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RESETTLEMENT AND RESENTMENT: A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACTS OF INDIGENE RESETTLEMENT POLICIES ON COMMUNITY COHESION AND SECURITY IN ABUJA FCT

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Abstract

This study analyses the socio-political and security consequences of indigene resettlement policy in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. The country's administrative capital, Abuja has experienced unprecedented urbanization, causing displacement and resettlement of the indigenes. While the policies aim to support modernization and national integration, they have also bequeathed unimaginable grudge to host communities. Supported by qualitative study design, the study is based on in-depth interviews conducted within resettlement zones like Armac, Abaji, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kwali, and Kuje. It critically examines patterns of indigene resettlement within the FCT, examines their impact on host societies, and explores challenges confronting responsible implementation of indigenous resettlement policies in Abuja Federal Capital Territory. The research supports the fact that resettlement policies not only caused physical displacement but also social dislocation, economic marginalization, and loss of trust among indigenous peoples, settlers, and the state. The research argues that exclusion of indigenous people's voices in policy formulation and implementation has been driving forces for further social fragmentation and has created enabling conditions for long-term grievance and potential radicalization. It ends by advocating for community-led policy processes, culturally responsive urban planning, and continuous dialogue as the most effective strategies to attain social cohesion and advance human security

within resettlement zones. The study contributes to further theoretical discourses on urban displacement, politics of identity, and peacebuilding in the context of the urbanization of African cities.

Keywords: Indigene Resettlement; Community Cohesion; Urban Displacement; Human Security

Introduction

The formulation and implementation of resettlement policies remain a complex and contentious issue across many developing nations. Resettlement, whether for infrastructure development, urban expansion, or administrative relocation, often involves difficult trade-offs between national interests and the rights of local communities. In contexts where these policies are inadequately conceived or poorly executed, they tend to foster grievances, exacerbate socio-economic inequalities, and destabilize intergroup relations. This trend is particularly evident in Nigeria, where the movement of the country's administrative capital from Lagos to Abuja has ignited protracted debates over land rights, compensation, and the marginalization of indigenous populations. The case of Abuja demonstrates how mismanaged resettlement policies can become a potent source of community insecurity and social unrest.

The decision to relocate Nigeria's capital from Lagos to Abuja was rooted in both strategic and developmental considerations. Lagos, while serving as the political and economic hub, had become congested and geographically limited, making it unsuitable for long-term administrative expansion. Abuja was chosen due to its central location and its potential to serve as a neutral ground, free from the historical and ethnic baggage associated with other major cities (Paul & Ahmadu, 2019). However, what appeared to be a rational and inclusive national project failed to take into full account the implications for the indigenous communities occupying the territory now known as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). These communities, primarily the Gbagyi, Gade, Koro, and Gwandara, were subjected to various forms of displacement, often without adequate consultation, compensation, or planning for their socio-economic reintegration.

Although the Nigerian government-initiated frameworks to manage the resettlement process, including Decree No. 6 of 1979, which established

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compensation rates and provided legal backing for the relocation of affected populations, the execution fell short of expectations. Resettlement committees were formed and agreements were signed, such as the October 10, 1977 deal that offered monetary compensation to households relocated from Niger, Plateau, and Kwara States. However, delays in payment, insufficient housing provisions, and lack of infrastructural support rendered these initiatives ineffective in practice. In many cases, the funds allocated for resettlement were either misappropriated or diverted, leaving many displaced communities to fend for themselves.

The failure to fulfill these resettlement promises has led to a growing sense of injustice among the indigenous populations. The perception that the federal government prioritizes the infrastructural development of Abuja over the welfare of its original inhabitants has intensified feelings of exclusion and neglect. This discontent has manifested in various forms, including legal disputes over land ownership, protests against demolition exercises, and the formation of advocacy groups such as the Abuja Indigene Forum and the Abuja Youth Development Aspiration Forum. These groups have consistently demanded the enforcement of resettlement agreements and greater recognition of indigenous land rights.

