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Navigating Urban Marginalities: An Assessment of the Federal Capital Territory Administration's (FCTA) Challenges in Developing Abuja's Satellite Towns

By

Corresponding author: Marcel Ahamefule

Department of Political Science and Diplomacy., Veritas University Abuja.

Co-author: James Nda Jacob

Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Abuja.

Abstract: This study critically examines the development efforts of the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) in addressing urban marginalities in Abuja, Nigeria. While Abuja was established with the intention of achieving balanced urban development, the reality reflects a deeply uneven growth trajectory that privileges the central districts over the peripheral satellite towns. Through field observations, interviews, and analysis of project data, this article highlights how infrastructural underinvestment, administrative discontinuities, funding challenges, corruption, and community non-compliance hinder the FCTA's developmental goals. Despite numerous regional infrastructure projects and legislative backing, development in the satellite towns remains slow and often unsustainable. The research emphasizes that inclusive planning, continuity in policy execution, stronger community engagement, and increased transparency are necessary to ensure that development reaches the underserved areas. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on urban governance and highlights the complex issues between policy intent and implementation in rapidly urbanizing African cities.

Keywords: Urbanization, Urban Marginalities, Satellite Town, Development

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization has become a defining feature of the 21st century, with most the world's population residing in urban areas. In recent decades, it has become a defining feature of global development, leading to the growth of cities as centers of economic, political, and social activity. However, the rapid growth of cities brings both opportunities and challenges both in developed, developing and underdeveloped countries of the world.

Following the creation of Nigerian states in May 1967, Lagos became both the Federal Capital and the capital of Lagos State. This dual function quickly led to severe political, administrative, and infrastructural challenges, making Lagos increasingly ungovernable and congested (Obiadi et al., 2019). As these issues intensified, the Nigerian government decided in 1976 to establish a new Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Abuja.

The choice was based on Abuja's central location, greater availability of land, and its perceived neutrality, in contrast to Lagos' limitations in expansion space and infrastructural strain (Ade & Afolabi, 2013). To guide the development of this new capital, a comprehensive Master Plan was created. It envisioned a city where infrastructure, housing, transportation, environment, and social services were harmoniously integrated (Olaitan, 2004). However, over the years, various administrations have deviated from this vision, resulting in a distorted urban landscape marked by rising inequality and a growing divide between the rich and the poor (Obiadi et al., 2019).

Today, the situation of development in the FCT reflects this imbalance. The city center is marked by formal, well-planned areas coexisting with informal settlements. Thesquatter communities—often built on unallocated or abandoned land—are largely disconnected from the city's infrastructure. Many of their inhabitants, driven by survival, provide low-wage services in the formal sectors but live without basic amenities, further portraying the urban-rural divide that exist within the FCT as an urbanized area. These conditions raise critical environmental and social concerns. The Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) remains central to driving the city's development through policy and infrastructure provision. However, despite their efforts, urban marginalization has become a key issue in the FCT, prompting the need to examine the challenges FCTA encounter in developing these satellite towns or urban marginalities.

Key Terms: Urbanization, Urban Marginalities, Satellite Town, Development.

Definition of Key Terms

Urban Marginalities

Aceska, Heer and Kaiser-Grolimund (2019) defined urban marginalities as those spaces or territory, poor and stigmatised neighbourhoods, be it 'ghettos', 'informal settlements', 'townships' or even 'camps', most common and most visible socio-spatial formations in cities where economically, politically and socially marginalized urban dwellers come to live.

Urbanization

Urbanization denotes the rise in urban residency, primarily characterized by the expansion of urban spaces, whether horizontally

or vertically (Demographic Partitions, 2014). It is also defined as the "process by which large numbers of people become permanently concentrated in relatively small areas, forming cities" (Britannica 2025).

Development

Todaro and Smith (2006, p.14) define development as "a multi-dimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions, as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and eradication of poverty". Sen (1999, p.3) simply defined development as "a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy".

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the challenges confronting the development efforts of the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA), in FCT satellite towns. The research relied on a combination of key informant interviews, field observations, and document analysis to collect data. Key informant interviews were conducted with officials from relevant administrative departments within the FCTA to gain firsthand knowledge of the internal challenges affecting development in the FCT. In addition, field observations were carried out in selected satellite towns to assess the visible state of infrastructure, public services, and ongoing projects. These observations supported the interpretation of findings by offering direct visual evidence of developmental gaps and administrative interventions. The study also incorporated document analysis, which involved reviewing official reports, development plans, policy documents, and budgetary records. These documents helped contextualize the primary data and provided a foundation for comparing policy intentions with on-ground realities. All collected data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, institutional bottlenecks, and possible policy solutions.

