

Land market distortions in Nigerian cities and urban sprawl: the case of Abuja and Port Harcourt

1.0 Introduction

Rapid urban growth especially in the last two decades has put enormous pressure on land in Nigerian cities. The number of people living in Nigeria's towns and cities is expected to double to 80 million in the next 13 years and reach 100 million by 2010 (World Bank, 1996). The consequences especially for urban development and land management are many. The federal government of Nigeria (FGN) in a white paper observed that, "the uncontrolled nature of urban development is brought about by the tremendous difficulty, experienced by individuals and corporate bodies in giving access to build" (FGN, 2002:45). Government has re-iterated that the main objective of its National Urban Development Policy is, "to ensure that land is available for the purpose of controlled and orderly development in the urban areas (FGN 2006:14).

Land for urban development and access to it remain contentious issues in Nigeria. The on-going congressional hearing on the activities, especially land allocation and demolition decisions the immediate past management of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja is a pointer to this. Across the country, Nigeria's urban centres, but especially Abuja, Port Harcourt and Lagos, have been theatres of struggles for access to land and conflict. The largely uncontrolled and unregulated nature of almost all new developments is a result of these struggles and underlying question of access (Oruwari & Owei, 2006). Urban growth has been fuelled by its own dynamics and majority of urban dwellers are in – migrants who attempt to secure their livelihoods within the urban environment. Thus, in spite of the rising poverty, inadequate services, poor housing, poor sanitation and generally depreciation urban life quality, the influx of people continues.

Of primary concern is the differential access to land which is moderated by state agencies through laws that are not in tune with existing customary laws and traditional attachment to land. This has impacted negatively on urban spatial morphology. Land delivery systems based on legal concepts and administrative systems have proved unable to cope with the demands of rapid urban growth. Most land for urban development in Nigeria, as observed by Ikejiofor (2006), is supplied outside state regulatory frameworks. Not one Nigerian city has evolved an effective urban growth management strategy. The transformation of adjoining rural lands into urban uses, resulting from deliberate government policy and the push of a city into the countryside as a result of land demand for organic growth are important aspects of Nigeria's urbanization experience. Demicheli (2003) has modeled Lagos, for similar scenarios for which we are here comparing Abuja and Port Harcourt, which complements other major cities of Nigeria.

Urban sprawl is commonly used to describe physically expanding urban areas consisting largely of a pattern of low-density expansion of large urban areas, under market conditions, into mostly surrounding agricultural areas. Sprawl in Nigeria consist of informal housing development on the urban fringe on land that is mostly privately owned, sold in single small plots and in the case of Port Harcourt and Lagos, also on marginal land along the waterfronts. Usually no development permits have been granted. In more recent times, there is an increase in residential estates on the urban fringe, developed by government or private sector agencies for their workers or by property developers for

sale. Such developments are well planned, serviced and have approved building plans. Thus, there is marked disparity and multiplicity of urban social and spatial structures and wide disparities in quality of urban life in developments on the urban fringe. The pattern of urban sprawl development is multi-nuclei, leap-frogging over areas and leaving agricultural enclaves across the urban fringe. Thus, it is difficult to generalize about the type of development found on the urban fringe. Urban sprawl in the Federal Capital territory (FCT), Abuja and Port Harcourt can best be conceptualized as a dynamic process of physical and social transition occurring in two interlocking directions of growth i.e. an outward expansion from the existing core towards the fringes and growth moving from the nuclei of development in towns and villages on the fringe towards the core. The magnitude of this process is far greater than the capacity of government authorities to organize or control.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of the study is to analyze how land market distortions constitute the fundamental push for urban sprawl in Nigeria using the FCT, Abuja and Port Harcourt as case studies. Specific objectives are as follows:

- I) Examine how the processes of land acquisition, both public and private, contribute to the dynamics of urban sprawl.
- II) Show how sprawl has changed the urban spatial morphology; and
- III) Examine the implications for urban growth management.

