



MacArthur
Foundation



World Indigenous People Day 2022

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**FCT ORIGINAL INHABITANT CLAMOUR
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES**

A curated media report on the United Nations International Day of World's
Indigenous People Commemoration in Nigeria

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Forward

Across the world, indigenous populations have stories of how they have endured pains as aboriginal communities. The pains of such groups can be measured in terms of [in]calculable losses in human lives, material exploitations, as well as mental and spiritual possessions. Consequently, indigenous peoples, with their low climate adaptability, are faced with struggles for identity and recognition in emerging urbanized areas in which the State is perennially implicated in the socio-economic and political underdevelopment of these communities.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the world's indigenous people.¹ This UNDRIP framework also elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situation of indigenous peoples. Either as a collective or as individuals, Article 1 of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples² avers that: "Indigenous peoples have the right to the full enjoyment, of all human rights and fundamental freedoms as recognised in the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights law." Article 2 states: "Indigenous peoples and individuals are free and equal to all other peoples and individuals and have the right to be free from any kind of discrimination, in the exercise of their rights, in particular that based on their indigenous origin or identity."

Although Nigeria is not a signatory to the UNDRIP (A/RES/61/295) "on the ground that all Nigerians are indigenes of the country, and no dominant group is crowding out the indigenes of any place from their land since the land belongs to all people and is held in trust by the Government...as enshrined in the Land Use Act of 1978." Nonetheless, the Abuja original inhabitants, like other autochthonous groups elsewhere, face a situation of eroded traditional, social, cultural, economic and political rights arising from the implementation of Decree No. 6 of 1976 (now Cap. 503 LFN, 2004).

Poverty comes with a lot of powerlessness. In the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, problems relating to unfair treatment, marginalisation and alleged exclusion often arise in the areas of service delivery, employment, land allocation, compensation and the resettlement of aboriginal communities. These problems have been occurring in varying degrees since the establishment of the City in 1976, and full official movement in 1991. Most of the privileges enjoyed by other State indigenes are not available to the original inhabitants of Abuja, even when Section 299 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as amended,

prescribes that "The provisions of this Constitution shall apply to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja as if it were one of the States of the Federation."

In a keynote address presented at the African Regional Conference on August 9, 2022 at Chida Event Centre, Abuja, Professor Oshita O. Oshita spotlighted some of the travails and triumphs of the original inhabitants of the FCT, Abuja, and how these can be managed. He argued that "a look at Abuja today would show a City that either learnt badly or failed to learn from the lessons of Lagos and has prematurely crashed under the weight of urban planning 'disorder'. Insecurity and exclusion of significant populations are thus in a hurry to swallow the 'Centre of Unity'. The big question today is whether Abuja was really 'uninhabited' as at the time it was pronounced as new Capital of Nigeria.

Being unequal in power relations with those who dominate them, the autochthonous inhabitants are usually faced with troubled citizenship and contested historical identity in their ancestral space. In most cases, government institutions, opportunistic public officers, and even their own leaders take undue advantage of their circumstances. It is against this backdrop that the Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED), with the support of MacArthur Foundation, and cohort of FCT Original Inhabitants groups and selected non-profit organizations with programming experience on the promotion of cultural, economic and political rights, commemorated the United Nations International Day of the World's Indigenous People, for the first time ever, in Nigeria to raise awareness on the Abuja original inhabitants' clamour for social justice and equal opportunities.

To mark 2022 International Day of World's Indigenous People's in Nigeria, CHRICED convened series of activities; namely: A One-day National Stakeholders' Dialogue on August 6, 2022, where issues affecting the Abuja original inhabitants were raised and suggestions for way forward offered^[1]. On August 8, 2022, a Grand Rally of the FCT Original Inhabitants staged at the Old Parade Ground Abuja with a Cultural Exhibition; and on the D-Day of the celebration, a Regional Conference held on August 9, 2022 and an Awards' dinners for Heroes and Heroines of the FCT Original Inhabitants struggle.

As a Cohort of civil society organizations working to ensure the promotion and protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, these activities were not organized as an end in themselves. They all present peaceful, lawful and effective options to call on stakeholders in government to stand on the side of justice, fairness and inclusion. As succinctly put by Armsfree Ajanaku (Punch, August 2022) although, "the theme of 2022 UN Indigenous Day celebration focuses on the role of indigenous women in the transmission of local knowledge, Original Inhabitants in the FCT at different convening to mark the day focused the narrative on the broader historic injustices, marginalization, and exclusion which have been a part of their experiences. This is to ensure that the voice of FCT original inhabitants resonates in the global context of the struggle for the rights of indigenous people (Ajanaku, Punch, August 2022).

^[1] See, HipCity (2022) *Baseline Study on Improving Access to Inclusive Basic Services (Basic Healthcare, Basic Education and WASH) for Original Inhabitants of the FCT (OIS)*.

^[2] Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) on September 13, 2007

^[3] See, the communique issued by the Stakeholders at the end of the One-Day National Dialogue published as advertorial in several national dailies.



Fighting for Justice to Guarantee Peace...

ABOUT CHRICED

Resource Center for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED) is a Nigerian nonprofit, and a knowledge-driven platform of active citizens working for the promotion of human rights, rule of law, democracy and accountability. CHRICED is registered in October 2006 with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) under Companies and Allied Matters Act No. 1 of 1990, Part C. CHRICED is certified through equivalency determination by NGOsource, a project of [TechSoup](#) and the [Council on Foundations](#), as equivalent of a United States public charity organization.

Vision

CHRICED envisions a democratic Nigeria where participation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability are guaranteed for the well-being of citizens.

Mission

CHRICED is committed to the advancement of a democratic, representative, and inclusive political culture in Nigeria by mobilizing state and non-state actors to actively collaborate in fostering the rule of law, accountability, and responsive use of resources for the collective well-being of the people. *Civic education is our strategic vehicle for empowering citizens, in pursuit of this mission*

CHRICED Thematic and Approach

With offices in Abuja and Kano, CHRICED is currently pioneering rights-based approach to tackle the decades-old marginalization, human rights violations, economic deprivation and social emasculation and other forms of historic injustices suffered by the indigenous people in Nigeria. CHRICED is addressing the crippling issue of maternal and child mortality in northern Nigeria. We are also intervening in the region to improve accountability in management of

constituency projects and local government resources. Another key focus of our intervention has been to increase access to education for girls through strong community action, as well as to prevent the labor exploitation of vulnerable almajiri street children in Northern Nigeria. CHRICED program targeting marginalized youths, especially in the poor rural areas, has focused on promoting equitable access to economic and livelihood opportunities for youths in Nigeria. CHRICED also has experience in monitoring and advocating transparent and credible elections within and outside Nigeria.

Governance Structure

CHRICED has three-layer structure:

The Advisory Council composed of eminent individuals who have distinguished themselves in their respective areas of endeavor. It meets at least once in a year to provide leadership and guidance to the Centre. Although the Council does not have formal decision-making powers, the Chairman of the Council is the Chairman of the Centre. In this way, it feeds into other structures of the Centre. In addition, the Council provides guidance to the Board and Secretariat in an effective manner.

The Board of Directors is responsible for policy formation in accordance with the guidance received from the Council. The Board approves the work of the Secretariat and meets at least twice in a year. In between, a Management Committee comprising three board members and the Executive Director is responsible for the work of the Centre.

The Secretariat is the administrative and coordinating center of the organization. It is headed by the Executive Director who is mandated in accordance with the aims and objectives of CHRICED, to manage and steer the organization to success. The Executive Director is responsible for recruitment of core staff, subject to approval of the Board, and s/he is answerable to the Board.

About the OI Project

The CHRICED project entitled "Promoting the Political, Economic, and Cultural Rights of Original Inhabitants of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja" is a two-year initiative supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. It aims to strengthen the technical, programmatic, and financial capacity of Original Inhabitant organizations in the FCT in order to make them more resilient and enable them to create a sustainable citizen-led framework to advocate for the protection of their rights and interests. The project addresses the decades-long marginalization, human rights violations, economic deprivation, and social emasculation suffered by the inhabitant people of the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, as well as other forms of historic injustices. The program proposes complementary group mobilization and capacity building to help inhabitant groups use evidence-based methodologies, targeted advocacy, and timely information to influence key governance processes in order to address the historical injustices perpetrated against them since the relocation of the FCT. CHRICED is exploring potential synergies and partnerships with other grantees and frontline organizations with similar missions to advocate for marginalized and vulnerable citizens.

The project amplifies the voices of OI organizations in the FCT-Abuja by building their capacities to influence key governance processes, particularly those relevant to the fulfilment of their political, economic and cultural rights. CHRICED work with diverse FCT original inhabitants' groups to develop the capacity for impactful programming, strategic and targeted messaging in order to advocate for social justice, and accountability of government institutions. The program identifies the primary barriers to effective group mobilization, advocacies and outreaches. It employs participatory processes to assist the marginalized inhabitant peoples of the FCT through their organizations to develop strategies for sustainable advocacies and campaigns that take these specific needs and interests into consideration.

Introduction

This publication is based on curated media reports on the commemoration of the 2022 United Nations International Day of the World's Indigenous People in Nigeria. The International Day of the World's Indigenous People is commemorated every August 9 in line with the UN General Assembly resolution 49/214 passed on December 23, 1994.⁴ On this day, people from around the world are encouraged to spread the UN's message on the protection and promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples. Events at the UN headquarters in New York include messages from high-level UN officials, governments, indigenous peoples and other key leaders; performances by indigenous artists; and panel discussions on emerging issues. Others events are also held worldwide to celebrate the day.⁵

In Nigeria, the Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED) with the support of MacArthur Foundation commemorated the 2022 International Day of the World's Indigenous People, for the first time ever, to raise awareness on the FCT Original Inhabitants clamour for social justice and equal opportunities. CHRICED worked with a consortium comprising FCT Original Inhabitants' groups and selected non-profit organizations with programming experience on the promotion of cultural, economic and political rights, including sectoral thematic issues as it relates to access to education, health, sexual and gender-based violence, and environment for sustainable inclusive development in the FCT.

Amongst several activities, a National Stakeholders' Dialogue on the Rights of FCT Original Inhabitants themed Building resilience, fostering recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants and the Struggle for Justice; an African Regional Conference on Indigenous Struggles for Social Justice; festivals, exhibitions, and a grand rally showcasing rich cultural expressions and products of FCT OIs signposted events reported in this publication of curated media reports to mark the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples in Nigeria.

Aside its knowledge management value and utility, the publication boosts documentation, popularization and or amplification of FCT Original Inhabitants' cultural expressions and products. "As rich and diverse as the OI culture is, it is not well documented and not associated as part of the FCT culture in cultural repositories, as such no cultural emblem of the OI is associated with the FCT."⁶ This publication now bridges important gaps in terms of poor knowledge of FCT cultural expressions, insufficient documentation, violation of sacred heritage sites, and promotes the preservation of cultural sites.

It also raises stakeholders' attention on magnitude of untapped cultural economies potentials of FCT Original Inhabitants as well as sensitising on cultural activities (such as Abuja carnival, FCT festival on arts and culture, quarterly drama performance, anticipatory fishing festival, festival village, retrieval of artefacts, reinvigoration of OI pottery, textiles and weaving, etc).

The publication identified and collated reports from news medium (conventional print and online newspapers) on CHRICED's commemoration of World Indigenous People Day Celebration in Nigeria. With its knowledge management value, the publication is published for wide dissemination and documentation.

A total of 30 media reports on or around commemorative activities organised by CHRICED and its cohorts for the 2022 International Day of the World's Indigenous People were selected. Thus, the criteria for the selection of reports included in this publication is largely based on the specificity of contents (new reports, editorials, opinion commentaries/articles, interviews, advertorial, documentary, pictorials, etc.) published by media outlets on or around the 2022 International Day of the World's Indigenous People commemorative activities in Nigeria.

Synthesized thematically, the issues raised in the curated media reports crystalized on the need to give Abuja Original Inhabitants a pride of place, upgrading the FCT into a state status to enable the indigenes enjoy the full rights and privileges associated with it like other Nigerians from across the 36 states of the federation; appointment of an indigene as Minister of the FCT, lamented the refusal of successive administrations to appoint an indigene as minister of the FCT despite occupying their territory. This is based on the argument that the donation of their ancestral land to Government of Nigeria was remarkable for the unity of the country and the peaceful co-existence of the citizens which should be commensurately appreciated by all other Nigerians.

^[4] The date marks the day of the first meeting of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Population in 1982.

^[5] See: <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/international-day-of-the-worlds-indigenous-peoples#:~:text=On%2023%20December%201994%2C%20the,on%209%20August%20every%20year.>

^[6] See: Draft Report [2020]. *The Original Inhabitants (OI) of the FCT Nigeria and the quest for a State*

Upgrade Abuja to state, FCT monarchs beg FG⁷



FCT, Abuja

August 7, 2022 | By [Friday Olorok](#).

The leadership of traditional institutions in the Federal Capital Territory on Saturday raised concern over the “non-challant” attitude of various administrations to agitations by their indigenes since 1990. They expressed surprise why it has been difficult for the Federal Government to appoint an indigene as Minister of the FCT or upgrade Abuja to a status of a state to enable the people enjoy the rights and privileges associated with the office.

The traditional rulers raised the concerns at a national dialogue on Rights of FCT Original Inhabitants, organised by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Education with the theme, “Building resilience, fostering recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants and the Struggle for Justice”, as part of activities to mark the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples which comes up on August 9.

The Ona of Abaji and Chairman of the FCT Council of Traditional Rulers, Adamu Yunusa, lamented the non-recognition of the indigenes at the helm of affairs at the Federal Executive Council with a call on government “to be fair” to all. The monarch, represented by Mansur Sule, said the FCT indigenes should be treated like any other Nigerian is treated.

“The donation of our ancestral land to government is remarkable for the unity of the people and the peaceful co-existence of the citizens but we are not seeing commensurate appreciation from the country. The people should do us justice to see we are given our rights. We just want to be treated like any other Nigerian is treated. “It is high time our right is given to us”, he said.

Etsu of Kwali, Alhaji Shaban Audu, noted that the indigenes had sacrificed a lot for the FCT, adding that what they needed was equal opportunity. He said, “We have sacrificed a lot. Though we remain grateful to the government because certain things had been done, more needs to be done for the socio-political advancement of the people.”

Executive Director of CHRICED, Dr. Ibrahim Zikirullahi, said the injustices suffered by the indigenes might continue due to activities of “selfish politicians” who benefit from the present system. He said the government must address the plights of the natives to avoid the breakdown of law and order in the capital city.

