

Planning and Land Administration Challenges in Developing New Cities:– The Abuja Experience in Nigeria

Ibrahim Usman Jibril (Nigeria)

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SUMMARY

The decision to relocate the capital city of Nigeria from Lagos in the south to a central location of Abuja was taken almost four decades ago. It is spacious with easy access to all parts of the Federation. The Master Plan of the new city of Abuja was submitted in 1979. Actual development activities started in the early 1980s. The relocation of the seat of the Federal Government from Lagos to Abuja was effected in 1991. The Master Plan provided ‘an organized pattern of land use and development guidelines for 500 hectares of government activity, 891 hectares of service, 12,486 hectares of residential land, 920 hectares of light industry, 1,840 hectares of transport infrastructure, 561 hectares of commercial, and 8,300 hectares of open and recreational land’ (P. 5 MP). It stipulates a maximum population of 3 million people after 25 years of development after which population growth would be accommodated in satellite towns. “The 25-years-plus focus requires that the plan must recognize changes and uncertainty by making provisions for foreseen growth and transition as well as unforeseen events.”(P. v MP). 14 years after the target year of 2000, how has the implementation fared? What are our expectations? And what are the present realities? This paper traces the implementation of the Master Plan since inception with particular emphasis on series of government policy changes and its implications on the development of the city of Abuja. It attempts a critical analysis of the performance of the Plan from the land administration and planning perspective. Key issues brought out in this study include the huge population of the city beyond the original projections. Provision of transport infrastructure is lagging behind with consequences of traffic grid lock hence longer journey time. Various land uses have been changed. There is increase in size of the city from its original 250sq km to over 300sq km now and city has changed shape from original crescent shape to something different. Though the city has seen tremendous development in the last 34 years, a lot still needs to be done. Resettlement issues are a reoccurring decimal with significant effect on implementation of the master plan provisions. Professional Planners and Land Administrators are constantly at receiving end from government/political leadership. This is not a very pleasant development and would definitely require serious intervention from organised professional bodies in order to protect its members that are involved in discharging their professional duties. The development of Abuja has lessons for other nations. Our experiences could serve not only as guide but a good laboratory for land related professionals the world over.