Conceptual Framework

Urban sprawl as observed in the Nigerian context can be portrayed as a process of “scatterisation” particularly as it is mostly unplanned, unregulated development characterized by a mix of land uses on the urban fringe. The nature of urban development in the process of city expansion is shaped by the complex land tenure system. From the 1917 Public Lands Acquisition Ordinance to the 1978 Land Use Act, government has staked its interest in land through acquisition and control of land. The Public Land Acquisition Ordinance was enacted by the British colonial government, “to empower the Governor to acquire land when required for public purpose” (Ola, 1977:18). Thus, title to land passed from indigenous groups where an interest in land is held under customary law to the colonial government having been converted into an interest under English law. However, land left un-acquired remained under control of their original owners, and was held under customary laws. The enactment of the 1978 Land Use Act brought under the control of the Governor of a state (region) and the minister of the FCT all land within their areas of jurisdiction. The statutory certificate of occupancy (C of O) issued by the governor or minister, constitute the legal title to land. The fundamental principles of the Land Use Act are contrary to customary laws and cultural attachments to land. This poses a critical challenge for accessing land for urban development for both public and private use.

Approach to the Study

The study used map analysis, interview of key informants including government officials and community leaders; official documentation and other research outputs to obtain data. The paper examines urban growth and land use changes in both Port Harcourt and the FCT as case studies to reflect the Nigerian experience of urban sprawl.

2.0 Port Harcourt’s Urban Growth and Land Use Change overtime

Historically, several Ikwerre and Okrika villages occupied the area around Port Harcourt City before 1913. Then the natives were rural and their occupation was farming and

fishing. Considering that the population was only 5,000 at the inception of the City, the pressure on land was perhaps minimal (Okoye, 1975). Presently, greater Port Harcourt has a population of about 1.5 million people going by the 1991 population census. Of importance to this study is that the city has sprawled to cover the entire land area equated with the Upper Bonny River Basin. It is in fact the restricting effects of the Bonny, Imo and New Calabar Rivers that have for now checked the spatial growth of the city. The area known as Greater Port Harcourt also corresponds to the study area. It includes six Local Government Areas; namely all of Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor; parts of Eleme, Oyigbo, Etche and Ikwerre. The present-day socio-economic environment of Port Harcourt is undeniably linked to petroleum exploitation in the Niger Delta. In spite of the massive wealth arising from petroleum, some commentators have claimed that there is still a lot of material deprivation in the Delta (Okonta and Douglas, 2001). Port Harcourt's population reflects this deprivation.

The growth of Port Harcourt and its region has been phenomenal since its inception in 1913. Growth has been experienced in terms of population and space. Two years after its founding the population was 5,000. Census figures for the city through its history are 7,185 in 1921; 15,201 in 1931 and 71,634 in 1953 (Okoye, 1975). The 1963 census gave the city's population as 179,563 and in 1973 it was 213,443 (Ogionwo, 1979). The 1991 census fixed the population of Port Harcourt and Obio/Akpor Local Government Areas at 645,883. The projection for 1996 by the National Population Commission is 832,471 for the two local governments and the interim figures for the 2006 national census is over one million. Spatially too, Port Harcourt city has grown to cover much of the Upper Bonny River Basin. Originally the city covered a 25 km² area between the UTC junction and the New Layout Market. In the land use and vegetation map of Nigeria (1975/76) the built-up area of Port Harcourt covered 17.4km². Twenty years later, a similar map showed the extent of the city as 89.4km². This is a five-fold increase. By the 1976 Local Government Reform, the Port Harcourt Local Government Area Council stretched from Choba and Rukpokwu in the north, Iribe in the east and the main western channel of the Bonny River in the west. This is an area of over 239.6 km².