Zikirullahi said, “The FCT indigenes made enormous sacrifices to provide space for Nigeria’s capital. Therefore, the government can no longer ignore the voices of the original inhabitants. They are landless, don’t have representatives in the federal cabinet and of course, even their children don’t have a place they can call their own. They have been suffering discrimination over time.

“We are supporting them to reawaken their voice and put their issues before the government and the international community. They are going about their case lawfully and peacefully and perhaps maybe that is why the government is not listening. We are telling the government that is not only those that are violent and unholy that it should discuss and negotiate with. It is high time they listen to the original inhabitants.

“The constitution says the government to take over land for public use but not for them to confiscate lands and begin to sell. If we are in a statement where justice works the original inhabitants should be collecting land. Hardly do we have any tribe that doesn’t have a presence in Abuja and if we want to have peace there is need for us to address the problems of the OIs.”

He wondered why the government has refused to obey series of court judgements meant to address the agitation of the indigenes, adding that CHRICED is considering how it can enforce those rights that have been given to them by the court.

“We know that our lawmakers are the number one lawbreakers in the land and we have seen them serving as rubber stamp to the executive, especially when you have a system where the government is weak and clueless. Today, the lawmakers we have are those who feel that the marginalisation of FCT indigenes advanced their course. We are asking the OIs to sit up,” he said.

⁷ <https://punchng.com/upgrade-abuja-to-state-fct-monarchs-beg-fg/>

“We know that our lawmakers are the number one lawbreakers in the land and we have seen them serving as rubber stamp to the executive, especially when you have a system where the government is weak and clueless. Today, the lawmakers we have are those who feel that the marginalisation of FCT indigenes advanced their course. We are asking the OIs to sit up,” he said.

Treat us like Nigerians, FCT monarchs beg Federal Government⁸

08 August 2022 | By [Sodiq Omolaoye, Abuja](#)



Traditional rulers in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have lamented the nonchalant attitude of various administrations since 1990 to agitations by indigenes of the territory. The monarchs wondered why it has been difficult for the Federal Government to appoint an FCT indigene as a minister or upgrade Abuja to a status of a state to enable the people to enjoy the rights and privileges associated with it. They raised the concerns at a National Dialogue on Rights of FCT Original Inhabitants, organised by the Resource Centre for Human Rights and Education (CHRICED) in Abuja, at the weekend.

With the theme, ‘Building Resilience, Fostering Recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants and the Struggle for Justice,’ the event was part of activities to mark the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, which comes up tomorrow. Chairman of the FCT Council of Traditional Rulers, the Ona of Abaji, Alhaji Adamu Yunusa, who lamented the non-recognition of the indigenes at the Federal Executive Council (FEC), called on the government to be fair to all.

Etsu of Kwali, Alhaji Shaban Audu, noted that the indigenes had sacrificed a lot for the FCT, adding that what they needed was equal opportunity. “We have sacrificed a lot. Though we remain grateful to the government because certain things had been done, more needs to be done for the socio-political advancement of the people,” he said.

Executive Director of CHRICED, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, said the injustices suffered by the indigenes might continue due to the activities of selfish politicians, who benefit from the present system. He said the government must address the plight of the natives to avoid the breakdown of law and order in the capital city.

“FCT indigenes made enormous sacrifices to provide space for Nigeria’s capital. Therefore, the government can no longer ignore the voices of the original inhabitants. They are landless, don’t have representatives in the federal cabinet and of course, even their children don’t have a place they can call their own. They have been suffering discrimination over time.

“We are supporting them to re-awaken their voice and put their issues before the government and the international community. They are going about their case lawfully and peacefully and perhaps maybe that is why the government is not listening. We are telling the government that it is not only those that are violent and unholy that it should discuss and negotiate with. It is high time they listened to the original inhabitants.”

On her part, Executive Director, Centre for Transparency Advocacy (CTA), Faith Nwadishi, advocated the political, economic and cultural rights of the original inhabitants. Nwadishi also said the 1999 Constitution Review that was carried out by the National Assembly would have been a golden opportunity for the 9th Assembly to etch their names in gold when the history of the FCT would be discussed.

⁸ <https://guardian.ng/news/treat-us-like-nigerians-fct-monarchs-beg-federal-government/>

Treat us like Nigerians, FCT indigenes tell FG⁹

Monday 8 August 2022 | By Abbas Jimoh



Indigenes of the Federal Capital Territory have called on the Federal Government to treat them like every other Nigerian. They made the call in Abuja yesterday through their traditional rulers at a national dialogue on rights of FCT original inhabitants, organised by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Education (CHRICED). The theme of the event was ‘Building Resilience, Fostering Recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants and the Struggle for Justice’. Held in collaboration with Cohort of FCT Original Inhabitant (OIs) Groups, with support from John D. And Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the event was part of the activities commemorating the United Nations International Day of World Indigenous Peoples coming up on August 9.

The monarchs wondered why it had been difficult for the Federal Government to appoint an FCT indigene as minister or upgrade Abuja to a status of a state to enable the people enjoy the rights and privileges associated with it like other Nigerians across states. The Ona of Abaji and chairman of the FCT Council of Traditional Rulers, Alhaji Adamu Baba Yunusa, represented by the Galadima of Abaji, Mansur Mohammed Sule, urged government to be fair to all. He said: “The donation of our ancestral land to government is remarkable for the unity of the people and the peaceful co-existence of the citizens but we are not seeing commensurate appreciation from the country. The people should do us justice to see we’re given our rights. We just want to be treated like any other Nigerian is treated. It’s high time our right was given to us.”

The Etsu of Kwali, Alhaji Shaban Audu, said: “We’ve sacrificed a lot. Though we remain grateful to the government because certain things had been done, more needs to be done for the socio-political advancement of the people.”

Earlier, Executive Director, CHRICED, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, urged the government to address the plights of the natives to avoid breakdown of law and order in the FCT. “The FCT indigenes made enormous sacrifices to provide space for Nigeria’s capital. Therefore, government can no longer ignore the voices of the original inhabitants. They’re landless, but don’t have representative in the federal cabinet and of course even their children don’t have a place they can call their own. They’ve been suffering discrimination over time.

“We’re supporting them to reawaken their voice and put their issues before the government and international community. They’re going about their case lawfully and peacefully and perhaps maybe that’s why the government is not listening. We’re telling the government that is not only those that are violent and unholy that it should discuss and negotiate with. It’s high time they listened to the original inhabitants.”

On her part, the Executive Director, Centre for Transparency Advocacy (CTA), Faith Nwadishi, urged political, economic and cultural rights of the original inhabitants. She also said that the 1999 Constitution Review process that was carried out by the National Assembly would have been a golden opportunity for the 9th Assembly to edge their names in gold when the history of the FCT would be discussed and the right things are done.

Nwadishi said, “The FCT is known as a centre of unity. If we decide to leave the indigenous issues to only the indigenous people, we would not be doing justice to them. A lot of us have come from different places. “I come from the Niger Delta, for instance, I am an Okpai woman, and I have my indigenous issues also, and that’s what compels me and gives me the zeal to push for the recognition of the rights of the indigenous people of the FCT because once you recognise the rights of the indigenous people of the FCT, you have set a precedent.

“The FCT, the geographical location we have the SEC today, is not the first place we have had as our national capital. As you are approaching Lagos, you have signs and will understand that this is significant to the people of Lagos State. But, in coming to Abuja at the city gate there is nothing that depicts the fact that there are people who own this land.”

⁹ <https://dailytrust.com/treat-us-like-every-other-nigerian-fct-indigenes-tell-fg/>

Nigeria: Abuja Monarch to Buhari – Restructure for Inclusive Governance, Justice, Devt¹⁰



August 8, 2022 | By Luminous Jannamike

Traditional rulers in the Federal Capital Territory, FCT, have urged President Muhammadu Buhari to accede to the call for the restructuring of the country, saying it was borne out of real and perceived marginalisation of different ethno-religious groups. They spoke at a National Dialogue on Indigenous Rights in Nigeria, organised by the Resource Centre for Human Rights and Education, CHRICED, in Abuja, weekend. The dialogue, themed “Building Resilience, Fostering Recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants and the Struggle for Justice” was part of activities to mark the International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, which comes up tomorrow.

Speaking at the event, the Ona of Abaji, who doubles as the Chairman, Abuja Council of Chiefs, Adamu Yunusa, called for political and economic restructuring in Nigeria to make room for inclusive governance, justice and development of all parts of the country. According to him, doing so will effectively address the agitation for the inclusion of the original inhabitants of the FCT in governance and decision making. He said: “The donation of our ancestral land to government is remarkable for the unity of the people and the peaceful co-existence of the citizens but we are not seeing commensurate appreciation from the country.

The Etsu of Kwali, Alhaji Shaban Audu, said: “We’ve sacrificed a lot. Though we remain grateful to the government because certain things had been done, more needs to be done for the socio-political advancement of the people.”

Earlier, Executive Director, CHRICED, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, urged the government to address the plights of the natives to avoid breakdown of law and order in the FCT. “The FCT indigenes made enormous sacrifices to provide space for Nigeria’s capital. Therefore, government can no longer ignore the voices of the original inhabitants. They’re landless, but don’t have representative in the federal cabinet and of course even their children don’t have a place they can call their own. They’ve been suffering discrimination over time.

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On her part, the Executive Director, Centre for Transparency Advocacy (CTA), Faith Nwadishi, urged political, economic and cultural rights of the original inhabitants. She also said that the 1999 Constitution Review process that was carried out by the National Assembly would have been a golden opportunity for the 9th Assembly to edge their names in gold when the history of the FCT would be discussed and the right things are done.

Nwadishi said, “The FCT is known as a centre of unity. If we decide to leave the indigenous issues to only the indigenous people, we would not be doing justice to them. A lot of us have come from different places. “I come from the Niger Delta, for instance, I am an Okpai woman, and I have my indigenous issues also, and that’s what compels me and gives me the zeal to push for the recognition of the rights of the indigenous people of the FCT because once you recognise the rights of the indigenous people of the FCT, you have set a precedent.

“The FCT, the geographical location we have the SEC today, is not the first place we have had as our national capital. As you are approaching Lagos, you have signs and will understand that this is significant to the people of Lagos State. But, in coming to Abuja at the city gate there is nothing that depicts the fact that there are people who own this land.”

^[10] <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/08/abuja-monarchs-to-buhari-restructure-for-inclusive-governance-justice-devt/>

“The people should do us justice to see we are given our rights. We just want to be treated like any other Nigerian is treated. It is high time our right is given to us.”

Similarly, the Etsu of Kwali, Shaban Audu, who noted that the indigenes had sacrificed a lot for the FCT, said what they needed was equal opportunity. “We have sacrificed a lot. Though we remain grateful to the government because certain things had been done, more needs to be done for the socio-political advancement of the people,” he said.

Executive Director of CHRICED, Mr Ibrahim Zikirullahi, called for a robust representation of the indigenes in the core governance structures responsible for service delivery. He said: “The FCT indigenes made enormous sacrifices to provide space for Nigeria’s capital. Therefore, the government can no longer ignore the voices of the original inhabitants.” Zikirullahi, therefore, called for prompt action by government to address the plight of the indigenes.

Executive Director, Centre for Transparency Advocacy, CTA, Ms Faith Nwadishi, advocated the political, economic and cultural rights of the original inhabitants. Nwadishi also said the 1999 Constitution Review process carried out by the National Assembly would have been a golden opportunity for the 9th Assembly to edge their names in gold, when the history of the FCT would be discussed.

Secretary, Garki Traditional Council, Lazarus Nyaholo, called for more of stakeholders’ engagement in re-echoing the demands of the indigenes. “We don’t want resettlement, we want to be integrated into governance,” Nyaholo said.



8th August 2022 | From Okwe Obi, Abuja

Traditional rulers drawn from the six Area Councils in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have appealed to the Federal Government to give original inhabitants a pride of place in the scheme of things. They lamented the refusal of successive administrations to appoint an indigene as minister of the FCT despite occupying their territory.

The monarchs spoke recently in Abuja at a National Dialogue on Rights of FCT Original Inhabitants, organised by the Resource Centre for Human Rights and Education (CHRICED) in Abuja. The theme of the Dialogue was ‘Building Resilience, Fostering Recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants and the Struggle for Justice.’

Chairman of the FCT Council of Traditional Rulers, who doubles as the Ona of Abaji, Alhaji Adamu Yunusa, called on the present administration to treat original inhabitant like every other Nigerian. Represented by Mansur Sule, he said: “The donation of our ancestral land to government is remarkable for the unity of the people and the peaceful co-existence of the citizens, but we are not getting commensurate appreciation from the country. “The people should do us justice to see we are given our rights. We just want to be treated like any other Nigerian. It is high time they gave us our right.”

Also, the Etsu of Kwali, Alhaji Shaban Audu, stressed that the indigenes had sacrificed a lot for the FCT which ordinarily should count for them. He said: “We have sacrificed a lot. Though we remain grateful to the government because certain things had been done, more needs to be done for the socio-political advancement of the people.”

The Executive Director of CHRICED, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, said the inhuman treatment meted out to indigenes might fester due to the insidious mien of some politicians determined to stymie their progress. Zikirullahi said: “FCT indigenes made enormous sacrifices to provide space for Nigeria’s capital. Therefore, the government can no longer ignore the voices of the original inhabitants.

“They are landless, don’t have representatives in the federal cabinet and of course, even their children don’t have a place they can call their own. They have been suffering discrimination over time. We are supporting them to re-awaken their voice and put their issues before the government and the international community.

“They are going about their case lawfully and peacefully and perhaps maybe that is why the government is not listening. We are telling the government that it is not only those that are violent and unholy that it should discuss and negotiate with. It is high time they listened to the original inhabitants.”

¹¹ <https://www.sunnewsonline.com/give-us-a-pride-of-place-fct-monarchs-tell-fg/>

Need to give hope to the Abuja Original Inhabitants¹²



August 10, 2022 | Editorial

The promise made to the original Inhabitants of Abuja remains unfulfilled as successive governments have repeatedly dashed their hopes. All these was why a non-governmental organisation, Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED) and others came together in commemoration of the United Nations International Day of World Indigenous People to find a lasting solution to their plight. ADEOLA TUKURU reports.

The programme which kick- started on August 6th to August 9th, 2022 in different parts of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) was in collaboration with Cohort of FCT Original Inhabitant Groups, and with the support from John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

The plight of Nigeria’s original inhabitants in the FCT is one of the national issues that has received little attention. As a result, they have not only had their lands taken away without compensation, but they have also faced various forms of marginalization and discrimination.

