



Urbanization and developing sustainable cities: Abuja as a case study



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Introduction

Urbanization is characterized by the movement of people from rural areas that tend to be sparsely populated to cities that occupy more compact spaces and provide more densely populated living opportunities. The rapid expansion of metropolitan areas has been termed urban sprawl – referring to the complex pattern of land use, transportation and social and economic development. (Frumkin 2002). Urban sprawl has been a trend long associated with North American cities, but is fast becoming the trend in developing countries where real estate developers are pushing a "world class" lifestyle. Urban sprawl can be seen as a good thing being that it is the expansion of the urban center to rural areas bringing more efficient use of land (construction of hospitals, schools, roads, railways et cetera) to an area of low population density in the North American case. Urbanization and the sprawl that it creates are an efficient and sustainable way of accommodating an ever growing world population (United Nations Population Fund 2007). Cities allow for the population to be accommodated while land can be used to develop industries, grow crops or be put to uses other than housing. The assumption is that such uses will help improve the economic circumstances of all through job creation, innovation, food production, and the production of goods and services.

Nigeria has one of the highest urbanization rates in the world (Atere and Akinwale 2006). Like most developing countries its pattern of urbanization takes the form of a central core city with peripheral areas that are suburban; peri-urbanization. (United Nations Population Fund 2007). Residential suburbanization has its roots in cultural aspirations and has been promoted by official policies, but both the aspirations and the policies have come into question. By contrast, urban growth by peri-urbanization is largely unplanned and without direction. These different contributions to urban sprawl need to be reviewed with regard to their wider implications (United Nations Population Fund 2007). In other words, in America where there is the assumption that everyone wants a large house on a large lot, with good automobile access to facilities, developing countries such as Nigeria, find such aspirations unrealistic for

mass urbanization because such countries lack the resources necessary to deal with the transportation and other costs associated with dispersed cities. They look to urbanization as a show of modernity and economic development. Sprawl at least in the Nigerian case is seen as an unfortunate by product of urbanization that can be tolerated but which provides no status for its occupants.

This paper will look at the development of urban centers in Nigeria by looking at the case of Abuja. Abuja was seen as a solution to the peri-urbanization that blighted Lagos the former Nigerian capital. I will show how the conditions that created the situation in Lagos have been replicated in Abuja, and I suggest that rather than seeing urban sprawl as a terrible thing, it should be seen as a challenge that can be tackled by incorporating the creativity of its unplanned nature into existing plans with diligent monitoring.

What is Urban Sprawl?

Urban Sprawl or just sprawl can be defined in various ways. Michael P. Johnson provides us with several definitions but summarizes the characteristics that define sprawl as having:

- segregated land uses,
- emphasis on the automobile or public transportation
- a push for growth at the boundary of the metropolitan area,
- residential and employment densities that are generally lower than those in further-in suburbs or in the central city,
- the inability of local governments to work together to devise common policies to address perceived negative characteristics of the current growth regime (Johnson 2001)

Others believe that the phenomenon of urban sprawl, which is characterized by vigorous spatial expansion of urban areas, is a symptom of an economic system gone wrong. By transforming pastoral farmland into often-unattractive suburbs, sprawl is thought to disrupt a natural balance between urban and

non-urban land uses, leading to a deplorable degradation of the landscape (Brueckner and Fansler 1983). Others suggest that sprawl occurs in addition as a result of speculation over the future use of land, or as a result of physical terrain that is not suited for the continuous development (Harvey and Clark 1965). However, they also argue that it is the lack of coordination of the decision to speculate which produces sprawl and not the speculation itself (Harvey and Clark 1965). Public regulation contributes to sprawl by imbalancing the attractiveness of competing areas (Harvey and Clark 1965). For example, differences in land use controls inside and outside of corporate limits make the lesser controlled area more attractive (Harvey and Clark 1965). The economist's view of urban sprawl is more objective. Economists believe that urban spatial size is determined by an orderly market process which correctly allocates land between urban and agricultural uses (Brueckner and Fansler, *The Economics of Urban Sprawl: Theory and Evidence on the Spatial Sizes of Cities* 1983). If we use the more objective definition then urban sprawl occurs as a result of a market process that due to growth reallocates land from agricultural use to more productive use on the city's periphery. For this paper we will look at sprawl as the product of growth and reallocation.

Urban sprawl is often seen in a negative light because it is associated with harmful environmental impact. While an area is developing, sprawl patterns imply that the urbanized area is larger than it otherwise would be because undeveloped tracts remain interspersed among developed subdivisions (Peister 1989). This inefficient development is seen as negative. Such negatives as loss of environmentally fragile lands, reduced regional open space, greater air pollution, higher energy consumption, reduced diversity of species, increased runoff of storm water, and ecosystem fragmentation Margules and Meyers are cited as making urban sprawl undesirable (Brueckner and Fansler 1983). However Peiser concludes that the costs associated with sprawl though high are lower than one might expect for the case where gross densities were constrained to be the same between sprawl and planned communities (Peister 1989). Urban sprawl is negative when it is the result of poor or unforeseen circumstances in urban planning.

