


# ABUJA

## A CITY FOR ALL

Moving from Vision to Reality

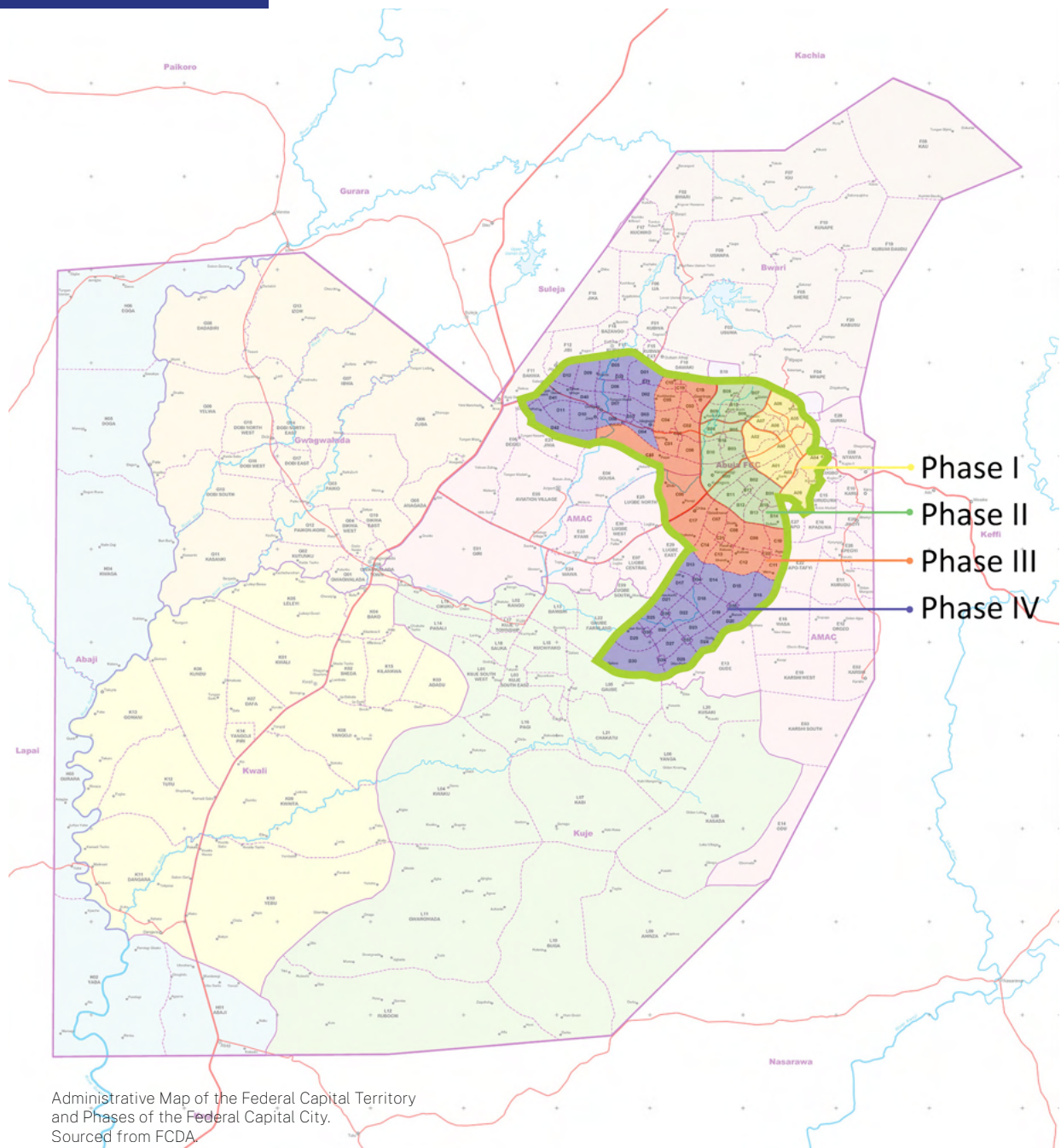


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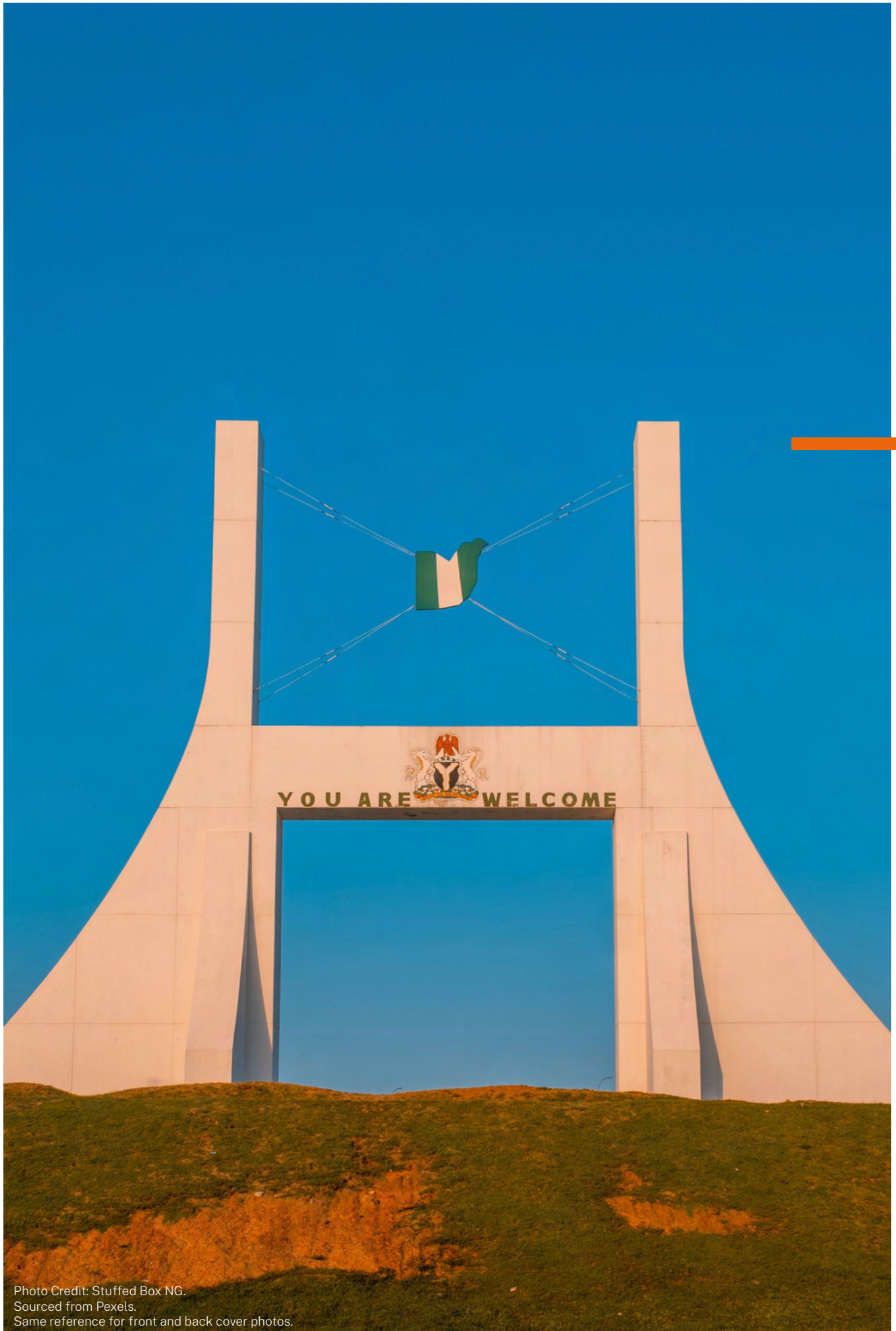


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Same reference for front and back cover photos.



# Introduction

The idea of Abuja as a new capital emerged in the early 1970s, shortly after the end of the Nigerian civil war. The new city should symbolize the country's unity, ensuring that every Nigerian has easy access to the capital and feels like a valued citizen. A master plan was approved in 1979 and was expected to be implemented in phases spanning over decades, starting during a time of relative wealth due to high oil revenues. However, dwindling government income in the 1980s stalled progress, leading to speculative investments that created vast empty plots of land.

This was followed by urban sprawl, characterised by rapid, unplanned, and uncoordinated development of housing, industry, business, and informal activities without the necessary infrastructure in place. In an attempt to control this development, consecutive city administrations have used the Abuja Master Plan as a justification not only for massive and violent evictions of communities over the past decades but also for the destruction of businesses and real estate investments, leaving the private sector and many communities in a state of uncertainty.

Comparing the current realities of the city with its initial vision of equal access, equal citizenship, environmental conservation, and rapid national economic growth raises important questions and calls for self-reflection on the way forward. This need for reflection has manifested itself in recent years through a call for the review of the Abuja Master Plan. In June 2023, the HipCity Innovation Centre and the Heinrich Böll Foundation Abuja office organized a two-day conference that brought together representatives from various government agencies, town planners, builders, as well as Original Inhabitants and People with Disabilities to understand the scope of such a review.