The consequences of this protracted resettlement crisis are far-reaching, particularly in the realm of community security. Displaced indigenes have increasingly resorted to non-compliance with relocation orders, leading to the illegal occupation of government lands and infrastructure. In some instances, development projects have been halted or disrupted due to resistance from local communities who feel cheated by the state. Furthermore, the influx of new settlers and developers into the FCT has escalated land ownership disputes, with many original landowners challenging government land allocations in court. These legal and social confrontations have created a tense atmosphere of uncertainty and mistrust, further complicating governance and law enforcement efforts in the territory.

The Abuja case underscores a critical policy gap in Nigeria’s urban planning and development strategies—namely, the insufficient consideration of indigenous rights and social sustainability in national development projects. While the FCT

has grown into a modern administrative and commercial hub, this growth has come at the cost of deepening social fractures and undermining the livelihoods and cultural identities of the aboriginal populations. There is, therefore, a pressing need to re-evaluate and redesign resettlement frameworks in ways that are participatory, transparent, and justice-oriented.

This study investigates the intersection of indigene resettlement policies and community security in Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory. It seeks to understand how flawed policy design and implementation have contributed to insecurity, resistance, and socio-political agitation in Abuja. By focusing on the lived experiences of displaced communities, the study aims to uncover the structural and systemic issues that continue to fuel the crisis. It also examines how the interplay between land rights, urban governance, and identity politics shapes the current security landscape in the FCT.

Although several studies have explored the broader dynamics of internal displacement, land tenure, and urban development in Nigeria, there remains a significant gap in the literature specifically addressing the nexus between resettlement policies and community security within the Abuja context. This research contributes to bridging that gap by offering a comprehensive and grounded analysis of the ongoing tensions in the FCT, with the ultimate goal of informing more inclusive and sustainable policy solutions.

In sum, the Abuja resettlement saga is not merely a historical footnote but a continuing source of contestation that highlights broader challenges in Nigeria's approach to development, governance, and conflict management. As such, addressing the underlying issues surrounding indigene resettlement in Abuja is not only crucial for ensuring community security but also for fostering national cohesion and sustainable urban growth.

Literature Review

Indigenous Resettlement Policies

Indigene resettlement policies can be referred to as a social procedure in which individuals leave their unique region of abode and settle in another zone. Also, it may be characterised as an intentional or automatic development of the

extensive number of individuals from one place (which is generally the first settlement) to another (which is another settlement), and this development is not without outcome (Agba, Ogaboh, Akpanudoedehe, & Ushie, 2010). affirms that movement can be caused by two variables. These incorporate the migration that happens when the choice of moving is arranged and forced by an outer specialist and happens when there is no decision to remain which is known as automatic dislodging. Automatic migration can be caused by ecological degradation, natural events, clashes or development projects. Involuntary movement is contrary to deliberate movement, for example, provincial urban relocation which influences individuals that are eager to seek after new chances. By the preceding clarification, Croll (1999) characterises automatic resettlement as the constrained migration of whole families, which is planned to be permanent.

Different policy ideas have been tried out towards the resettlement of the inhabitants of FCT between 1976 to 2015, barely four decades (Jibril, 2006). Strategies ranging from integration, total resettlement, and partial resettlement have all been experimented with (Jibril, 2006). However, it appears that FCDA does not have a consistent policy direction (Owei, 2015). If the need for resettlement is for developmental purpose and the benefit of the larger society, then it is inevitable for resettlement to take place. What matters most, in this case, is how the resettlement strategies are structured (i.e. the presence of efficient and effective frameworks to plan and implement it) so that it will have a reduced-adverse effect on the affected people and the environments. In line with this view, the government has initiated several policy strategies in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria to cushion the adverse effects of the resettlement programmes.

