
JULIUS O. UNUMEN (PhD)
Ambrose Alli University,
Ekpoma, Edo State,
Nigeria.

&

PROF. E. C. EMORDI (Fellow, Wolfson College, Cambridge)
Ambrose Alli University,
Ekpoma, Edo State,
Nigeria

Abstract:
The study examines the contrast between the vision and the reality as well as emerging issues with regard to the status of Abuja, Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria, as a “no man’s land”. It argues that when Abuja was created in 1976, the vision of the founding fathers was that the new capital would be “ethnically neutral” and, therefore, a “no man’s land”, where no ethnic group could claim to be indigenes of the area and on that basis demand for special privileges. This was to prevent the situation in Lagos, the former capital, which is predominated by the Yoruba ethnic group that laid claim to its ownership. In reality, however, the prevailing situation in Abuja within the period under review, with respect to its status as a “no man’s land”, is the contrast of this vision. The study posits that by 1976, when Abuja was created, there were nine indigenous ethnic groups that inhabited the area, which the Federal Government promised to evacuate and resettle outside the 8,000 square kilometers Territory. The failure of government to keep to this promise made Abuja to become the opposite of the vision of the founding fathers as a “no man’s land”. Incessant protests and agitations by the indigenous ethnic groups for special privileges in Abuja on the grounds of being indigenes of the area became common place with evident implications for ethnic harmony and peace in the Territory. Some emerging issues, including demand by the indigenous ethnic groups for Abuja to be recognised and administered as a state with a mayor or a governor, and having its own house of assembly, among many other demands, have become worrisome developments in the area. The study adopts the historical and analytical approaches and relies essentially on literary materials for its analysis. It concludes by recommending, among others, the need to integrate the indigenous people of Abuja into the development of the Territory to ensure ethnic harmony and avert the impending implosion in the nation’s capital.

Keywords: Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Vision, Reality, No Man’s Land, Agitations.

Introduction:
One issue that has been in the front burner in Nigeria’s Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, especially since 2003 when a “reform agenda” aimed at recapturing the vision of the founding fathers of the nation’s capital and restoring the Abuja Master Plan (AMP) started (Unumen, 2010: 80-86), is the status of the Territory as a “no man’s land”. This status was the vision when the 8,000 square kilometer Territory was created in 1976. While the vision of the founding fathers of Abuja was that it would be “ethnically neutral” so that no group could lay claim to being indigenes of the Territory and on the basis of that ask for special privileges in the area (Mohammed, 1976: 82), the contrary has been the prevailing reality in the nation’s
capital within the period under consideration. Incessant protests and agitations by the indigenous inhabitants of the area for compensations and inclusion in the management of the Territory in particular and the governance of the country in general, on the grounds of being indigenes of Abuja, have brought to the fore the issue of the status of the nation’s capital as a “no man’s land” (Daily Trust, 2019; Preston, 2013:1; Oduah, 2016:).

Many analysts, including a segment of the local and international media, have capitalised on this situation to cast aspersions on the country (Preston, 2013:1; Aljazeera, 2016; Oduah, 2016; The Guardian, 2018; The Guardian, 2019; Channels, 2019 and TVC News, 2020). Available evidence also suggests that the indigenous group have threatened to take up arms and become violent if their numerous demands are not met (Oduah, 2016:1). Violent protests by the indigenous people in what is supposed to be a “center of unity” and a “symbol of the country’s greatness” (Mohammed 1975) would portend serious threat to national security and peaceful co-existence in the area. Considering the fact that the country is still grappling with both latent and active insurgencies in its North-East, South-South and South-East geo-political zones, the consequences of allowing current peaceful protests and agitations by the indigenous people of Abuja to degenerate into violent confrontations would be dire for the nation.

From the current developments in the area, many analysts and commentators, including some media outfits, find it difficult to understand why and how a nation’s capital that has the toga of a “no man’s land” is now contending with incessant agitations and protests by the indigenous people for special privileges, recognition and compensations as well as representation in the governance of the FCT in particular and the country in general, among several other demands. Consequently, the debate about whether Abuja is, in reality, a “no man’s land” has become current (Aljazeera, 2016; Barnabas, 2018; Oloja, 2019: 1).