Aerial View of a Section of Wuse District, Abuja.  
Photo Credit: Terver Photos.  
Sourced from Adobe Stock.

The discussions during the conference revealed that before undertaking the review of the master plan, political decision-makers, FCT civil servants, professional communities, civil society, and residents need to engage in a political discussion to arrive at commonly agreed principles and policies enabling an inclusive development of a city that caters to everyone's needs. This inclusive approach is crucial in ensuring that the original vision of equal access, citizenship, and environmental conservation is upheld while fostering sustainable economic growth.

The following recommendations were made:

- Use an integration approach rather than a resettlement and relocation approach for developing communities with and for the Original Inhabitants.
- Develop a housing policy that focuses on low-income earners who currently find it difficult to afford to live in the expensive city.
- Streamline and coordinate government agencies more effectively.
- Strictly adhere to participatory planning and implementation processes, starting from a democratically elected government, rather than an appointed one, for a city that aims to be the avant-garde of democracy and the gateway to Africa.



# 1 Use of an “Integration” Approach to Safeguard the Right to the City for the Communities of the Original Inhabitants (OI)

Abuja is composed of the Federal Capital City (FCC), carved out from the larger Federal Capital Territory (FCT) covering 8,000sqm<sup>1</sup>, more than two times the size of the former capital Lagos. While the FCC, occupying approximately 15% of the FCT's area, has a master plan known as the Abuja Master Plan (AMP), the settlements outside the FCC, often referred to as Satellite Towns, do not yet have a master plan.

Nine indigenous tribes have been recognized in the FCT as the Original Inhabitants of Abuja, with the Gbaya or Gwari tribe being the most dominant group, with roots in Niger and Nasarawa States<sup>2</sup>. After the 1976 proclamation of the Federal Capital Territory, they were supposed to be resettled and integrated by the government into the development fabric of the new FCT, a process that is yet to be completed after more than 47 years. Their indigenous settlements are still visible in the Abuja landscape, marked by perimeter fences, especially along the ring road leading to the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport.

After the proclamation of the new capital, the government kick-started the infrastructural development of the FCC, which led to the reluctant migration of civil servants to the city. To incentivize their move to the city, along with other private sector businesses, the government provided free accommodation in places such as Life Camp and Nyanya Labour Camp. At that initial stage, land allocation lacked stringent procedures, and frequently, the indigenous communities gave it away freely, disregarding the Abuja Master Plan, despite the fact that the 1976 decree establishing Abuja had deprived them of their customary rights to the land. The massive construction and development of new areas in the 1990s attracted an influx of artisans, unskilled labourers, and a significant number of People with Disabilities (PWD) in search of better livelihoods and living standards. Since the 2000s, during the peak of the crisis in the North Eastern and North Central parts of the country, Abuja has become a preferred destination for many citizens fleeing conflict-affected areas. In today's times, residents from neighbouring states such as Nassarawa, Niger, Kogi, Benue, and Kaduna commute to Abuja, further impacting land use, transportation, business, and housing development.

Currently, defining who the “Original Inhabitants” (OIs) are has become complex, especially when considering family ties. Many residents within the Federal Capital Territory have close family ties outside the region. Moreover, if they were not present in the 1976 census due to their non-residential status at the time, their eligibility becomes further complicated.

A pragmatic approach, as applied by the Department of Resettlement and Compensation<sup>3</sup>, defines “Original Inhabitants” as those who resided in the FCT prior to 1976, while considering settlers or communities who started residing in the FCT after 1976 as “Other Nigerians.” Original inhabitants do not possess receipts or titles, whether customary or traditional, for the lands they occupy. Instead, the Land Use Act of 1978 serves as the primary legal instrument for determining land ownership. Although titles have not been granted to Original Inhabitants, they have been recognized as distinct entities within the master plan. On the other side, the FCT Act of 1976 acknowledges that individuals with proof of land ownership should be compensated, including for economic trees.

Initially, the aim was to resettle all Original Inhabitants (OIs) living on the new capital's territory (FCT) to neighbouring states. However, this strategy soon changed, focusing on resettling OIs from the Federal Capital City (FCC) into various areas within the FCT. Successful examples of this approach include the resettlements for the construction of the Usuma Dam and the Kubwa resettlement scheme. In 1992, the policy of integration was introduced, which involved upgrading existing houses and infrastructure while integrating the village into the overall plan. Garki Village stands as the only real example of this integration approach that can be studied today<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.fcda.gov.ng/about/the-new-federal-capital>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/07/cry-of-abujas-original-inhabitants-a-call-for-justice-at-the-heart-of-power/>

<sup>3</sup>Workshop note June 2023

<sup>4</sup>Workshop note June 2023



Economic Migrant in Abuja.  
Photo Credit: HipCity Hub.