According to Paul and Jumai (2019), resettlement whether in the form of voluntary or involuntary always has its repercussion for the displaced persons and the organisation or government initiating the idea of resettlement. The group of people being compelled to pave way for "development" will unavoidably encounter a decrease in their standard of living. Notwithstanding the above mentioned, they remain to lose their abode and socio-economic and cultural assets. The displaced communities, for instance, will suffer from loss of economic opportunities as businesses lose their customer base, productive

farmlands and other forms of livelihood will also be dismantled. The social fabric of these communities stands the risk of being torn apart; so also the informal networks and kinship ties that sustained them in times of need. These entire factors will definitely affect the livelihood of the people. But in any case, resettlement is a fact of life where the need be. It is an approach to development. It is an inevitable consequence of development. Of course, no society would want to be static or stagnated in one position.

Research evidence, however, suggests that many of such initiatives have not yielded or brought positive outcomes (Jibril, 2006). The symptoms of this are prolonged and constant conflicts between the government and the indigenes of the FCT (Ahmadu, 2017). In most cases, government's attempt towards resettlement is faced with stiff resistance from the affected people. This means that the series of resettlement policies experimented with have not yielded any favourable result.

Resettlement policy, in a way, can be viewed as the sort of strategy that builds up the resettlement and compensation standards, authoritative game plans, and structured criteria to be connected to address the issues of the general population who claim or use land or assets, which individuals need to move or dislodge from their present spots of living arrangement or business so as to accomplish the set targets. As indicated by African Development Bank (ADB) (2003), the essential objective of the resettlement strategy is to guarantee that when individuals must be dislodged, they are dealt with fairly, and that they share in the advantages of the projects that include their resettlement. The targets of the arrangement are to guarantee that the interruption of the vocation of individuals in the task's region is limited, guarantee that the uprooted people get resettlement help to enhance their expectations for everyday comforts, set up a component for checking the execution of the resettlement programmes. Above all, the resettlement arrangement ought to be arranged and dependent on a developmental methodology that tends to sort out issues of the livelihood and expectations for everyday comforts of the dislodged individual just as remuneration for loss of benefits, utilizing a participatory methodology at all phases of undertaking structure and execution.

Under the resettlement policy, uprooted populace having formal lawful rights to land or resources and the individuals who can demonstrate privilege under the nation's standard laws are considered and will be completely rewarded for the loss of land or different resources. Be that as it may the third classification of uprooted people who have no conspicuous lawful right or case to the land they are possessing in the project territory will be qualified for resettlement assistance rather than compensation for land (WB, 2012). By and by, at the base, under resettlement strategy, land, lodging, and foundation ought to be given to the antagonistically influenced populace, including indigenous groups, ethnic, religious and semantic minorities, and pastoralists who may have rights to the land or different assets taken for the undertaking (Paul and Jumai, 2019).

A decent resettlement arrangement guarantees that pay for the full substitution cost for loss of terrains and different resources ought to be paid before project execution with the view to enhance the previous expectations for everyday comforts, salary gaining limit and productivity of the affected populace. The enhancement of these expectations for everyday comforts ought to likewise apply to the host communities. What's more, the necessities of the affected populations (landless, female-headed family units, youngsters, older, and minority ethnic, religious and semantic groups) must be at the focal point of the improvement approach (ADB, 2003). Much the same as compensation, financial advantages and expenses ought to likewise be contemplated while figuring resettlement policy. It ought to be connected to decide project feasibility with respect to resettlement.

The full expense of resettlement exercises relevant to accomplish the goals of the undertaking ought to be incorporated into the complete expenses of the project (World Bank, 2013). The expenses of resettlement, like the expenses of other project exercises are treated as a charge against the monetary advantages; and any net advantages to re-settlers (when contrasted with the "without-project" conditions) ought to be added to the benefits stream of the projects (Paul and Juma, 2019).

Resettlement Policies and Implication for Community Security in Abuja FCT

It is indisputable that there can be no policy that is fool-proof. Being a human contrivance, any policy whether on social, economic or political matter will always have or generate its own problems either at the level of conception, implementation or consequence. However, these three levels of policy engineering are directly interrelated. The overall success of a policy in terms of desired result for instance is hinged on faithful implementation as informed by its conception. Equally, any distortion or shift at the level of implementation will both reverse the original conception and generate unpalatable consequence or outcome. In this context, the Abuja resettlement policy is not an exception. A fine conception at origin, the subsequent implementation of the policy was to generate some problems that would greatly impact on the contemporary politics of the entire Abuja Project.