It is against this background that this study examines the vision and the reality as well as emerging issues with regard to the status of Abuja as a “no man’s land”. The main objective of this study is to historicise how Abuja became, in reality, the contrast of the vision of the founding fathers with regard to its status as a “no man’s land” within the period under review. Other specific objectives are to examine: the different ethnic groups that inhabited the FCT by 1976, their relative numerical strength and geographical spread; the vision of the founding fathers of Abuja with respect to its status as a “no man’s land”; the contemporary reality of Abuja as a “no man’s land”; emerging issues in the area and; based on the present reality in the Territory, recommend a way forward to the federal government.

Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, is a land of approximately 8,000 square kilometers located at the geographical centre of the country. It is located between latitudes 7° 25’ and 9° 20’ north for the Equator and longitudes 6° 45’ and 7° 39’ east of Greenwich. Abuja was carved out of three states of Nigeria by Decree 6 of February 5, 1976. The three states from which Abuja was excised were Plateau, Kwara and Niger (FCDA, 2003: 18).

The study is divided into seven parts. Following this introduction, is the discussion of the nine indigenous ethnic groups, their relative population and geographical spread within the FCT when the Territory was created. The third part examines the vision of the founding fathers of Abuja with regard to its status as a “no man’s land”, while the fourth section focuses on the developments that led to the change in the policy of resettlement and its implications. The fifth section examines the contemporary reality with regard to the status of Abuja as a “no man’s land”. Emerging issues from the failure of the government to evacuate and resettle all the indigenous ethnic groups outside the area designated as the FCT, as it initially promised, is discussed in the sixth section, while the seventh section is the conclusion and recommendations.

**Indigenous Ethnic Groups that Inhabited the FCT by 1976:**

Contrary to the assumption that the FCT was a “virgin land”, when it was created in 1976 (Mohammed, 1976), available evidence suggests that there were nine indigenous ethnic groups in the area that had been living there for hundreds of years and had developed a very rich culture and civilization (Unumen, 2009: 52). These were the Gbagyi (Gwari), Koro, Gade, Bassa, Ganagana, Gwandara, Ibira Koto and a few Hausa and Fulani (Balogun, 1997: 109). The Gbagyi people, popularly known as “Gwari”, were the most numerous of the groups in the area by 1976, constituting between 68 and 70 percent of the total population. There were basically two sub-groups of the Gbagyi in the FCT by 1976, namely: Gbagyi Genge and Gbagyi Yarma. The Gbagyi people, with numerical dominance, were spread all over the entire FCT by
1976. Their areas of highest concentration were Kwali, Garki and Ushafa. Other areas included the present location of Federal Capital City (FCC), Kuje and Gwagwalada (ABUIA, 1979: 124-125; Balogun, 1997: 108). It was this situation that made the FCT area to be generally referred to as “Gwari land”. Gwari land was a generic reference to the different ethnic groups in the territory and other parts of the Middle Belt region (Paden, 1986: 319).

Another major ethnic group in the FCT by 1976 was the Bassa. The Bassa people are said to have migrated into Abuja during the “Habe” Hausa period, in the nineteenth century, from the north-western part of the country. They initially settled in large numbers along the banks of River Gurara. They later migrated to the southern and central areas of the FCT. Bassa people, like the Gbagyi, are acknowledged as being people that prefer to live among other ethnic groups. They were found scattered in small numbers and small settlements all over the area by 1976. Their areas of highest numerical concentration were Abaji and Gwagwalada areas. Although they were found in other parts of the FCT, they, however, lacked numerical dominance in any particular area of the Territory (Balogun, 1979: 108; ABUIA, 1979: 124-125).

Generally, the Koro people are believed to be the descendants of Kwararafa people of Jukun. There were three sub-groups of the Koro people in Abuja by 1976 namely: Koro Huntu, Koro-Ganagana and Koro Nuhu. They are believed to have initially settled around Zuma rock in the northern outskirt of the territory. They, however, later migrated to Zuba in the pre-Jihad era. Their area of numerical dominance by 1976 was Zuba and Tunga Maji in the extreme northern part of the FCT area. However, they were also found in lesser numbers in other parts of the Federal Capital Territory (ABUIA, 1979: 124-125; Balogun, 1997: 108).