Over the following decades, various approaches and agencies were responsible for the resettlement and welfare of the Original Inhabitants, frequently employing conflicting or poorly coordinated strategies. In 2004, these agencies were merged into the FCDA Department of Resettlement and Compensation, tasked with formulating a cohesive resettlement and relocation policy, as well as designing comprehensive resettlement schemes. Unfortunately, to this day, the Department lacks a clear-cut policy to regulate its affairs and processes. It still needs to coordinate with multiple government agencies, such as the Public Building Department, Engineering Department, Satellite Town Development Agency, Health or Education Secretariat, and more. These agencies respond to different authorities: some directly under the FCT Minister's office, others under the Minister of State or the Permanent Secretary who oversees entities like the Abuja Metropolitan Management Services or the Executive Secretary FCDA. A committee consisting of professionals from the Ministry of Works and Housing, the Ministry of Agriculture, and other departments oversees the operations of the Department of Resettlement and Compensation. However, they appear to lack a strong connection to the realities of living in the communities of the original inhabitants.

This overlapping and uncoordinated governance structure is not the only reason for the failure of the resettlement schemes: since inception they suffered from inadequate funding and the lack of political will to ensure their success. As a result, housing units were constructed without the necessary supporting infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, or schools, in place, which further delayed the relocation of the communities. Consequently, the built houses either started to collapse or were taken over by migrants seeking cheap accommodation.

Furthermore, these approaches failed to take into considerations the communities' ability to continue their usual economic activities, which initially involved farming. With the growth of urban sprawl, the communities shifted to informal trades, which they can no longer pursue in the new areas allocated to them. Over time, the Original Inhabitants engaged themselves in selling of land within their settlements to migrants, contributing to unplanned urban expansion. This increasingly evoked forced evictions and demolitions despite the fact that today, many of these communities offer affordable accommodation to low-income migrants, who predominantly live as tenants or landowners among them. These migrants would fall under the government's relocation scheme, which provides plots of land with basic infrastructure, but the beneficiary is responsible for building the house. However, so far, no such relocation scheme has been implemented.





Communities of Original Inhabitants (OI) are increasingly demanding that housing be provided for all, including both the original inhabitants and their tenants. As a result, they strongly advocate for the Policy of Integration. Considering that all attempts at resettlement or relocation have been mostly unsuccessful for the past 40 years, it is difficult to comprehend why the integration approach was not adopted from the beginning. This indicates that Abuja's vision, like many African cities, has been and continues to be shaped by foreign thinking and its definition of "modernity." This belief is evident in the mind set of town planners and political decision-makers, who think that the communities' traditional lifestyle, characterized by courtyards and extended families, cannot be sustained within the nation's capital.

However, modern architectural and town planning approaches highlight the importance of traditional sustainable building materials and designs, as showcased in the "Laboratory for Future" of the 2023 Architectural Biennale in Venice<sup>5</sup>, focusing on Africa. An integration approach that strikes a nuanced balance between preserving cultural heritage and accommodating the demands of urban development, involving collaboration with urban designers, academics, and civil society, could propel Abuja into the realm of a forward-looking, modern, and inclusive gateway to Africa.

<sup>5</sup><https://static.labiennale.org/files/architettura/Documenti/brochure-2023b.pdf>





◀ Overview of some landmark buildings in Abuja's Central Business District (Cultural Zone).  
Photo Credit: Jordaces Media.  
Sourced from Shutterstock.

## Next Steps

1. Design an “Operational Guideline” for the Department of Resettlement and Compensation (R&C), outlining internal processes and procedures, with the active involvement of stakeholders such as Original Inhabitants (OIs) and representatives of their tenants, government officials, professional bodies, and civil society organizations. The consultation processes should start with a comprehensive assessment to gather diverse perspectives and define roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes, address transparency, accountability, and grievance redress mechanisms, and design engagement, feedback, and monitoring processes for continuous evaluation and improvement.
2. Facilitate the issuance of titles for Original Inhabitants (OIs) more efficiently and ensure the implementation of people-friendly biometric data collection methods in conjunction with other government census efforts. This will streamline the process and provide accurate data for land administration purposes.
3. Engage all community groups and members, rather than just community leaders, in the decision-making processes related to the design and planning of layouts, especially in cases where resettlement becomes necessary for developments, including projects of overriding public interest.
4. Develop regulations that prioritize the delivery of public and private infrastructure that caters to the needs of persons with disabilities (PWD).