It may not amount to an exaggeration or out of place to say that the Abuja resettlement policy had been a victim of the typical inconsistency in policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria. It has always been the case in this country that policies conceived and implemented by past regimes are often reversed, distorted or even scrapped by successor regimes. In respect of the Abuja resettlement policy, as has been noted earlier, when General Murtala Mohammed pronounced Abuja as the nation's new federal capital, he made it abundantly clear that government would evacuate and resettle all the territory ' s original inhabitants in their former states of origin or places of their choice. This is in order to render the territory a-no-man's-land, that is, a wholly federal government-controlled terrain that is free from the control of any particular ethnic group. However, barely ten days after announcing the government's decision to relocate the federal capital from Lagos to Abuja, General Mohammed was assassinated.

Although the successor regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo did not reverse or scrap the Abuja project, and indeed even proceeded with its actualisation through immediate drawing up and approval of a master plan, and the setting of necessary administrative machinery for its execution in place. The resettlement policy did subsequently suffer a somersault. Instead of the compulsory

evacuation and resettlement of the Abuja indigenes decreed by General Mohammed, the Obasanjo regime adopted what has been described as a live-where-you-are, unless-the-land-is needed instance. (Mamman, et al, 1994)

Again, to further compound this policy shift, the Shagari-led federal government in the Second Republic, unduly policised the resettlement exercise by open encouragement to its National Party of Nigeria (NPN) supporters to remain in the capital territory while demanding those of rival parties like the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) in Plateau state to move out. This coupled with the alleged misappropriation and mismanagement of compensation money by government officials and local leaders involved in the resettlement exercise had either compelled some who had earlier relocated to retreat or altogether discouraged others from evacuating from the capital territory. In a similar fashion, the resettlement of Abuja indigenes and other displaced persons within the federal capital territory has not been consistent as some villages like those in Giri and Ido, Sanka and Kasuwan Murtala along the Airport Road have not yet been relocated. In fact, in the particular case of Giri, the delay in resettling the people may likely generate problem or even conflict in future whenever the University authorities decide to develop the vast permanent site.

Thus, on the whole and as things stand today, it is apparent that the resettlement business has remained unfinished. Not only that, but in particular, the: “reversal and changes of policy implementation in the development and growth of the Federal Capital have today tended to contradict the aims and objectives of creating Abuja as spelt out in the provisions of Decree 6 of 1976. In other words, while Decree 6 of 1976 vests ownership of the lands in the territory to the Federal Government, "the customary right of occupancy of the original inhabitants has not been extinguished and the people have not been adequately compensated and resettled according to law.

There is no doubt that the shift and inconsistency which characterised the implementation of the resettlement policy has been accompanied by a non-resolution of the status of Abuja. Since inception and at various times, a clear and final legal or constitutional status of Abuja has not been resolved, not even with the provisions entrenched in the 1979 and 1989 constitution. For instance, in the 1979 constitution, Section 263 provides that: The provisions of this

constitution shall apply to the Federal Capital Territory as if it were one of the States of the Federation. (Talle, 1999).

Theoretical Framework - The Deprivation, Frustration and Aggression Theory

The deprivation, frustration and aggression theory of Dougherty (1937) is adopted by the study to explain the problem associated with right of indigeneship of Federal Capital Territory. The theory was propounded by Mac Dougherty in (1937), by 1971, Dougherty and Pfaitzgraff, through their work, seconded the theory. The theory point of view is that aggression is always being trigger by frustration and the occurrences of aggressive behaviour always presuppose the existence of frustration. The duo conceive aggression as an action with the intent to harm. Though the form of harm they are referring to can either be physically or non-physically. Lending credence to the theory Abugu and Onuba, (2015) buttress that scarcity is cause by insufficient supply or unequal distribution of resource as a result of deprivation which ultimately leads to aggression.