Implication of Rapid Urbanization for Nigerian Urban Areas

Rapid urbanization presents both opportunities and critical challenges for Nigerian cities. As Scott (2015) notes, by 2050, more than two-thirds of the global population will reside in urban areas, with the United Nations projecting that nearly all

population growth from 2017 to 2030 will occur in urban zones (Barney, 2015). While urbanization can foster economic growth and infrastructure development, the rapid and unplanned nature of urban expansion in Nigeria has led to severe socio-economic and environmental consequences. Between 2000 and 2020, Nigeria's major cities—Abuja, Lagos, and Port Harcourt—experienced significant annual urban population increases, with Abuja showing the highest growth rate of 7.1% (African Cities Research Consortium, 2021). Despite such growth, infrastructural development has not kept pace. According to the World Economic Forum (2018), urban infrastructure investments in Africa remain woefully insufficient, averaging just 2% of GDP between 2009 and 2015. This is far below India's 5.2% and China's 8.8%. As a result, a substantial proportion of urban dwellers in Nigeria live in overcrowded slums, lacking access to basic amenities and safe housing.

Musa (2019) emphasizes that this rapid urban influx is largely driven by rural-urban migration spurred by economic hardship in rural areas. Poor infrastructure, lack of social amenities, and limited opportunities in the countryside push people toward cities, where they often end up in informal settlements. Consequently, urban development in Nigeria outpaces economic planning and investment, leaving many without adequate housing or services. Oyesiku (2002) warns that this mismatch results in underdeveloped urban areas, increasing poverty and exacerbating inequality. The scale of poverty in Nigeria is deeply concerning. The National Bureau of Statistics (2022) reports that 63% of Nigerians—about 133 million people—are multidimensionally poor, with 42% of them residing in urban areas. Despite housing some of the continent's wealthiest individuals, Nigeria's urban areas are marked by stark inequalities and systemic poverty (UN-DESA, 2012; Population Matters, 2024). Urban residents, particularly those in slums, are often excluded from planning and decision-making processes, and their informal contributions to the economy are undervalued (Musa, 2019).

Urban expansion has also taken a heavy toll on environmental sustainability. Daramola and Ibe (2010) highlight the strain on land resources and the resultant environmental degradation, including

pollution, flooding, erosion, and urban sprawl. Inadequate waste management, unregulated construction, and the destruction of natural landscapes contribute to ecological instability, especially in cities like Lagos and Port Harcourt. The effects are dire: poor sanitation, limited access to clean water, and deteriorating public health conditions are widespread, particularly in informal settlements (Aliyu and Amadu, 2017; Oshodi, 2010 cited in Musa, 2019). Housing inequality remains a major concern. With a housing deficit exceeding 20 million units as of 2018, bridging the gap would require upwards of ₦21 trillion in investment (Moore, 2020). Despite several national housing policies over the decades, implementation has been weak and often politically unstable. Financial exclusion, especially among informal sector workers, exacerbates the problem, as many cannot access mortgage schemes due to a lack of formal income documentation or land titles (Musa, 2019). The rising cost of imported construction materials further compounds housing challenges, driving up costs and reducing affordability.

Towry-Coker (2012) asserts that Nigeria lacks a viable and inclusive housing finance framework, and Musa (2019) proposes alternative models such as housing microfinance and community-based financing. These would better serve the needs of marginalized urban populations who are often excluded from mainstream housing programs. Moreover, housing inequality is increasingly being recognized not just as a shelter issue, but as a reflection of broader economic disparities and limitations in converting income into meaningful opportunities (Anierobi et al., 2023).

The Situation of Development in the FCT

When the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) was established, it was envisioned as a symbol of balanced urban development—a place that would reflect the aspirations of a modern city. But over the years, the reality on the ground has strayed far from that original vision. The pace and pattern of development have leaned heavily toward the central districts like Maitama, Asokoro, and Wuse, leaving the surrounding satellite towns in the shadows. This imbalance has created a clear urban divide: the affluent live comfortably at the core, while the urban poor are pushed to the margins, struggling with inadequate infrastructure and poor

access to services. One of the underlying issues has been the chronic underfunding of infrastructure projects in the FCT. According to a report, the territory has only accessed about 25% of the funding it needs over a span of forty years, which has significantly stalled development in many areas (Independent Newspaper Nigeria, 2019). This funding gap has left essential projects either incomplete or abandoned altogether, especially in the less visible parts of the city where the majority of low-income residents live.