Cities as the Engine of Development

Developed countries often attribute their development to the opportunities presented by the growth of cities. Molotch (1976), for example, developed the concept of a growth machine dominated by real estate and local business interests that either manipulated or controlled outright local government for the purpose of creating a political environment conducive to economic expansion (Goetz 1994). Eaton and Eckstein argue that the larger the city, the higher the human capital, the higher the rents, the higher the wages (Eaton and Eckstein 1993). City growth is driven by the acquisition of human capital- the interaction of individuals with complimentary knowledge (Eaton and Eckstein 1993). This emphasis on human capital as a major factor in the growth of cities is supported by Glaeser, Schneikmann and Schleifer (1995). This is a view also supported by Jacobs who in addition states that local competition and the existence of small diverse businesses promote knowledge transfer and growth (Glaeser, Kallal, et al. 1992). It is therefore understandable that migration to the city should be the objective of those who seek work and for those in the city to seek workers to expand economic development.

Theories that Explain the Use of Land Around Cities

There are arguments that state that urban sprawl has direct and indirect environmental and societal consequences, there are other arguments that state that urban sprawl represents the logical choice for millions of individuals, businesses and units of government seeking to satisfy market, social and political demands at a reasonable cost (Buzbee 1999). Thus urban sprawl can be said to be a market, social and political problem that will require market, social and political solutions. Jacobs states that to bring back dead American cities we have to change the way we think in terms of city design (Jacobs 1989). Using Jacobs's theory of growth, urban sprawl is the result of poor design. Instead of building cities that suit things such as automobiles we should build cities that suit human capital development.

When discussing growth we may also look at the concept of growth poles. Perroux introduced (in the 1950s) the concept of growth poles. His main concern was to show that the operation of market forces did not guarantee a harmonious "equilibrium" in space. Economic activity and development would not

necessarily spread evenly and equitably throughout the land. Rather, the natural tendency is towards polarization of economic activity, leading to a dominance/dependency relationship among urban centers, regions, and nations rather than a spatial equilibrium (Higgins 1983). Perroux saw the market as working to promote development, which he defined as growth and structural change in the economy, geographic space and in society all at once (Higgins 1983). The abstraction of Perroux's theory allowed critics such as Gilbert (1974), Moseley (1973), Lasuen (1969) and Boudville (1966; whose work was the main basis for the revision of the theory) to modify the theory for the purposes of regional planning by emphasizing geographical rather than economic space (Parr 1999). The poles were taken to mean urban centers and the spread effects spread to a particular geographic space (the region adjacent to the urban center itself) (Higgins 1983). The theory being that by encouraging industrial development in certain urban centers one can increase income and employment on the periphery. However, this revision does not take into account the size of the city and that in many instances growth is not generated by the urban center if the kind of industry available is not appropriate. Where the pole theory does apply it can account for urban sprawl which will develop on the periphery to take advantage of income and growth opportunities in the urban center.

There is also the question of uneven growth. Not all cities grow at the same rate indeed there are cities that do not attract large growth on the periphery. Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Eli Heckscher and Bertil Ohlin are all economists who emphasized the phenomenon of comparative advantage whereby policies foster regional division of labor based on differentials in regional endowment (Fan 1997). The assumption is that each region has certain advantages and based on those advantages that region develops. Because each advantage is different and may be discovered at different times, development is uneven. For instance the discovery of gold in the American west drew settlers from the core east to develop the western periphery (Fan 1997). We can apply this concept to urban sprawl, its development is going to be uneven and dependent on what creates jobs and opportunity in a particular urban area. Its development

will depend on the comparative advantage of the region. Urbanization¹ is an uneven spatial process of leads and lags that inevitably produces social tensions, conflicts, and outbursts of popular protest. Some regions urbanize early and building on their success, leave less dynamic regions far behind (Friedmann 2005). This unevenness creates income inequality.

Dahl states that (using the United States as the example) government is controlled by different interest groups and no one group has a monopoly on power (Dahl 2005). Each group has to cooperate with the other to get things done, and the proportion of power a group possesses shifts periodically. This contributes to the complexity of power and the mechanism of growth in the city as those in power are responsible for the policies that promote growth. Dahl rejects the hypothesis that power in New Haven is controlled by a group of covert economic notables as he points out that there is nothing clandestine about their activities. This does not mean that economic notables have no influence in certain matters. Their main strategy is to gain services and benefits from government and as far as possible to displace the costs from themselves to others. Those who are able to exercise this advantage are varied and change over time. These interest groups will thus seek to influence such matters that concern them but they do so openly according to Dahl. If we apply this outlook to urban sprawl we can say that the development of sprawl is the result of different power groups finding advantage in having people live on periphery of the city. Where government policy is favorable to having people occupy the core of the city then interest groups will make sure there is some movement to the core to take advantage of government policy.

Logan and Molotch in *Urban Fortunes*, present a theory that best describes the situation of Abuja, Nigeria. They propose that place entrepreneurs (who happen to be an interest group in the vein of Dahl) are the determinants of all economic activity in a city. They also state that the aim of all activity is economic growth, meaning the use of land should be to maximize growth opportunity or the acquisition

¹ Taking urbanization as a symbol of growth and development

of more rent.² Those who govern (or influence policy) are the place entrepreneurs and manipulation of land to maximize rent is their aim (Logan and Molotch 2007). With the influx of citizens to the city, place entrepreneurs purchase the land surrounding the city. Their aim is to rent accommodation to those who cannot afford to live in the core of the city; they (those who flock) only work there. Since the city is the growth machine that attracts people from near and far, speculating on the value of land due to increased demand is a viable way to secure rent. It also results in urban sprawl. Rent seeking behavior is thus a contributor to the development of sprawl as unplanned accommodation is provided (for market bearing rent) to those who need to work in the core.