This reality has, in turn, contributed to the denial of basic social services to indigenous populations living in backwater communities away from the glitz and glamour of the city centre.

Also, the absence of a defined state-status for the FCT has further subsumed the rights and privileges of the people under a humongous federal structure controlled mainly by the president.

National stakeholders dialogue on the rights of FCT original inhabitants

At the National stakeholders’ dialogue on the rights of FCT original inhabitants, Executive Director of CHRICED, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, said the inhuman treatment meted out to indigenes might fester due to the insidious mien of some politicians determined to stymie their progress. The program was themed: ‘Building Resilience, Fostering Recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants and the Struggle for Justice.’

Zikirullahi explained that FCT indigenes made enormous sacrifices to provide space for Nigeria’s capital. Therefore, the government can no longer ignore the voices of the original inhabitants. He explained that August 9th, was set aside by the United Nations as the world indigenous peoples to reflect on the issues affecting the indigenous people, mobilize political women or resources to address those issues.

According to him, it is a big opportunity to send a message across to the Government of Nigeria and to the International communities that the original inhabitants of FCT were forcefully driven out from their lands and they are still in existence. These factors have thus impinged on the legitimacy of those institutions thereby constraining the effective delivery of key social goods and services to the people at the grassroots.

Zikirullahi said they are still adopting in agitating for their rights. “So, we have seen the gross violation of the fundamental human rights. Their incredible right to choose their leaders have been taken away from them. For example, in 2023, when every citizens of this country will be going to the polls to elect their governors and members of State Assembly, the original inhabitant will not be participating because they have been denied that.

On appointing non-indigenous ministerial nominees

Successive governments have made a promise of appointing non-indigenous ministerial nominees to the position of Minister of the FCT. Zikirullahi said states are having members under Federal system and wondered why the original inhabitants, whose population is even more than some states in the Federation, are completely denied their rights. “In the National Assembly, all states are represented but the FCT inhabitants are not, this is an arbitration because these people deserve to be represented. Their voice needs to be heard. They need to be recognized for the sacrifices they have made. Because the compensation cannot be equal to the sacrifices they have made. You know what it means in a place where you buried your loved ones,” he said.

^[12] <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/08/abuja-monarchs-to-buhari-restructure-for-inclusive-governance-justice-devt/>

Supreme Court declaring Abuja as a state

He said the Supreme Court has declared Abuja as a state, but the National Assembly failed to put the necessary process in place so as to give them the recognition. According to him, the constitution itself is there and very clear as far as this issue of state is concerned. “Because the constitution have stated Nigeria should include Abuja as part of the states but they have denied them the rights as a state.

Tradition rulers appeal on scheme of things

The Chairman of the FCT Council of Traditional Rulers, who doubles as the Ona of Abaji, Alhaji Adamu Yunusa, called on the present administration to treat like every other Nigerian. He said the donation of our ancestral land to government is remarkable for the unity of the people and the peaceful co-existence of the citizens, but we are not getting commensurate appreciation from the country. Also, the Etsu of Kwali, Alhaji Shaban Audu, stressed that the indigenes had sacrificed a lot for the FCT which ordinarily should count for them. He said: “We have sacrificed a lot. Though we remain grateful to the government because certain things had been done, more needs to be done for the socio-political advancement of the people.”

Cultural rally of Abuja original inhabitants

Other part of the events was Grand cultural rally of Abuja original inhabitants (featuring exhibitions and dance), where one of the Princesses in Bwari Area Council from Iku village, Princess Sarki Sylvia explained that when one sees a Gbagyi person, what comes to one’s mind is a peaceful man or peaceful woman because they are all known as peaceful people but lamented that they have been taken for granted for that.

She said their culture is so wide and broad adding that the history of the Gbagyi people touches almost all the areas of the northern part of Nigeria. She said one can find some of their areas in Kaduna, Kano, Katsina Zamfara even all the way from Maiduguri states.



Watch the report on the Voice TV Nigeria: [YouTube video](#). By Dorcas Olanrewaju



UN Indigenous Peoples Day: FCT Original Inhabitants and their struggle for justice¹⁴



August 12, 2022 | Isiyaku Ahmed and Armsfree Ajanaku

For Nigeria, the commemoration of the 2022 UN International Day of World’s Indigenous Peoples holds a lot of significance, especially in the face of rising outcry from the Original Inhabitants of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The indigenous peoples in the space occupied by the Nigerian capital have continued to agonize about what they have variously described as the injustice they have suffered at the hands of the Nigerian State.

^[13] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dpN7wWOfXPI/>

^[14] <https://stalliontimes.com/2022/08/12/un-indigenous-peoples-day-fct-original-inhabitants-and-their-struggle-for-justice/>

Although the theme of this year's UN Indigenous Day celebration focuses on the role of indigenous women in the transmission of local knowledge, Original Inhabitants in the FCT at different convening to mark the day have also tried to focus the narrative on the broader historic injustices, marginalization, and exclusion which have been a part of their experiences.

Since being made to part with their lands to make way for Nigeria's capital city over four decades ago, FCT Original Inhabitants insist that their human rights have been consistently trampled upon, just as promises made to them have not been fulfilled, over forty years after.

One of the promises made by the then Supreme Military Council headed by the Head of State, late General Murtala Mohammed in 1976 was that following the acquisition of their lands, Original Inhabitants would be resettled outside the territory at the government's expense.

Many FCT Original Inhabitants have expressed disappointment that those lofty promises have not been fulfilled, just as they have accused the government of unjustly abandoning them to live in penury after the compulsory acquisition of their lands without compensation.

FCT Original Inhabitants have equally agonized over how the government's failure to fulfil its' side of the bargain has left them landlessness, statelessness, and excluded from the commanding heights of decision-making in the country. In the first place, having taken over the lands in the territory without compensation, and with no robust efforts at resettling them, FCT Original Inhabitants have condemned the government for rendering them economically prostrate.

They have similarly stressed that being deprived of their prime lands without any prior and informed consent has also had a devastating effect on their cultural treasures and repositories.

The 1999 Constitution as amended has also been implicated as one of the major sources of enabling the perpetuation of the decades-long injustices and marginalization suffered by FCT Original Inhabitants. Section 297(2) of the 1999 Constitution as amended states that the "ownership of all lands comprised in the Federal Capital Territory shall vest in the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria," but the same constitution is silent about the people who were existing on the land before the coming of the capital.

Many FCT Original Inhabitants have interpreted the silence about their existence in the entire constitution to mean that there was no pre-existing indigenous population in the area before the acquisition of the lands in the territory by the government.

Section 299 in the eyes of FCT Original Inhabitants goes on to add insult to injury by stating that the "provisions of this Constitution shall apply to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja as if it were one of the States of the Federation; and accordingly (a) all the legislative powers, the executive powers and the judicial powers vested in the House of Assembly, the Governor of a State and in the courts of a State shall, respectively vest in the National Assembly, the President of the Federation and the courts which by virtue of the foregoing provisions are courts established for the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja."

These sections of the nation's grundnorm, which have been variously described as "satanic" by FCT Original Inhabitants activists collectively deny Original Inhabitants the kind of sub-national representation, that Nigerians in other states enjoy. The reality of the Original Inhabitants in the FCT is further worsened by the lack of robust representation in the core structures of governance, responsible for service delivery.

The Minister of the FCT for instance is an appointee of the President. In the absence of any rule compelling the President to appoint a representative from the Original Inhabitants, political considerations are mostly prioritized, leading to the exclusion of the indigenes of the city. Unlike other citizens of Nigeria in various states who have the right to vote in a Governor and a State House of Assembly, the FCT Original Inhabitants have been denied such by the Constitution.

Sadly, decades of calls to reform this constitutional lacuna have been ignored. Rights activists have thus implicated these constitutional gaps as being responsible for the neglect, poverty, and deprivation apparent in the Original Inhabitants communities, located in the backwaters, which are not too far from the beautiful Abuja City Centre.

Many of such communities cannot boast of potable water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities. In these Original Inhabitants communities also, education facilities are few and decrepit health facilities, making them susceptible to an outbreak of various preventable diseases. Attempts by Original Inhabitants in the FCT to take advantage of the rule of law to advance their rights have been repudiated. This is largely due to the culture of impunity and disrespect for the rule of law, which pervades Nigeria's national space. For instance, despite the unwavering commitment, that FCT Original Inhabitants have demonstrated to upholding peaceful, lawful, and non-violence in their search for justice, the Nigerian authorities have always frustrated and undermined these efforts. It has become so bad that even judicial verdicts handed down by courts of competent jurisdictions have been simply ignored by successive governments. It is against this background that human rights groups have called on the government to listen to the cries of FCT's Original Inhabitants and ensure their issues are addressed.

One of such groups is the Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED), which has been working with the support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to build the organizational program and financial management capacity of FCT Original Inhabitants Organizations. The project is aimed at addressing the decades-long injustices, marginalization, and exclusion suffered by the Original Inhabitants in the FCT since the relocation of Nigeria's capital from Lagos to Abuja by virtue of Decree No 6 of 1976. With the support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, CHRICED has been supporting Original Inhabitant groups to develop initiatives to address pressing political, socio-economic, and cultural challenges facing them, foster opportunities for engagement with policymakers, and advocate reforms to promote inclusion, equity, and equality for the Original Inhabitants in FCT.

An important aspect of the two-year project is the urgent need to internationalize the stories and struggles of FCT's Original Inhabitants. It is pertinent to state that despite the over four decades of marginalization, exclusion, and repression suffered by FCT Original Inhabitants, since their ancestral lands were taken over to make way for the Nigerian capital, not many within and outside the shores of Nigeria know about their plight and struggles. And because there is little knowledge and awareness about the injustices suffered by the Original Inhabitants, there is a dearth of initiatives to support them in seeking redress.

Subsequently, the lack of awareness about the plight of FCT Original Inhabitants is also apparent at the continental level, where Nigeria projects itself as a giant. At the regional level, the issue of the injustice done to Original Inhabitants of the FCT has similarly received scant and perfunctory attention.

The result is that there have been no broad continental activities to connect the issues confronting the FCT Original Inhabitants to the struggles of other indigenous peoples on the African continent. The ongoing project of Promoting the Rights of the Original Inhabitants in the FCT seeks to make the issue a subject of international conversation. This way, the authorities in Nigeria may be influenced to bring an end to the paradox of a people who made enormous sacrifices for the unity of Nigeria, becoming refugees in their ancestral lands.



August 9 every year is observed by the United Nations as the International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples. The day is observed to celebrate the achievements of indigenous peoples around the world and highlight their struggles, as well as what governments, and societies can do to address the plights of these marginalised peoples. For Nigeria, the commemoration of the 2022 UN International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples holds a lot of significance, especially in the face of rising outcry from the original inhabitants of the Federal Capital Territory. The indigenous peoples in the space occupied by the Nigerian capital have continued to agonise about what they have variously described as the injustice they have suffered at the hands of the Nigerian State.

Although the theme of this year's UN Indigenous Day celebration focuses on the role of indigenous women in the transmission of local knowledge, original inhabitants in the FCT at different convening to mark the day have also tried to focus the narrative on the broader historic injustices, marginalisation, and exclusion which have been a part of their experiences. Since being made to part with their lands to make way for Nigeria's capital city over four decades ago, FCT original inhabitants insist that their human rights have been consistently trampled upon, just as promises made to them have not been fulfilled, over 40 years after. One of the promises made by the then Supreme Military Council headed by the Head of State, the late General Murtala Mohammed in 1976, was that following the acquisition of their lands, original inhabitants would be resettled outside the territory at the government's expense.

Many FCT original inhabitants have expressed disappointment that those lofty promises have not been fulfilled, just as they have accused the government of unjustly abandoning them to live in penury after the compulsory acquisition of their lands without compensation. FCT original inhabitants have equally agonised over how the government's failure to fulfil its side of the bargain has left them landlessness, statelessness, and excluded from the commanding heights of decision-making in the country.

^[15] <https://punchng.com/un-indigenous-peoples-day-fct-original-inhabitants-struggle-for-justice/?amp>

Same article syndicated in several online newspapers; see, cross reference links:

<https://platinumpost.ng/2022/08/11/un-indigenous-peoples-day-fct-original-inhabitants-and-their-struggle-for-justice/>

<https://theexplainer.com.ng/un-indigenous-peoples-day-fct-original-inhabitants-and-their-struggle-for-justice/>

<https://www.blueprint.ng/un-indigenous-peoples-day-fct-original-inhabitants-and-their-struggle-for-justice/>

^[16] Ajanaku is the Programmes & Communications Manager, CHRICED (aajanaku@chriced.org.ng)

In the first place, having taken over the lands in the territory without compensation, and with no robust efforts at resettling them, FCT original inhabitants have condemned the government for rendering them economically prostrate. They have similarly stressed that being deprived of their prime lands without any prior and informed consent has also had a devastating effect on their cultural treasures and repositories.

The 1999 Constitution as amended has also been implicated as one of the major sources of enabling the perpetuation of the decades-long injustices and marginalisation suffered by FCT Original Inhabitants. Section 297(2) of the 1999 Constitution as amended states that the “ownership of all lands comprised in the Federal Capital Territory shall vest in the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,” but the same constitution is silent about the people who were existing on the land before the coming of the capital. Many FCT original inhabitants have interpreted the silence about their existence in the entire constitution to mean that there were no pre-existing indigenous populations in the area before the acquisition of the lands in the territory by the government.

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These sections of the nation’s grundnorm, which have been variously described as “satanic” by FCT Original Inhabitants activists collectively deny Original Inhabitants the kind of sub-national representation, that Nigerians in other states enjoy. The reality of the Original Inhabitants in the FCT is further worsened by the lack of robust representation in the core structures of governance, responsible for service delivery. The Minister of the FCT for instance is an appointee of the President. In the absence of any rule compelling the President to appoint a representative from the Original Inhabitants, political considerations are mostly prioritized, leading to the exclusion of the indigenes of the city. Unlike other citizens of Nigeria in various states who have the right to vote in a Governor and a State House of Assembly, the FCT Original Inhabitants have been denied such by the Constitution.

Sadly, decades of calls to reform this constitutional lacuna have been ignored. Rights activists have thus implicated these constitutional gaps as being responsible for the neglect, poverty, and deprivation apparent in the Original Inhabitants communities, located in the backwaters, which are not too far from the beautiful Abuja City Centre.

Many of such communities cannot boast of potable water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities. In these Original Inhabitants communities also, education facilities are few and decrepit health facilities, making them susceptible to outbreaks of various preventable diseases.