Even though Abuja's city master plan was designed to guide orderly development, its implementation has mostly favored the elite. Luxurious housing estates and gated communities have sprung up in the central city, while informal settlements have been demolished with little regard for the displaced. These actions paint a picture where the comfort of the wealthy seems to take precedence over the survival of the poor (Ebo, 2006). As a result, the low-income earners who can no longer afford rent in the city are forced to move to peripheral areas like Mpape, Nyanya, Bwari, and Dei-Dei—places that are growing rapidly in population but remain largely underdeveloped. These satellite towns are overcrowded and under-serviced. Basic amenities such as water supply, good roads, waste disposal systems, and public health facilities are either lacking or stretched beyond capacity. The migration of poor families to these areas is driven by the lower cost of housing, but this affordability comes at the cost of living. A study on Nyanya, for instance, revealed that rapid population growth has far outpaced infrastructure development, leading to daily struggles with transport, education, and healthcare (Ejaro&Abubakar, 2013).

Interestingly, many of the people living in these satellite towns are vital to the functioning of Abuja's city center. They work as cleaners, drivers, security guards, cooks, and other essential service roles for the affluent population. Yet, despite their importance, they remain excluded from the benefits of urban development. They endure long commutes, high transportation costs, and often live in overcrowded conditions, making it nearly impossible to build stable lives or invest in their personal growth (RSIS, 2023). Efforts by the FCT Administration, such as the Abuja Light

Rail intended to link these towns with the city center, have had limited impact so far. While the light rail's revival is a step in the right direction, broader issues of planning, inclusivity, and sustained investment in public infrastructure remain unresolved (Reuters, 2024). The persistent neglect of satellite towns raises serious concerns about whether the FCT is truly committed to inclusive development or if its urban policies will continue to entrench inequality.

Development Policy of the FCTA

The developmental policy objective of the FCTA is centered on transforming the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) into a globally recognized capital city that balances urban development with infrastructural expansion in both rural areas and urban satellite towns. The FCTA aims to provide efficient administration and critical infrastructure to improve the quality of life for residents while positioning Abuja as a "first-class Federal Capital Territory comparable to the best in the world" (FCTA n.d). One of the key legislative frameworks is Decree No. 6 of 1976, which established the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) and laid the foundation for the planning, design, and administration of the FCT. This decree was aimed at ensuring the orderly development of Abuja as the new capital, covering areas such as infrastructure, land allocation, and municipal services.

Also, the Federal Capital Territory Act of 1984 further formalized the legal and administrative structure of the FCT, outlining the powers and functions of the FCTA. It was later codified into the Laws of the Federation as Cap F6 LFN 2004, ensuring the continuity of governance and development efforts in the FCT. Furthermore, the 2004 (Resolution Order No.1 of 2004) by the then President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo led to the establishment of the Satellite Towns Development Agency (STDA), now Satellite Towns Development Department (STDD), of the FCTA to focus on carrying out the core mandate of opening up the satellite towns in FCT through infrastructural provision to enhance habitability and improved standard of living of all inhabitants, consequently, decongesting the city centers (STDD Progress Report, 2023). However, these legal provisions empower the FCTA to oversee urban planning, infrastructure development, and

service delivery across the city and its satellite towns of the FCT. The development programmes of the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) cover a broad spectrum of infrastructural and socio-economic initiatives aimed at fostering

balanced growth in the FCT. This study primarily focuses on regional infrastructure in these satellite towns in order to show the role the FCTA played in developing infrastructure in these areas.

Some Regional Infrastructure Projects for FCT Satellite Towns in Selected Area Councils