Urbanization in Developing Countries

Developing countries face greater challenges with respect to urbanization than the developed countries. Developed countries urbanized at a relatively leisurely rate. For instance what took the United States 90 years to accomplish regarding urbanization took Brazil 30 years and took Korea 20 years (Henderson 2002). In the United States people are fleeing the cities for the suburbs, but in developing countries with a mostly rural population or with limited employment avenues, the city is still seen as a growth engine. Urban Sprawl in the United States is more a product of white flight from the urban core and is practiced by those who can afford to move to more spacious surroundings. Urban sprawl in the United States works in the opposite direction to what is happening in the third world. Cities are dying and need re-engineering in the United States so I think it would be more appropriate for me to look at China and Brazil as being at a stage closer to what obtains in Nigeria.

China is urbanizing at a frantic rate. China's path to urbanization is routed in government policy. The reversal of Mao's anti-city agricultural policies has led to rapid urbanization spurred on by the ladder-step doctrine of the Deng regime. This is a policy that specifies which regions are to be favored for

² Rent is distinguished from profits as rent is the acquisition of some sort of gain without actually producing anything.

economic development (the coastal areas which had the human resources and physical infrastructure) with the intension that this development will spread to the surrounding areas in a step-by-step fashion. Some regions were allowed to “get rich first (Henderson 2002).” This was a way to develop inter-regional interdependence and promote a longer term integrated national space policy. However there are questions as to the extent to which this policy has promoted great difference between rural and urban China and between unevenly developed regions. The resultant migrations from the rural interior produced peripheral settlements next to the core cities, making such cities even larger. Migration was and still is taking place at such a rapid rate that the city infrastructural resources are unable to cope with the influx. Urban planning in an economy with so much growth brings in so many parties and interests that it is hard to stick to a plan, and the effectiveness of urban planning cannot be immediately assessed. All the development (rural industrialization and capital investment in the coastal cities of China) has also led to a Chinese society that is less regimented by the government; people are left more to their own devices.

The Chinese authorities are very much involved in the planning and governing of cities. This is done in conjunction with various business elite who are working in their own best interest. All land belongs to the government but can be leased on a long term basis to localities and businesses for economically beneficial activity and investment (Fan 1997). Personal relationships are very important and are based on long term reciprocities that cannot be easily detected as corruption. As such it is hard to hold powerful entrepreneurs accountable for abhorrent action or for ignoring government policy with respect to urban development. The Chinese government has started to vigorously enforce policies with the goal of: making its cities sustainable; providing and maintaining standard facilities for the migrant workers who live in camps on the cities’ periphery; annexing surrounding rural areas in a bid to provide adequate amenities for those flooding the cities as well as urbanizing those rural areas; and trying to generally increase accountability and local participation in the urbanization process.

Not unlike most low- and middle-income countries and transitional countries, Brazil is in the uncomfortable position of having to “change the wheels with the car moving”, given the grave social, urban and environmental problems that have accumulated over decades of rapid urbanization and governmental neglect (E. Fernandes 2007). Brazil has experienced one of the world’s most drastic processes of socioeconomic and territorial reorganization as a result of rapid urbanization (E. Fernandes 2007). At the beginning of the twentieth century more than 70 per cent (Avriter 2007) of its population inhabited the countryside by the end of the century 83 per cent (E. Fernandes 2007) of the total population lived in urban areas. As a result there is a very high concentration of population and economic activities in a very small part of the national territory. Rapid urbanization in Brazil has generated a national urban crisis characterized by a combination of socio-spatial segregation, negative environmental impact, violence and growing informal development. Brazilian cities grew in an unfair, disorganized and illegal way. The unfairness was the result of a process of modernization without any kind of planning that even when proposing planned cities, did not reserve spaces for the poor population, as had been the case of Belo Horizonte and Brasília (Avriter 2007). In these planned cities, the poor population was ignored and had to occupy urban plots of land illegally. This was possible mainly because of a long-standing tradition of political, legal and financial centralization during most of the urbanization process.

Brazil had no comprehensive national land and urban policies, and had a political and legal system that was exclusionary and elitist (Avriter 2007). The promulgation of the 1988 Constitution allowed for the development of organizations that set out to use the legal system to obtain land rights for the poor. The emergence of urban social movements was one of the novelties of the Brazilian democratization. In the cities of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte and Porto Alegre there was a huge increase in the creation of neighborhood associations. Recife, in the northeast, has also seen the creation of many new neighborhood associations (Avriter 2007). The National Movement for Urban Reform (MNRU) was formed in 1982 with the aim of elaborating a proposal for urban reform during the National Constituent

Assembly. The MNRU was formed originally by popular movements, neighborhood associations, NGOs and Trade Unions (Avriter 2007). This organization was instrumental in demanding urban land reform.