In consonance with the above, Miller (2008) confirms that for every conflict there must be a corresponding trigger and vice-versa. This can however be link to the case understudy, this is because the trigger was created by the government when the decision was reached to establish the capital in a region with is aboriginal, hence the people react through conflict. This level of deprivation if more than anything resulted into frustration and trigger their aggression. To this end, Miller (2009) concludes that frustration is both a necessary and sufficient condition for aggression which can lead to serious conflict. Frustration instigates aggression against targets that are to some degree related to that source. But in some instances, the receivers of aggression have no link or connection with the cause of the aggression from the initial stage. A typical clarification here is necessary; the local people within the community understudy bear the consequences of the frustration.

Be that as it may, this theory is apposite to this study because the taken over of the peoples land with meagre or no compensation deprived them of their natural resources, the construction of different form of edifice on the land, the use of

security to clasp down on them and perhaps inability to secure job on their land increased their level of frustration and hence, triggered their aggression.

Methodology

The study used the qualitative approach where data was sourced through Key Informant Interview (KII. A total of 51 respondents were interviewed, including community leaders, farmers, youth leaders, association leaders among others consisting of male and female of different age brackets between 20 years and above. The population of the study is the selected six Area Councils across the Federal Capital Territory, namely, Armac, Abaji, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kwali and Kuje. This is because the areas largely accommodate the resettled indigenes by the federal government resettlement policies. The study also utilizes secondary data gathered from journals, government publications, Newspapers, books and also from academic research works

Data Presentation and Analysis

Focuses of the Indigenous Resettlement Policies in Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT)

An interview respondent describes the focus of indigenous resettlement policy in Abuja as follow:

> The transfer of ownership of land to the representative of federal government which is the federal capital authority resulted in conflict between locals and the authority for example the current location of DSS office head quarter in Asokoro was taken from indigene by the federal government using the land act of 1997, the indigenes always agitate for proper compensation on this land. There is a place call Asokoro village where the indigenes were relocated to, but this same place has been allocated to the elite, the indigene has to relocate and resettle in another area. As the city expands, the indigenes were displacing. At a point, these displace indigenous people of Nigeria's capital say they could take up arms if the government tries to displace them again. (KII/Male/

> Indigene Resettlement Policies (IRP) in the FCT/April, 2022)

In the same vein, a community leader in Kwali Area Council sees the thrust of indigenous resettlement policy in Abuja as follow:

> This major shift in policy direction can be said to be the root cause of problems of squatters and Land Administration within the FCT. This began with the Total Evacuation Scheme of 1979 followed by the Kubwa Resettlement policy of 1980, then the Integration Policy of 1991 and another Resettlement Policy of 2005. This policy involved moving the original inhabitants outside the Federal Capital City and any other areas designated for development. In the implementation of this Policy, a total of 12 communities were earmarked for resettlement. The implementation of the Abuja Master plan was designed in incremental stages where one sector is completed before the next is begun and at every phase, the native settlers are to be resettled elsewhere for ease and completion of physical development. For over years of commissioning of the physical development plan, thousands of the original inhabitants of Abuja were displaced to make way for the construction of Nigeria's new capital, but not adequately compensated. (KII/Male/Indigene Resettlement Policies (IRP) in the FCT/April, 2022)

Another respondent an indigene of Gwagwalada Area Council stated that:

> The transfer of land ownership right within the FCT from indigene to the federal government was not properly done, the indigene are not engaged in the conception and implementation of this policies that affect their personal lives. The major problem now is that, people will just come with document from the government that our farm

> land has been allocated to an organization without our knowledge; we really need government intervention in this regard. (KII/Male/Indigene Resettlement Policies (IRP) in the FCT/April, 2022)

A respondent in Amac Area Council also opines that:

> The aim of FCT by government in bringing government closer to the people irrespective of indigenous background is not obtainable in the FCT today. The indigene has lost their value, the government declares Abuja as city for everybody, and any tribe can claim indigene which is not obtainable in other part of the country. We, the indigene of Abuja do not have any resources than farming but the land has been confiscated by government without adequate compensation. Most properties in Abuja belong to strangers, if we have been compensated there is no need for further agitation but they always tell us that the indigenes have been compensated long time ago, this same problem is common around settlement in FCT. (KII/Male/Indigene Resettlement Policies (IRP) in the FCT/April, 2022)

Impact of Indigenous Resettlement Policies on the host communities in Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT)

On effects of indigenous resettlement policies on the host communities in Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT) an indigene of Kuje Area Council stated that:

> The policy statement made by Government in 1976, when it decided to move the Federal Capital of Nigeria from Lagos in the coastal area to Abuja in the central part of the country was for complete relocation of the entire inhabitants of about 150,000 – 300,000 people outside the new Federal Capital Territory. The aim is to enable Government take direct control, plan and develop the new city without any hitch. This policy as resulted in total

> displacement of our settlement and our farmland has since been taken away from us, now we grow produce on smaller plots of land, and we are conscious not to cut down trees protected by the government. This has increase poverty and illiteracy level among us. We have been pressured to leave our settlement and farmland as the city's continuous to expand without adequate compensation by the federal government. (KII/Female/Indigene Resettlement Policies (IRP) in the FCT/April, 2022)

A respondent in Amac Area Council also state that:

> There are a lot of consequences of indigenous resettlement policies on the local, we already lost rights to our ancestral lands, this resettlement as also lead to loss of state citizenship and loss of ties to the king and traditional titles, many are out of job due to the displacement and closure of exiting industries and local factories in our area. Farmers are out of business when the farm land as been taken away from them, all this led to psychological upheaval for many indigenes. This mass dispersal of indigenous people from the FCT, especially in my town resulted in low standard of living and it has caused us to lose social, economic, and cultural assets. The government policy is not yielding effective result because of inconsistent promises regarding resettlement policies. Our agitation is adequate and proper compensation and resettlement in the FCT. (KII/Male/Indigene Resettlement Policies (IRP) in the FCT/April, 2022).

The Challenges Confronting Responsible Implementation of Indigenous Resettlement Policies in Abuja Federal Capital Territory

While corroborating the findings, a respondent in Abaji Area Council stated that:

> The major challenges of implementing indigenous resettlement policies in Abuja Federal Capital Territory is funding, the federal government need huge amount of money to resettle and compensate the indigenes. Apart from the funding, the political will on the part of the leaders to implement the projects are lacking. Several administrations have come and gone without the determination to get the issues of resettlement put in proper shape in the Federal Capital Territory. This could be attributed to the negligence on the part of the government to take resettlement a serious matter in the FCT. Corruption is another obstacle to the realisation of the goals of resettlement in FCT, this manifests seriously in the area of over inflation of contract sums, conscious or deliberate increase of the number of households to benefit from the resettlement projects. Mostly, those that benefit from resettlement projects have no linkage in any way with the communities. Yet, they are listed among the beneficiaries as members of the community to the detriment of the original inhabitants. Again, because the government lacks the interest and the determination to settle the indigenes, they normally result to threats and intimidation to force members of the communities from their place of the original settlement. In cases of my community the government uses policy force and soldiers to intimidate us and force most of the inhabitants to live involuntarily without adequate compensation. (KII/Male/Indigene Resettlement Policies (IRP) in the FCT/April, 2022)

Discussion of Findings

Focuses of the Indigenous Resettlement Policies in Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT)

Findings from key informant interviews indicate that indigenous resettlement policies in Abuja's Federal Capital Territory (FCT) are widely perceived by affected communities as exploitative, exclusionary, and poorly implemented. Although originally designed to facilitate orderly relocation and compensation, these policies have largely prioritized urban expansion and federal development objectives over the rights and welfare of indigenous populations. Respondents consistently highlighted the forced transfer of land from indigenous communities to the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA), often justified through the Land Use Act of 1978. This legal instrument enabled land expropriation without meaningful consultation, leading to significant grievances. A striking example is the displacement of a community from an allocated resettlement site in Asokoro, which was later reassigned to elites—triggering secondary displacement and deeper resentment.