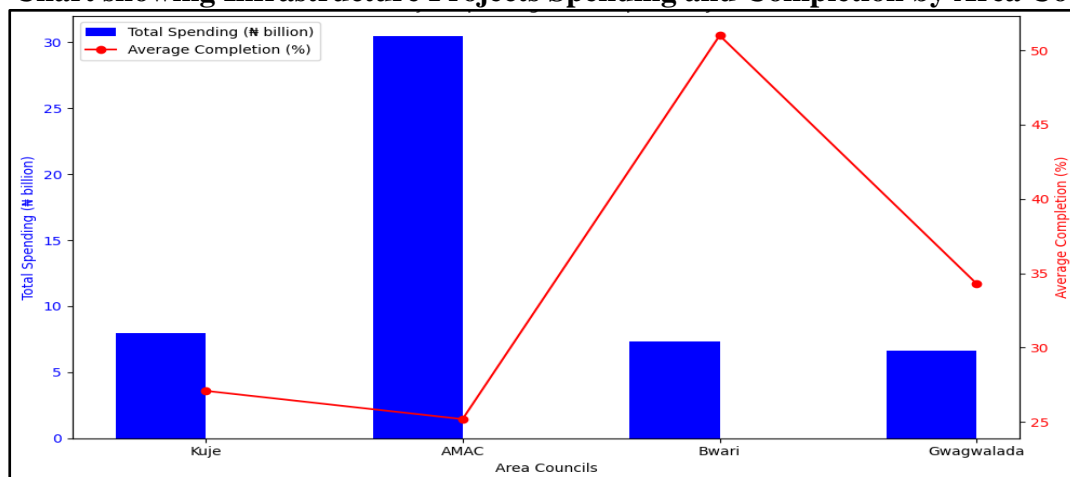
Area Council	Contractor	Project Description	Date of Award	Contract Sum (N)	Completion (%)
KUJE	MessrsCoduc Nigeria Limited	Provision of Engineering Infrastructure to 30 Villages in Kuje	7th July 2015	955,730,034.00	28.00
	Messrs Tripod Resources Limited	Provision of Access Road to Senate Staff Mass Housing Quarters Kuje	7th July 2015	680,561,817.08	15.00
	M/S First Rate Construction Co. Ltd	Provision of Solar Powered Bore Hole at Takwa Village Kuje Area Council	26th July 2020	14,572,117.35	0.00
	M/S Lofty Construction Co. Ltd	Provision of Solar Powered Bole Hole at AnyigyyiAffaKuje Area Council	31st July 2020	14,515,679.85	0.00
	M/S Ometra Construction	Rehabilitation of Dr. Ekpendu Street at Staff Quarters Kuje	30th May 2019	84,917,312.87	45.00
	M/S A.A Shafa Ltd	Construction of Feeder Road at section A Kuje Farm Centre	30th May 2019	143,380,475.70	3.00
	M/S Tilt Construction Co. Ltd	Construction of box culverts on Kuje – Sabo Road in Kuje Area Council	30th May 2019	16,548,564.65	0.00
	Gozcom Investment Ltd	Provision of 7.7 33/1KVA outdoor injection sub-station at Dafara	24th July 2017	183,196,225.00	0.00
	Global Services Ltd	Rehabilitation of Access Road to Kuje Prison	24th July 2017	163,907,660.00	50.00
	Sahabi Liman	Rehabilitation of Rubochi Township Roads and	19th May 2023	5,776,587,352.25	0.00

		upgrading of RubochiGwargwada Road			
	COAN WA Limited	Provision of Engineering Infrastructure to Resettlement Site of Wasa 1	28th December 2017	26,872,643,736.22	33.00
	M/S Basman Project Ttd.	Installation of Stand-Alone Solar Street Light within the territory (Karshi-Jikwoyi Road)	10th February 2021	1,146,659,500.00	83.00
	M/S Black Gold Construction Ltd	Upgrading of Roads and Drainages in Nyanya Phase I in AMAC	30th May 2019	383,370,782.82	15.00
	M/S Star Point Investment Ltd	Provision Of Solar Powered Bore Hole AtKurudu AMAC	29th July 2020	18,918,680.76	100.00
	M/S Baruch-Aris Works Ltd	Provision of Solar Powered Bore Hole at Kawu Village	23rd July 2020	19,144,615.88	0.00
	M/S CMCO	Rehabilitation of 2.5KM Access Road to Mpape	30th May 2019	1,403,521,854.73	0.00
	Sanol Engineering Consultants Ltd	Engineering Design for Dualization of Karshi-Apo Road	24th July 2017	50,756,848.80	35.00
AMAC	M/S NGOVESTER Nig. Ltd	Provision of Sub-Station at Dakwa Village	30th May 2019	23,822,106.00	0.00
	MessrsAkatech Construction Limited	Provision of Engineering Infrastructure from Arab Road Junction to Byazin	30th May 2019	282,249,835.40	40.00
	EqualteKNig Ltd	Rehabilitation of road from Law School Bwari to FCT boundary	9th March 2021	1,466,334,591.34	63.00
	M/S Vipan Global Investment	Construction of 14KM Mpape-Galuwyi-Shere Road	10th February 2022	5,454,836,230.67	59.00
BWARI	M/S Next Level Engineering	Shekwo Avenue Road Bwari	30th May 2019	75,940,527.55	16.00

