



City profile

Abuja city profile

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ABSTRACT

Abuja, the most rapidly growing city in Africa, is not just a modern capital city of Nigeria. It is a city that is being contested by the elites who desire to realize their modernist vision of an orderly and beautiful city and the poor who struggle to stitch together a living largely in the informal sector. Abuja is also the destination of innumerable unemployed people who migrate to the city in search of perceived employment opportunities and of those who see the city as much safer than other parts of the country. It is within this context, coupled with limited resources, that the city administration is struggling to cope with the increasing challenges of providing housing, basic public services and an efficient transportation system. The key issue is whether the government's partnership with the private sector in the development of Abuja in the last decade can meet these challenges.

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Introduction

Like many major cities in developing countries, Abuja is experiencing an astronomical rate of population growth. Indeed its urbanization rate of 8.32% per annum makes it the fastest growing city in Africa (Myers, 2011). While the current population of the city is estimated at over 3 million people, its day-time population often reaches up to 7 million (Iro, 2007). This makes Abuja the fourth largest urban area in Nigeria after Lagos, Kano and Ibadan. Moreover, the city's rapid rate of urban growth is more astounding in its satellite settlements which are growing at about 20% per annum (Abubakar & Doan, 2010). Even though natural population increase is part of this growth, the major force underlying this overwhelming growth is in-migration due to perceived better economic opportunities in Abuja, rural people's quests for urban life, lack of investment in Nigeria's smaller towns and villages, and the belief that the city is much safer than other parts of the country.

The results of this explosive growth is the acute shortage of housing (Abdullahi, 2010; Umoh, 2012), the proliferation of informal settlements (Amba, 2010; Jibril, 2006), occupation of uncompleted buildings (Abubakar & Doan, 2010), water scarcity (Abubakar, 2012), dilapidated sewer systems (Ilesanmi, 2006; Ojo, 2011) and traffic congestion (Benna Associates, 2009). Amid these challenges, and coupled with limited resources, the city administration is surprisingly trying to realize its elitist vision of

an orderly and beautiful modern city. However, this vision is constantly being thwarted by hordes of poor people that are trying to make a living mainly in the city's informal sector.

This article, therefore, analyses the three and a half decades of urban development in Abuja with particular emphasis on recent initiatives aimed at meeting these challenges. The specific objectives of the paper are to: (a) review Abuja's geography, historical development, and planning and urban form in order to best understand the context within which these challenges occur; (b) discuss the major challenges facing the city and critically evaluate how its recent partnerships with the private sector in housing provision, garbage collection and public transportation services is attempting to meet these challenges; and (c) to offer some recommendations on the way forward.

Geographical background

Abuja city is located in the central part of Nigeria north of the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers (Fig. 1). The city is part of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) whose land area of about 8000 km² makes it almost two and a half times the size of Lagos State, the former capital territory of Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa and the sixth most populated in the world. The geography of the area is defined by two renowned rock formations—the Zuma Rock from whose base the FCT begins and the Aso Rock that is located to the east of the city.

Abuja lies at latitude 9.07°N and longitude 7.48°E, and at an elevation of 840 m (2760 ft) above sea-level. This elevation and tropical location gives Abuja a mild weather which contrasts sharply