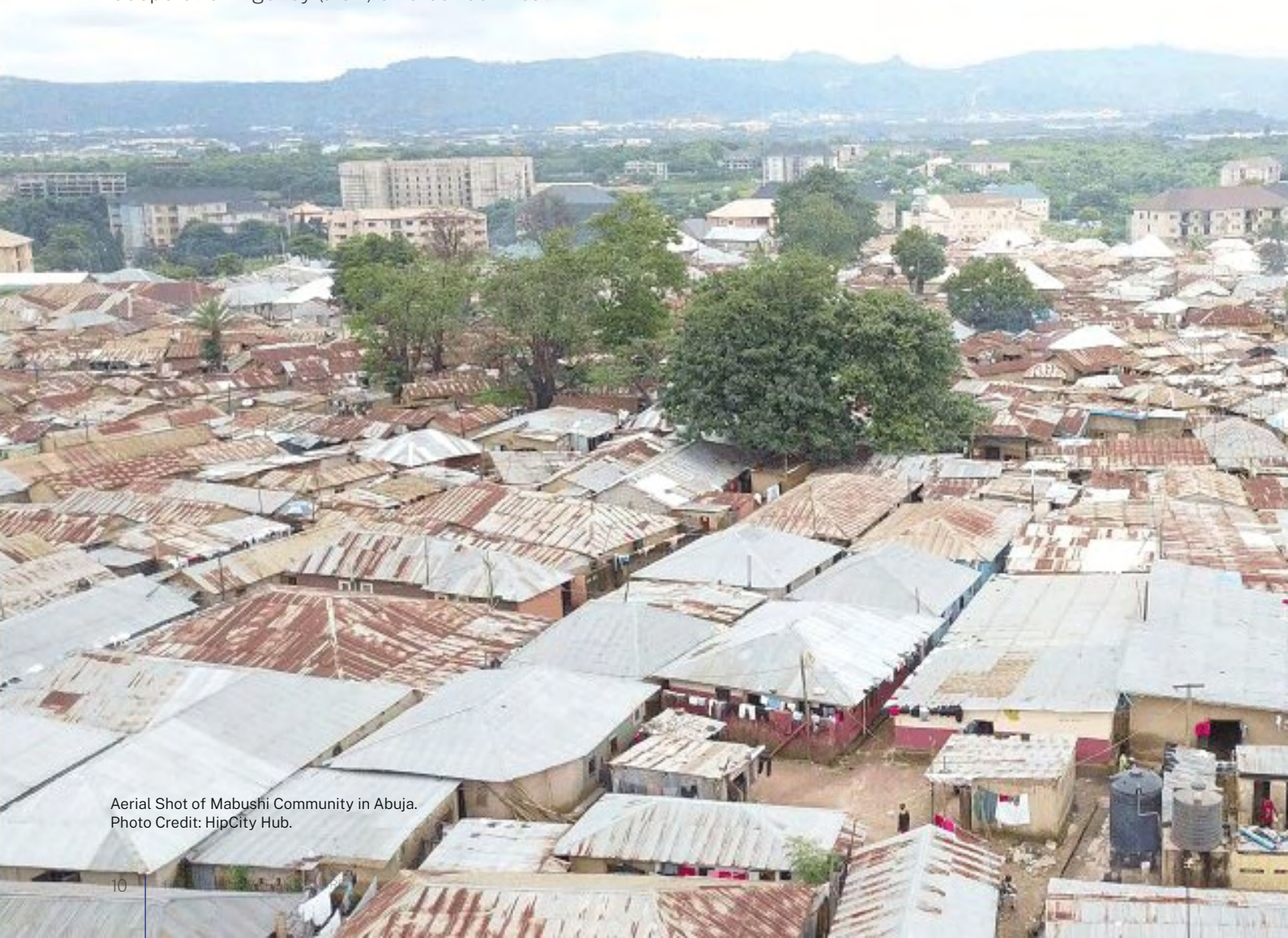
## 2 | Ensure Provision of Housing and Income Opportunities for All Needs

The Abuja Master Plan (AMP) envisioned the development of the Federal Capital City (FCC) in four phases: Phase I was designed to accommodate 230,000 residents, Phases II and III were planned to accommodate an additional 585,000 and 640,000 people, respectively. Thus, after the implementation of Phase III, the city was intended to accommodate an estimated population of 1.5 million<sup>6</sup>. However, at present, Phases I to III of Abuja's development remains unfinished, and the population of the FCC is already estimated to be 3,839,646, exceeding the projections by 2,384,646 people. This rapid population increase has put a strain on the infrastructure provided for Phases I to III, which is gradually becoming inadequate for the current population.