Historical accounts referenced successive policy efforts such as the 1979 Total Evacuation Scheme and the 1980 Kubwa Resettlement Policy. These initiatives, while aligned with Abuja's Master Plan, systematically uprooted indigenous communities with little socio-economic support, resulting in informal settlements, loss of land rights, and weakened traditional structures. Interviews from Kwali, Gwagwalada, and AMAC councils revealed common themes of non-inclusive decision-making and lack of participatory governance. Many respondents decried the top-down approach, absence of consultation, and inadequate or delayed compensation. The erosion of indigenous identity and livelihoods, especially in agriculture, was cited as a major consequence of persistent land dispossession.

In summary, Abuja's resettlement policies have evolved into mechanisms of displacement and marginalization. The failure to incorporate indigenous voices, protect traditional rights, and ensure just compensation has deepened insecurity and disillusionment. A shift toward inclusive, transparent, and equitable policy frameworks is essential to promote peace, restore trust, and support sustainable urban development in the FCT.

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Impact of Indigenous Resettlement Policies on the host communities in Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT)

Field findings reveal that indigenous resettlement policies in Abuja's Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have had profound socio-economic, cultural, and psychological impacts on host communities. Drawing from key informant interviews, it is evident that the forced displacement of indigenous populations, without adequate planning, compensation, or livelihood alternatives, has left lasting scars on these communities. It was noted that the 1976 relocation policy, while aimed at facilitating Abuja's development, was poorly executed. Entire communities lost their ancestral lands and farmlands, with minimal compensation or support. Agricultural activities, once central to the local economy, have been severely disrupted due to shrinking land access and environmental restrictions, contributing to widespread poverty and rising illiteracy.

Similarly, urban expansion has further marginalized rural dwellers, pushing them out of their economic spaces without viable alternatives. Many displaced persons remain economically insecure, with no meaningful reintegration or empowerment provided by the state. Culturally, the loss of ancestral lands has weakened traditional institutions, eroding indigenous leadership structures and community identity. A male respondent from AMAC lamented the decline of cultural heritage and local governance, leading to a sense of political and cultural alienation. Psychologically, many indigenes experience feelings of exclusion and betrayal. Broken promises, irregular compensation, and poor infrastructure in resettlement areas have deepened distrust toward the government. These unresolved grievances have fueled agitation and resistance.
Overall, the poorly implemented resettlement policies have led to economic hardship, social fragmentation, and cultural dislocation. Unless urgent steps are taken to reform compensation frameworks and ensure inclusive, participatory development planning, the resulting insecurity and marginalization will continue to threaten community cohesion and peace in the FCT.

The Challenges Confronting Responsible Implementation of Indigenous Resettlement Policies in Abuja Federal Capital Territory

The findings reveal multiple systemic challenges impeding the effective and responsible implementation of indigenous resettlement policies in Abuja Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The finding highlighted funding as the most critical constraint. The resettlement process, which involves compensation, relocation logistics, and infrastructural development, requires substantial financial investment. However, successive governments have either failed to allocate sufficient resources or mismanaged existing funds, leading to incomplete or poorly executed resettlement initiatives. Another significant challenge is the lack of political will. Despite numerous promises across different administrations, there has been little sustained commitment to addressing the plight of displaced indigenous communities. This governmental negligence has led to widespread distrust and a perception that the state does not prioritize the welfare of its indigenous citizens.

Corruption further exacerbates the situation. The respondent observed that project contracts are frequently inflated, and ghost beneficiaries—individuals without genuine ties to the affected communities—are fraudulently included in compensation schemes. This malpractice not only undermines the credibility of the resettlement process but also deprives rightful indigenous families of the support they deserve. Additionally, coercive tactics such as threats, intimidation, and the use of security forces to enforce evictions were reported. In several cases, indigenous inhabitants were forcibly removed without adequate compensation or viable relocation alternatives, intensifying community grievances and heightening social tensions.