	Services				
	M/S Ometra Construction	Rehabilitation of Dr. Ekpendu Street at Staff Quarters Kuje	30th May 2019	84,917,312.87	45.00
	M/S Barachah Global Limited	Provision of 500KVA 33/0.415v Transformer and LT Reticulation of SabonGari Bwari	24th July 2017	45,356,157.00	34.00
	M/S Teleview International Nig. Ltd	Rehabilitation of Aguma Palace Road	4th December 2020	900,294,304.75	12.00
	M/S Delta Foss	Construction of KASCE Feeder Road at Gwagwalada	9th March 2021	3,552,438,591.09	15.00
	M/S Neic Nig. Ltd.	Rehabilitation of 12.6Km road from Gwagwalada to Paikon Kore	10th May 2019	1,364,439,012.62	40.00
	M/S Vamitha Resources Ltd	Provision of Solar Powered Bore Hole at Shishada Village Gwagwalada	25th July 2020	16,825,034.63	0.00
	M/S Bodic Global Investment Ltd	Provision Of Powered Bore Hole at Zhibodo Village Gwagwalada	30th July 2020	18,171,896.15	100.00
GWAGWALADA	M/S Frantech Global Resources	Rehabilitation of old Kutunku Road Gwagwalada	30th May 2019	484,335,093.44	75.00
GWAGWALADA	M/S Harney Projects Limited	Rural Electrification from Dobi to Ledi 1 and 2	24th July 2017	58,324,266.00	100.00

Source: STDD Progress Report (2023)

Chart showing Infrastructure Projects Spending and Completion by Area Council



In the table illustration above, it is evident that infrastructure spending across the different area councils shows a clear disparity, with AMAC receiving the largest share of allocations (₦30,452,358,827.77). As the most urbanized area council in the Federal Capital Territory, AMAC's projects receive substantial funding, particularly the Wasa Resettlement Site project, which alone accounts for ₦26.87 billion. This highlights the government's emphasis on urban development and resettlement initiatives in this key area. The variety of projects in AMAC, including solar street lighting and road upgrades, points out its need to sustain urban infrastructure and support the large population in locations like Karshi, Nyanya, and Mpape. However, the completion rate for projects in AMAC averages around 25.2%, indicating slower progress compared to other councils, potentially due to the scale and complexity of the projects.

Bwari, with a total spending of ₦7.31 billion, shows a more balanced approach, combining both urban and rural development. Key projects, such as the Mpape-Galuwyi-Shere Road, received funding, underscoring the need for better road connectivity to rural areas within the council. In Bwari, the completion rate stands at 51%, the highest among the area councils, indicating relatively steady progress in project execution.

Kuje, which received a total of ₦7.98 billion, focuses heavily on rural infrastructure, with several projects targeting the development of basic utilities and road networks. The Rubochi Township Road Rehabilitation project, with a budget of ₦5.77 billion, is the major investment aimed at improving rural connectivity. However, Kuje's average project completion rate is relatively low at 27.1%, indicating that many projects are either incomplete or progressing slowly.

Gwagwalada, with total spending of ₦6.66 billion, places emphasis on road rehabilitation and rural electrification. The KASCE Feeder Road project and the Aguma Palace Road rehabilitation are some of the largest investments, underscoring the importance of improving transport infrastructure in Gwagwalada. The completion rate in Gwagwalada averages 34.3%, with variation across projects. Despite electrification of some part of the area council

been successfully completed, several roadworks are lagging behind.

The FCTA has collaborated extensively with the area councils to foster development. In an interview with a profiled FCTA staff, he explained that, in many cases, the FCTA executes major infrastructural projects, commissions them, and subsequently hands them over to the respective area councils. However, a notable challenge arises after the handover: the area councils often neglect the maintenance of these projects, which impacts their long-term sustainability. Despite this issue, officials from the area councils visited by the researcher—AMAC, Bwari, and Gwagwalada—acknowledged their ongoing collaboration with the FCTA.

For instance, during an interview with one of the senior staff at AMAC, he highlighted that the council's development efforts made possible with FCTA's support. He noted several infrastructure projects commissioned under the administration of Minister Nyesom Wike, including the construction of Gosa Township Access Road, rural electrification initiatives at Dangma and Jiyita, and the development of Karmo Sabo Abattoir Access Road. In addition, educational facilities in satellite towns received attention, with projects such as the construction of a Block of 3 Classrooms with a Head Teacher's Office at Madalla and the renovation of classrooms at LEA Primary School Zhiyidna all commissioned in 2024. These projects commissioned underlines FCTA's commitment to uplifting these satellite towns and seeing to the critical development needs in these areas.

