Tearful Reunion

As they pushed Anuak villagers out of their homes, local officials conscripted many of them to work on building the new, government-selected sites.

Odoge Otiri, the young husband who says he was assaulted by soldiers, says he drew their anger because he had stayed home and refused to work cutting tall grass to thatch the roofs of the new homes that he and his neighbors

didn't want.

The soldiers smashed away at his elbows and knees with their sticks, he says, until he passed out. When he regained consciousness, he saw that he was alone, with no soldiers or any signs of a village in sight.

He walked nearly two hours to reach another Anuak village.

“Even though I was walking slowly and I was scared, God guided me on my way,” he says.

Though Otiri was a stranger, a woman there took care of him out of concern for a fellow Anuak. She tended to his injuries for three days while he regained strength.

Then he began the long, slow walk to the border. He had no way at the time to send word to his wife and no idea what was happening to her back in their village.

When he reached the Anuak settlement in Pochalla, South Sudan, he asked two businessmen who were heading to Gambella to look for Omot and tell her where he was staying.

After his wife, Aduma Omot, was released by the soldiers, she faced a painful choice of her own: whether to stay in Ethiopia or to flee and hope to find her husband across the border.



Aduma Omot and her daughter, Annacerjwok, at their home in the Gorom Refugee Camp in South Sudan. Andrea Campeanu / International Consortium of Investigative Journalists

Without word from her husband, she also decided to leave Ethiopia. She began walking toward Pochalla.

Along the way, in the town of Pignudo, she encountered the two businessmen. They told her that her husband was alive and was awaiting her in South Sudan.

When she reached the Anuak refuge in Pochalla, two small children led her to the compound where her husband was staying.

“I saw her entering into the compound, and we all wept,” Otiri recalls. “The first thing that came into my mind was a great pleasure.”

### **‘Agree to Disagree’**

In late 2011, Human Rights Watch confronted the World Bank and the Ethiopian government about reports of abuses stemming from the resettlement program in Gambella. These accounts, which it detailed soon after in a report called “Waiting Here for Death,” described a campaign of evictions enforced by arbitrary arrests, beatings, rapes and killings.

The report said the group had “documented at least seven credible accounts of people dying as a result of the beatings inflicted by the military and heard of many more that could not be corroborated.”

One villager quoted in the report described soldiers using guns and sticks to beat a 19-year-old so severely that he began vomiting blood and died soon after.

Human Rights Watch charged that the World Bank and other development funders bankrolling the Protection of Basic Services effort were “involved in a program that is doing more to undermine the rights and livelihoods of the population than to improve them.”

The bank denied that resettlement was being imposed by force or that World Bank money had been used to support forced relocations. The bank said its investments in Ethiopia had helped slash child mortality in half and increase primary school enrollment by 13 percent in less than a decade.

The Ethiopian government has said its resettlement campaign in Gambella relocated 37,883 families before it concluded in mid-2013.

A top Ethiopian official told Human Rights Watch that all families were relocated with their “full consent and participation.” Any allegations of police and military coercion, the official said, were “downright fabrications” ginned up by “anti-development” elements in Gambella who were working “in a concerted campaign with the support of their foreign handlers.”

With few other options, Anuak refugees turned to the World Bank’s internal watchdog unit, known as the Inspection Panel.

Daily life at the Gorom Refugee Camp. Andreea Campeanu / International Consortium of Investigative Journalists

Working with an American nonprofit organization, Inclusive Development International, a group of Anuak refugees filed a 21-page complaint in September 2012 charging that the bank’s support for the Protection of Basic Services program violated the bank’s rules against wrongful evictions and dispossessing indigenous groups. It said the services financed by the bank were “precisely” those to be provided by the resettlement campaign, meaning that bank funds were “substantially contributing” to the evictions.

In a series of meetings with World Bank officials, Anuak refugees described widespread abuses by the government. Toulmin, the bank’s Ethiopian program director, said that the refugees’ accounts weren’t enough to outweigh the findings of field missions by the bank and other foreign donors that found no evidence of widespread forced evictions or human rights abuses.

“At the end, we simply had to agree to disagree,” Toulmin said.

A day after the complaint was filed, the bank approved another \$600 million dollars in spending for the basic services program.

## **‘The World Bank Was Responsible’**

In February 2014, a team from the Inspection Panel headed to Ethiopia to conduct a field investigation in Gambella, which remains home to tens of thousands of Anuak.

