

Regional Development Planning in Nigeria: The General and Particular

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ABSTRACT The failure of the country's planning machinery (which has been dominated by economists), to recognize the spatial diversities and complexities in the cultures, peoples and material resources of the country justifies the need for regional planning and a sound regional development policy and framework for the country. Going through history of the country, however, this paper finds out that regional planning has not been really embraced, notwithstanding the fact that such attempts as categorization of cities, creation of administrative units and unconscious establishment of regions like river basins, Niger-Delta, among others, have been made. The paper, however, recognizes the fact that regional plans have been witnessed in such places as Lagos and Abuja. Using Abuja as a case study the value of regional plan is appreciated; while at the same time, the paper frowns at its implementation with reference to the discrepancy between the planning areas of the plan and the established area councils, as well as delay of the plan's review. The paper, therefore, calls for a prompt review of Abuja plan, and proposes a national framework for regional planning in the country. The framework adopts the existing six geo-political zones as regions whose problems, activities, development, yardsticks, etc are to be determined and coordinated by their respective Regional Councils to be established according to the model.

INTRODUCTION

In most countries of the world, different geographical areas are not endowed the same way. While some areas are blessed with some category of resources, others are rich in other types of treasure. These resources, which are material and human, also vary in stock from one place to another. Hence some areas tend to grow and develop at a higher rate, at the expense of others. The resultant effect of this is over-concentration of activities and its attendant problems of population explosion, congestion, housing shortage, environmental problems, etc in the favoured areas or cities, and under-development or backwardness in the less privileged areas.

If the trend continues unchecked, it will not only amount to social injustice and inequity to some class of people or areas but also constitute a setback to regional and overall national development. This is the concern of regional planning which is aimed at correcting lopsided development and promoting regional and national development through the identification, analysis, and allocation of resources within and among region of a state or country. This is why Ugwu (1992) regards it as having an economic bias.

The questions now are: why regional planning

in Nigeria? To what extent has it been embraced in the country? And more importantly how does a typical regional plan in the country look like, if there is any? All these constitute the focus of this paper as it attempts to make a broad appraisal of regional planning practice in the country with a special interest in Abuja Regional Plan.

WHY REGIONAL PLANNING IN NIGERIA

Nigeria has been observed to be made up of diverse ethnic groups and different geographical areas of varying material and human resources. And the emerging patterns of development as identified by Adeniyi (1983) show that there are disparities in development between urban and rural areas and among different geographical areas in the country. This necessitates a deliberate intervention in resource allocation or reallocation, opportunities distribution, and overall development pattern. Regional planning readily recommends itself to this.

Besides, experience has shown that the domination of the country's planning machinery by economists has hindered the achievement of balanced development among the various communities in the different geographical areas of the country, which is a major objective of development planning. This is because such

indices as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross National Product (GNP), etc which are being employed, only show aggregate growth, but have nothing to say about the spatial distribution of benefits, or opportunities.

It should be noted that the objectives of regional planning are not basically different from those of the purely economic (sectoral) planning (Adeniyi, *ibid*). Rather the former emphasizes the need for the planning machinery to accept the fact that recognition of regional differentials while formulating economic policies would help strengthen the national economy and promote national integration (Adeniyi, *ibid*).

In summary, regional planning helps to identify areas where excess labour force is concentrated and those areas where resources are under-utilized, with a view to striking a balance and promoting not only aggregate growth of the national economy but also spatial equity and equality. And in agreement with Ezenagu (2001), it is a formal process of spatially ordering human activities for the purpose of ensuring spatial equity and general progress in socio-economic welfare terms.

APPROACHES TO REGIONAL PLANNING IN NIGERIA

Nigeria may be described as having no specific, well formulated, clear regional development policy or framework. Most of the country's commitments towards regional development are products of other policies, which do not have bases for regional planning in all its ramifications. Nevertheless, approaches to regional planning in Nigeria, may be discussed under the following headings: National Development Planning, Constitutional Developments and Creation of Administrative Units, and Regional Plans Adoption.

Constitutional Developments and Creation of Administrative Units

The country, over the years, has witnessed a number of constitutional developments and creation of more administrative units, both of which directly or indirectly affect the regional structure and development of the country.

These include:

- i. The categorization of cities into first, second and third class by the colonial Township

Ordinance of 1917. With this Lagos (the only first class city) and other second-class cities serve as growth centers for their respective hinterlands.