Another observation from the land use and vegetation maps for the region in the 1970s and 80s is the reclamation of vast areas of marginal land in the south of the city bordering Bonny River. Most of the mangrove swamps bordering the city have been reclaimed during the 20-year period; even the river channels are narrower than before for the same reasons. This typifies the Borokiri axis; one of the many neighbourhoods in Port Harcourt city. It is surrounded by mangrove swamps and originally was inhabited by fishermen who used it as fishing ground. The reclamation of mangrove swamps for urban development by government and individuals in Borokiri have been going on since. From five maps and one satellite image describing the land use, types and changes in Port Harcourt, the Borokiri area was analyzed to determine the progression of reclaimed portion as presented in Table 1. Prior to 1965, a total of about 432,014.4m² of land, which today represent 16 per cent of the total landmass of Borokiri existed in the neighbourhood as presented in Table 1. Between 1965 and 1975, a total of about 654,136.6m² representing 24 per cent of the land was reclaimed. The period from 1975 to 1985 saw the lowest reclaimed portion of land in the neighbourhood with 106,261.2m² of land representing only 3.9 per cent of the total area. The period between 1985 - 1995 and 1995 - 2005 had the highest period of reclamation of land in Borokiri with 56 per cent representing more than half of the entire land area. While 640,369.7m² of land was reclaimed in the period from 1985 to 1995 representing 24 per cent of the total land area, 878,597.0m² of land representing 32 per cent of the land was reclaimed between

1995 and 2005. The total area of land reclaimed for the period between 1965 - 2005 is 2,279,364.60 km² representing 84 per cent of the total land mass and built up area of Borokiri. Development here represents the mixed density, mixed land use pattern in other urban fringe areas. The land reclamation timeline for the Borokiri neighbourhood in Port Harcourt is shown in fig 2.

Table 1: Trend in Borokiri land Expansion

| Year | Total Reclaimed Land (m ²) | % change |
|-------------|--|----------|
| Before 1965 | 432,014.4 | 16.0 |
| 1965-1975 | 654,136.6 | 24.1 |
| 1975-1985 | 106,261.2 | 3.9 |
| 1985-1995 | 640,369.7 | 23.6 |
| 1995-2005 | 878,597.0 | 32.4 |

Source: Authors' Map Analysis

Table 2: Some Previously Rural Settlements that Port Harcourt has Sprawled Into

| S/No | Settlement | Major Activity | Population | | Distance to City Centre |
|------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------|---------|-------------------------|
| | | | 1991 | 2008 | |
| 1 | Rumuola | Petroleum production | 4,327 | 10,751 | 6 |
| 2 | Oginigba | Industrial Estate | 4,124 | 10,247 | 6 |
| 3 | Rumuomasi | Local airport | 19,193 | 47,690 | 7 |
| 4 | Woji | Housing Estate | 6,635 | 16,486 | 7 |
| | Rumueme | Housing Estate/oil | 22,427 | 55,726 | 7 |
| 5 | Rumuobiakani | Oil company | 8,451 | 20,999 | 8 |
| 6 | Rumuogba | Oil company | 2,697 | 6,701 | 8 |
| 7 | Rumuepirikom | Major junction | 8,333 | 20,705 | 8 |
| 8 | Rumuokwuta | Major junction | 5,213 | 12,953 | 9 |
| 9 | Rumuibekwe | Housing Estate | 2,006 | 49,84 | 9 |
| 10 | Eleenwo | Oil production | 8,645 | 21,481 | 10 |
| 11 | Eliozu | Major junction | 1,321 | 3,282 | 11 |
| 12 | Rumuokurusi | Oil company camp | 19,875 | 49,385 | 11 |
| 13 | Akpajo | Petrochemical plant | 5,195 | 12,908 | 11 |
| 14 | Rumuokoro & Bori camp | Military/major junction | 16,155 | 40,141 | 12 |
| 15 | Rumuolumeni | College/naval base | 10,847 | 26,952 | 13 |
| 16 | Nchia & others | Petroleum refineries | 42,421 | 105,407 | 14 |
| 17 | Ozuoba | Major transport artery | 7,415 | 18,424 | 15 |
| 18 | Eneka | Major transport artery | 5,409 | 13,440 | 15 |
| 19 | Ireibe | Farm settlement | 3,549 | 8,818 | 17 |
| 20 | Choba | University | 10,968 | 27,253 | 18 |
| 21 | Igbo Etche | Mixed activities | 22,626 | 56,221 | 18 |
| 22 | Oyigbo | Oil/power plant | 43,403 | 107,847 | 19 |
| 23 | Aluu | University | 7,051 | 17,520 | 20 |
| 24 | Rukpokwu | Mixed activities | 4,689 | 11,651 | 20 |
| 25 | Igwuruta | Major junction | 13,463 | 33,452 | 22 |
| 26 | Umuagwa | International airport | 7,108 | 17,661 | 27 |