The Gade people claim that they were from Nassarawa and Keffi areas of Nassarawa State. Gade people were initially mostly settled in Kuje, a settlement they founded. By 1976, their area of highest concentration was the Kuje Area Council in the south-western part of the Territory (Balogun, 1997: 109). Like other ethnic groups, they were found in smaller numbers in other parts of the FCT (ABUIA, 1979: 124-125).

The Ganagana people, by 1976, were mostly concentrated in the Asara and Wako districts, in the south-western part of Gwagwalada. They were also to be found in large numbers in Abaji, the southern part of the FCT (Balogun, 1997: 109). Igbira Koto people were mostly concentrated in the southern part of Abuja, particularly in Abaji area. They were also found in large numbers in Gwagwalada and the Buga area of Kuje Area Council. It must be noted, however, that like the other ethnic groups, the Ganagana and Igbira Koto were found in smaller numbers in other parts of Abuja by 1976 (ABUIA, 1979: 124-125).

The Hausa and Fulani were found in small numbers in the north western part of the Territory, especially at Kwali, Garki and Wuse by 1976. They are believed to be late comers to the Territory. It has been argued that both Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups had not made any significant impact on the cultural landscape of Abuja by 1976. Consequently, the two ethnic groups are not usually regarded as aborigines of the Territory (Balogun, 1997: 110). An argument has been put forth that Hausa and Fulani influence in the area was negligible up to 1976. This is attributed to what has been described as the “stubborn adherence” of the indigenous peoples to their traditions and culture (Shekwo, 1986: 49). However, it has been established that up to 1976, in addition to their indigenous languages, the Hausa language was the official language, a kind of lingua franca, among the different indigenous peoples in most parts of the Territory (Unumen, 2009: 53). It was the general language for governance and commerce being the language of the suzerain initially at Zauzau, Zaria, later Suleja. Since language is a very important aspect of the culture of a people (Adamu, 2007: 5), the argument that the Hausa and Fulani influence was negligible in the Territory, is easily debunked. What could be readily established with regard to the Hausa and Fulani people of the Territory is the fact that they were late comers to the area.

For the percentages of the various ethnic groups of FCT population by 1976, the Gbagyi constituted as high as approximately 70 percent of the total population. The Bassa, constituted approximately 18.9% of the population. The next major ethnic groups were the Gwandara, Gada and Hausa who constituted approximately 6.4%, 5.5% and 4.3% respectively. Iriba Koto was next with approximately 1.5%. The Fulani and Koro constituted approximately 0.5% and 1.0% respectively (Abumere, 1990: 18-19). The different ethnic groups had as many as 845 settlements in the Territory. All the 845 settlements were small in size and population. They were scattered all over the entire Territory (Abumere, 1990: 18-19). By 1976, there was a high degree of ethnic mix in the Territory. The various ethnic groups, to a very large extent, lived and
intermingled with one another peacefully. There were no distinctive geographical zones that could be identified as strictly or exclusively occupied by any of the ethnic groups although one particular group might be in the majority. Rather, the different ethnic groups lived in mixed settlements made up of Gbagyi and San and were then newly appointed as the Chief Justice of the Federal Capital Territory would.

The V of the country, good climate, very low population density, availability of land for future expansion, physical building materials, possibility of generating power resources, good drainage, good soil and the area not being within the control of any of the major ethnic groups in the country in order to enhance national unity and integration (Aguda et al, 1975: 48). The whole of the “vast territory” was later named Abuja. The recommendations of the panel were based on the following criteria: Abuja’s central location in the middle of the country, good climate, very low population density, availability of land for future expansion, physical planning convenience and ethnic harmony (Aguda et al, 1975: 48). Other criteria the panel based its recommendations on were adequate water supply, security, multi-access possibility, existence of local building materials, possibility of generating power resources, good drainage, good soil and the area not being within the control of any of the major ethnic groups in the country in order to enhance national unity and integration (Aguda et al, 1975: 47).