In contrast, during the interview with the Head of the Logistics Department at Bwari Area Council, he emphasized that the primary source of funding for the area council comes through the Joint Allocation Account Committee (JAAC). Similarly, a key staff member in the infrastructure department of Gwagwalada Area Council acknowledged that the FCTA has provided assistance in road construction in remote areas and the rehabilitation and development of healthcare facilities within the council. However, this official also pointed out the existing challenges related to delays in obtaining responses from the FCTA for urgent matters. He

noted that "when requests are made, FCTA's response to challenges that require immediate attention is slow due to procedural delays... moving from one table to another." He suggested that reducing these bureaucratic bottlenecks would greatly enhance the area councils' ability to make provision for the pressing infrastructural needs more efficiently.

However, the trend in infrastructure spending shows a clear priority for urban development in AMAC, while councils like Kuje and Gwagwalada focus more on rural connectivity and basic infrastructure. Bwari's projects demonstrate a mix of both urban and rural needs, with more funding going toward road networks and essential utilities. However, the disparity in project completion rates across the councils suggests that while the government is investing in infrastructure, there are challenges in ensuring timely execution, especially in the more rural areas where projects tend to experience delays.

Impact of the Infrastructure Development in Some Satellite Towns

The impact of FCTA's infrastructure development across peripheral area councils like AMAC, Kuje, Bwari, and Gwagwalada has been substantial, yet the progress varies across different locations. Under the leadership of past and current FCT Ministers, the administration has prioritized road rehabilitation, construction of new roads, and improvements to public utilities. These efforts aim to enhance connectivity in rural communities, while supporting urban expansion.

The construction of the Apo-Wasa road in AMAC represents a huge infrastructural investment that is currently helping the road access between Karshi and Apo. During a recent visit at the site, the researcher observed that, despite the ongoing construction, the road is already in use, providing a shorter route for commuters traveling between Apo and Karshi. The partial completion has already made a substantial difference, to provide a shorter, more efficient route for commuters. Instead of the usual longer journey through Asokoro and Karu via the congested Nyanya-Karshi road, commuters now have the option to travel directly between Apo and Karshi. Some of the workers in the Karshi Secretariat pointed out that the new route is beneficial for them residing in Apo who commute

to areas such as Karu, Karshi, and Nyanya. Given the rising cost of transportation, the Apo-Wasa road now further offers a more economical alternative, to save both time and money.

In Karu, AMAC, the researcher observed that the FCTA, in collaboration with AMAC, has made notable efforts to enhance infrastructure by installing electricity transformers in residential areas behind Karu Market. Also, the partnership extended to providing solar-powered boreholes, which have also improved water access for residents. One of the local residents shared that "before the installation, those of us living in these compound and surrounding houses had to buy water from private boreholes in the area. But now, with the solar-powered boreholes, we no longer purchase water because it's free for everyone." However, he also pointed out occasional challenges: "Sometimes, we face technical issues with the solar power, and fixing it can take time, which forces us to revert to buying water until it's repaired." Despite the temporary setbacks, the provision of solar-powered boreholes from the researcher's observation has considerably eased the burden of unlimited access to water for many residents in the community.

In Karshi, the FCTA, Satellite Town Development Department, has made huge infrastructural investments to stimulate development and open up the town for further growth. During the field observation, the researcher noted substantial ongoing infrastructural activities, including road construction and opening up aimed at attracting real estate investors and private businesses to the area. Among the notable developments is a newly established private hospital that has already become operational. In addition, there are various infrastructure projects in progress, such as primary water schemes, the installation of electric poles, and the establishment of educational facilities like the FCT Agency for Mass Education.

However, despite these advancements in the Karshi area, the researcher also observed several challenges related to project delays. These delays have contributed to instances of theft and vandalism, with building materials being looted from partially constructed facilities by local

hoodlums. For example, one of the community town hall constructed by the STDD has been severely impacted, with its roofing sheets entirely stolen. These setbacks emphasize the need for improved project management and security measures to ensure that ongoing developments in Karshi are completed successfully and continue to serve the community without further disruption.

Challenges Facing FCTA in the Development of FCT Satellite Towns

Based on the findings of this study, these challenges were considered as the key challenges facing the FCTA in the development of FCT Satellite Towns.