Since the Constitution making process was subject to widespread popular participation an amendment developed by members of the Urban Reform Movement included:

- the autonomy of municipal government;
- the democratic management of cities;
- the social right to housing;
- the right to the regularization of consolidated informal settlements;
- the social function of urban property; and
- the need to combat land and property speculation in urban areas (E. Fernandes 2007)

To avoid the exclusionary and elitist tendencies of old, in order to properly implement the popular amendments, the Urban Reform Movement then decided to consciously invest in the formulation of municipal master plans throughout the country that were both inclusive and participatory. The new constitution also brought about new environmental laws and the use of independent municipalities as laboratories for urban planning and development. The social right to housing was adopted in 2000 and the continuous social mobilization led to the 2005 law that established the National Fund for Social Housing.

Of particular importance is the 2001 enacting of the City Statute. The City Statute elaborated on the principle of the “social function of property and of the city”, thus replacing the individualistic paradigm of the 1916 Civil Code. In addition, the statute provided a range of legal, urban and fiscal instruments to be used by the municipal administrations, especially within the context of their master plans, to regulate,

induce and/or revert urban land and property markets according to criteria of social inclusion and environmental sustainability (E. Fernandes 2007). With the introduction of true democracy in Brazil social mobilization allowed for the introduction of new rights and creations and adherence to urban master plans. The focus of urban policy in Brazil is therefore to develop environmentally sustainable cities that are inclusive.

Background on Nigeria

Nigeria obtained its independence from Britain in 1960 after years of constitutional talks and negotiations to make sure that one ethnic region did not dominate the other. On October 1, 1960 Nigeria became an independent state within the British Commonwealth with the Queen as the titular head of state. Three years later Nigeria became a republic with Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe as the Nigerian President (ceremonial) and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as the Prime Minister (the real power). The country still remained a member of the British Commonwealth (Uweche 1971).

The Republican Constitution as it then stood came to an abrupt end on January 15, 1966. Prolonged political disturbances were climaxed by a bloody coup d'état carried out by young military officers (the January Boys: Maj. Kaduna Nzeogwu, Maj. Emmanuel Ifeajuna, Maj. Anuforor and two other majors) (Uweche 1971) and the Nigerian armed forces (de St. Jorres 1972). The military took over the country and General Aguiyi-Ironsi was installed as Head of State. The regional system of government was set aside and a unitary government was established. Another coup (counter-coup) took place in July 1966; Ironsi was killed and was replaced by Col. Yakubu Gowon and the country was reverted to the regional federal system. This coup is seen by some as a northern coup, and retaliation against officers of eastern extraction was rampant (de St. Jorres 1972).

The January coup was bloody and eliminated the top politicians from the North the Sarduna of Sokoto Sir Ahmadu Bello (premier of the Northern region) and the Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafewa Balewa.

The West also lost its premier Chief Akintola and a few other prominent politicians. At the time of the coup Nigeria was a confederation made up of three regions the North, the East and the West. Each region was run by a Premier (like a state governor) with each premier in charge of the revenue generated in his region. Each region ran its affairs much as is done by states in the United States, there was little central control. The office of president was ceremonial while the prime minister retained full executive control (Uweche 1971). The economy was based on agricultural production, with the oil industry being somewhat underdeveloped at this time.

The end result of the coups was a 30 month civil war between the Igbos ³of Biafra and the rest of Nigeria. The political atmosphere was one of high ethnic suspicion. There was also an extended period of military dictatorship from 1966-1979. During this period Nigeria experienced an oil boom and was encouraged by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to fund its industrial growth through the use of credit and loans. The oil boom marked the beginning of the de-emphasis of agriculture and the over dependence of the Nigerian economy on a single resource, oil. Oil also presented the opportunity for Nigeria to develop a new capital. Political control shifted from the regions to the center which was under military control. The end of the war also brought further division of the country initially into 12 states but now there are 36 states. Additionally ethnic minorities began to assert their right to be heard and be part of the national discourse. So where there was only conflict between the three major ethnic groups that make up the majority of the population (the Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba) now you have to contend with balancing the interests of six regions, two major religions and various ethnic minorities.

Modern urbanization in Nigeria fits into the central place theory model which implies the dominance of and growth of a single primate city which becomes a central place of commerce, administration and

³ Biafra did include some other minority tribes such as the Ijaws, Tiv, Kalabaris, Effiks and the Ibibios but these groups as a whole were not entirely supportive of the Igbo cause and were only marginally victims of the Northern Massacres of the Igbos in 1967.

political activity (Tijani 2006). This model was used by the British colonialists to create often from scratch cities for their administrative purposes in their bid to rule the various regions that made up colonial Nigeria. Lagos emerged as a capital largely as a result of its convenient geographical location. Being a coastal city it made for easy European contact and was well suited as a starting point for hinterland contact (Tijani 2006).

Lagos which was the capital of Nigeria (from 1960-1976) had the largest sea-port, was the largest employment centre, was the capital of Lagos State and was the largest commercial and financial capital in the country. In 1970 it had an estimated annual total population increase of 11%, and in 1965 it had a concentration of about 32% of the country's total manufacturing plants, making it a characteristically primate city to its fullest (Umaru 2007). However, among the salient reasons for transferring the Federal Capital of the Nigeria from Lagos to Abuja was the physical and environmental problems largely caused by the population increase beyond the existing physical capacity of Lagos city. It was also noted that the result of increased population was serious over-crowding in slum areas and acute shortage of land which had seriously impeded further growth (Umaru 2007). A fresh start given the availability of oil money was seen as a better choice than fixing the problems found in Lagos. Abuja was also the geographic middle of Nigeria although it is technically located in the North of the country.