Based on the recommendations, the military government under General Mohammed, on February 5, 1976, created the new FCT via Decree No. 6, which vested the responsibility of the development of Abuja on the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) (FGN, 1976: A15). Consequently, the local inhabitants in the area who needed to be moved out of the territory for planning purposes were to be resettled outside the area in places of their choice, at Government expense. He also reiterated that since the area was not within the control of any major ethnic group in the country it would be for all Nigerians a symbol of their oneness and unity (Mohammed, 1975: 70; Tell, 2014: 6).

Decree 6 stated that the area contained as the Federal Capital Territory would, as from the promulgation of the decree, cease to be portion of the states concerned and would be governed and administered by or under the control of the Federal Government of Nigeria. No other person or authority was permitted to continue to exercise control over the entire area of the new Federal Capital Territory besides the Federal Government of Nigeria. Similarly, ownership of the lands comprised in the territory was vested in the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN, 1976: A16).

The Vision of the Founding Fathers of Abuja as a “no man’s land”:

When the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, was created in 1976, the vision of the founding fathers was that the 8,000 square kilometers Territory would be a “no man’s land” in line with the principle of “equal citizenship”. Equal citizenship was intended to prevent a situation where any group of persons could claim ownership of the area and on the basis of that demand for special privileges within the nation’s capital
(Unumen, 2010: 71). The principle of equal citizenship implied that no ethnic group would be able to claim any special privilege on the basis of ethnic cleavages as was the case in Lagos. It is pertinent to note that besides Lagos lying almost below sea level, which makes it prone to flooding and ocean surge, as well as limited land mass, one crucial reason one for the decision to relocate the nation’s capital from Lagos in 1976 was that it was identified predominantly with one ethnic group and its culture, namely, the Yoruba people. According to the report of the Akinola Aguda Panel (Aguda et al, 1975: 63):

... Lagos is within an area traditionally belonging to one of the major ethnic groups, namely, the Yoruba ... The point in clearly indisputable that the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants of Lagos, we are told between 75 and 80 percent, are Yoruba, that Lagos is essentially a Yoruba city with an Oba and traditional chiefs, and also that it is a city with predominantly Yoruba culture.

The panel also argued that since Nigeria is a federation consisting of a large number of ethnic and language groups with different cultures and traditions, it deserved a capital that would be “ethnically neutral”. It was against this background that the vision and contemplation of the founding fathers of Abuja was that it would be a “no man’s land” in order to forestall the situation in Lagos (Aguda et al, 1975: 62). The vision of Abuja as a “no man’s land” envisaged that no group of Nigerians would be regarded either in law or in fact as a “native foreigners” in the nation’s capital (Aguda et al, 1975: 64). Similarly, it envisaged a situation where no Nigerian could claim to be indigenes of the nation’s FCT. It is important to reiterate also that it was to achieve this vision that the initial plan was to evacuate and resettle all the indigenous people of Abuja outside the Territory. This decision was also to ensure that the nation’s capital would be a place where every citizen of Nigeria could have equal rights and privileges (Aguda et al, 1975: 64). It was to achieve this noble objective that the new capital was declared a Federal Capital Territory (Unumen, 2010: 71). As the Aguda Panel put it:

... any capital of Nigeria should be a place where every citizen of Nigeria can lay claim to every available right and privilege on equal footing with any other citizen. For this reason, it is our view that the federal capital should be a Federal Capital Territory (Aguda et al, 1975: 64).

In the broadcast declaring Abuja as the new capital, the head of state declared the area a Federal Capital Territory. He specially emphasised that the area was not within the control of any of the major ethnic groups. He also expressed the hope that the new capital created on such “virgin lands” would be for all Nigerians “a symbol of their ones and unity”, emphasising that “the Federal Territory will belong to all Nigerians” (Mohammed, 1976). One implication of declaring Abuja as a Federal Capital Territory was that customary rights to ownership of land within the 8000 square kilometers territory were terminated. Consequently, Abuja became a capital that belonged to every Nigerian, where every Nigerian would be rest assured that he or she has an opportunity to live in parity with other Nigerians, and where no Nigerian would be regarded either in law or in the facts as a “native foreigner”.