Attempts by Original Inhabitants in the FCT to take advantage of the rule of law to advance their rights have been repudiated. This is largely due to the culture of impunity and disrespect for the rule of law, which pervades Nigeria’s national space. For instance, despite the unwavering commitment, that FCT Original Inhabitants have demonstrated to upholding peaceful, lawful and non-violence in their search for justice, the Nigerian authorities have always frustrated and undermined these efforts. It has become so bad that even judicial verdicts handed down by courts of competent jurisdictions have been simply ignored by successive governments. It is against this background that human rights groups have called on the government to listen to the cries of FCT Original Inhabitants and ensure their issues are addressed.

One of such groups is the Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education, which has been working with support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to build the organisational program and financial management capacity of FCT Original Inhabitants Organisations. The project is aimed at addressing the decades-long injustices, marginalization and exclusion suffered by the Original Inhabitants in the FCT since the relocation of Nigeria’s capital from Lagos to Abuja by virtue of Decree No 6 of 1976. With the support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, CHRICED has been supporting Original Inhabitant groups to develop initiatives to address pressing political, socio-economic, and cultural challenges facing them, foster opportunities for engagement with policymakers, and advocate reforms to promote inclusion, equity, and equality for the Original Inhabitants in FCT.

An important aspect of the two-year project is the urgent need to internationalise the stories and struggles of FCT Original Inhabitants. It is pertinent to state that despite the over four decades of marginalisation, exclusion and repression suffered by FCT Original Inhabitants, since their ancestral lands were taken over to make way for the Nigerian capital, not many within and outside the shores of Nigeria know about their plight and struggles. And because there is little knowledge and awareness about the injustices suffered by the Original Inhabitants, there is a dearth of initiatives to support them in seeking redress.

Subsequently, the lack of awareness about the plight of FCT Original Inhabitants is also apparent at the continental level, where Nigeria projects itself as a giant. At the regional level, the issue of the injustice done to Original Inhabitants of the FCT has similarly received scant and perfunctory attention. The result is that there have been no broad continental activities to connect the issues confronting the FCT Original Inhabitants to the struggles of other indigenous peoples on the African continent. The ongoing project of Promoting the Rights of the Original Inhabitants in the FCT seeks to make the issue a subject of international conversation. This way, the authorities in Nigeria may be influenced to bring an end to the paradox of a people who made enormous sacrifices for the unity of Nigeria, becoming refugees in their ancestral lands.

Indigenous Struggles in Africa: Case of FCT-Abuja Original Inhabitants¹⁷



August 12, 2022 | Isiyaku Ahmed

Being the full text of the welcome statement by Comrade Dr. Ibrahim M. Zikirullahi, Executive Director, Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED) at the One-Day Africa Regional Conference to Commemorate the United Nations International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples, held on Tuesday, August 9, 2022, at the CHIDA Event Centre Jabi, FCT Abuja.

Protocols

The Director, Africa Office of the MacArthur Foundation, Your Royal Highnesses, FCT Original Inhabitant groups and organizations, distinguished resource persons, fellow CSOs participants, invited guests, ladies, and gentlemen of the Press.

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to this Africa Regional Conference on indigenous rights, with a focus on the rights of the Original Inhabitants (OIs) of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. This conference is one of the activities organized by the Cohort working on the project of Promoting the Rights of Original Inhabitants in the Federal Capital Territory to commemorate the annual August 9 observance of the United Nations International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples.

It is pertinent to note that despite the over four decades of marginalization, exclusion, and subjugation that FCT Original Inhabitants have endured since their ancestral lands were expropriated to make way for the Nigerian capital, few Nigerians and foreigners are aware of their plight, and struggles. Due to the lack of knowledge and awareness regarding the injustices suffered by the Original Inhabitants, there is a paucity of initiatives to assist them in seeking redress.

Consequently, the lack of awareness regarding the plight of the Original Inhabitants is also evident at the continental level, where Nigeria positions itself as a giant. Regionally, the issue of the injustice committed against the Original Inhabitants of the FCT has also received scant and superficial attention. This results in a lack of coordinated efforts to raise awareness about their plight. Therefore, there have been no broad continental activities connecting the problems facing the FCT Original Inhabitants to those of other indigenous peoples on the African continent.

This is the context in which the project of Promoting the Rights of the FCT's Original Inhabitants was conceived. The project aims to address the decades-long injustices, marginalization, and exclusion suffered by the Original Inhabitants of the FCT since the relocation of Nigeria's capital from Lagos to Abuja under Decree No. 6 of 1976. The Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED), with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, has been supporting Original Inhabitant groups to develop initiatives to address pressing political, socio-economic, and cultural challenges facing them, and to foster opportunities for engagement with policymakers, and advocate reforms to promote inclusion, equity, and equality for the Original Inhabitants in FCT.

How Original Inhabitants in the FCT can advance their struggles and interests in accordance with the rule of law, justice, and respect for their citizenship rights is a crucial aspect of this project. This Regional Conference and its theme, therefore, present numerous opportunities in this regard. Since similar indigenous struggles exist in other parts of the African continent, the Cohort working on this project deemed it necessary to hear directly from scholars and practitioners from other African nations.

CHRICED and members of this project Cohort are quite optimistic that by sharing experiences and comparing notes with our brothers and sisters from other parts of Africa, the organizations being supported will be able to tap into the treasure trove of experience and expertise available across the continent in order to advocate for justice with regard to the issues facing FCT Original Inhabitants in a sustainable and effective manner.

^[17] <https://stalliontimes.com/2022/08/12/indigenous-struggles-in-africa-case-of-fct-abuja-original-inhabitants/>

Consequently, while we look forward to hearing the valuable insights and perspectives of our distinguished scholars, we recognize as a group that there are a number of anomalies that have hampered the search for justice for marginalized groups such as the FCT Original Inhabitants. One example is the pervasive culture of impunity and disregard for the rule of law in Nigeria.

For example, despite FCT Original Inhabitants' unwavering commitment to upholding peaceful, lawful, and non-violent means of seeking justice, Nigerian authorities have consistently frustrated and undermined these efforts. It has gotten so bad that even judicial verdicts issued by competent courts have been simply ignored by successive governments.

Without preempting our learned resource persons' perspectives, let me state that this Regional Conference provides an opportunity to reflect on similar experiences from other parts of the continent. In the face of the many adversities that FCT OIs have faced, we believe that the least we can do as a cohort is to inform the rest of the world that it is unfair and unjust that a people who made enormous sacrifices to provide Nigeria with its "acclaimed centre of unity" should no longer be treated as second class citizens in the land where they trace their origins.



To ensure that this message is heard, we need as many voices of reason and courage as we can find across our country, continent, and globe.

One of the unique qualities of the FCT Original Inhabitants is the fact that they have always relied on peaceful, and lawful approaches to get their voices heard. For this reason alone, they ought to get a listening ear. I look forward to the vibrant perspectives of this Regional Conference that would contribute to the search for justice by FCT Original Inhabitants.

At this juncture distinguished participants, let me express our unreserved thanks to the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation for its support of Original Inhabitants through CHRICED. When the history of the long and tortuous struggle of the FCT Original Inhabitants for justice and inclusion is written, the magnanimity of the MacArthur Foundation would be a prominent part of that story.

We have brought seasoned scholars and practitioners to do justice to the three major topics we identified. The Keynote on "**Key Issues Affecting FCT Original Inhabitants: Travails and the Quest for Social Justice**" will be delivered by **Prof. Oshita Oshita**, former Director General of Nigeria's National Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), with a demonstrated history of teaching and working in the research, academic and civil society spheres. A Chevening Scholar, Skilled in Conflict Resolution, Mediation, Nonprofit Organizations, Program

Evaluation, Public Speaking, International Relations, Conflict-Sensitive Planning, and Mainstreaming of Peace building in Development Programming. He is currently the Executive Director of the Ubuntu Centre for Africa Peace Building and Development (UCAP).

The second presentation on "**Building Resilience, Fostering Recovery: African Indigenous Struggle for Social Justice**" will be addressed by **Dr. Quinter Akinyi Onyango, University of Free States, South Africa**. Quinter is a dynamic, passionate, and innovative internationalization and communication practitioner with over 8 years of experience in international education, partnership, marketing and communication, and international student life support services. She is a global citizen, that believes in people's diversity as a source of strength to be valued and built on.

Prof. Emily Choge Kerama of the Religious and Philosophy Dept, Moi University, Kenya will take us through "**The Role of African Indigenous Women in the Preservation and Transmission of Traditional Knowledge**". Emily is a Professor and Chair of Postgraduate Studies in Theology at Moi University, Kenya. She is also a patron of Moi University Disability Club and a motivational speaker to various schools and colleges. She earned her PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary.

To the rest of the invited participants, I would like to thank you for honoring our invitation, and I do hope that what promises to be a lively discussion at this conference will enhance our understanding of the issues affecting the FCT-Abuja Original Inhabitants, as well as other indigenous peoples in the African continent, and provide suggestions for addressing them.

Finally, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the **John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation** for their assistance in making this conference a reality. Without their support and commitment, we would not be here today. Thank you for the rapt attention.

Trouble looms as Abuja aborigines blow hot¹⁸



August 13, 2022 | Adewale Adeoye

Caught in the complex web of a burgeoning city, indigenous peoples of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja speak on their fears and aspirations in a land they had occupied for close to a thousand years but are now faced with threats of extinction. ADEWALE ADEOYE, who was on a week-long visit to Abuja indigenous communities, reports...

Our lives matter.'

Idris Adamu, a cab driver from Jigawa State, who took the reporter to the event, whispered his fears in thick Hausa accent: 'I hof (hope) this fefu (people) are not trying to chase us away.' Musa Ndua, a Bassa of indigenous extraction who overheard him, shot back: 'We are not asking you people in Abuja to go. We are the original owners of this land. We have fought for 40 years for recognition, no one listens. We want integration. Our civilisation, our values, our tradition, our humanity are being destroyed.' Adamu returned a dry, conspiratorial grin, hopped into his cab and zoomed off even as another cab operator honked, shouting 'Abuja is no man's land'; the common cliché that is distasteful to Bassa, Dibo, Ganagana, Egbira, Gwandara, Gade, Koro, Anwanwa and Gwarri indigenous peoples whose forefathers had lived in the FCT since the 12th Century. Their population is more than 15 million. The Gbwari alone are about 5.8 million people in the FCT and beyond.

The ancestral owners of the FCT land under the aegis of Original People Inhabitants seized the August 9 window offered by the United Nations International Day of Indigenous Peoples to reassert themselves collectively as a people being squeezed by the spiralling Abuja industrial and commercial grandeur

On that Monday, for the first time in a long history spanning centuries, the cries of marginalised indigenous peoples of the FCT echoed from the deep valley. It was the week the UN had proclaimed as the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, coined for the first time in 1994 following global outcries of several indigenous peoples across the globe who had called global attention to the threats they face.

The nine ethnic nationalities that own the FCT say that their land, their cultures, their traditional knowledge and even their spirituality have been trampled or even thrown into the trash bin in the face of onslaught of civilisation, economic upbeat and the invasion of their land by capital and the prowess of multinationals. The people list lack of statehood, denial of access to opportunities, occupation of ancestral shrines, threat of extinction of their languages and outright display of arrogance by land occupiers who, for decades, continue to magnify the 'Abuja is No man's land' slogan.

Aba Ahmed from Koro, in a chat with our correspondent, said he was 15 in 1976 when the Nigerian military government announced the transfer of the seat of power from Lagos to Abuja. He recalled that his parents and thousands of the indigenous peoples were invited and asked one question almost at gun point: 'Do you want to stay on this land or you want to be evacuated?' He said frightened by blistering gun nozzles, the majority of the people said they would wish to leave the land their forebears had treasured for centuries. The landless people then moved to neighbouring states where they rented apartments with their families. Ahmed said the military branded those among them who said they would stay on the land as rebels.

"There is no land that is ungoverned. Abuja belongs to some people. We have been cultivating the land since 1300s. The land is ours. We need to be recognised as a people," Lazarus Nyanolo who holds a PhD and official of FCT Original Inhabitants and Secretary, Garki Chiefdom told our correspondent, his eyes cloudy with suppressed tears.

"We have been patient enough. Our land sits on billions of money but our indigenous communities have no good roads, no water, no electricity and no access to opportunities. They should not wait until we start to block all entries into Abuja before they listen to us," Suleiman Usman, an Ebira with stern eyeballs, told our correspondent.

On Monday, our correspondent visited some of the ancestral homelands. In Kubwa, Paska, Dutse, Dankoru, Kute and several rural communities, poverty is etched on the face of the land. In some communities a mushroom of mud huts dot the landscape.

^[18] <https://thenationonline.net/trouble-looms-as-abuja-aborigines-blow-hot/>

Excited but ignorant children ran helter-skelter, some half naked, some in pampers; nearby, women tender domestic animals while some prepared food in ramshackle makeshifts.

In general, the visitor is confronted with extremely poor population that eke out a living in the most difficult ways: no access to electricity, bad roads, limited land for cultivation and lack of access to potable water. Most residents rely on the dwindling forest for their livelihood, including their source of wealth. But close by is a chain of sky rise buildings and the opulence associated with Abuja.

Living a hair's breadth away from the wealth and power of Abuja, the original inhabitants are enveloped in penury. One aged woman said any time she visited Abuja city centre, she felt like someone who had been raped and robbed in daylight. They talk of compensation, but they gave nothing or at best peanuts. They forced thousands of people away from their lands," she said in a ghostly voice that fits her old and fragile physique.

She said the Federal Government sometimes paid like N30,000 only for the crops on plots of land owned by indigenous people while the same land would be sold to someone else at about N30 million. She said when the FG paid stipends as compensation in 1976 there were few educated people among the indigenous peoples. But that today, those children of yesterday are now highly educated and are desperate to deconstruct the historical injustice.

In those rural communities, from distance, daily locals are enraged watching the beautiful, electrified Abuja skylines, dotted with reflections of energy, beauty and affluence.

It was partly the tempestuous condition that drew the conference organised by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education, (CHRICED) with the support of MacArthur Foundation in collaboration with FCT Original Inhabitants, a coalition of groups from the nine ethnic groups that traditionally own the land Abuja now stretch her vast wings. The event drew indigenous peoples and other stakeholders who gathered together for constructive engagement on the plight of indigenous peoples of the FCT. The conference extended to an African regional meeting held on Tuesday with participants from several African countries and representatives of the diplomatic communities.

Some of the resource persons were Dr Quinter Akinyi Onyango of the University of Free States, South Africa; Prof Emily Choge of Religious and Philosophy Department, Moi University, Kenya; Prof Ismail Adegboyega Ibraheem, Director of International Relations, Partnerships and Prospects, University of Lagos; Prof Oshita O. Oshita, Executive Director, Ubuntu Centre for Africa Peace Building and Development, (UCAP) in Abuja among many others.