The rapid transformation of Lagos into a large and often unmanageable mass of humanity is not unique to Nigeria. Developing countries seeking to capitalize on the growth machine of the city have experienced this. Unlike the developed countries where cities developed over a relatively long period of time, developing countries experienced rapid almost instant development leading to wholesale urbanization seemingly overnight. In China the movement of rural dwellers seeking jobs in the city has led to the springing up of "villages" on the periphery of cities. John Freidman identifies five dimensions to urbanization in China: administrative urbanization reflects the urban nature of the place and in China one can be classified as urban and be entitled to certain privileges; economic urbanization reflects the decline

in certain aspects of production such as agricultural and extractive modes in preference for manufacturing and professional or service type urban jobs; physical urbanization where towns become paved and begin to look urban; socio-cultural urbanization in which large numbers of strangers are thrown together and new patterns of consumption and leisure are established ; and political urbanization political change is associated with urbanization (Friedmann 2005). The Chinese government's policy of promoting manufacturing and the growth of cities has put these dimensions into play.

In Nigeria, urbanization has centered on the creation of states and state capitals, the logic being that a state capital will attract the kind of development that grows a city. These states have been created and funded by using money from the central government (a legacy of military dictatorship) that has been generated not from private sector taxation, but from the sale of oil. Lagos is one of the few examples of the organic development of a large urban center through true private enterprise.⁴ While the expansion of Lagos was planned, those plans were ignored and interest groups were allowed to pursue increased rent opportunities indiscriminately.

Land is also the safest hedge against inflation and the lack of social welfare programs in Nigeria. If one builds rental property one is assured of rent even if one cannot obtain appropriate employment. The desire and effort to own land and building is thus seen as a responsible economic plan to individual Nigerians.

Land in Abuja

On 5 February 1976, the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) was established by Decree Number 6 and charged with the development of a Federal Capital City for Nigeria. This action was a sequel to the recommendations of a special committee inaugurated by government on 9 August 1975 to examine the desirability or otherwise of relocating the capital city from Lagos. What emerged from the

⁴ Others would be Ibadan, Kano and Onitsha each an old empire capital, a part of the trans-Saharan trade route, and a colonial trading post respectively.

committee's detailed study was the choice of an area of about 8000 km² in Nigeria's Middle Belt Region, south of the town of Abuja (which later lost its name to the new capital city and took up a new name, Suleja), and north of the confluence of Rivers Niger and Benue, as Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The location was an area of very low intensity of development due to historical and ecological factors and is almost the geographical center of the country (Ikejiofor 1998).

In June 1977, the FCDA commissioned a US-based consortium, International Planning Associates (IPA), to produce a master plan for the proposed Federal Capital City and its region. This assignment was completed and a comprehensive master plan submitted to the FCDA on 15 February 1979 (IPA, 1979). This master plan is supposed to be the basis for progressive development of Abuja in four phases. Actual construction work began in 1980 (Ikejiofor 1998).

“Urban land markets play a critical role in shaping urban development outcomes—determining the locations, density, form and price of residential, commercial and industrial development. Urban land markets are driven by both demand and supply factors. On the demand side, population growth, income, and level of economic activity determine how much land is demanded to support development. Urban land supply is determined by topography and physical conditions, patterns of land ownership, availability of infrastructure—roads, water, electricity—and government regulations. The interaction of urban land market demand and supply determines urban land prices. If urban land supply is very responsive to demand, land prices will tend to reflect the productive value of land. On the other hand, if urban land markets are constrained and cannot effectively respond to demand pressure, land prices will tend to be much higher—exceeding their productive value. These constraints are often the result of restrictive land use regulations, inadequate network infrastructure to support urban land development, unclear property ownership and titling records, and the actions of landowners to drive up land prices by withholding land from the market. “

(M. V. Serra, David E. Dowall, Diana Motta, and Michael Donovan, 2004: 9-1)

In Abuja, while the government mandated the move of most government administrative offices, the embassies and international organizations to move to Abuja, proper provision in terms of infrastructure such as housing and roads were not made (Ikejiofor 1997). The center of the city was finished in phases but the demand for housing first from those forced to relocate, then from those who voluntarily relocated to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the new city led to speculation in land surrounding the city. All land in Abuja (and in Nigeria) is owned by the government. Allocations were offered for sale as areas were opened up by the provision of electricity, roads and pipe borne water. Abuja was initially a successful plan when compared to Lagos. This was because of the tight control the government had with respect to all construction going on in the city. To understand the relationship between development control procedures and low-cost housing land shortage, one has to look at the impact of development control standards on land and property development costs. The effect of the high standard of infrastructure that is provided (even in high-density residential areas) and the high quality of construction demanded by the building codes is that both land and property development costs are far beyond the level low-income earners can afford. The development control laws stipulate the minimum value of development permitted (Ikejiofor 1998). However the city plan has not been strictly adhered to and those who tried to keep things on track were hindered by politics and interest groups. The Minister for the Federal Capital Territory during President Obasanjo's second term Mallam Nasir El Rufai gained a reputation for demolishing what he determined to be illegal structures in Abuja. Many of these buildings were worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, but they were built on sewers or in areas designated as open spaces El Rufai has made very powerful enemies (Ali 2004).