- ii. Emergence of the federal structure of Nigeria with the 1954 Lyleton constitution. With this each of the three regions: North, East, and West had its own Governor and Regional Assembly as against central administration brought about by the 1914 amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates (Lawal, 1982).
- iii. Creation of more states from the former three regions to 12 states in 1967, 19 in 1976, 21 in 1991, 30 in 1992, and 36 in 1996.
- iv. Creation of more local governments. Today there are 774 local councils, which help, in even distribution of national cake.
- v. Creation and recognition of the six geo-political zones in the country: North-West, North-central, North-East, South-West, South-East, and South-South.
- vi. Establishment and recognition of the Niger-Delta Development Commission for the development of the Niger-Delta area, which has been known to be backward for long.
- vii. Designation of Abuja as the new Federal Capital Territory.
- viii. Others include senatorial districts and federal constituencies.

National Development Planning

The country has no doubt had a series of several development plans. These include: the 1946 10-year Development and Welfare Plan for Nigeria, the First Second and Third National Development Plans of 1962-68, 1970-74, and 1975-80 respectively. The Colonial Development and Welfare Plan had some credit in such programmes as Niger Agricultural Project (Baldwin 1975), the Shendam Agricultural Project, and expansion of export crop production, establishment of a "model village" and enactment of the 1946 Town and Country Planning, Ordinance, among others. However the programmes were frustrated due to a premature end of the plan as a result of constitutional changes, which led to the Revised plan (for the period 1951-56) that shifted emphasis from integrated planning to sectoral growth in the national planning, the first and second National Development plans were not regional planning oriented either (Adeniyi, *ibid*).

The third National Development plan was the first development planning approach that set a priority for regional planning, as one of its objectives is creation of “balanced development” and the plan was therefore, structured to generate growth simultaneously in all geographical areas of the country (Nigeria, 1975). The plan provided basis for regional planning and development by articulating that “policy will be directed towards ensuring that both the rural and urban areas are equipped for their proper role in the development of the national economy” (Nigeria, 1975). During the plan period such achievements as creation of more states, setting up of the Federal Ministry of Housing and Urban Development and Environment, local government reforms, setting up of twelve River Basin Development Authorities (in 1977) to cut across state boundaries, establishment of Regional Planning Division within the Federal Ministry of Economic Development and Reconstruction, among others, were witnessed (Adeniyi, *ibid*)

Adoption of Regional Plans

Although adoption of regional plans is not a popular phenomenon in Nigeria, justice cannot be done to the description of “Regional Planning in Nigeria” without making reference to a few places like Abuja and Lagos, which have had respective regional plans at one time, or another. The point of concern, however, is that these plans have been due for review for long yet none has been reviewed. Besides, sincerity behind their implementation is questionable. The following section takes a broad look at the Abuja regional plan as a case study.

ABUJA REGIONAL PLAN: OVERVIEW

The Preceding Circumstances

Lagos which was the former federal capital city had become a center of array of environmental, socio-economic and other problems which include slums, traffic congestion, housing shortage, too much pressure on infrastructure and services and more importantly physical restrictions to expansion- swamps, forest, lagoons and the sea.

The new FCT was deemed suitable as federal capital not only because of its accessibility due to its being nearly equidistant from all parts of the country, but also its vast expanse of land

which could accommodate future expansion. That is not all; its location promotes balanced development.

This right thought of the federal government through the “Aguda Committee” of 1975 led to the designation of about 8,000 square kilometers in the open guinea savanna area as the FCT under decree no 6 of February 4, 1976 and establishment of the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) which was the federal government agency that entered into contract agreement with Doxiadis Associates Nigeria Limited in 1981 for the plan preparation (Iloeje, 1981 Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1983).

Purpose of the Plan

In addition to the general goals of national planning, and creating a wider and more functional administrative territory, the more specific goals of the Abuja Regional Plan as derived from it, may be stated to include the following, among others:

- i. Preservation of the natural environment
- ii. Decentralization of activities nuclei with Abuja Municipal as the highest order nucleus.
- iii. Achievement of economies of scale and a high degree of self-sufficiency especially in food production.
- iv. Balanced economic development of the various areas.
- v. Respect for tradition and minimum resettlement.
- vi. Creation of a comprehensive rural-urban integration system and hierarchical ordering of settlements.
- vii. Coordinated comprehensive development in the wider regional context.
- viii. Improved accessibility of all areas. (Fed. Rep. Of Nigeria, 1983).