Speaking at the conference, His Royal Highness Alhaji Ismaila Danladi Mohammed, said the government should engage the people for a peaceful resolution of the lingering problem. The Etsu Kwari said: "They took the land, took our sacred places and left us naked." Another youth told the audience which included top government officials: "If you think you are enjoying today without our recognition, you are murdering sleep." He said the culture and civilisations of the people have been lost to the fleeting time and to them, the illusion of splendour occasioned by the overwhelming infrastructure in the FCT mostly do not add value to the economic conditions of largely poor and vulnerable indigenous peoples in the FCT.

A woman leader in the community said Aso Rock, the seat of power, was one of the sacred places taken away by government. She said: "We told them Aso Rock is our spirituality. If they don't return it to us, there will never be peace in Aso Rock." She said some of the sacred traditional groove taken from the people included a spiritual site where the spirits of the dead were invoked from the ancient times.

CHRICED's Executive Director, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, said his group and international partners want to promote dialogue, peace and justice. He said: "This is the first time in history that we have come together to speak about the tribulations of indigenous peoples of the FCT as a united front." He said part of the reasons for the conference was to initiate robust discussions for a peaceful resolution of the problems.

A traditional ruler said the indigenous peoples are neglected and treated as second class citizens right in their ancestral homelands. "It is excruciatingly painful that the original inhabitants who made enormous sacrifices to give Nigeria its centre of unity have been rendered stateless and left to wallow in despair and regret," he lamented.

The representative of MacArthur Foundation, Dr Kole Shettima, said it is the first of its kind in the history of the community that a regional conversation around indigenous issues would be held.

"We are guests of this place. We have been thinking of how we can be good guests to our people," he said.

Another representative of the traditional chiefs in the FCT said: "The indigenous people are very peaceful. We are saying give us our right." He said in other countries like Germany, Brazil where the capital cities were moved, adequate compensation was paid while inclusion was a policy. Indigenous peoples claim over ancestral land is a global phenomenon. This compelled the UN on July 28 to adopt the process of dealing with the problem.

In 1993, following the recommendation of the World Conference on Human Rights, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the International Decade of Indigenous peoples (1995-2004). The UN described the indigenous peoples as “holders of unique languages, knowledge systems and beliefs and possess invaluable knowledge for sustainable development.” In some countries, lack of government intervention has led to armed uprising against the state.

Abdulkareem Tijani, who leads a civil society promoting indigenous rights, said: “Though certain things are being done, much needed to be done.” The traditional rulers of Gbware said: “We cannot do anything that will destabilise Nigeria. We will not do it. We just want the government to listen to us. “We are like fatherless children. You have become our parents. Please hold us. We need to be considered as the real indigenous people. “We must have our full rights.” He said when the rest of the country elects state governors, Abuja indigenous people go to sleep. They are also denied statehood by virtue of the legal requirements that one must have a state of origin to be gainfully employed or to gain admission into higher schools.

“Our people are compelled to claim Nassarawa, Kogi, Kwara and other states to be included where states of origin is required for opportunities since Abuja is not a state,” he lamented. Section 263 of the 1979 Constitution says that the FCT will be treated like a state, but that only exists on paper. He said the whole country is keeping quiet in the face of bottled up stinging bees that can force their way out at any time. He said the various governments have broken promises.

A representative of the Environmental Rights Action (ERA), Chimma Williams, said “the situation of indigenous people in Abuja is induced and forced displacement. It is not acceptable.” Nyanolo said he was born and brought up in Garki Village. “I entered secondary school in 1976 when the FCT was created. “Let me correct the impression that there were no towns created here. Aguda Panel said it was a virgin land, but we had lived here, cultivated the land, which means the land was not virgin. “We are not Nigerians. The constitution says to be a Nigerian, you must come from a state, but the FCT is not a state. “When land is taken away from you, it means everything on earth has been taken away.”

One participant said the law in FCT says “we do not have the right to allocate our land to our children. When you refuse us, whether you like it or not, we will take it by force unless we are all killed so that the land can become virgin.” Nyanolo said the FCT by land mass is more than Bayelsa and Lagos. “So why should we have only one senator? “Some states have 20 people in the House of Reps but we have only two.

How can they lobby over 360 lawmakers? “We as a people are being administered as a ministry. Are we indigenes of a ministry? “When others are electing their governors, we are busy sleeping, disenfranchised.”

He said his people went to court that they should be represented at the Federal Executive Council (FEC) up to the Supreme Court, adding that his people won but the FG failed to comply. “The land we own is being reallocated to us. They valued what we planted 1000 metres at N30,000. Someone from somewhere who got the land will sell it for N30 million.”



The challenge came in 1976 when the then Gen. Murtala Mohammed administration wanted to move the federal capital away from Lagos. A panel was set up, led by Justice Akinola Aguda. Other members of the panel were social critic Dr Tai Solarin, Col. Monsignor Pedro Martins, Prof O.K Ogan, Prof. Ajato Gandonu, Alhaji Mohammed Musa Isma and Chief Owen Fiebai.

The committee suggested some 30 cities including Ile-Ife, Makurdi, Okene, Osara, Kafanchan, Agege, Agena, Auchu and Abuja. Some of the considerations for choosing Abuja were security, excess land, low population, soil, ethnic accord, health, climate and centrality. It was thought that Lagos was identified with only one group, the Yoruba; a situation considered as a “threat to national unity.”

At the FCT, an official who did not wish to be named told our correspondent that the authority was looking into the grievances of the indigenous people. “We are aware of some of the challenges. They cannot say compensation has not been paid. They can only say it may not be enough,” he said.

After the conference, the indigenous people expressed support for peaceful means of expressing their grievances to local and international authorities while urging the Nigerian government to meet her international obligations like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) where member states affirm that before developments take place in indigenous communities, the people must have ‘free, prior and informed consent’ among other things. Some challenges: The indigenous people are yet to develop their alphabets while many of their cultures have been eroded through contact with bigger ethnic groups in the FCT. Nyanolo said it was not a problem, adding that his people are already developing their alphabets. In February next year, the indigenous people also hope to mark, for the first time, their Heritage Day.

Nyanola was right when he said while some of the older generation are appealing for calm the youths are boiling with anger. Saliu Idris, 25, a Nupe who came from Warri where he grew up, said his father told him the family lost over 1,000 acres to the FCT. He is a graduate but has no job and watches cars in Warri. He appears to sum up indigenous youths' lack of trust in government's various promises. He said: "Bros, we are tired."

Informed about Federal Government's plans to address the problem, he took off his fez cap in a dramatic response: "Bros, wicked people no dey change. Winch (Witch) no dey get mercy."

But Zikirillahi said his group will work with the Nigerian government and international partners to ensure justice is done in the shortest time possible to avoid breeding a rebellious movement in the FCT at a time the authorities are almost dazed with terrorists threats in Abuja, once Nigeria's safest city.

Nigeria should join the fight against injustice to us – Abuja Inhabitants¹⁹



Scan to watch the video



Echoes from the Valley²⁰



August 13, 2022 | Adewale Adeoye

Abuja city centre wore a new, strange face last Monday morning, a day soaked with dew, following a thunderous rainfall the previous night. At the old parade ground adjacent the Army Headquarters, a mammoth crowd of indigenous people thronged the park, adorned in ancient costume; traditional worshipers and local herbsmen with all the paraphernalia of ancient warriors came. Masquerades in different form and shape took over the space as passersby watched with a mix of awe and admiration. One banner spoke their mission: 'We are indigenous owners of land in FCT. We can't breathe. Our lives matter.'

Idris Adamu, a cab driver from Jigawa state who took the reporter to the event whispered his fears-a thick Hausa accent: 'I hof (hope) this fefu (people) are not trying to chase us away.' Musa Ndua, a Bassa of indigenous extraction who overheard him shot back: 'We are not asking you people in Abuja to go. We are the original owners of this land. We have fought for 40 years for recognition, no one listens. We want integration. Our civilisation, our values, our tradition, our humanity are being destroyed.' Adamu returned a dry, conspiratorial grin, hopped into his cab and zoomed off even as another cab operator honked, shouting 'Abuja is no man's land' the common cliché that is distasteful to Bassa, Dibo, Ganagana, Egbira, Gwandara, Gade, Koro, Anwanwa and Gwarri indigenous peoples whose forefathers had lived in the FCT since the 12th century. Their population is more than 15million. The Gbwari alone are some 5.8m people in FCT and beyond.

^[19] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYlyvrOTdMU>

^[20] <https://saharareporters.com/2022/08/15/echoes-valley>

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On that Monday, for the first time in a long history spanning centuries, the cries of marginalised indigenous peoples of the FCT echoed from the deep valley. It was the week the UN had proclaimed as the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, coined for the first time in 1994 following global outcries of several indigenous peoples across the globe who had called global attention to the threats they face.

The nine ethnic nationalities that own the FCT say that their land, their cultures, their traditional knowledge and even their spirituality have been trampled or even thrown into the thrashbin in the face of onslaught of civilisation, economic upbeat and the invasion of their land by capital and the prowess of multinationals. The people list lack of statehood, denial of access to opportunities, occupation of ancestral shrines, threat of extinction of their languages and outright display of arrogance by land occupiers who, for decades, continue to magnify the 'Abuja is No man's land' slogan.

Aba Ahmed, from Koro in a chat with our correspondent said he was 15 in 1976 when the Nigerian military government announced the transfer of the seat of power from Lagos to Abuja. He recalled his parents and thousands of the indigenous peoples were invited and asked one question almost at gun point: 'Did you want to stay on this land or you want to be evacuated?'. He said frightened by blistering gun nozzles, the majority of the people said they would wish to leave the land their forebears had treasured for centuries. The landless people move to neighbouring states where they rented apartments with their families. He said the military categorised those who said they would stay on the land as rebels. 'There is no land that is ungoverned. Abuja belongs to some people. We have been cultivating the land since 1300s. The land is ours. We need to be recognised as a people,' Lazarus Nyanolo who holds a Phd and official of FCT Original Inhabitants and Secretary, Garki Chiefdom told our correspondent, his eyes cloudy with suppressed tears.

As a matter of fact, many youths from the communities who spoke to our correspondent said the issue at hand is like a molten magma, waiting to erupt. 'We have been patient enough. Our land sits on billions of money, but our indigenous communities have no good roads, no water, no electricity and no access to opportunities. They should not wait until we start to block all entries into Abuja before they listen to us,' Suleiman Usman, an Epira with stern eyeballs, told our correspondent.

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Living an eye blink away from wealth and power of Abuja, the original inhabitants are enveloped in penury. One aged woman said anytime she visited Abuja city centre, she felt like someone who had been raped and robbed in daylight. 'They talk of compensation, but they gave nothing or at best peanuts. They forced thousands of people from their land,' she said in a ghostly voice that fits her old and fragile physique. She said the Federal Government sometimes paid like N30,000 only for the crops on plots of land owned by indigenous people while the same land would be sold to someone else at about N30million. She said when the FG paid stipends as compensation in 1976, there were few educated people among the indigenous peoples but that today, those children of yesterday are now highly educated and are desperate to deconstruct the historical injustice. In those rural communities, from distance, daily locals are enraged watching the beautiful, electrified Abuja skylines, dotted with reflections of energy, beauty and affluence.

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The representative of MacArthur Foundation Dr Kole Shettima said it is the first of its kind in the history of the community that a regional conversation around indigenous issues would be held. 'We are guests of this place. We have been thinking of how we can be good guests to our people' he said. Another representative of the traditional chiefs in the FCT said 'The indigenous people are very peaceful. We are saying give us our right.' He said in other countries like Germany, Brazil where the capital cities were moved, adequate compensation was paid while inclusion was a policy,' a Chief and participant said.

Indigenous peoples claim over ancestral land is a global phenomenon. This compelled the UN on July 28 to adopt the process of dealing with the problem. The 1993, following the recommendation of the World Conference on Human Rights, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the International Decade of Indigenous peoples (1995-2004). The UN described the indigenous peoples as 'holders of unique languages, knowledge systems and beliefs and possess invaluable knowledge for sustainable development.' In some countries, lack of government intervention has led to armed uprising against the state.

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'The land we own is being reallocated to us. They valued what we plant 1000 metres at 30,000naira. Someone from somewhere who got the land will sell it for 30million naira.' The challenge came in 1976 when the then Gen Murtala Mohammed administration wanted to move the capital from Lagos. A panel was set up led by Justice Akinola Aguda. Other members of the panel were critic, Dr Tai Solarin, Col Monsignor Pedro Martins, Prof O.K Ogan, Prof Ajato Gandonu, Alhaj Mohammed Musa Isma and Chief Owen Fiebai. The committee suggested some 30 cities including Ile Ife, Makurdi, Okene, Osara, Kafanchan, Agege, Akena, Auchu and Abuja. Some of the considerations for choosing Abuja were security, excess land, low population, soil, ethnic accord, health, climate and centrality. It was only thought that Lagos as identified with only one group, the Yoruba, a situation considered 'as a threat to national unity.'

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Nyanola was right when he said while some of the older generation are appealing for calm, the youths are boiling with anger. Saliu Idris, 25, a Nupe who came from Warri where he grew up said his father told him the family lost over 1000 acres to the FCT. He is a graduate but has no job and watches cars in Warri. He appears to sum up indigenous youths lack of trust in government various promises. He said 'Bros, we are tired.' When informed about FG plans to address the problem, he took off his face cap in a dramatic response

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Dance, dialogue as FCT original inhabitants mark UN Indigenous Day²¹



August 14, 2022 | Armsfree Ajanaku

For Original Inhabitants of Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, the first two weeks of August have turned out to be very eventful. The days were packed with diverse activities, which promoted their cultures while inspiring reflection on what to do about the historic injustices they have faced for over four decades. The rallying point for these activities was the UN International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples, which is observed annually on August 9. The UN system uses the day to celebrate the achievement of indigenous peoples all over the world, just as it galvanises governments and societies to take action to address the injustices they face.

From discussions around land justice to insightful updates about the preservation of indigenous knowledge, this particular UN Day offered a time for the world to calmly reflect on the most pressing challenges facing indigenous populations. In the context of Nigeria, FCT Original Inhabitants have been identified as one of the indigenous peoples, whose plights have just begun to attract the attention of stakeholders. So what exactly is the story or struggle of the Original Inhabitants in the Nigerian capital, and why have their cries for justice been muffled all these years? Leading experts on the issue insist that to understand the plight of the Original Inhabitants in the FCT, interlocutors must embark on an excursion back to the contemporary history of Nigeria.