The importance of the ethnic neutrality of the new capital would be better appreciated when it is viewed against the background that Nigerian just emerged from a civil war in the 1970 and needed to take decisions that would enhance national unity and integration. It was in this regard that an “ethnically neutral” and “centrally accessible” capital was thought to be desirable considering also that the country is ethnically diverse. The new capital was, therefore, envisioned as a symbol of Nigeria’s aspirations for unity and greatness (Mohammed, 1975).

Change in the Resettlement Policy and its Implications for the “No Man’s Land” Status of the FCT

When Decree 6 was promulgated in 1976, the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja area, was made up of many small settlements. There were a total of 845 indigenous settlements in the Territory with a population of 132,000 people (Abumere, 1990: 8-9). The original plan of the Federal Government was that the entire indigenous people of the Territory would be evacuated and resettled outside the approximately 8,000 square kilometers land area (Mohammed, 1976: 82).
Due to a combination of many factors, the original plan of evacuating and resettling the entire indigenous population outside the area changed. Following the assassination of General Mohammed in an abortive coup d’état led by Lt. Colonel Buka Suka Dimka on February 13, 1976, General Olosegun Obasanjo, the erstwhile Chief of General Staff, became the Head of State. On July 13, 1978, General Obasanjo announced that the initial policy of resettling all the indigenous population outside the Territory at government expense had been changed. The new policy was that only those within the “priority area” would be resettled. The priority area comprised parts of Phase 1 of the Federal Capital City (FCC) and parts of the area for the Usman Dam water project (Mabogunje, 2001: 3-4). The new policy meant that about one hundred and fifty indigenous settlements in the remaining parts of phase 1, and phases 2 to 4 of the FCC, apart from an area designated for special projects in the FCC, and the rest of the FCT, would remain where they were.

The factors that accounted for the change in the initial plan of resettlement of the indigenous population include the upsurge in the number of people originally estimated to be resettled, shortage of funds for the resettlement as well as limited funds for payment of compensations (Jibril, 2006: 5; Areola, 1990: 19-20). Others were the need to allow the people to remain within the Territory to continue their farming activities, which had helped to combat the prevalence of tsetse fly in the area and as a support to the food requirements of the FCT instead of the Territory depending solely on the neighbouring states for food supplies. There was also the fear that if all the indigenous people were evacuated and resettled outside the Territory, the FCT could turn into a “ghost” territory where most residents would migrate to other fun-filled cities on weekends leaving the capital empty and deserted (Okoduwa and Unumen, 2008a: 20). The fact that General Murtala Ramat Mohammed was assassinated on February 13, 1976, shortly after promulgating decree 6, could have also contributed to the change in the initial resettlement policy. It is a matter of debate whether he would have changed the initial policy of resettlement of all the indigenous people outside the FCT or not if he had remained the head of state up to 1979 in the face of the factors enumerated above (Okoduwa and Unumen (2008b: 21).

The Reality with Regard to the Status of Abuja as a “No Man’s Land”

The twist in the policy of resettling all the indigenous people outside the FCT meant that the indigenous people were “deemed” to be citizens of the FCT, contrary to the initial idea of making the nation’s capital “no man’s land” and preventing indigene-settler’s dichotomy in the Territory. Consequently, the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) was directed to appoint an administrator to look after the welfare of the indigenous population. It was in this regard that the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) was created by government in a notice in official gazette number 55, volume 66 of 1979. It was in this respect that in 1981, Doxiads Associates was awarded the contract for the design of a regional master plan for the FCT. The work was completed and submitted in 1983 (Unumen, 2009: 118).