Originally, the timeline for the AMP revision was 15 years, starting in 1994, with provision for subsequent 5-year revisions. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) offered technical

support, which is being assessed by the Federal Capital Development Authority, for the review of the master plan 29 years after it was due for revision in 1994. Today, in 2023, the AMP has existed for 44 years without undergoing any review.

The FCC master plan included provisions for different categories of housing. However, these provisions have never been supported by policies and models that would make decent housing affordable for low-income groups. The Department of Mass Housing (DMH), responsible for government housing delivery in the FCC, primarily relies on Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) as its major tool. Under this approach, the DMH grants land to developers who build an agreed number of housing units, sell them to the public, and then share the profits with the government at a ratio of 30% (government) and 70% (developer).<sup>7</sup>



Aerial Shot of Mabushi Community in Abuja.  
Photo Credit: HipCity Hub.



Regrettably, this arrangement excludes low-income groups from accessing housing, whether through lease or purchase. As a result, Abuja is perceived as a city for high-income earners, with housing prices beyond the reach of most income groups. The situation further worsened when the federal monetization policy was introduced in July 2003, which halted the government's practice of building mass housing for its civil servants and political office-holders<sup>8</sup>. Instead, these individuals now receive money to acquire their own houses as they see fit. This policy places a heavy burden on the city's agencies responsible for land use and allocation, as they face pressure to allocate and develop land according to the wishes and preferences of political office holders, significantly distorting the initial master plan.

Affordable housing settlements for low-income groups is currently available in communities of the Early Settlers/Original Inhabitants but the government has yet to integrate them into the mainstream development of the FCC. The informal condition of these settlements, which offers cheaper housing, attracts vulnerable economic migrants and certain categories of government workers. Government-designated areas for the settlement of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and indigenous

people have been encroached upon without these settlements ever been built, while the number of families under this scheme has increased over time.

In areas such as Shere, assigned for a resettlement program since 1998, houses have been renovated but are yet to be allocated. Other locations designated for the resettlement of indigenous persons have been reallocated/converted as areas for government use such as the Jibi resettlement camp that is now occupied by the Nigerian Police Force as their barrack<sup>9</sup>. Areas located outside the FCC but within the FCT do not fall under the current master plan, resulting in development being guided by individual discretion without much regulation, making cheap accommodation readily available. These locations remain major transit or trapping points for migrants to Abuja, who may stay there as long as required to find economic opportunities. Some of the locations include Dutse Alhaji, Gwagwalada, and some parts of Kubwa.

The 18 IDP Camps in Abuja, including Lugbe IDP Camp, Area One IDP Camp, Karonmajigi IDP Camp, New Kuchingoro IDP Camp, and Kuje IDP Camp, have also become favoured places for low-income groups seeking better opportunities in Abuja.

An emerging challenge observed is a new policy of FCDA promoting vertical housing, which makes it difficult for some civil servants and private individuals who have been allocated land to develop, as they lack the ability to construct multiple-floor buildings as required by the revised development rules. This is causing redundancy in the flow of new housing units into the already saturated market.<sup>10</sup>

Abuja primarily serves as a political and diplomatic city with mixed uses, encompassing businesses, industries, public spaces, and residential areas. The master plan initially designated formal neighbourhood business areas, which over time transitioned into informal business zones. In 2004, some of these areas were officially converted into informal markets to cater to expanding communities. However, as of today, five of these informal markets have been closed, leaving only one at Garki Area 1<sup>11</sup>. Owning or renting open stalls and shops in the current formal markets is often costly and unaffordable for low-income earners. Consequently, significant pockets of informal businesses, including street hawking and inner street corner stalls, exist within the FCC, despite being prohibited by the FCT administration.



<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fcda.gov.ng/about/the-new-federal-capital>

<sup>7</sup> Workshop note, June 2023

<sup>8</sup> Workshop note, June 2023

<sup>9</sup> <https://allafrica.com/stories/200304100783.html/> workshop note, June 2023

<sup>10</sup> Workshop note, June 2023

<sup>11</sup> Workshop note, June 2023

There is no deliberate economic development program targeted at economic migrants or vulnerable groups. Nevertheless, economic migrants within the city often find employment in various sectors across different parts of the city, such as furniture making in Idu Industrial Area, agriculture in Kuje, technology hubs along the Airport Road, waste recycling businesses in the designated Gosa landfill area, and building materials trading activities in Jabi.

The Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEPB) and the FCC Task Team on Environment are tasked with preventing street trading or economic activities in non-designated areas, as these are not permitted within the city. Outside the FCC, the landscape is dominated by various informal activities, including small-scale buying and selling businesses

operating in front of homes and makeshift shops. The system of accessing business opportunities is fluid and self-regulating, without state intervention. The ability to pay in cash is a key factor in securing a business location. The evident oversight in allocating space for organized informal trade once again reflects the foreign and colonized spatial planning approach, which disregards the significant contribution of the informal sector to the city's development.

## Next Steps

1. Develop housing policies and programs that support the integration of the Original Inhabitants to improve their current precarious living conditions. Addressing this critical concern is essential to reducing the high risk associated with living in Abuja for other low-income Nigerians.
2. Prioritize a “Mixed-Income Housing” policy with social and cooperative models that aim to include all income groups in the city, fostering collaboration in service delivery. This approach will enhance the functionality and efficiency of the FCC while mitigating the pressure of informal settlements expansion in the FCT.
3. Implement and enforce a taxation scheme on vacant houses in the formal housing sector to generate revenue that can be reinvested in providing adequate housing for low-income groups. While the demand remains unmet in the informal sector, there is an excess supply in the formal sector.
4. Develop a deliberate “Economic Development Strategy” as a major platform for wealth creation, with a strong emphasis on the informal economy, which is deeply rooted in the African settlement growth pattern.
5. Establish a dedicated unit to address issues of informality, including data collection, registration, formalization, business development, access to finance, and resources.
6. Incorporate informal business opportunities as part of the Abuja Master Plan (AMP) review process and formulate a detailed implementation plan.





### 3 Increase Efficiency, Transparency and Accountability of Government Agencies

The distortion of the initial Masterplan was actually initiated by the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) itself in the 1980s when it chose to relocate from its designated location. While the Masterplan envisioned a dispersion of government offices across the territory, the FCDA leadership opted to move into the inner-city centre. This decision led other government institutions to follow suit, resulting in overcrowding the inner city while leaving their designated areas abandoned. To alleviate this, decentralizing the functions of public institutions and corporate entities to the area councils would be an ideal solution. This would help reduce congestion in the inner city and encourage infrastructure development in those areas.

Contributing to the Masterplan's distortion is the dual structure of the FCC and FCT authorities, overseen by an appointed Minister, with an increasing number of departments responsible for land allocation. The Department for Urban and Regional Planning (DURP), under the Executive Secretary of the FCDA, is said to be the custodian of the Abuja Master Plan. This department determines land use within the overall FCT, overseeing compliance with the Abuja Masterplan for the Federal Capital City (FCC) and designing layouts for the six Area Councils, which fall under the authority of the Minister of State for FCT. Thus, the DURP's role is to approve development schemes only if they align with the designated land use and layout design in the Abuja Masterplan.

Initially, the Area Councils, represented by zonal managers, were responsible for designing layouts within their councils and had the authority to allocate land, issuing Customary Certificates of Occupancy. In 2003, FCT Minister Mallam Nasir El-Rufai attempted to streamline land administration systems to enhance efficiency and consistency by eliminating the zonal land managers responsible for land allocation. As a result, only the FCT Minister now signs certificates of ownership/occupancy, leading to legal disputes as certificates issued by the Area Councils are no longer recognized unless validated by the Minister. This change caused significant contention, frustration, and uncertainty, impeding housing and infrastructure development<sup>12</sup>.

Concurrently, the Abuja Geographic Information Systems (AGIS), directly under the FCT Minister's authority, was established as a documentation and record-keeping department for all lands within the FCT. Although initially intended for the computerization of the cadastral and land registry of the FCT, this department now handles land application forms, seemingly duplicating the role of the Department of Land Administration.

With the continual creation of new agencies over time, roles have become duplicated, and responsibilities have been delegated, resulting in a lack of transparency and accountability. Residents, both Original Inhabitants and other Nigerians, often struggle to determine which agency is responsible for what, which are their rights and obligations, and how to establish the legal status of their properties. The existing system of disseminating information about land administration, allocation, land use, and development schemes to the public is ineffective and leaves people feeling treated unfairly.