But when the investigators began travelling to new government-built villages to meet with Anuak who’d been resettled, they found that the Ethiopian authorities had gotten there first.

“All the people had been instructed in advance of us coming,” says Eisei Kurimoto, a scholar of Anuak history at Japan’s Osaka University who’d been asked to join the review team as an adviser. “And they had been intimidated in advance to tell us good things.”

So while most of the team conducted public meetings, Kurimoto decided to meet privately with villagers in their homes. Even in the formal meetings, Anuak described armed soldiers accompanying government officials who told them to evacuate. But some of their testimonies in the private conversations were far more troubling.

In these private sessions, they described shootings, arbitrary arrests and sexual violence, according to transcripts of Kurimoto’s discussions with villagers.

“There was one Anuak man among [military] Special Forces who rejected the order to go force farmers to move to the new location by force,” an Anuak, whose name is not given, told Kurimoto. “And we heard a shot, a highland [federal] policeman shot this man ... to death right there.”

When the panel released its report in February 2015, the voices of people who described threats and violence were largely absent.

The report noted that the panel “came across” some information about abuses linked to the evictions, but the report did not describe them in detail — prompting Inclusive Development International, the NGO that helped Anuak villagers file the complaint, to claim the panel had “whitewashed damning evidence of widespread human rights abuses.”

The Inspection Panel said it didn’t have the authority to investigate allegations of human rights violations by the bank’s borrowers. Its only role, it said, is to determine whether the bank violated its own rules.

The panel’s report criticized the bank for ignoring evidence of an “operational link” between the bank-financed project and Ethiopia’s eviction campaign and for failing to do anything to protect affected communities.

But the panel stopped short of assigning the bank blame for the mass evictions. Because the evictions were not a “necessary” part of the health and education program, the panel said, the bank couldn’t ultimately be held responsible for them.

Kurimoto, the panel’s own expert, thought this conclusion didn’t make sense.

“Personally, I think the World Bank was responsible,” he told ICIJ. The bank “turned a blind eye to what was happening on the ground.”

In March 2015, the World Bank approved a new \$350 million loan to Ethiopia, which included support for local government in Gambella.



Anuak attending a Sunday morning church service in the Gorom Refugee Camp. Andreea Campeanu / International Consortium of Investigative Journalists

## ‘In the Hands of God’

On a sweltering Sunday morning in South Sudan last summer, hundreds of Anuak refugees packed onto the dirt floor of a small, dimly lit church.

At the front of the congregation, a tall young man with a microphone began to sing. At first his forceful baritone hung alone in the hot, close air, but he was soon joined by a burst of song from the choir.

Then the congregation rose to its feet, clapping along. Sweat dripping from his face, the singer paced down the narrow aisle, his hoarse and powerful voice exhorting all to worship. Some raised their hands in the air. Piercing ululations from women rang out over the voice of the choir.

In the war-torn nation of South Sudan, Gorom Refugee Camp is a bastion of faith for more than 2,000 Anuak who have fled Ethiopia. They are struggling to rebuild their lives amid scarcity and an unknown future.

Odoge Otiri and Aduma Omot live in a two-room shelter beside a patch of okra and cassava that Otiri is cultivating. They have been in Gorom, supported by aid from the United Nations, for more than two years. Otiri says that there is nothing to do there.

“Life in the refugee camp is very difficult,” Otiri says. “There is not enough food.”

But they haven’t given up. Without much hope that they can return to Ethiopia, they are doing their best to make new lives in a new land. Since they arrived, their family has grown to include their first child, a baby daughter. The girl fidgets in Omot’s arms, occasionally reaching out to breastfeed.

Her name is Annacerjwok — Anuak for “In the Hands of God.”

[Sasha Chavkin](#) is a reporter at the [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#). He traveled to Ethiopia and South Sudan for this story.

Produced by Hilary Fung and [Shane Shifflett](#).

Video editing and production by [Hilke Schellmann](#).

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By Jacob Kushner, Anthony Langat, Sasha Chavkin and Michael Hudson

Wednesday, April 15, 2015, 8:01 pm EDT

Gladys Chepkemai was weeding potatoes in her garden the day the men came to burn down her house.