Another factor was the attitude of government officials and policy makers. The attitude of the government officials and policy makers towards self-help low-cost housing in Abuja has contributed immensely to the desperate housing situation of the low-income group. Policy officials in the city perceive medium- and high income housing to be more germane to the image/symbolic status of the new

capital than low-cost dwellings affordable by the majority of citizens. This encouraged the development of more realistically priced accommodations (sprawl) outside the city (Ali 2004).

The urban population in Nigeria is growing at a rapid rate. While the Nigerian population is increasing by about 2.8% per annum, the rate of urban growth is as high as 5.5% per annum (Imam, Wilson and Cheeseman 2008). Today, with a population of about 170 million, the country has about 50% living in the cities (World Fact Book 2012). Much of the urban population is located on the periphery as the cities are sprawling in nature (Drarmola and Aina 2004). Abuja was designed for about 3 million at full growth, but as at 2004, it has an approximate population of about 6 million (Drarmola and Aina 2004). In anticipation of the expansion to certain areas, and often with advance knowledge of land development plans, place entrepreneurs bought up land on the periphery from local owners. The fact that the government owns the land in the city core acts as a constraint on the availability of the land. Only those interest groups that can influence the government have access to such land, this policy would thus afford them the opportunity to exact excessive rent. Apart from sale of land through government allocation, land can be acquired from the traditional owners of the land, (the native occupants) or one could purchase land from those who had received government allocations or who purchased land from the traditional owners. (Land purchased from traditional owners is technically illegal but enforcement has been so haphazard that the practice is widespread and thriving). Such people are usually land speculators who only sell in the future for prohibitive prices (Ogu and Ogbuozode 2001).

In Abuja, as is common in many developing countries, urban sprawl comprises two main, contrasting types of development in the same city, according to, *State of World Cities 2010/2011: Bridging the Urban Divide* (Burdett 2010). One type is characterized by large, peri-urban areas with informal and illegal patterns of land use and is combined with a lack of infrastructure, public facilities and basic services; this is often accompanied by little or no public transportation and by inadequate access roads (Burdett 2010). The other is a form of suburban sprawl is one in which residential zones for high and middle income

groups and highly valued commercial and retail complexes are well connected by individual rather than public transportation (Burdett 2010). So areas such as Apo, Asokoro and Gwarinpa would be the suburbs, while Nyanya, Lugbe and Karu would be the peri-urban areas related to Abuja.

While Nigerian society was not initially highly stratified, the political developments within the country have created political elites out of retired army officers, former military and civilian heads of states and business people who have allied themselves with the army officers or political office holders (both elected and appointed). Nigerian civil servants and members of academia are also in a favored position as they are often the first to get land allocations at highly subsidized prices. These individuals are a very small percentage of the Nigerian population but are highly influential when it comes to formulating policy. In the case of Abuja they were the first to have access to government housing and were offered the first opportunity to acquire housing at the city core when the government chose to sell off its property to raise revenue and encourage private housing in the early 2000's. Most of the land in the city is owned by well-placed Nigerians, mostly people who have held or currently hold top government positions (Tangaza 2004). These include ex-military officers and well connected civilians.

Unlike in capitalist developed countries where private firms play a major role in housing production, in Nigerian cities individuals construct a large proportion of the housing stock. A substantial proportion of houses that were built by householders were constructed informally and outside the official building codes and planning regulations. Production of houses for outright sale by small-scale builders and private housing firms, for sale and mortgage funded housing are very limited. The construction of housing units by companies for their workers is becoming less significant, not least since the economic down turn of the mid-1980s (Ogu and Ogbuozode 2001). House hunters are therefore at the mercy of landlords and real estate agents who often demand two years rent upfront. In 2005 a modest house with three bedrooms and

two bathrooms was available for rent at N500, 000⁵ (\$4300 at 2005 exchange rates and a minimum wage of less than \$100 per month) per year on the outskirts of Abuja at the city center the rent was N3m (\$25,631). There is a known reluctance on the part of corporate housing firms for providing rental housing units to low income occupants because the high return margins required are just not available from this particular group (Ikejiolor 1997). This is the situation in Abuja and reflects the attitude that was prevalent in Brazil's planned cities.

Like China, personal relationships are very important and like China government policy concerning real estate is constantly changing. Like China people are flocking to the urban areas particularly to Abuja and Lagos, but unlike China and Brazil there seems to be no coherent urban plan. China has focused on cities as the avenue through which development will be channeled. In Nigeria people flock to the urban centers for jobs because there is no job creation anywhere else.⁶ While there are efforts to provide private sector employment, the government sector still remains the largest employer in Nigeria. The seat of the Federal government is Abuja, hence the influx of people not just from the rural areas but from less dynamic urban centers (such as Jos⁷ in Plateau State). While Abuja is developing at a rather rapid rate because of the high government presence, other regions are not developing and are even losing people to Abuja.