The civilian regime of under Shehu Shagari subsequently created the Ministry of Federal Capital Territory (MFCFT) (Benna, 1989: 254) as a supervisory ministry for the FCDA and other FCT parastatals and agencies. The FCDA remained the government agency responsible for the administration and development of the FCT outside the FCC. However, in 1985, the Federal Government under the military regime of President Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida promulgated Decree 12 that transferred the functions of FCTA to the MFCT (Dami Associates, 1996: 9), perhaps, in order to avoid multiple and complex administrative systems in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Thus, although the government initially promised that the new capital would be a “no man’s land”, later developments and policy changes, including failure to evacuate and resettle all the original inhabitants of the FCT, Abuja, outside the area designated as the FCT has made the vision to be achieved in breach. The reality is that the FCT, Abuja became neither “ethnically neutral” nor a “no man’s land”. The nine indigenous people of the Territory that the government neither evacuated and resettled nor compensated remain indigenes of Abuja. According to Spaces for Change (2012):

Residents of FCT are broadly classified into indigenes and non-indigenes/settlers/squatters. The indigenes are the original inhabitants of Abuja whose communal occupation and landholding predates the establishment of Abuja as the Federal Capital, while non-indigenes refer to those who migrated to the city after the post-capital era.
This reality is notwithstanding that the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has vested all the land in the FCT, Abuja, exclusively only on the Federal Government of Nigeria.

It is pertinent to note that notwithstanding the change in the policy of creating and resettling all the indigenous ethnic groups in the FCT outside the area, the FCT Act that vests all lands of Abuja “exclusively” in the Federal Government of Nigeria still persists (Barnabas, 2019). The implication of this is that customary right to land by the indigenous ethnic groups in the FCT does not exist. The compulsory termination of customary land rights in Abuja, contrary to what is obtainable in other states of the country, is also backed by the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Section 3, 293 and Part 11 of the First Schedule of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) vest the ownership of the Federal Capital Territory in the Federal Government of Nigeria, (FGN, 1999). This obvious contradiction has contributed in no small way to agitations and protests by the indigenous people. Barnabas (2019) argued that to take Abuja land from the indigenous people without adequate compensation and/or resettlement, especially the termination of their customary land rights, contrary to what is obtainable in the thirty six states of the country, is a violation of the international law on the rights of indigenous people.

With regard to the political administration of Abuja, the president is the governor of Abuja while the vice president is the deputy governor, courtesy of sections 301-302 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria (as amended). However, the president appoints a cabinet minister who exercises such powers and performs such functions as are delegated to him or her by the president from time to time (FGN, 1999: Section 302). The Minister(s) is accountable to the president and not to the indigenous ethnic groups of Abuja. Abuja indigenous ethnic groups are currently entitled to two elected members of the House of Representatives and one member of Senate in the country’s National Assembly. Other states of the country are entitled to 6 elected House of Representatives and 3 elected Senators in the National Assembly.

Emerging Issues:

Agitations and protests by the indigenous ethnic groups in Abuja have become common experiences, especially since 2003, when a “reform agenda” aimed at restoring the Abuja Master Plan and the vision of the founding fathers, started (Unumen, 2010: 80-86). As early as 2017, Agbo wrote that Abuja had experienced “protests from the original inhabitants of Abuja, a group made up of all the indigenous tribes that had hitherto occupied the lands around the capital city and its territories”. He maintained that “these groups periodically stage demonstrations across the city, demanding proper resettlements, jobs, and adequate compensation for their lands”. Agbo warned that protests and agitations by the indigenous people of Abuja are delicate issues that “if not well-managed, have the potential to become a violent struggle that will upset the prevailing peace in the city, as has happened with similar political situations in the past” (Agbo, 2017:1). It is pertinent to note that since 2017, the frequency and scale of these agitations and protests have increased in Abuja.