Overall, these challenges such as financial inadequacies, political apathy, corruption, and coercive displacement methods have collectively hindered the successful implementation of resettlement policies in the FCT. The findings underscore the urgent need for a transparent, inclusive, and rights-based approach to indigenous resettlement, anchored in genuine political commitment and accountability mechanisms to prevent further marginalization and community insecurity.

Conclusion

The study reveals that indigenous resettlement policies in Abuja's Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have evolved into mechanisms of systemic displacement, marginalization, and socio-political exclusion. Despite their stated intentions to support development and orderly relocation, these policies have prioritized urban expansion over the rights and welfare of indigenous communities. Poor planning, inadequate compensation, lack of participatory governance, and weak institutional accountability have contributed to widespread economic hardship, cultural erosion, and psychological distress among displaced populations. Host communities have experienced disrupted livelihoods—particularly in agriculture—declining traditional authority, and weakened community cohesion, all of which fuel feelings of alienation and mistrust toward the government.

Challenges such as insufficient funding, lack of political will, corruption in compensation processes, and coercive displacement methods further hinder the responsible implementation of resettlement programs. These failures have not only undermined the credibility of public institutions but also generated community resistance, deepening insecurity across the FCT. To address these grievances and avert future instability, a paradigm shift is needed – one that centers indigenous rights, transparency, and inclusive planning. A just, participatory, and accountable resettlement framework must replace the current top-down, exploitative model to rebuild trust, restore dignity, and foster sustainable peace and development in Abuja's rapidly transforming urban landscape.

Recommendations

In light of the systemic challenges, socio-economic impacts, and deep-seated grievances identified in the study, there is a compelling need for the urgent reform of indigenous resettlement policies in Abuja's Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The study recommendations are proposed to ensure a more equitable, inclusive, and sustainable resettlement framework. Policymakers should adopt a rights-based and participatory approach. Resettlement policies must shift from top-down enforcement to community-driven models that respect the rights, voices, and agency of indigenous populations. This includes conducting genuine

stakeholder consultations prior to any land acquisition or relocation, ensuring that affected communities are involved in decision-making processes. Traditional leaders, women, youth, and civil society actors should be meaningfully represented in resettlement planning and implementation committees.

The government should also ensure adequate and transparent compensation by reviewing and updating compensation frameworks to reflect current economic realities and community needs. Compensation should be timely, fair, and comprehensive—covering land, housing, lost livelihoods, and cultural dislocation. Payment processes must be transparent and free from corruption, with independent oversight bodies established to monitor disbursement and redress grievances. Similarly, there must be stronger political will and institutional responsibility to implement resettlement policies faithfully. Federal and FCT authorities should be held accountable for unmet promises and failures in policy execution. This includes conducting periodic audits of resettlement projects, publicly releasing implementation reports, and sanctioning officials involved in corrupt or coercive practices.

Furthermore, livelihood restoration and social services need to be prioritized. In other words, resettlement should go beyond physical relocation to include robust economic and social reintegration support. The government should provide displaced indigenes with access to agricultural land, job training programs, educational services, and healthcare facilities. Special attention should be given to youth empowerment and female-headed households, who are disproportionately affected by displacement. Policies should be sensitive to the cultural and spiritual significance of land to indigenous communities towards preserving cultural heritage and strengthen local institutions. Efforts should be made to document, protect, and promote local traditions, customs, and governance systems. Strengthening indigenous leadership structures and enabling them to play active roles in resettlement governance will enhance community trust and cohesion.

Finally, to ensure continuity, fairness, and coordination, a permanent, independent Resettlement and Indigenous Affairs Commission should be established for the FCT. This body should be legally mandated to oversee all

resettlement activities, handle complaints, prevent secondary displacements, and act as a bridge between the government and indigenous communities. Addressing the crisis of indigenous resettlement in Abuja requires a comprehensive and just policy transformation. Only through transparency, participation, and accountability can trust be restored, grievances addressed, and long-term community security and urban development achieved.

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