^[21] <https://guardian.ng/art/dance-dialogue-as-fct-original-inhabitants-mark-un-indigenous-day/>

The travails of the FCT Original Inhabitants, the experts reckon, began when Nigeria decided to relocate its capital from Lagos. The megacity was already bursting at its seams due to overpopulation, the crime rate was high and there were frequent disagreements between the federal and state authorities over space.

After a long search, the Akinola Aguda Panel, which was set up by the government recommended the current space occupied by the FCT as the most suitable location. Many Original Inhabitants lament that the genesis of their challenges was the assertion in the Aguda Panel report, which implied that the area to be taken over was a virgin land with no indigenous population. They say this marked the start of the marginalisation, exclusion and oppression they have had to endure right in their own ancestral lands

As things stand, the vast majority of FCT Original Inhabitants have not been compensated for the takeover of their lands, nor have they been properly resettled as promised by the government when it decided to take over their lands. As things stand, FCT Original Inhabitants have not only been made landless; they have also been made stateless in the sense that they technically belong to none of the 36 states of the country.

Unlike Nigerians in the 36 states who have governors, Houses of Assembly and a vast array of other institutions, Original Inhabitants only have six Area Councils thereby limiting their political participation. For these marginalised citizens, the situation is worsened by the fact that attempts they have made to use the law courts to correct these anomalies have been undermined by the government. Several court decisions in favour of FCT Original Inhabitants have simply been ignored by the government.

It is against this backdrop of historic anguish and pains over feelings of unjust treatment by the Nigerian State that FCT Original Inhabitants observed the UN International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples.

Despite what they described as the demoralising realities they have experienced over the years, Original Inhabitants in the FCT used the buildup events and the day itself to restate their calls for justice, fairness and equity. The various events themed around the world indigenous day also offered an opportunity for stakeholders involved in the struggle for the rights of Original Inhabitants in the FCT to go down memory lane, encourage the inhabitants and admonish them on the need to continue on the path of peace and nonviolence in advocating for the authorities to respect their rights. In the face of their adversities, the silver lining, which appears to have rekindled the hopes of the indigenous peoples in the Nigerian capital is the project titled; Promoting the Rights of the Original Inhabitants in the FCT.

Launched in August 2021, the project has started the process of raising awareness about the plight of FCT's Original Inhabitants by building their capacity for self-led advocacies around their political, economic and cultural rights. Using the cohort approach, the project has awarded sub-grants and is providing technical assistance to 10 FCT Original Inhabitants organisations to enable them to advocate to the authorities with a view to redressing the current and historic injustices being experienced by the indigenous peoples of the capital. It is the project cohort, which galvanised other FCT community groups to make the events themed around UN Day a resounding affirmation of the right of Original Inhabitants as citizens of Nigeria.

On Saturday, August 6, a National Stakeholders Dialogue was convened with the theme; Building Resilience, Fostering Recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants and the Struggle for Social Justice. Setting the tone for the dialogue, CHRICED Executive Director, Comrade Ibrahim M. Zikirullahi flayed what he described as the paradoxical situation of the Original Inhabitants, whose lands were parceled out by virtue of Decree 6 of 1976 to make room for Nigeria's capital.

He said: "It is unjust that these people who gave Nigeria the space for its capital are being neglected and treated as second-class citizens, right in their ancestral homelands. It is excruciatingly painful that the Original Inhabitants who made enormous sacrifices to give Nigeria its centre of unity have been rendered stateless and left to wallow in despair and regret.

A visit to Original Inhabitant communities, just a few hours drive away from the façade of the supposedly beautiful Abuja City Centre, would reveal the sordid underbelly of the deprivation the people are subjected to."

On his part, 2022 winner of the Goldman Prize for the Environment, Barrister Chima Williams who gave the keynote speech at the event encouraged FCT indigenous peoples to continue on the path of non-violence, just as he called on the Federal Government to ensure justice is done on the issue.

The other notable activities to mark include the Grand Cultural Rally of the Original Inhabitants, which was held at the old parade ground where various cultural troupes thrilled the hundreds of spectators in attendance with traditional dances of the nine FCT indigenous tribes.

The commemoration rounded off on Tuesday, August 9, with an Africa Regional Conference. The conference received paper presentations from experts from other parts of the African continent, where similar experiences of indigenous peoples like those in the FCT could be shared.

Keynote speaker at the regional conference, Professor Oshita Oshita of the Ubuntu Centre for Africa Peace Building and Development counselled the Original Inhabitants to unite and keep up the good fight. According to the renowned peace and conflict scholar, struggles like the one the Original Inhabitants were involved were long and tortuous.

Professor Oshita however assured the indigenes that they will triumph because their cause is a just one. The conference also took presentations from Dr Quinter Akinyi Onyango of the University of Free States, South Africa and from Professor Emily Choge of Moi University in Kenya. The commemoration closed on a lively note with a dinner amidst optimism that sooner or later, justice will come the way of the long-suffering indigenous peoples of the Nigerian capital

INDEPENDENT

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Address Exclusion of Abuja Indigenous People without Delay, Stakeholders tell FG²²



August 14, 2022 | Oluseyi Taiwo-Qquntu

Civil society groups from Nigeria and across Africa and ancestral peoples of the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT) have expressed deep concern over what they consider as the continues socio-economic exclusion of indigenous peoples in Abuja. The Civil Society groups expressed the concern at the Abuja old park, at an event to mark the United Nations World Day of Indigenous peoples. They said the situation is a time bomb that should be addressed without delay. In a communiqué issued at the end of the programme which was organized by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civil Education, (CHRICED) and the MacArthur Foundation, the indigenous people insisted that their land taken away represent

the most significant historical injustice they suffer. There are nine indigenous ethnic groups in the FCT namely the Gbwari, Koro, Bassa, Ebira, Ganagana, Nupe, Gade, Gwandara and Dibo. Since 1976 when the Nigerian Capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja, the original owners of the land claimed that have been subjected to all forms of socio-cultural repression. They said peanuts were paid to them which do not meet up to the worth of their land.

In a communiqué issued at the end of the National stakeholders' dialogue on Rights of Original inhabitants of FCT and signed by Dr. Ibrahim Zikirullahi and leaders of several civil society groups the stakeholders said the bottled up anger of indigenous peoples in the FCT should be addressed to avoid possible outbursts. The conference theme was 'Building Resilience, Fostering Recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants and the Struggle for Social Justice'. The stakeholders said indigenous peoples are distinguished by their ancestral land, their distinct language, culture and time honoured values which are treasured and have been preserved for centuries. They noted that in Nigeria, the rights of indigenous peoples in the FCT are a major challenge in the search for sustainable development, peace and stability.

The stakeholders in the communiqué said "we are aware that the Original Peoples of the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT) are indigenous to their territories, their ancestral land which they have lived for centuries. That they own the land; the land is their livelihood, their dignity and pride; they have cultivated the land which is their greatest material and spiritual assets. That the indigenous peoples in the FCT are about nine with their own culture and civilisations that continue to face existential threats from various dimensions.

Participants noted that in 1976, the history of Original People of FCT was deconstructed with the movement of the Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja by the military government.

The movement led to dramatic changes in the sociology, the land ownership, control and management effected through the military Decree 6, all of which affect the past, present and future of FCT indigenous peoples; "That indigenous peoples in FCT are recognised by their own history and values backed by international instruments including but not limited to International Convention in Indigenous Peoples, the ILO Convention 168 all of which emphasise the protection of indigenous peoples including their intellectual and cultural property". On December 23, 1994, the UN General Assembly resolution 49/214 adopted the International Day of Indigenous Peoples to address the fears over ancestral land and associated lost resources.

^[22] <https://independent.ng/address-exclusion-of-abuja-indigenous-people-without-delay-stakeholders-tell-fg/#>

The communiqué said that the FCT 1976 Decree 06 has affected the history, spirituality, indigenous knowledge, environment, culture, civilisations and heritage of indigenous peoples of the FCT. “That indigenous peoples in the FCT have been consistently denied their right to land and capacity to own property in a territory that historically belongs to them. Other forms of discrimination and exclusion manifest through denial of access to ancestral land, lack of economic, political, cultural opportunities and identities, denial of statehood, denial of access to utilities like health, quality education and job opportunities’ they said.

The conference was attended by traditional rulers from the various kingdoms, Government Officials, Civil Society Organisations, (CSOs), Executive Director, CHRICED, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, the media, labour, peasants, several representatives of indigenous peoples Environmental Rights Action, (ERA), Prof A B Ahmed of the Faculty of Law, Bayero University, Executive Director, Centre for Transparency and Accountability, (CTA), HRH Alhaji Ismaila Danladi Mohammed, Journalists for Democratic Rights, (JODER), and the members of the FCT Original Inhabitant Association.



Stakeholders task FG on Exclusion of Abuja Indigenous People²³



August 14, 2022 | Bola Badmus

As Nigeria joins the rest of the world to mark the United Nations (UN) World Day of Indigenous Peoples, Civil Society groups from the country and across Africa as well as the ancestral peoples of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have expressed deep concern over what they considered as the continued socio-economic exclusion of indigenous peoples in Abuja, urging the Federal Government to address the situation without delay. There are nine indigenous ethnic groups in the FCT namely: the Gbwari, Koro, Bassa, Ebira,

Ganagana, Nupe, Gade, Gwandara and Dibo. Hundreds of stakeholders who, at the weekend gathered at the Abuja Old Park to celebrate the August 09 event, expressed this concern, describing the situation as a time bomb that should be addressed without delay to avoid possible outburst.

The event was celebrated with a regional conference, themed: “Building Resilience, Fostering Recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants And the Struggle for Social Justice,” a workshop and a day dedicated to the promotion of indigenous heritage, to showcase the culture of their people, even as they insisted that their land taken away represented the most significant historical injustice they suffered.

The conference organized by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civil Education, (CHRICED) and the MacArthur Foundation, also had in attendance traditional rulers from the various kingdoms, government officials, Executive Director, CHRICED, Mr Ibrahim Zikirullahi; the media, labour, peasants and several representatives of indigenous peoples Environmental Rights Action (ERA). The Indigenous people, in making the demand, lamented that they had been subjected to all forms of socio-cultural repression since 1976 when the Nigerian Capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja. In a communiqué issued at the end of the National Stakeholders Dialogue titled: “Rights of Original Inhabitants of FCT,” and signed by Dr. Ibrahim Zikirullahi and leaders of several civil society groups, they demanded that the bottled up anger of indigenous peoples in the FCT should be addressed to avoid possible outbursts.

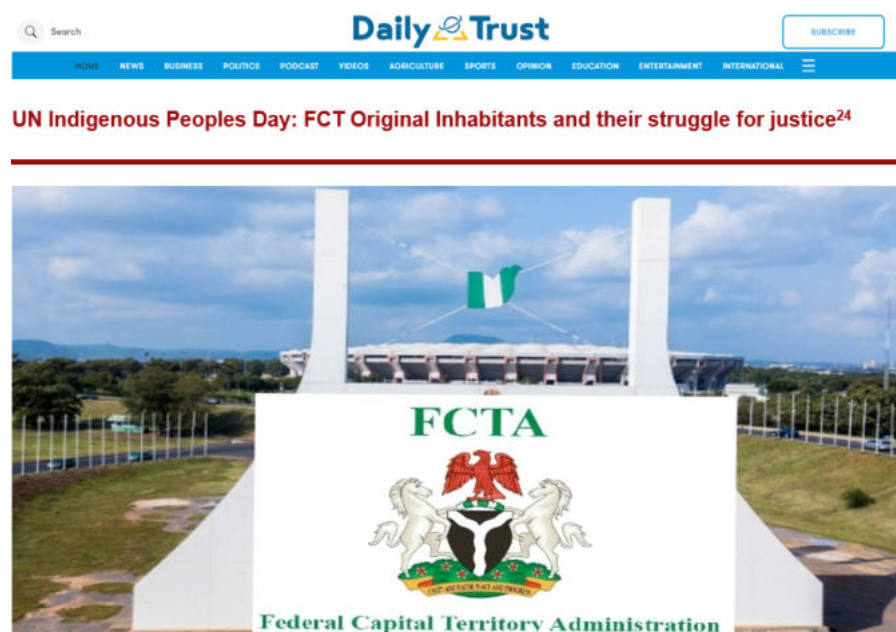
The stakeholders said indigenous peoples were distinguished by their ancestral land, their distinct language, culture and time-honoured values which, which, according to them, were treasured and has been preserved for centuries. This was just as they noted that in Nigeria, the rights of indigenous peoples in the FCT were a major challenge in the search for sustainable development, peace and stability.

“We are aware that the Original Peoples of the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT) are indigenous to their territories, their ancestral land which they have lived for centuries; That they own the land; the land is their livelihood, their dignity and pride; they have cultivated the land which is their greatest material and spiritual assets; That the indigenous peoples in the FCT are about nine with their own culture and civilisations that continue to face existential threats from various dimensions; That in 1976, the history of Original People of FCT was deconstructed with the movement of the Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja by the military government. The movement led to dramatic changes in the sociology, the land ownership, control and management effected through the military Decree 6, all of which affect the past, present and future of FCT indigenous peoples; That indigenous peoples in FCT are recognised by their own history

^[23] <https://tribuneonlineng.com/stakeholders-task-fg-on-exclusion-of-abuja-indigenous-peoples/>

and values backed by international instruments including but not limited to International Convention in Indigenous Peoples, the ILO Convention 168 all of which emphasise the protection of indigenous peoples including their intellectual and cultural property,” the communiqué stated.

Others that attended the event were Prof. A B Ahmed of the Faculty of Law, Bayero University; Executive Director, Centre for Transparency and Accountability (CTA); HRH Alhaji Ismaila Danladi Mohammed, Journalists for Democratic Rights, (JODER), and the members of the FCT Original Inhabitant Association. It would be recalled that on December 23, 1994, the UN General Assembly Resolution 49/214 adopted the International Day of Indigenous Peoples to address the fears over ancestral land and associated lost resources.



August 14, 2022 | Armsfree Ajanaku

August 9 every year is observed by the United Nations as the International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples. The Day is observed to celebrate the achievements of indigenous peoples around the world and highlight their struggles, as well as what governments, and societies can do to address the plights of these marginalized peoples. For Nigeria, the commemoration of the 2022 UN International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples holds a lot of significance, especially in the face of rising outcry from the Original Inhabitants in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The indigenous peoples in the space occupied by the Nigerian capital have continued to agonise about what they have variously described as the injustice they have suffered in the hands of the Nigerian State. Although the theme of this year's UN Indigenous Day celebration

focuses on the role of indigenous women in the transmission of local knowledge, Original Inhabitants in the FCT at different convening to mark the day have also tried to focus the narrative on the broader historic injustices, marginalization, and exclusion which have been a part of their experiences.