Source: Authors' Fieldwork

as the transfer of titles to land in Port Harcourt goes on mostly outside the formal governmental processes and channels. The greater proportion of developers does not possess the Certificate of Occupancy which is the recognized title to land (Kings - Amadi, 2004).

Port Harcourt has no clearly defined settlement development policy; neither does it have a clearly defined urban policy. The implementation of the Land Use Act of 1978 in facilitating access to land has been very selective, especially benefitting those in public office and their supporters. Public sector land delivery has proved to be an inefficient regulatory tool for urban land management. Thus, the inefficient urban planning system has promoted urban sprawl. The Greater Port Harcourt Master Plan prepared in 1975 was never implemented. The institutional framework for managing urban growth was also not established. Rather, the present administration has established a new Ministry of Urban Planning to implement the proposed Greater Port Harcourt Plan. With rapid population increase, and the need for shelter at affordable cost, urban development is informal and sprawling into wherever on the urban fringe land is available with willing buyers and sellers.

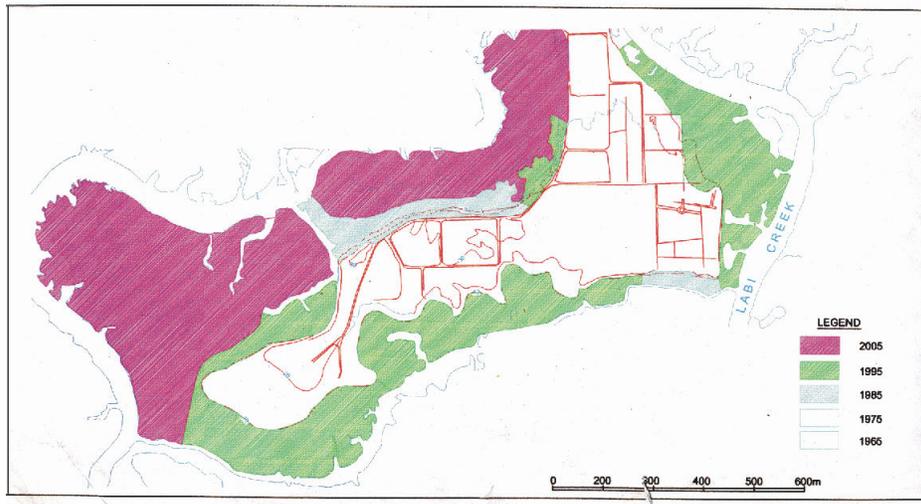


Fig 2 Reclamation Timeline in Borokiri, Port Harcourt

3.0 Distortions of the land market and Urban Sprawl in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja was created as a new seat of the Federal Government of Nigeria by Military Decree – Decree 6 of 1976. It also established the Federal Capital Development Agency (FCDA) to manage the development of the new capital. A portion of the FCT was designated as the Federal Capital City (FCC). The FCT covers an area of approximately 8,000 sq km while the Federal Capital City (FCC) itself occupies 25,000 hectares. At creation, the FCT comprised of 845 villages, 150 of these within the FCC and up to 5km radius. The FCC has been the focus of planning and development in the territory's thirty years of existence. Its planning is divided into four phases and several districts. For purposes of administration, the local population within the FCT was divided into 4 area councils in 1991. Since 1998, these have been increased to six. The population of the FCT in 1976 was about 124,000. The 1991

national census gave a population figure of 371,674. The provisional population figure from the 2006 census is 1,405,201.