After her mother-in-law told her that rangers from the Kenya Forest Service were on their way, Chepkemai strapped her 1-year-old son on her back and hurried to her thatched-roofed home. She grabbed two tins of corn, blankets, plates and cooking pans, and hid in a thicket.

She watched, she said, as the green-uniformed rangers set her house ablaze.

After they were gone, she came out of the thicket to see what was left.

“What used to be my home was now ashes,” she said.

The young mother is one of thousands of Kenyans who have been forced out of their homes since the launch of a World Bank-financed forest conservation program in western Kenya’s Cherangani Hills. Human rights advocates claim government authorities have used the project as a vehicle for pushing indigenous peoples out of their ancestral forests.

They are not alone.

In developing countries around the globe, forest dwellers, poor villagers and other vulnerable populations claim the World Bank — the planet’s oldest and most powerful development lender — has left a trail of misery.

Dams, power plants, conservation programs and other projects sponsored by the World Bank have pushed millions of people out of their homes or off their lands or threatened their livelihoods. In some cases, governments supported by World Bank money have arrested, beaten and even killed people who objected to being forced from their homes, according to interviews and official complaints.

They’ve been put at risk because the bank has repeatedly violated its own rules for protecting people who are in the path of development projects, an investigation by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, The Huffington Post, The GroundTruth Project and other ICIJ media partners has found.

This story is the first in a series about what can happen to people on the ground when the World Bank bankrolls big projects. Other stories published today by HuffPost and ICIJ include [an overview detailing the reporting team’s key findings](#), a look at [mass evictions in Ethiopia](#) tied to a World Bank project and an examination of a [Peruvian gold mine](#) backed by the bank’s private-sector investment arm. ICIJ and its partners will publish more stories in the coming weeks based on reporting from India, Honduras, Kosovo and other countries.

“I don’t understand why they chase us like this”

Selly Rotich, mother of five

The World Bank has admitted “shortcomings” in its protections for people displaced by projects the bank supports. It says it is working to improve its policies and how it enforces them. The bank also says protecting people in the way of big projects is a “cornerstone” of its efforts to “end extreme poverty and promote shared prosperity.”

In Kenya, the World Bank’s in-house Inspection Panel found the bank violated its policies by failing to do enough to protect the Sengwer, an indigenous minority group in Kenya’s western forests that includes Chepkemai and her family.

[The report](#), released last year, concluded the bank wasn't directly to blame for the evictions targeted at the Sengwer, but said the bank might have helped prevent abuses against them if it had enforced its own rules — including the requirement that its borrowers respect the land rights of indigenous peoples.

Smoke rises from a homestead destroyed by fire in western Kenya's Cherangani Hills. Members of the Sengwer, an indigenous group, claim Kenya Forest Service rangers have tried to drive them out of their ancestral forest by burning their homes. Tony Karumba / GroundTruth

The World Bank began financing the Kenya Forest Service's Natural Resources Management Project in 2007. It promised to cover \$68.5 million of the project's \$78 million budget in an effort to help the KFS "improve the livelihoods of communities participating in the co-management of water and forests."

The Forest Peoples Programme, a U.K.-based advocacy group, says the bank's funding of the conservation project put the Sengwer in danger because the project redrew the Cherangani Hills' protected Forest Reserve in a way that included thousands of them inside the reserve's boundaries. This gave KFS officials a pretext for evicting them, according to the group.

Paul Kibet, secretary of the Sengwer Council of Elders, said that cash from the World Bank also provided the equipment the KFS needed to launch its mass eviction campaign. "After receiving this money, they bought new vehicles. They bought the forest guards a lot of new guns and boots, et cetera," he said.

"When I woke up the next morning my body was grayish and pale"

John Chebaraa, a 60-year-old father of seven

Kenya's government claims the Sengwer are illegally occupying public lands. Authorities have torched at least a thousand Sengwer homes since the World Bank began financing the conservation project, according to accounts by Sengwer and human rights researchers. They have also jailed dozens of Sengwer for farming without permits and trespassing on lands that their clans have occupied "since time immemorial," a formal complaint filed in 2013 by a group of Sengwer to the World Bank claimed.

The KFS says it has not carried out "forceful" evictions of the Sengwer and that "genuine persons deserving resettlement" have been "extensively profiled through a consultative and participatory process."

