

Implementation of the Master Plan of Abuja, Nigeria, 1976 – 2012: A view from a Land Manager

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SUMMARY

When the Central Government of Nigeria decided in 1976 to relocate the Nation's Capital City from the coastal area of Lagos to a more central location of Abuja, it commissioned the International Planning Associate (IPA) to produce a Master Plan for the new City. The IPA submitted its report in February 1979 which was subsequently approved as the Master Plan of Abuja by the Central Government. This became the guiding principle for the subsequent development of the City that now known as Abuja. In the last thirty six years development has been going on based on the provisions of this Master Plan. One of the significant features of this Plan was the 'the Neighbourhood Concept', which made provision for a population of five thousand people within a neighborhood. Apart from the residential development, it also made provision for neighborhood centres that provides commercial service or facilities within the neighbourhood. A collection of these neighborhoods constitute a district which in turn has a district center for higher order commercial activities. In between the many residential districts lies the Central Area (Central Business District - CBD). The City is being developed in Phases and has about four phases. It is planned in form of a crescent and development has been going on in the last thirty six years. A total land area of 250 square kilometers is earmarked for the City with an ultimate population of about three million people. The seat of the Central Government of Nigeria finally moved from Lagos to Abuja in November 1991. A lot has been achieved and a lot also needs to be done in the coming years ahead. This paper attempts a critical analysis of the implementation of the provisions of the Master Plan of Abuja from the Land Administration and Land Management perspective. Working for over 27 years in the Administration of the Federal Capital Territory, 22 of these years as a Land Officer in charge of administration and management of land, I have participated in policy implementation as well as followed closely the implementation of the Master Plan provisions. A lot has been written about the Master Plan of Abuja. How the Plan fared, were we got it right and how it was done to get it right, where we got it wrong and how we got it wrong, the consequences of getting it wrong, the nature of the wrongs – distortions of the major provisions and the impact on the City and its environs as well as its population and lessons derived from these are highlighted in this paper from the perspective of the experience of an insider and a participant. One issue however stands clear in the Abuja Experience. This issue remains the Strong Political Will from leaders to lead without fear or favour. Recommendations are also provided on the way forward particularly for developing Nations that may find themselves in a similar situation with Nigeria.