Heavy Influx into the FCT

The surge in population in the FCT is driven by various factors including economic opportunities and relative security. This has been believed to have placed immense pressure on existing infrastructure, housing, and service delivery systems. The original Abuja Master Plan did not anticipate such exponential growth, hence leading to a mismatch between the population size and the available resources. Consequently, the FCTA struggles to provide adequate housing, maintain infrastructure, and deliver essential services to both long-term residents and new migrants. This situation is further exacerbated by the proliferation of informal settlements, which often lack basic amenities and are not integrated into the city's formal planning framework. In response to these challenges, the FCTA established the Satellite Towns Development Department (STDD) in 2004, aiming to accelerate the provision of basic amenities in satellite towns and decongest the city center. Despite these efforts, the rapid population growth continues to outpace the administration's capacity to plan and implement development projects effectively.

Funding Challenges

Despite ambitious plans to enhance infrastructure, housing, sanitation, and social services, the FCTA still grapple with inadequate financial resources, hindering the full execution of these projects. This financial shortfall affects the timely completion of critical infrastructure and the provision of essential services in urban

marginalities and satellite towns. A notable example is the Apo-Karshi Road project, awarded in 2011 with an initial budget of ₦6.3 billion. Due to funding delays and inflation, the project's cost escalated to ₦97 billion over 12 years, yet it remains incomplete (Vanguard, 2023). Such delays not only inflate project costs but also erode public trust in government initiatives.

The funding challenges also influence the quality of work executed. Budgetary constraints have led to the preference for indigenous construction companies over multinationals, primarily because local firms can operate within limited budgets. However, this often results in the use of substandard materials, compromising the quality and longevity of infrastructure projects. For instance, the Karshi water supply project, awarded in 2013 with a contract sum of over ₦19.4 billion, has seen minimal progress, with work reportedly at only 8% completion as of recent assessments (Daily Trust, 2023). An FCTA staff member pointed out that the persistent issues of incomplete projects, delays, and, in some cases, outright abandonment are closely tied to the challenge of inadequate funding. While there may be elements of mismanagement within the allocation of funds for urban marginalities, the data indicates that government funding for these development projects is often insufficient. This financial inadequacy not only delays critical projects but also hinders the overall progress of development activities in the FCT, further impacting the urban poor residing in marginalized areas.

Administrative Changes

Frequent administrative changes within the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) pose significant challenges to the continuity and effectiveness of development efforts in Abuja. Each new minister often introduces distinct priorities and strategies, leading to shifts that can disrupt ongoing projects. This lack of policy continuity results in delays, resource misallocation, and, in some cases, abandonment of critical infrastructure projects. For instance, the Wasa Housing Infrastructure Project, awarded in 2014 at ₦26 billion, experienced a cost escalation to ₦85 billion by 2018, with only 21.4% of the work completed. Such variations and delays are

attributed to administrative inefficiencies and frequent changes in leadership.

The recent restructuring within the FCTA has led to the premature retirement of several senior directors, causing disruptions in project management and execution. The appointment of new permanent secretaries, bypassing long-serving directors creates uncertainty within the administration which further affects institutional memory and hampers the smooth transition and continuity of development projects (The Abuja Inquirer, 2024). The respondent from the FCTA noted that such frequent changes in key administrative roles, like the Coordinator of the Satellite Towns Development Department (STDD), often lead to the redefinition of development priorities, causing further delays and inefficiencies.

Non-compliance from communities

Non-compliance from communities, although not widely acknowledged by the general public as a critical barrier, has been identified by field experts as a substantial challenge in the FCTA's development efforts. The responses from the communities reflect a division in perception, where the community participants—especially those who may benefit directly from FCTA services—do not see community resistance as a major issue. However, insights from interviews and field observations suggest otherwise. According to an FCTA staff member, efforts in communities like Karshi and Nyanya have often encountered resistance. In these areas, community members sometimes prioritize immediate financial benefits over strategic, long-term development goals. For instance, relocation and compensation schemes are often met with distrust or outright refusal, delaying critical infrastructure and housing projects. Such resistance not only hinders the implementation timeline but also raises the cost and complexity of executing government initiatives. Despite being compensated, some residents continue to encroach on designated project areas, deliberately planting what are termed “economic trees” to claim further compensation. This tactic, as the FCTA staff member confirmed, has evolved into a strategic barrier that communities exploit for financial gain. Even in areas where substantial infrastructure such as hospitals, streetlights, and

water systems have been introduced, the resistance persists. The case of the proposed Muhammadu Buhari Estate in Karshi indicates this challenge, where the FCTA was compelled to pay compensation for trees on otherwise vacant land in order to proceed with the project.