Jinadu (2004) examined the trend of urban growth in and around the Federal Capital City, Abuja using satellite image data, in establishing growth patterns between 1987 and 2001. Table 3 below shows the rapid growth in size of the settlements.

A description of these settlements was made as follows:

- Planned Development Area (Well Laid Out Resident Environment): Abuja city, parts of Karu, Nyanyan, Kubwa (Federal Housing Estate) Lugbe (Lugbe Estate)
- Urban Sprawl Areas (Built haphazardly with poor access and services): New areas of Lugbe, Gwagwa, Karmo
- Slum Development / Squatter settlements: Abuja and old areas of Karu, Nyanyan, Lugbe, Kubwa, Zuba, Gwagwa, Idu and Sabon Karmo

The physical character of these settlements was attributed to the following:

- Abuses of the land allocations process by corrupt FCDA officials.
- Land speculators and informal building investors who have taken advantage of the increasing demand for housing.
- Indiscriminate sales of land by traditional chiefs.
- Ineffective institutional capacity for urban management.

Fig 3 shows the land use/land cover maps for the FCT in 2001.

Table 3: Growth of Settlements in the Federal Capital Territory 1987 to 2001

| S/NO. | SETTLEMENTS | SIZE IN 1987 (KM ²) | SIZE IN 2001 (KM ²) | Growth Rate % |
|-------|----------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. | Abuja FCC | 15.862 | 105.127 | 40.2 |
| 2. | Dutse Alhaji | 0.092 | 1.743 | 128.2 |
| 3. | Gwagwa | 0.237 | 3.147 | 87.7 |
| 4. | Idu /Karmo | 0.464 | 6.051 | 86.0 |
| 5. | Karu / Nyanyan | 2.725 | 27.965 | 66.2 |
| 6. | Kubwa | 0.112 | 13.565 | 858.0 |
| 7. | Kuchigoro | 0.024 | 1.084 | 315.5 |
| 8. | Lugbe | 0.105 | 4.594 | 305.4 |
| 9. | Zuba | 0.649 | 4.298 | 40.2 |

Source: Jinadu (2004)

Over the years, the FCDA lacked a consistent policy for implementing the Master Plan. Between 1976 and 1978, it was a policy of resettling all villages outside the FCT. By 1981, this policy was changed to that of resettling only villages within the FCC. From 1984, it was a policy of integration of some villages within the FCC essentially out of ethnic sentiments and political exigency. While these policy shifts were going on, the land market was open to large scale speculative buying as many who needed land in the FCC could not get allocations. Under the provisions of the Land Use Act the private acquisition of land outside the allocation by the FCT minister is illegal. However, it is the process through which land is widely acquired in settlements within the FCT. Land is usually purchased from local people through their chiefs. Also the Area Councils give Customary Certificates of Occupancy without the knowledge of the FCDA. Customary Certificates of Occupancy are valid for 50years. Land acquired by purchase from indigenes was mainly documented by a letter duly signed by the chief of the community.

Legally it does not constitute a title to land. The FCDA has not been able to stop the selling and purchase of land in the FCT. This is easily the main factor responsible for urban sprawl in Abuja. Since indigenous land owners feel they can get more money by selling directly to developers, rather than wait for government compensation usually considered meager, land is sold under different guises.