Since being made to part with their lands to make way for Nigeria's capital city over four decades ago, FCT Original Inhabitants insist that their human rights have been consistently trampled upon, just as promises made to them have not been fulfilled, over forty years after. One of the promises made by the then Supreme Military Council headed by the Head of State, late General Murtala Mohammed in 1976 was that following the acquisition of their lands, Original Inhabitants would be resettled outside the territory at government's expense. Many FCT Original Inhabitants have expressed disappointment that those lofty promises have not been fulfilled, just as they have accused the government of unjustly abandoning them to live in penury after the compulsory acquisition of their lands without compensation. FCT Original Inhabitants have equally agonised over how the government's failure to fulfil its' side of the bargain has left them landlessness, statelessness, and excluded from the commanding heights of decision making in the country.

In the first place, having taken over the lands in the territory without compensation, and with no robust efforts at resettling them, FCT Original Inhabitants have condemned the government for rendering them economically prostrate. They have similarly stressed that being deprived of their prime lands without any prior and informed consent has also had a devastating effect on their cultural treasures and repositories. The 1999 Constitution as amended has also been implicated as one of the major sources of enabling the perpetuation of the decades-long injustices and marginalisation suffered by FCT Original Inhabitants. Section 297(2) of the 1999 Constitution as amended states that the "Ownership of all lands comprised in the Federal Capital Territory shall vest in the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria," but the same constitution is silent about the people who were existing on the land before the coming of the capital. Many FCT Original Inhabitants have interpreted the silence about their existence in the entire constitution to mean that there were no pre-existing indigenous population in the area before the acquisition of the lands in the territory by the government.

Section 299 in the eyes of FCT Original Inhabitants goes on to add insult to injury by stating that the "provisions of this Constitution shall apply to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja as if it were one of the States of the Federation; and accordingly (a) all the legislative powers, the executive powers and the judicial powers vested in the House of Assembly, the Governor of a State and in the courts of a State shall, respectively vest in the National Assembly, the President of the Federation and the courts which by virtue of the foregoing

^[24] <https://dailytrust.com/un-indigenous-peoples-day-between-fct-original-inhabitants-and-struggle-for-justice/>

provisions are courts established for the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.” These sections of the nation’s grundnorm, which have been variously described as “satanic” by FCT Original Inhabitants activists collectively deny Original Inhabitants the kind of sub-national representation, which Nigerians in other states enjoy.

The reality of the Original Inhabitants in the FCT is further worsened by the lack of robust representation in the core structures of governance, responsible for service delivery. The Minister of the FCT for instance is an appointee of the President. In the absence of any rule compelling the President to appoint a representative from the Original Inhabitants, political considerations are mostly prioritized, leading to the exclusion of the indigenes of the city.

Unlike other citizens of Nigeria in various states who have the right to vote in a Governor and a State House of Assembly, the FCT Original Inhabitants have been denied such by the Constitution. Sadly, decades of calls to reform this constitutional lacuna have been ignored. Rights activists have thus implicated these constitutional gaps as being responsible for the neglect, poverty, and deprivation apparent in the Original Inhabitants communities, located in the backwaters, which are not too far from the beautiful Abuja City Centre.

Many of such communities cannot boast of potable water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities. In these Original Inhabitants communities also, education facilities are few and decrepit health facilities, making them susceptible to outbreak of various preventable diseases. Attempts by Original Inhabitants in the FCT to take advantage of the rule of law to advance their rights have been repudiated. This is largely due to the culture of impunity and disrespect for the rule of law, which pervades Nigeria’s national space. For instance, despite the unwavering commitment, which FCT Original Inhabitants have demonstrated to upholding peaceful, lawful and non-violence in their search for justice, the Nigerian authorities have always frustrated and undermined these efforts.

It has become so bad that even judicial verdicts handed down by courts of competent jurisdictions have been simply ignored by successive governments. It is against this background that human rights groups have called on the government to listen to the cries of... The lack of awareness about the plight of FCT Original Inhabitants is also apparent at the continental level, where Nigeria projects itself as a giant. At the regional level, the issue of the injustice done to Original Inhabitants of the FCT has similarly received scant and perfunctory attention. The result is that there have been no broad continental activities to connect the issues confronting the FCT Original Inhabitants to the struggles of other indigenous peoples on the African continent. The ongoing project of Promoting the Rights of the Original Inhabitants in the FCT seeks to make the issue a subject of international conversation. This way, the authorities in Nigeria may be influenced to bring an end to the paradox of a people who made enormous sacrifices for the unity of Nigeria, becoming refugees in their ancestral lands.



August 15, 2022 | Seye Olumide

Civil society groups across Nigeria, Africa and ancestral people of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have called on the Federal Government to urgently address the alleged socio-economic exclusion of indigenous people in Abuja. Rising from a conference, organised by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civil Education (CHRICED) and MacArthur Foundation, to mark the United Nations World Day of Indigenous Peoples entitled: ‘Building resilience, fostering recovery: FCT original inhabitants and the struggle for social justice’ in Abuja, the stakeholders said the continued “exclusion of Abuja indigenous people is a time bomb that should be addressed without delay.”

In a communiqué issued at the end of the national stakeholders’ dialogue on rights of original inhabitants of FCT and signed by Dr. Ibrahim Zikirullahi and leaders of several civil society groups, the stakeholders said the bottled-up anger of the locals should be addressed to check potential outbursts. They said indigenous peoples are distinguished by their ancestral land, distinct language, culture and time-honoured values treasured and preserved for centuries.

The participants pointed out that in Nigeria, the rights of indigenous peoples in the FCT remain a major challenge in the search for sustainable development, peace and stability. While recognising other ethnic groups like Hausa and Fulani, who are in Abuja and have been there for several decades, the stakeholders explained that they are not asking them to leave, but to work with the other indigenous ethnic groups for peace and stability in the FCT.

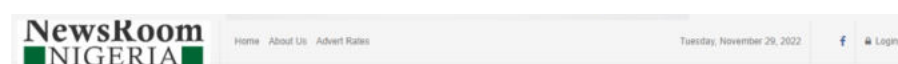
The communiqué reads in part: “We are aware that the original peoples of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) are indigenous to their territories and ancestral land which they have lived for centuries.

^[24] <https://dailytrust.com/un-indigenous-peoples-day-between-fct-original-inhabitants-and-struggle-for-justice/>

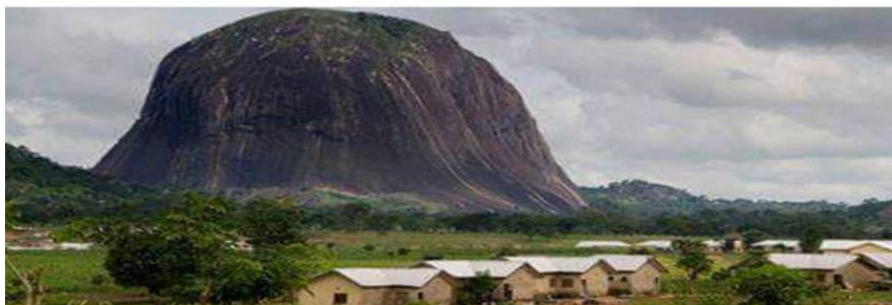
That they own the land, the land is their livelihood, dignity and pride. They have cultivated the land, which is their greatest material and spiritual asset. “That the indigenous peoples in the FCT are about nine with their own culture and civilisations that continue to face existential threats from various dimensions.”

The document observed that in 1976, the history of the original people of FCT was deconstructed with the relocation of the federal capital from Lagos to Abuja by the then military government. They stressed that the development led to dramatic changes in the sociology, land ownership, control and management effected through the military Decree 6, all of which affected the past, present and future of FCT indigenous people.

The communiqué also expressed displeasure over the way Abuja indigenes have been “consistently denied their right to land and capacity to own property in a territory that historically belongs to them.” It added: “Other forms of discrimination and exclusion manifest through denial of access to ancestral land, lack of economic, political, cultural opportunities and identities, denial of statehood, denial of access to utilities like health, quality education and job opportunities.”



Abuja aborigines demand recognition, lament loss of land, culture²⁶



August 15, 2022 |

The nine indigenous peoples who own the ancestral land speaking under the coalition, FCT Original Inhabitants said since 1976 when the Federal Capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja, the indigenous peoples have been subjected to cultural, economic and political exclusion. President Muhammadu Buhari and the National Assembly have been asked to put in place the legal framework that will lead to the recognition and integration of indigenous peoples in the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT). The indigenous peoples also plan to engage the various Presidential aspirants to ask them what they have in stock for them.

The nine indigenous peoples who own the ancestral land speaking under the coalition, FCT Original Inhabitants said since 1976 when the Federal Capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja, the indigenous peoples have been subjected to cultural, economic and political exclusion. The representatives of Bassa, Koro, Ebira, Gbwari, Ganagana, Nupe and other indigenous peoples spoke at the event marking of the United Nations World Indigenous Peoples organised by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civil Education, (CHRICED), Original Inhabitants With Disabilities Multipurpose Cooperative Society, (FCT), other civil society groups with the support of MacArthur Foundation. The event was attended by experts from across Nigeria and abroad. ‘We call on President Muhammadu Buhari, the National Assembly and the Federal Capital Development Authority, (FCT) to listen to our cries. We have been neglected by various governments. It is time to pay attention to the needs of the indigenous peoples in Abuja’, the participants stated in the communiqué issued at the three-day event.

The conference was convened to keep stakeholders abreast of the socio-economic and cultural issues affecting the Original Peoples of the FCT. Attended by over 100 people, traditional rulers, Government Officials, the media, labour, peasants, several representatives of indigenous peoples, Diplomats including but not limited to association of Original Inhabitants, Environmental Rights Action, (ERA), Green Peoples Environmental Network, (GREPNET), FCT Original Inhabitant and Secretary, Garki Chiefdom among many others.

The communiqué signed by the Executive Director, CHRICED, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, Dr Lazarus Nyalolo of the FCT Original Inhabitants, Journalists for Democratic Rights, (JODER) and many other leaders of rights groups said indigenous peoples are distinguished by their ancestral land, their distinct language, culture and time honoured values which are treasured and have been preserved for centuries. ‘Aware that the Original Peoples of the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT) are indigenous to their territories, their ancestral land which they have lived for centuries. That they own the land; the land is their livelihood, their dignity and pride. They have cultivated the land which is their greatest material and spiritual assets’ the participants said.

They observed that in 1976, the history of Original People of FCT was deconstructed with the movement of the Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja by the military government. The movement led to dramatic changes in the sociology, the land ownership, control and management effected through the military Decree 6, all of which affect the past, present and future of FCT indigenous peoples’ they said. They noted further that the indigenous peoples in the FCT are nine ethnic groups with their own culture and civilisations that continue to face existential threats from various dimensions.

^[26] <https://www.newsroomnigeria.com/abuja-aborigines-demand-recognition-lament-loss-of-land-culture/>

Some of the recommendations at the end of the event sent to stakeholders including the National Assembly are that the rights of indigenous people in the FCT should be viewed in the context of the National Question which demands immediate resolution; 'The original peoples of the FCT should be integrated into local and National framework of economic, political and social development. Participants resolved to develop a National Network of Indigenous Peoples with a plan of action driven by peaceful demands for the resolution of areas that undermine the rights of indigenous peoples in the FCT and in Nigeria; They said that the indigenous peoples want integration and not resettlement and call for corporate responsibility on the part of the Government and other economic stakeholders on indigenous territories Participants called on the Nigerian Government to return all occupied Spiritual sites or pay compensation where necessary.

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UN Indigenous Peoples Day: FCT Original Inhabitants and their struggle for justice²⁷



August 12, 2022 | Armsfree Ajanaku

August 9 every year is observed by the United Nations as the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The Day is observed to celebrate the achievements of indigenous peoples around the world and highlight their struggles, as well as what governments, and societies can do to address the plights of these marginalized peoples. For Nigeria, the commemoration of the 2022 UN International Day of World's Indigenous Peoples holds a lot of significance, especially in the face of rising outcry from the Original Inhabitants in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The indigenous peoples in the space occupied by the Nigerian capital have continued to agonise about what they have variously described as

the injustice they have suffered in the hands of the Nigerian State. Although the theme of this year's UN Indigenous Day celebration focuses on the role of indigenous women in the transmission of local knowledge, Original Inhabitants in the FCT at different convening to mark the day have also tried to focus the narrative on the broader historic injustices, marginalization, and exclusion which have been a part of their experiences. Since being made to part with their lands to make way for Nigeria's capital city over four decades ago, FCT Original Inhabitants insist that their human rights have been consistently trampled upon, just as promises made to them have not been fulfilled, over forty years after. One of the promises made by the then Supreme Military Council headed by the Head of State, late General Murtala Mohammed in 1976 was that following the acquisition of their lands, Original Inhabitants would be resettled outside the territory at government's expense.

Many FCT Original Inhabitants have expressed disappointment that those lofty promises have not been fulfilled, just as they have accused the government of unjustly abandoning them to live in penury after the compulsory acquisition of their lands without compensation. FCT Original Inhabitants have equally agonised over how the government's failure to fulfil its' side of the bargain has left them landlessness, statelessness, and excluded from the commanding heights of decision making in the country. In the first place, having taken over the lands in the territory without compensation, and with no robust efforts at resettling them, FCT Original Inhabitants have condemned the government for rendering them economically prostrate. They have similarly stressed that being deprived of their prime lands without any prior and informed consent has also had a devastating effect on their cultural treasures and repositories.

The 1999 Constitution as amended has also been implicated as one of the major sources of enabling the perpetuation of the decades-long injustices and marginalisation suffered by FCT Original Inhabitants. Section 297(2) of the 1999 Constitution as amended states that the "ownership of all lands comprised in the Federal Capital Territory shall vest in the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria," but the same constitution is silent about the people who were existing on the land before the coming of the capital. Many FCT Original Inhabitants have interpreted the silence about their existence in the entire constitution to mean that there were no pre-existing indigenous population in the area before the acquisition of the lands in the territory by the government.

Section 299 in the eyes of FCT Original Inhabitants goes on to add insult to injury by stating that the "provisions of this Constitution shall apply to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja as if it were one of the States of the Federation; and accordingly (a) all the legislative powers, the executive powers and the judicial powers vested in the

^[27] <https://www.blueprint.ng/un-indigenous-peoples-day-fct-original-inhabitants-and-their-struggle-for-justice/>

House of Assembly, the Governor of a State and in the courts of a State shall, respectively vest in the National Assembly, the President of the Federation and the courts which by virtue of the foregoing provisions are courts established for the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.”