Additionally, non-compliance often stems from the disconnect between policy formulation and community engagement. Residents in marginalized areas frequently feel excluded from the development conversation and perceive FCTA initiatives as top-down impositions rather than collaborative efforts. As highlighted by the FCTA interviewee, many community members either lack proper information about ongoing projects or do not understand their long-term value, leading to reluctance or passive resistance. These issues often point to the need for deeper grassroots engagement and participatory planning mechanisms. While it may not be the most quantifiable challenge, community non-compliance represents a roadblock in ensuring that developmental projects are accepted, supported, and sustained over time, especially in the most vulnerable areas of the FCT.

Corruption and Mismanagement

Field findings indicate that developmental projects are often driven by personal and political interests among elites within the government and the FCTA. These individuals use their influence to steer projects toward affiliated companies, prioritizing personal connections over the capability to deliver high-quality results. Contract sums are frequently inflated to accommodate financial interests, allowing for kickbacks and diverting resources from actual implementation. Consequently, substantial funds allocated to infrastructure projects often result in substandard outcomes, as portions of the budget are absorbed by corruption and mismanagement.

Moreover, the quality of infrastructure is compromised to satisfy the financial interests of certain officials. Companies favored due to affiliations with elites may lack the expertise or resources for large-scale projects but are awarded contracts based on connections, leading to substandard work. This issue is exacerbated by the selection of local indigenous companies over multinationals, not based on capacity but on affiliations with government officials. These

companies often work within restricted budgets, resorting to lower-quality materials to complete projects, perpetuating a cycle of poor project delivery. Additionally, the FCTA has been reported to consistently flout the Freedom of Information Act, failing to provide information on abandoned projects, which undermines transparency and accountability (Obianyo et al, 2021).

Conclusion

The development of Abuja's satellite towns continues to lag behind expectations, undermined by a complex web of challenges ranging from rapid population influx and inconsistent administrative policies to community resistance, corruption, and inadequate funding. While the FCTA has initiated several regional infrastructure projects in line with its development mandate, these efforts often fall short due to systemic inefficiencies and governance gaps. The concentration of development in central districts such as Maitama, Asokoro, and Wuse has created a clear urban divide, leaving peripheral communities marginalized and under-served.

The findings from this study illustrate that despite the creation of institutions like the Satellite Towns Development Department (STDD), the aspirations of balanced urban development in the FCT remain largely unmet. Infrastructural projects are either delayed, abandoned, or completed with substandard quality due to political interference, mismanagement, and lack of consistent community engagement. Addressing these issues requires not only improved policy design but a stronger commitment to transparent governance and inclusive planning practices that reflect the needs of all residents—particularly those in the marginalized zones of the FCT.

Recommendations

a) Strengthen Community Engagement and Participation: This emphasizes the need for the FCTA to involve communities in the decision-making process for urban development projects. Some level of policy potency can be achieved through town hall meetings and using digital platforms for communication, the FCTA can ensure that residents, especially those in marginalized areas, have a say in how their communities are developed. This creates a sense

of ownership and cooperation, reducing resistance and ensuring that development aligns with local needs.

b) Implement Strict Anti-Corruption Measures and Enhance Transparency in Development Projects: This includes ensuring transparency in the procurement process, auditing completed projects, and creating independent bodies to oversee the management of funds. The aim is to ensure that public funds are used efficiently, contracts are awarded based on merit, and resources are not diverted for personal gain to ensure higher-quality delivery of infrastructure and services.

c) Prioritize Long-Term Infrastructure Development Over Short-Term Political Gains: This suggests that the FCTA should adopt a long-term, sustainable approach to urban development that transcends political cycles. Creating a comprehensive, multi-year development plan that remains consistent despite leadership changes, would ensure that critical infrastructure projects like roads, water supply, and housing can be completed without being delayed or abandoned due to shifting political priorities. This ensures continuity and the effective allocation of resources over time.

d) Increase Funding for Satellite Town Development: A dedicated fund for satellite and marginalized areas in the FCT would allow for targeted projects such as affordable housing, improved roads, and better public services. Public-private partnerships (PPPs) can be adopted to supplement these funds to strengthen project financing and ensuring that the areas most in need of development receive the attention and resources they deserve.

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