Also important was the failure to develop the designated satellite towns at the appropriate time. Too much attention and resources were committed to developing a modern capital within the FCC to the neglect of the important satellite towns. Furthermore, the Area Councils were neither equipped in terms of human capacity nor with resolve to manage the surge of new growth. As the capital city became over – priced, many low – income workers could not afford to live in the city. These drifted to surrounding villages and developed the kind of housing they could afford leading to expansion in the squatter settlements. The rich also took advantage of the situation by speculatively buying and freezing up large hectares of land in and around urban fringe villages for development. The proposed development of satellite towns was ignored until 2004. Whereas the FCDA says it has set up the Satellite Towns Development Authority to implement the plans on these seven settlements (Bwari, Kubwa, Kuje, Kuse, Yanga, Karshi, Angodi and Dobi) there is very little real evidence in terms of infrastructure provision. In 2007, the Abuja Metropolitan Management Agency estimates a total of 16 squatter settlements with over 32,421 structures at various stages of being relocated in 2006, to new locations within the FCT. Nyanya is described as the fastest growing slum in Nigeria (Adams, 2007).

Table 4: Population Growth in the Federal Capital Territory

| S/No | Settlement | 1991 Population | 2006 Population | Land Area Km ² |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------------------------|
| 1. | Abaji | 21,081 | 58,444 | 1016 |
| 2. | Abuja Municipal Area | 226,949 | 778,567 | 1813 |
| 3. | Bwari | N/A | 227,216 | 939 |
| 4. | Gwagwalada | 79,306 | 157,770 | 1070 |
| 5. | Kuje | 44338 | 97,367 | 1682 |
| 6. | Kwali | N/A | 85,837 | 1234 |
| Total | | | 1,405,201 | |

Source: National Population Commission, Abuja

The other factor is the escalating demand. Middle and low income people could only obtain land in the towns and villages surrounding the FCC. The pressure on land for development in these settlements outside the FCC is intense, as Abuja remains the destination of choice for urban to urban migration in Nigeria. Essentially, the FCC is designed for the rich. Housing within the FCC is beyond the reach of the low income and even the majority of the middle income, with the exception of those who are entitled to housing through their employers. Table 4 shows the increase in population of the area councils that make up the FCT.

4.0 Concluding Remarks

The dynamics of urban sprawl in Nigerian cities has shown that public sector land regulation has neither promoted efficiency in use nor equity in the land market. This is due to several factors as highlighted below:

- I. The absence of a land policy and appropriate regulatory mechanisms.

- II. Poor implementation of both the Abuja and Port Harcourt Master Plans especially the failure of government agencies to tackle development control across the city. Outside government lay-outs, development control is minimal and developers basically do as they please. The requirement to obtain registered titles to land as a pre – requisite for development is largely ignored. Thus the developments on the urban fringe are generally not regulated.
- III. The apparent lack of transparency in public sector allocation of land; the abuses of the process and lack of a consistent framework within which actual allocation takes place.
- IV. The conflict between indigenous land owners and government over ownership and control of land.
- V. Widespread land speculation and land grabbing by the rich.

5.0 Recommendations

Urban sprawl in the FCT and Port Harcourt has generated problems for urban management. The settlements that have experienced this growth in the urban fringe have generally suffered the lack of urban services and lack access roads. There is usually no planning. This has reduced the liveability and functionality of the cities. While it is clearly impossible to put an end to sprawl development, it is possible, it can be controlled, such that development proceeds in a planned and regulated manner. This is perhaps the greatest challenge to urban planners in Nigeria in a rapidly urbanizing context. Urban physical planning in the form of planned lay outs, development control and other regulatory mechanisms must be put in place. The way that land enters the development process, especially registration of title and decisions on what land is used for should also be properly addressed at all levels of government – national, regional (state) and local. It is obvious that indigenous land owners must be part of this process. The political class must realize that building functional cities, which are adequately serviced and have decent transportation systems, are crucial legacies they must endeavour to leave behind. There is need to strengthen urban governance, by improving human capacity, proper funding and building institutions that are efficient not just in the FCT and Port Harcourt but in other cities in Nigeria.

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