Land Use Plan

The Regional Plan recognizes 3 types of land use. These include (a) Spatially extensive zones (b) Spatially comparatively less extensive zones and (c) Linear zones.

The spatially extensive zones are zones of intensive agriculture, organized animal husbandry, productive forestry, and protected ecologically sensitive areas (which include forest, controlled animal grazing, fisheries, aquaculture

and selective tourism). This was to accommodate the fact that about 50% of the land area was fertile and suitable for agriculture.

The spatially comparatively less extensive zones are areas of new urban settlements and areas for future expansion.

The linear zones, on the other hand, refer to the systems of transportation corridors of primary, secondary and tertiary road network. The plan provides for a hierarchical system of road network that extend to every part of the FCT connecting every settlement. The rail system follows the same alignment with road. The two airports are located outside municipal area and well served with roads.

Settlements' Pattern and Planning Areas

The plan adopts a settlement pattern based on the theory of Ekistics System. Ekistics is the science of human settlements aims primarily at the proper distribution in space of all activities that human settlements generate or support in relation to all services they offer.

The pattern is like Christaller's hierarchical system of centers of settlements with Abuja Municipal as the center of highest order.

The plan divides the FCT into five Planning Areas the Capital Planning Area, Abaji Planning Area, Gwagwalada Planning Area, Izom Planning Area, and Waje Planning Area.

The Plan Phasing

The plan, which was designed to cover the period of 1981 to 2000, was to be executed in two phases. The first phase was for the period of 1981 to 1990. At this stage existing conditions were to be appraised. It was a period of drastic intervention to set the course for all later developments. It marked the commencement of projects, formulation of legislative measures and establishment of relevant agencies.

The second phase, which was supposed to cover the period of 1991-2000, is still extending till now, as the plan has not been reviewed. The period is characterized with massive development of the various aspects of the territory's economic, social, and industrial development.

Observations / Comments

It is no gainsaying that Abuja Regional Plan

is a real practical demonstration of regional planning in the country. Its importance could be appreciated right from the location of the territory in a way that does not only make federal administration more accessible to the entire country, but also aid the development of the middle-belt which was hitherto highly backward.

The goals are laudable and the approach, particularly as regards rural-urban integration, economic self-sufficiency, recognition and protection of agricultural land and tradition, as well as minimum resettlement, is quite appreciable. The outlook of some of the lower order settlements, that have developed according to the plan like Kuje reflects the character of a traditional rural community but with a difference in its relatively diversified economy and infrastructure while the municipal area depicts the character of an urban center, but with minimum traces of urban decay.

The plan ensures easy interaction and inter-settlement flow of commuters either between lower order settlements or from one settlement to Abuja Municipal or vice-versa.

The points of concern however is that the local administration of the territory does not fall in line with the planning areas of the plan. While the whole territory is made up of Six Area Councils of Abuja Municipal, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, Kwali and Abaji with a branch of FCDA in each of them, the planning areas according to the plan are five and some-what different from the Area Councils. This discrepancy, which may be due to either improper structure on the part of the plan or a baseless designation of the council areas, would jeopardize the implementation of the plan to some extent, even though the FCDA headquarters at the Municipal Area Council is not tampered with. This may be manifested in illegal structures and contravention cases around the territory.

Also of much concern is the fact that the plan has been due for review since 2000. Development after the expiration of the plan period is better described as contravention and illegal. It poses a lot of danger not only to the aesthetic value of the territory but also to its socio-economic performance.

It is high time, the federal government, through the FCDA, and Federal Ministry of Environment, should expedite action towards the review of the plan!

From the various discussions above the following may be observed.

1. Regional planning constitutes a significant

framework for a balanced growth and development in a country.

2. Nigeria, as a complex nation of different geographical units, need a comprehensive and articulate regional policy that takes care of every segment and interest of the nation.
3. Most of the identified geographical areas, regions or states lack regional plans, and a few ones like Abuja and Lagos whose regional plans have been due for review are better described as having none.
4. Most of the country's programmes or approaches to regional development are accidental and lack the basic tenets of regional planning, the success achieved in some notwithstanding.
5. The country has witnessed a number of development plans, most of which were dominated by the economists who perceive growth and development from the perspective of aggregate growth or increase in such indices as GNP or GDP which do not have

anything to say about spatial distribution of resources and opportunities.