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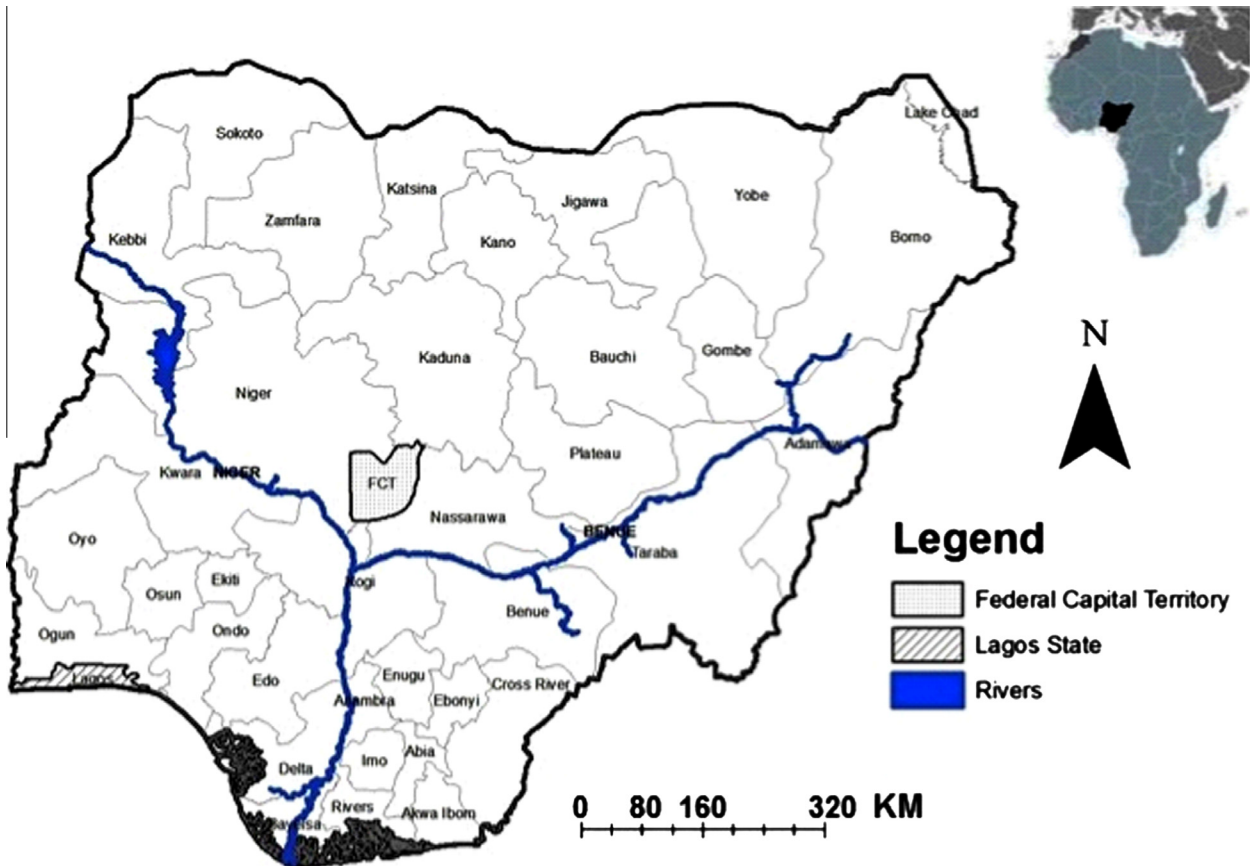


Fig. 1. Abuja is more centrally located and accessible from all parts of Nigeria than Lagos.

with the humid weather of Lagos, which is located on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean at 35 m (11 ft) above sea-level. The Abuja area has two distinct seasons: the rainy season that lasts from April to October with rainfall ranging from 305 to 762 mm (12–30 in.) and temperatures raising up to 40 °C in May; and the dry season that lasts from November through March with dry winds lowering the temperature to as low as 12 °C. Because of its abundant rainfall, rich soil and the location within the Guinea-Savanna vegetation zone, the region is agriculturally productive, with maize and tubers as the dominant crops.

Abuja's situation at the geographical center of Nigeria (Fig. 1) and its strategic position at the intersection of two highways linking the northern and southern parts of the country make it more accessible than Lagos. For example, while the road distance from Maiduguri in Borno State in the northeastern part of Nigeria to Lagos is about 1609 km (1000 miles), in contrast, the distance from Abuja to all parts of the country is less than 965 km (600 miles). This centrality and accessibility is actually one of the reasons why the new capital city was created.

Historical development

Abuja is a young city that began its existence on 3rd February 1976 when the federal military government established the FCT after accepting the recommendation that Lagos – the Nigerian capital since 1914 and also the country's major port and commercial and industrial center – could no longer effectively perform the dual role of state and federal capital. The Lagos' main problems were shortage of land for expansion, chronic housing and traffic congestion, overstretched and dilapidated infrastructure, unhygienic

environment and poor drainage (the city being only 10 feet above sea-level) and domination by one ethnic group – the Yoruba (IPA (International Planning Associates), 1979, Morah, 1993; Schatz, 2003). In addition, though Nigeria was not facing any war threat when Abuja was created, Obateru (2004) believes that Lagos is vulnerable to attacks in the event of military aggression from other countries and hence unsuitable to be Nigeria's capital.

In order to create a new capital city that is free from Lagos' problems, the federal territory that contains Abuja city was carved out of Plateau, Kwara, Niger and Kaduna states in the middle of the country (Fig. 1) and an agency, Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA), was established to plan and develop the city and the entire FCT. As such, FCDA selected and commissioned an American planning consortium, International Planning Associates (IPA), to prepare a master plan for Abuja City, which was completed in 1979 and the development of the city began the following year. At that time, there were about 300,000 people from indigenous tribes residing in 500–600 villages without access to roads and basic services within the FCT. Those villages located on the sites earmarked for the capital city, the game reserve area, the reservoir watersheds and Abuja airport were recommended for relocation while the rest were to be upgraded and integrated into the satellite settlements (IPA, 1979).

In terms of administration, there are six local area councils created within the FCT – Abuja Municipal, Abaji, Bwari, Kuje, Gwagwalada, and Kwali (Fig. 2). While Abuja city is sited within the Abuja Municipal area, the city is directly administered by the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA), which is headed by a minister appointed by the president. The FCTA has several departments and agencies, supervised by directors, including the Abuja Water Board, the Abuja Environmental Protection Board that

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