Market for the People

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Katangua is a market where shoppers can buy second-hand clothing and other goods at affordable prices

The name Katangua means only one thing to Lagosians: the market where second-hand clothing are sold at affordable prices. The market located in Abule-Egba, a suburb of Lagos, started on small scale, but it has grown to become a source of happiness to families who thronged there daily to replenish their wardrobes and buy other goods cheaper. But not many who patronise the market are conversant with its history and that it bears a Hausa name which has been mispronounced over the years. Rachael Adeleke, the Iyaloja or the leader of the market, is one of the few people who can trace the origin of the market and the reason why it has a Hausa name. According to her, it was one Alhaji Gatan Kowa, an Ilorin trader, who named it so. Gatan Kowa is a Hausa phrase which literally means “for all people.” But those who could not pronounce it well simply call it Katangua. The Iyaloja said some years back, Gatan Kowa was passing by Isale-oja in Agege, a Lagos suburb, when he sighted Lagos task force officials seizing goods and arresting traders at the market. for roadside trading. He was moved by their plight. This prompted him to ask one of the traders if they would agree to move to his parcel of land at its present location. “We all agreed and we moved down here in February 1984,” Adeleke said. Since then, the market has turned out to be a major commercial centre and has grown so fast with different trading sections comprising food sellers, tailors/clothing materials, fruit sellers, laundry and a host of other divisions. “This is a market where you can get different items. It is not a place to get second-hand clothes only but also general purpose items,” she said. The goods sold at Katangua Market are imported from the United Kingdom, United States, Dubai, China, Korea and other European and Asian countries, through Cotonou, Republic of Benin. Though many of the goods are contraband, the market is flourishing as more people are joining the business. Since they have to bring in these goods in big bundles through illegal routes, the traders say the cost of doing business has gone up. This, perhaps, explains the marginal but steady rise in the prices of goods in the market, especially in the last few months because some traders lament that after paying huge sums to clear their consignments from the Benin port, the Nigerian Customs officials also extort huge sums of money from them before they are secretly allowed into the country. To forestall this, the traders have organised themselves into a union called Travellers Progressive Union. The group is headed by Stanley Nkanwuchu. Katangua has outgrown Gatan Kowa, its founder. All Nigeria’s three major ethnic groups trade there. And three unions have emerged along ethnic lines with different leaders. While Adeleke plays dual roles as the market leader and head of the Yoruba section, the Hausa traders are led by Idris Mohammed who is also called Sarkin Kasuwa. Odus Ikujiobi is the leader of the Igbo traders. The market is run in accordance with unwritten rules; one of the rules demands that a stall must be outrightly purchased by a trader. Anthony Owolabi, secretary of the Yoruba section of the market, said that all a prospective trader needs to do is meet the overall chairman to get a shop or negotiate with the shop owners directly. The cost of renting shops at the market varies between N38, 000 and N84, 000 per annum, depending on the size. Some traders, however, opt for stands which cost N20, 000 per annum or N100 per day. Even with these high cost, the traders are still grappling with a few challenges. The market was demolished in November 2004, for environmental offences by the Agbado Oke-Odo local council. Since then, the market has only been reconstructed halfway without essential facilities such as toilet and water facilities. The only manageable toilet was a rickety restroom provided by a private individual who charges N20 after each visit. But more worrisome to the businessmen and women is the alleged plan by the state government to relocate the market. Adeleke told Newswatch that the Lagos State government plans to move the market to Amikanle, Abule Egba, and then relocate the Computer Village at Ikeja, which sells computer gadgets and accessories to the site. She said the plan was first conveyed to them towards the end of the former governor Bola Tinubu’s administration, but was suspended when Habibat Mogaji, the governor’s mother, intervened on behalf of the traders five years ago. “We got information from the right source that the market would be demolished but we are perplexed now because we have no place to go,” she said.