Participants at the 2-day Technical Workshop organized by HipCity Innovation Centre in Abuja, June 2023 ▼



<sup>12</sup> Workshop note, June 2023





## 4 Use a Participatory and Inclusive Approach

At present, the FCTA is in the process of developing a “Digital Service Level Agreement” aimed at enhancing understanding of the roles of various agencies and the timelines set for their processes and activities, benefiting both the public and staff members. This digital system is expected to promote accountability within the FCTA and could also help identify underperforming civil servants. While this initiative is underway and departments are submitting their contributions, there is minimal citizen participation in the design of this digital system. To rectify this, civil society organizations should be included to infuse the needs and expectations of local communities, and professional institutes such as Town Planners and Architects should also be involved to provide impartial information to residents involved in construction and document approvals.

It remains questionable whether solely reviewing the master plan will sufficiently address Abuja’s numerous challenges in its pursuit of realizing its initial visions. An initial step should involve a thorough review and simplification of the city’s governance structure through an in-depth participatory consultation process. This process should engage civil society organizations, representatives of all residents, and various professional institutes. Streamlining land-related departments under one unified leadership is necessary, as currently, there are six such departments under the purview of the Permanent Secretary, Surveyor General Office, and Executive Secretary respectively. Urgent harmonization of tasks is needed between the

“Abuja Geographical Information System” and the “Accelerated Area Council and Sectional Titles Re-Issuance Scheme.” The role of the Area Councils in land allocation, administration, and the delivery of municipal services, as the entities closest to the people, should be clarified.

Inclusivity begins with ownership, and a lack of a sense of belonging has led to failures in spatial planning and infrastructural development. A significant barrier to the inclusive participation of citizens/residents in the city’s development stems from the fact that the FCT Minister is not elected by the people but rather appointed by the federal government in power. Despite Abuja positioning itself as a symbol of democracy and unity for Nigerians and the entire African continent, its governance system lacks a separation of powers. Given the current and anticipated population of Abuja, it is regrettable that its residents, who have established the city as their home, lack the authority to decide on their own government. The roles of the two legislators and the senator representing Abuja in the Federal House of Representatives and the Senate, respectively, do not hold similar strong oversight as state houses of assemblies, such as those in Lagos State. Although the Constitution grants the National Assembly the authority to legislate on matters concerning Abuja, the impact is limited due to national lawmakers’ having other national concerns to deal with. Conversely, Area Council councillors are empowered to legislate on matters within their respective Area Councils.



Participants at the 2-day Technical Workshop organized by HipCity Innovation Centre in Abuja, June 2023

# OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Photos from the 2-day  
Technical Workshop  
organized by HipCity  
Innovation Centre in  
Abuja, June 2023



Use an integration approach rather than a resettlement and relocation approach.



Develop and implement a housing policy that focuses on low-income earners.



Streamline and coordinate government agencies more effectively.



Strictly adhere to participatory planning and implementation processes.











## BRIEF OF HIPCITY INNOVATION CENTRE

The realization that daily; the inequality gap keeps widening, with the civic space shrinking due to sundry reasons, more women and young persons are locked in poverty and need for want, we therefore recognize that for global peace to be sustained and migration curtailed, young people and women must be trained and equipped with the right attitude, skills set and capacity to create wealth, speak up against all forms of violence and victimization and most importantly play critical role in decision making process.

Therefore, at HipCity Innovation Centre we commit ourselves to ensuring free and democratic access to information, sharing with groups that have difficulty to access. We accept the responsibility to influence and cooperate with governmental institutions so long as the actions are approved in a democratic manner and are not in any used as a tool for victimization of the people.

We recognize education as an inherent right of each human being. We defend the principle of free and public education so as to guarantee the accessibility of education to all in order not to impede the privatization of knowledge.

We commit ourselves to promoting skills, knowledge transfer to help guide more youths and women into sustainable businesses, while engaging with policy makers and shapers to make legislations that would guarantee that every human has equal rights and opportunities to become the best they can be through their imagination and innovation without any impediments or exclusion.

### Vision

We envision a world where everyone irrespective of the circumstances surrounding their existence have equal access to opportunities that would ensure that they attain self-actualization without fear of marginalization, victimization or outright exclusion from issues that concern them.

### Mission


Our mission is to help everyone especially youths have the right mind-set to create wealth through skills, coexist, value human rights, respect the rule of law, realize their full potential, and meaningfully become tools for positive sustainable development.

HipCity Innovation Centre is registered in Nigeria with the Corporate Affairs Commission with CAC No: CAC/IT/116821









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