6. The absence of regional development policy in Nigeria has put regional development disparities on the increase. This is manifested in uncontrolled growth of urban centers at the expense of the rural areas as well as inter-regional imbalances in investment and employment opportunities, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following points are recommended as a model for regional planning and development in the country:

1. Without prejudice to the identity of the existing states and local councils, the six recognized geo-political zones in the country should constitute a framework for regional planning. Each zone makes a region while each state constitutes a sub-region.
2. There should be establishment of a "Regional

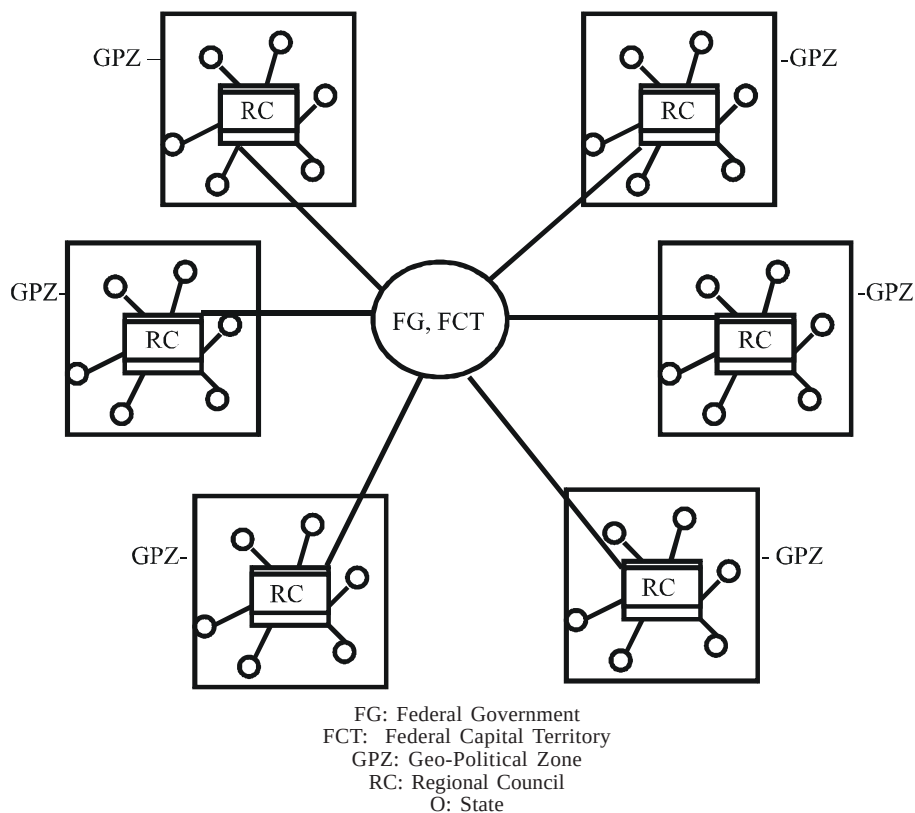


Fig. 1. A framework for regional planning in Nigeria

- Council” in each zone. This council is to be made up of the Governors and the chairmen of Urban and Regional Planning (URP) Boards (to be established according to the 1992 URP Law) of all the states concerned (i.e. two members from each state).
3. The federal government and the proposed Regional Councils, therefore embark on what Ezenagu (ibid) refers to as inter-regional planning and intra-regional (or inter-state) planning respectively. At state level, therefore, intra-sub-regional (intra-state) planning operates.
 4. It shall be the duty of the Regional Council to identify the distribution of population and resources, “developed” and backward areas, problems and other issues affecting each region as well as make necessary plans and recommendations for intra-regional and inter-regional development respectively. With this the states of the region can embark on joint regional development projects or programmes. Also by making their findings available to the federal government in forming a suitable regional policy for the country as a whole.
 5. The arrangement which looks like creating federations within a federation would not only address the problems of imbalance inequity and spatial inequalities in economic development but also brings about the advantages of large scale projects.
 6. Countries with similar structure can as well make use of this proposed framework as a guide for her regional development.

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