The indigenous people are protesting and demonstrating against and demanding for a number of things. Some of the demands of the indigenous people have been articulated by Original Inhabitants Development Association of Abuja (OIDA), the umbrella organisation of ethnic groups in the Territory, and presented at different fora (NdEge, 2012; Daily Trust, 2012; Mohammed, 2014; The Guardian, 2017a; The Guardian, 2017b; Onoja, 2018; The Nation, 2019). These include adequate compensation and, or resettlement by the federal government for the appropriation of the FCT land taken from them; payment of twenty per cent of all sales accruing from the sale of land within the FCT and forty per cent of all land allocations to individuals to the indigenous ethnic groups. Moreover, they want the privilege of having a governor or a mayor that is democratically elected, who would be accountable to the indigenous people. Abuja indigenes are also agitating and protesting against the situation where it is the National Assembly, which legislates for the Territory. They are asking to be allowed to have a house of assembly that the members would be democratically elected. They, therefore, want the National Assembly to give up the role of legislating for the Territory. In addition, they want the Territory’s representations in the nation’s Senate and the House of Representatives to be increased from one to three and from two to six respectively, so that the FCT would be at par with other states of the country. Other Demands by the indigenous people include, an increase in the number of area councils in the FCT from the present six to eleven. They also want major
streets in the FCT to be named after indigenous heroes and traditional rulers. Moreover, the indigenous people want the establishment of an FCT original inhabitant’s development commission.

In addition to peaceful protests and agitations, the indigenous people of Abuja have threatened severely to take to violence against the Nigerian state to press home their demands (Oduah, 2016: 1). A Court of Appeal at Abuja has already granted the request of the indigenous group for the Federal Government of Nigeria to be compelled to nominate at least one minister from among the indigenes of Abuja (The Guardian, 2018). Moreover, sympathy for agitations by the indigenous people is growing, especially among a segment of the international media (Preston, 2013).

Conclusion

The study historicised the changes in policies that resulted in a situation in which Abuja became a territory administered as one of the states in the country, contrary to the vision of the founding fathers. The major argument in this study is that although Abuja was envisioned to be “ethnically neutral”, where the problem of any group claiming to be indigenes of the area would not arise, the contrary has been the reality in the Territory within the period under consideration. Although it was the hope that the FCT would be “ethnically neutral” so that every Nigerian could call the place his or her home and to avoid the situation in Lagos where the Yoruba, who were in clear majority, laid claim to ownership of the area, because the government failed to evacuate and resettle the original inhabitants of the FCT, who were initially assumed to be few outside the Territory, the vision was realised in breach.

The case of the “no man’s land” status of Abuja is a very good example of how policy inconsistencies and summersault have resulted in a wide gap between vision and reality in post-colonial Nigeria. This is one major challenge Nigeria, as a country, is still grappling with. The policy inconsistencies emanated from the politicisation of the relocation of the nation’s capital from Lagos to Abuja and the consequent haste with which the development and subsequent movement into the Territory were carried out.

The study argued that the incessant protests and agitations by the indigenous people for compensation and inclusion in the political and economic management of the territory, among several other demands, constitute a threat to national security and throwing the nation back to the situation, which led to the creation of Abuja. The threat by the indigenous group to take up arms against the Nigerian state should also not be ignored. It has the potential of degenerating into insurgency if not nipped in the bud.

It is recommended that the indigenous people of Abuja should be fully integrated into the development of the Territory. Full integration is expected to put an end to, first, protests and agitations that have become common place in the area, and, second, the threat by the indigenous people to go violent if their demands are not met. Moreover, full integration is expected to promote ethnic harmony in Territory in particular and the country in general. More importantly, the image of the country would improve as a country that protects the rights of its indigenous people. The country that is grappling with active and latent insurgencies in its North-East, South-East and South-South geo-political zones cannot afford another insurgency in its capital. All these are important in view of the fact that the agitations of the indigenous people are already attracting support and sympathy locally and, perhaps, internationally. Many of the insurgencies in the country initially started as agitations. It is, therefore, recommended that the Federal Government should not continue to ignore the threat of taking up arms against the state as a stitch in time saves nine. It is in the interest of national security for the government to urgently find a permanent solution to the issue of the indigenous people of Abuja.

Considering the fact that it would be very difficult and expensive to turn the hands of the clock backward with regard to evacuating and resettling the entire indigenous people of Abuja that has since increased numerically, outside the Territory, it is recommended that they be officially and legally integrated and included in the development of the territory. This will not only give the indigenous people a sense of belonging, but would, expectedly, put an end to incessant agitations and protests with regard to their status in the area.

References