Abuja in particular is viewed as a revenue engine for the government. The sale of land is done at government prices which are raised indiscriminately. In 2009 the price of land was increased 900% by the Minister for the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja despite public outcry. His justification was that land was the only revenue generator in the FCT and that increasing the price would generate funds to continue

⁵ \$1=N117 in 2005

⁶ Most private sector jobs in Nigeria are found in the oil industry, the financial sector, the telecom industry and private academic institutions. These jobs are still closely tied to the government and are often businesses established by those who have close links to or who are recently retired from government.

⁷ Jos (a town in the middle of the country on a plateau) has experienced a great deal of civil strife involving religious battles and conflict over land. The exodus from Jos and other northern cities to Abuja has proceeded to fuel the real estate bubble that has continued to expand in Abuja.

to develop the area. There has been speculation that the prices were increased because certain interest groups had just bought up land at the low price and were ready to resell it at a little less than the 900% increase (Ogala 2009). Nonetheless in May 2010 prices were revised downwards by 50% so now a residential plot⁸ of land in a highbrow neighborhood costs N10m (\$66,667)⁹ while a plot in a less expensive area would be N1m. The initial land increase was so exorbitant that allottees who could not come up with the money sold their allotments to speculators who could afford the amount. In a country where the minimum monthly wage is N7500 or \$50 (possibly to be revised to N30, 000 or \$200) it is hard to see how anyone can afford a plot of land in Abuja (Adegboye 2009). The surrounding areas have become a haven for those who have to work in Abuja but cannot afford to live there adding to the development of sprawl.

Discussion

Abuja is a growing city. From the beginning of its creation adequate provision was not made for the population that would eventually descended on it. Powerful interest groups have always been in play in Nigerian politics and they perpetually seek to influence the distribution of land in Abuja. There is also the attitude that Abuja is for only the rich and powerful; government officials perpetuate that attitude. But for the city to run you have to have those who are not so well off, running the gas stations, driving the cabs, sweeping the streets doing all manner of menial jobs and they need somewhere to live.

Land is distributed in Abuja takes such an erratic manner that it allows for speculation and fraud. The government owns all the land in the urban areas of Nigeria. In Abuja the federal government of Nigeria owns the land. It however did not properly implement compensation to the traditional owners of the land, who are expected to give up their land for really low compensation and then agree to be relocated of ten to areas that are less desirable. In addition they lose the use of the land for farming and hunting. Even

⁸ 1000 sq meters

⁹ \$1=N150

when relocated they are generally offered land at a price since they have to pay for a certificate of occupancy in order to retain title to the new land otherwise they can be evicted at will. To make money they often sell their right to the new land to non-indigenes¹⁰ and remain homeless just to have some money for food since they can no longer farm or hunt.

Forced evictions have occurred to get rid of the informal settlements that make up the sprawl that surrounds Abuja. Those evictions have been the only solutions offered for the ‘problem (Fowler 2008).’ I have visited Abuja seven times in the last five years. Each time I have visited the traffic has been increasingly congested and areas have become increasingly densely populated. The once pristine landscape has become increasingly garbage strewn and the availability of potable water has decreased. The presence of unplanned peri-urban communities have continued to grow as more people move into a city planned for three million but already occupied by more than double that number. This is an unsustainable situation.

The government and the population believe that the city is the economic engine of the country. However the activities of the well connected and the country elite do not augur well for efficient growth of the city. The center of the city is controlled and is occupied by the richest members of society and prices at the center are so high that there is a barrier to lower income citizens making their homes there.

Transportation costs and the slow pace at which public transportation improvements are being made ensure that development of the city only occurs in those areas that have facilities that provide affordable housing, access to transportation and good roads. Evictions have been justified by stating that the informal communities of the periphery were not in the Abuja Master plan, but this plan has never been made public so that it can be challenged. It has also never been adjusted to incorporate prevailing

¹⁰ The original occupants of a particular area are referred to as indigenes in Nigeria

circumstances. This makes one wonder how relevant it is today given the rate at which the peri-urban areas are expanding.

Conclusion

Abuja is a beautiful city but the lack of accommodation for all those who have to work in the city means that informal communities spring up in an unplanned way. Since they are unplanned the government neglects those areas so they lack basic facilities such as clean water, roads and in many cases security. There is also the need for the occupants to commute longer distances to get to the center of the city where all the jobs and facilities are located. The environment is plagued by increased pollution from automobile exhausts, unsanitary conditions that affect the health of the population due to a lack of clean water, electricity or health centers.

Urban sprawl has developed in Abuja because the government has been unyielding to the need to provide adequate housing for the population that has moved to the city. The distribution of land in the city has been less than transparent and dominated by elite operators. There is a need to use a more democratic process to allocate land not only to civil servants, military offices, academics, politicians and the well connected, but to ordinary citizens. The narrative of Abuja being only for the rich has to be dispelled. A city has to accommodate all comers because a successful city has uses for all types.