In the spring of 2011, the World Bank urged Kenya's finance ministry to end the evictions until the bank could help the government work out a plan for addressing the Sengwer's concerns. According to bank officials, Kenyan authorities agreed to stop the evictions until they found new land where the Sengwer could relocate.

Sengwer leaders said the land offered by the government was treeless and barren.

The evictions and burnings continued.

Paulina Sanyaga said that after the KFS torched her home in March 2011, she slept in the forest with her children. Her youngest was 5 years old at the time. "My child asked why we were sleeping outside, and I told him that the government had burnt not ours alone, but everybody else's house too," she recalled.

Because her fence was destroyed by KFS men, she said, many of her cattle and sheep were lost or stolen.

"It felt so painful to lose them," she said. "They were my own sweat."

John Chebaraa, a 60-year-old father of seven, said he slept in a caved-in tree trunk the night after his home was burned in mid-2011.

Justin Kipkorir, Brian Bett and Councillor Joel Kiptale inspect Kipkorir's home, which he said was raided and destroyed by KFS officers. Shemilla Chemutai displays a cooking pot bearing puncture marks that she said KFS

officers made with a machete. An elderly Sengwer woman and relatives at their homestead at Ket Mokinget. Tony Karumba / GroundTruth

“It was very cold,” he said. “When I woke up the next morning my body was grayish and pale.”

After their house was torched in October 2011, Chepkemoi, her husband and her co-wife — the Sengwer are polygamous — built a makeshift shelter out of bamboo, cow hide and sheep skin. They slept in it for months instead of building a permanent house, she said, “because KFS were always patrolling nearby. If we built another house, they would have burned it down as well. So we waited until they stopped patrolling the area.”

The fire set by the KFS consumed their millet, five sacks of corn and four beehives, Chepkemoi’s husband, Brian Bett, said. The family only had potatoes and milk to eat.

“I did not have enough food for the family to eat, and we often had to sleep hungry so that my children could eat,” Bett said. “My children have faced a lot of difficulty and they cried a lot, because they are young and do not have the ability to explain what is ailing them.”

Kenya’s government continued its relocation push after the World Bank’s funding for the Natural Resources Management Project officially ended in June 2013.

In early 2014, advocates for the Sengwer reported that authorities had begun a new wave of evictions, writing to United Nations agencies that things on the ground were “chaotic,” with some people moving with their children and belongings “to nowhere in particular.”

The bank, noting that it was no longer funding the forest conservation project, said it was “not linked to these evictions.” World Bank officials argue the bank is not to blame for any of the evictions carried out by the KFS because the Kenyan government has been evicting the Sengwer for decades and continued doing so after the bank’s official role ended.

Tom Lomax, a human rights lawyer with the Forest Peoples Programme, said the World Bank deserves a measure of blame even for more recent evictions because it “did not do enough — or didn’t do anything loud enough — to address the evictions during the course of the project.” That emboldened Kenyan authorities to go forward with a removal campaign that grew increasingly aggressive during the World Bank’s sponsorship of the KFS, he said.

Tens of thousands of Sengwer still live in the Cherangani Hills. KFS rangers have maintained the campaign of evictions through 2014 and into 2015, according to Sengwer leaders.

In September, reporters witnessed two gutted, smoldering homes and several fences still burning. Residents said forest rangers had set the fires hours before.



Selly Rotich stands in what used to be her kitchen. Hours earlier KFS officers destroyed the mud and thatch dwelling, Rotich said. Tony Karumba / GroundTruth

“I don’t understand why they chase us like this,” Selly Rotich, a mother of five, said as she sat outside her scorched home.

The next day, nine KFS rangers confronted reporters as they entered the forest, demanding to know why they were talking to the Sengwer.

“These guys are squatters,” said one officer, who declined to identify himself. “They are not allowed to be in the forest. They are here illegally.”

Reporters asked the rangers if they were the ones who set fire to Sengwer homes the day before. Another ranger responded, “You are being lied to. You are being misled by the people. They claim that we are burning the houses — how do you know that they are not burning their own houses?”

At that, several of the KFS agents grinned.

[Jacob Kushner](#) and [Anthony Langat](#) are Kenya-based reporters for the GroundTruth Project, a non-profit global news service headquartered in the U.S. [Sasha Chavkin](#) is a reporter and [Michael Hudson](#) is a senior editor at the [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists](#).

Produced by Hilary Fung and [Shane Shifflett](#).

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