China and Brazil offer good examples as places that have done many things that can be adopted by the Nigerian government to solve some of the problems that Abuja faces, particularly the expansion of the peri-urban areas. China and Brazil have realized that they cannot continue to perpetuate a situation where large numbers of migrants and poor people are located on the edges of their cities. They have both implemented policies that specify a coherent urban policy with particular interest in maintaining sustainability. Brazil's program is highly participatory and therefore popular due to the democratic nature of Brazil's political system. While China does have a communist system, municipalities are being

allowed more and more autonomy to enforce accountability. They are also being challenged to incorporate sustainability into any urban planning.

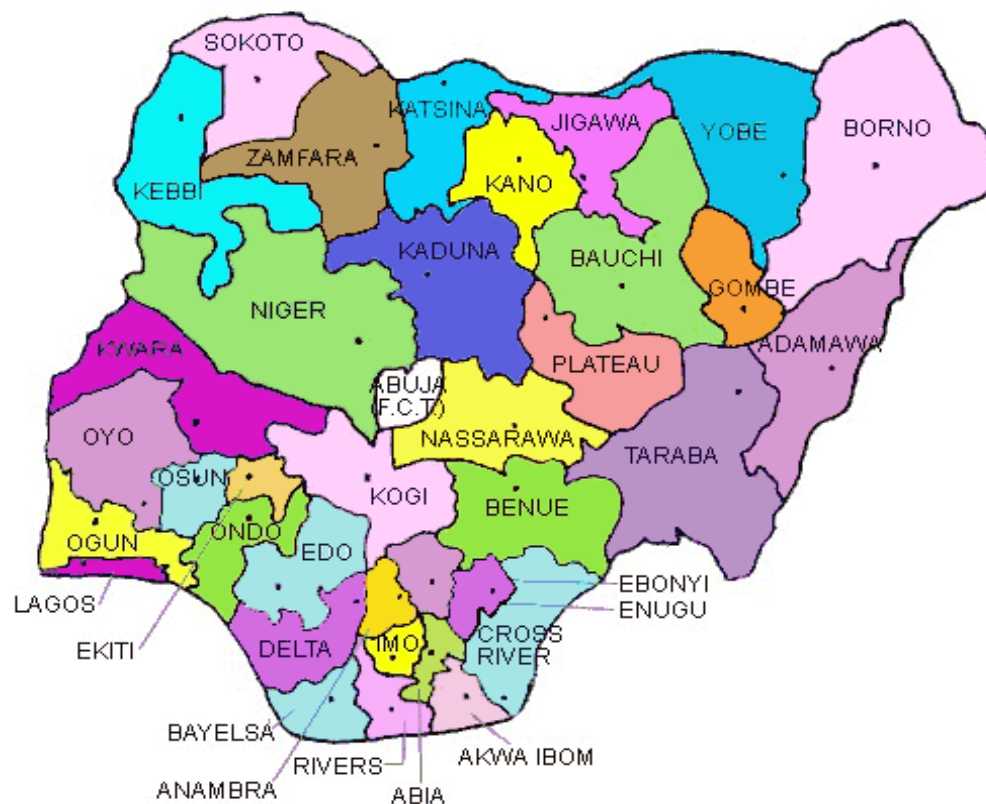
Abuja was a planned city but various governments have not adhered to the plan. Powerful interests and the importance of personal relationships have allowed for the corruption of the land distribution process. Little regard had been afforded low-income residents and the lack of job creation in the private sector has made it hard to get the government to absorb all those who are seeking employment. Like Chinese cities and cities in Brazil, sprawl has been a result. The folly of Lagos is beginning to be visited upon Abuja because the exclusionary and elitist tendencies that exemplified Lagos are now readily apparent in Abuja. While Nigeria is a democracy, many of the policies put in place are not popular and are implemented with little regard for the impact on everyday citizens. Growth has been restricted to cities that have a high level of government activity, areas that have many government ministries or local government administrative offices. This is a holdover from the colonial legacy.

The government in Abuja needs to learn from Brazil and China by: a) designing an urban policy that it will stick to; b) encouraging participation from all sectors of society in designing such a policy; c) streamlining the cumbersome and bureaucratic land acquisition process; d) encouraging through various incentives, investment of the private sector in housing for low income residents; e) setting up better avenues for financing the purchase of housing by low income earners; f) being more aware of ways in which sustainable urban development can be implemented; g) being more vigilant about ensuring accountability with respect to urban policy implementation; and h) being more willing to make use of local content when it comes to developing solutions to the problems of urban sprawl.

Urban policy especially with respect to Abuja is very arbitrary in Nigeria. Ministers revoke land certificates at will and set unrealistic prices for land. This has to be controlled. There is no input from ordinary citizens who have to live with the consequences of the policies. Access to land in Abuja is very

difficult and this lack of access is fueling speculation on the periphery where land is more accessible. Abuja or the FCT has room to expand but that expansion has to be well moderated to prevent the kind of sprawl that is unsustainable and environmentally unsound. Looking at making Abuja sustainable and enforcing the plans that have been approved (with appropriate modifications) will go a long way toward guarding against the construction of illegal structures. Monitoring and closely regulating the development of housing on the periphery will also help channel the sprawl in a more desirable direction. More transparency in the land allocation process will be an aid in preventing unsavory allocation practices. Abuja has a chance at success but there has to be the political will to make that happen.

Nigeria





Abuja

(Areas in red and orange are the areas that have been completely built up as of June 2008)

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