These sections of the nation’s grundnorm, which have been variously described as “satanic” by FCT Original Inhabitants activists collectively, deny Original Inhabitants the kind of sub-national representation, which Nigerians in other states enjoy. The reality of the Original Inhabitants in the FCT is further worsened by the lack of robust representation in the core structures of governance, responsible for service delivery. The Minister of the FCT for instance is an appointee of the President. In the absence of any rule compelling the President to appoint a representative from the Original Inhabitants, political considerations are mostly prioritized, leading to the exclusion of the indigenes of the city. Unlike other citizens of Nigeria in various states who have the right to vote in a Governor and a State House of Assembly, the FCT Original Inhabitants have been denied such by the Constitution.

Sadly, decades of calls to reform this constitutional lacuna have been ignored. Rights activists have thus implicated these constitutional gaps as being responsible for the neglect, poverty, and deprivation apparent in the Original Inhabitants communities, located in the backwaters, which are not too far from the beautiful Abuja City Centre. Many of such communities cannot boast of potable water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities. In these Original Inhabitants communities also, education facilities are few and decrepit health facilities, making them susceptible to outbreak of various preventable diseases.

Attempts by Original Inhabitants in the FCT to take advantage of the rule of law to advance their rights have been repudiated. This is largely due to the culture of impunity and disrespect for the rule of law, which pervades Nigeria’s national space. For instance, despite the unwavering commitment, which FCT Original Inhabitants have demonstrated to upholding peaceful, lawful and non-violence in their search for justice, the Nigerian authorities have always frustrated and undermined these efforts. It has become so bad that even judicial verdicts handed down by courts of competent jurisdictions have been simply ignored by successive governments. It is against this background that human rights groups have called on the government to listen to the cries of FCT Original Inhabitants and ensure their issues are addressed.

One of such groups is the Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED), which has been working with support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to build the organisational program and financial management capacity of FCT

Original Inhabitants Organisations. The project is aimed at addressing the decades-long injustices, marginalization and exclusion suffered by the Original Inhabitants in the FCT since the relocation of Nigeria’s capital from Lagos to Abuja by virtue of Decree No 6 of 1976. With the support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, CHRICED has been supporting Original Inhabitant groups to develop initiatives to address pressing political, socio-economic, and cultural challenges facing them, foster opportunities for engagement with policymakers, and advocate reforms to promote inclusion, equity, and equality for the Original Inhabitants in FCT.

An important aspect of the two-year project is the urgent need to internationalise the stories and struggles of FCT Original Inhabitants. It is pertinent to state that despite the over four decades of marginalisation, exclusion and repression suffered by FCT Original Inhabitants, since their ancestral lands were taken over to make way for the Nigerian capital, not many within and outside the shores of Nigeria know about their plight and struggles. And because there is little knowledge and awareness about the injustices suffered by the Original Inhabitants, there is a dearth of initiatives to support them in seeking redress.

Subsequently, the lack of awareness about the plight of FCT Original Inhabitants is also apparent at the continental level, where Nigeria projects itself as a giant. At the regional level, the issue of the injustice done to Original Inhabitants of the FCT has similarly received scant and perfunctory attention. The result is that there have been no broad continental activities to connect the issues confronting the FCT Original Inhabitants to the struggles of other indigenous peoples on the African continent. The ongoing project of promoting the Rights of the Original Inhabitants in the FCT seeks to make the issue a subject of international conversation. This way, the authorities in Nigeria may be influenced to bring an end to the paradox of a people who made enormous sacrifices for the unity of Nigeria, becoming refugees in their ancestral lands.

Abuja indigenous people ask Buhari, NASS for recognition, lament loss of ancestral land, culture²⁸



August 15, 2022 | Freedom Reporter

President Muhammadu Buhari and the National Assembly have been asked to put in place the legal framework that will lead to the recognition and integration of indigenous peoples in the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT). The indigenous peoples also plan to engage the various Presidential aspirants to ask them what they have in stock for them. The nine indigenous peoples who own the ancestral land speaking under the coalition, FCT Original Inhabitants said since 1976 when the Federal Capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja, the indigenous peoples have been subjected to cultural, economic and political exclusion. The representatives of Bassa, Koro, Ebira, Gbwari, Ganagana, Nupe and other indigenous peoples spoke at the event marking of the United Nations World Indigenous Peoples organised by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civil Education, (CHRICED), Original Inhabitants With Disabilities Multipurpose Cooperative Society, (FCT), other civil society groups with the support of MacArthur Foundation.

The event was attended by experts from across Nigeria and abroad. ‘We call on President Muhammadu Buhari, the National Assembly and the Federal Capital Development Authority, (FCT) to listen to our cries. We have been neglected by various governments. It is time to pay attention to the needs of the indigenous peoples in Abuja’, the participants stated in the communiqué issued at the three-day event.

The conference was convened to keep stakeholders abreast of the socio-economic and cultural issues affecting the Original Peoples of the FCT. Attended by over 100 people, traditional rulers,

Government Officials, the media, labour, peasants, several representatives of indigenous peoples, Diplomats including but not limited to association of Original Inhabitants, Environmental Rights Action, (ERA), Green Peoples Environmental Network, (GREPNET), FCT Original Inhabitant and Secretary, Garki Chiefdom among many others.

The communiqué signed by the Executive Director, CHRICED, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, Dr Lazarus Nyalolo of the FCT Original Inhabitants, Journalists for Democratic Rights, (JODER) and many other leaders of rights groups said indigenous peoples are distinguished by their ancestral land, their distinct language, culture and time honoured values which are treasured and have been preserved for centuries. ‘Aware that the Original Peoples of the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT) are indigenous to their territories, their ancestral land which they have lived for centuries. That they own the land; the land is their livelihood, their dignity and pride. They have cultivated the land which is their greatest material and spiritual assets’ the participants said.

They observed that in 1976, the history of Original People of FCT was deconstructed with the movement of the Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja by the military government. The movement led to dramatic changes in the sociology, the land ownership, control and management effected through the military Decree 6, all of which affect the past, present and future of FCT indigenous peoples’ they said. They noted further that the indigenous peoples in the FCT are nine ethnic groups with their own culture and civilisations that continue to face existential threats from various dimensions.

Some of the recommendations at the end of the event sent to stakeholders including the National Assembly are that the rights of indigenous people in the FCT should be viewed in the context of the National Question which demands immediate resolution; ‘The original peoples of the FCT should be integrated into local and National framework of economic, political and social development. Participants resolved to develop a National Network of Indigenous Peoples with a plan of action driven by peaceful demands for the resolution of grew areas that undermine the rights of indigenous peoples in the FCT and in Nigeria; They said that the indigenous peoples want integration and not resettlement and call for corporate responsibility on the part of the Government and other economic stakeholders on indigenous territories Participants called on the Nigerian Government to return all occupied Spiritual sites or pay compensation where necessary.

^[28] <https://freedomonline.com.ng/abuja-indigenous-people-ask-buhari-nass-for-recognition-lament-loss-of-ancestral-land-culture/>

Abuja indigenous people ask Buhari, National Assembly for recognition, lament loss of ancestral land, culture²⁹



August 15, 2022 |

President Muhammadu Buhari and the National Assembly should put in place a legal framework that will lead to the recognition and integration of indigenous peoples in the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT). The indigenous peoples also plan to engage the various presidential aspirants to ask them what they have in stock for them. This was part of the resolutions reached at an event marking the United Nations World Indigenous Peoples organised by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civil Education, (CHRICED), Original Inhabitants With Disabilities Multipurpose Cooperative Society, (FCT) and other civil society groups with the support of the MacArthur Foundation. The nine indigenous peoples who own the ancestral land, speaking under the coalition, FCT Original Inhabitants, said since 1976 when the Federal Capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja, the indigenous peoples have been subjected to cultural, economic and political exclusion. The representatives came from the Bassa, Koro, Ebira, Gbwari, Ganagana, Nupe and other indigenous peoples.

The event was attended by experts from across Nigeria and abroad. “We call on President Muhammadu Buhari, the National Assembly and the Federal Capital Development Authority, (FCT) to listen to our cries. We have been neglected by various governments. It is time to pay attention to the needs of the indigenous peoples in Abuja’, the participants stated in the communiqué issued at the three-day event. The conference was convened to keep stakeholders abreast of the socio-economic and cultural issues affecting the Original Peoples of the FCT. Attended by over 100

people, traditional rulers, Government Officials, the media, labour, peasants, several representatives of indigenous peoples, Diplomats including but not limited to association of Original Inhabitants, Environmental Rights Action, (ERA), Green Peoples Environmental Network, (GREPNET), FCT Original Inhabitant and Secretary, Garki Chiefdom among many others.

The communiqué, signed by the Executive Director of CHRICED, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, Dr Lazarus Nyalolo of the FCT Original Inhabitants, Journalists for Democratic Rights (JODER) and other leaders of rights groups, said indigenous peoples are distinguished by their ancestral land, their distinct language, culture and time honoured values which are treasured and have been preserved for centuries. Participants affirmed that the Original Peoples of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) are indigenous to their territories, their ancestral land which they have lived for centuries. That they own the land; the land is their livelihood, their dignity and pride. They have cultivated the land which is their greatest material and spiritual assets’the participants said.

They observed that in 1976, the history of Original People of FCT was deconstructed with the movement of the Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja by the military government. The movement led to dramatic changes in the sociology, the land ownership, control and management effected through the military Decree 6, all of which affect the past, present and future of FCT indigenous peoples’ they said. They noted further that the indigenous peoples in the FCT are nine ethnic groups with their own culture and civilisations that continue to face existential threats from various dimensions.

Some of the recommendations at the end of the event sent to stakeholders, including the National Assembly, are that the rights of indigenous people in the FCT should be viewed in the context of the National Question which demands immediate resolution; “The original peoples of the FCT should be integrated into local and National framework of economic, political and social development.” Participants resolved to develop a National Network of Indigenous Peoples with a plan of action driven by peaceful demands for the resolution of grew areas that undermine the rights of indigenous peoples in the FCT and in Nigeria; “They said that the indigenous peoples want integration and not resettlement and call for corporate responsibility on the part of the Government and other economic stakeholders on indigenous territories. “Participants called on the Nigerian Government to return all occupied Spiritual sites or pay compensation where necessary.”

^[29] <https://cityvoice.ng/abuja-indigenous-people-ask-buhari-national-assembly-for-recognition-lament-loss-of-ancestral-land-culture/>

Abuja Indigenes laments Loss of Ancestral Land, Culture, Demand recognition from President Buhari, NASS³⁰



August 15, 2022 | Akinwale Kasali

Indigenous People of the Federal Capital Territory, FCT, Abuja have demanded from President Muhammadu Buhari and the National Assembly to put in place a legal framework that will lead to the recognition and integration of its people. The indigenous peoples of the FCT have initiated plan to engage the various Presidential aspirants to ask them what they have in stock for them.

History has revealed that Nine indigenous peoples who own the ancestral land speaking under the coalition, FCT Original Inhabitants said since 1976 when the Federal Capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja, the indigenous peoples have been subjected to cultural, economic and political exclusion. The representatives of Bassa, Koro, Ebira, Gbwari, Ganagana, Nupe and other indigenous peoples who spoke at the event marking of the United Nations World Indigenous Peoples organised by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civil Education, (CHRICED), Original Inhabitants With Disabilities Multipurpose Cooperative Society, (FCT), other civil society groups with the support of MacArthur Foundation said there was need for them to be recognized by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The event was attended by experts from across Nigeria and abroad.

The Indigenous People of Abuja in a communique signed by Executive Director, CHRICED, Ibrahim Zikirullahi call on President Buhari, the National Assembly and the Federal Capital Development Authority, (FCT) to listen to its cries. “We have been neglected by various governments. It is time to pay attention to the needs of the indigenous peoples in Abuja”, the participants stated in the communique issued at the three-day event.

The conference was convened to keep stakeholders abreast of the socio-economic and cultural issues affecting the Original Peoples of the FCT, in which over 100 people, traditional rulers, Government Officials, the media, labour, peasants, several representatives of indigenous peoples, Diplomats including but not limited to association of Original Inhabitants, Environmental Rights Action, (ERA), Green Peoples Environmental Network, (GREPNET), FCT Original Inhabitant and Secretary, Garki Chiefdom among others.

Zikirullahi, Dr Lazarus Nyalolo of the FCT Original Inhabitants, Journalists for Democratic Rights, (JODER) and many other leaders of rights groups said indigenous peoples are distinguished by their ancestral land, their distinct language, culture and time honoured values which are treasured and have been preserved for centuries. “Aware that the Original Peoples of the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT) are indigenous to their territories, their ancestral land which they have lived for centuries. That they own the land; the land is their livelihood, their dignity and pride. They have cultivated the land which is their greatest material and spiritual assets”, the participants said.

They observed that in 1976, the history of Original People of FCT was deconstructed with the movement of the Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja by the military government. The movement led to dramatic changes in the sociology, the land ownership, control and management effected through the military Decree 6, all of which affect the past, present and future of FCT indigenous peoples’ they said. They noted further that the indigenous peoples in the FCT are nine ethnic groups with their own culture and civilisations that continue to face existential threats from various dimensions.

Some of the recommendations at the end of the event sent to stakeholders including the National Assembly are that the rights of indigenous people in the FCT should be viewed in the context of the National Question which demands immediate resolution;

“The original peoples of the FCT should be integrated into local and National framework of economic, political and social development. Participants resolved to develop a National Network of Indigenous Peoples with a plan of action driven by peaceful demands for the resolution of grew areas that undermine the rights of indigenous peoples in the FCT and in Nigeria”.

The indigenous peoples stated that they want integration and not resettlement and call for corporate responsibility on the part of the Government and other economic stakeholders on indigenous territories. It also called on the Nigerian Government to return all occupied Spiritual cites or pay compensation where necessary.

^[30] <https://www.thenewsstar.com.ng/2022/08/abuja-indigenes-laments-loss-of.html>

Buhari urged to appoint FCT indigenes into FEC³¹



August 15, 2022 | Jimoh Abbas

President Muhammadu Buhari has been urged to immediately appoint an indigene of the original inhabitants in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) into the Federal Executive Council (FEC).

This is contained in the communiqué of a week-long National Stakeholders Dialogue on Rights of Original Inhabitants in the FCT, held in Abuja, organised by the Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED), 10 Cohort of FCT Original Inhabitant Groups, and John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

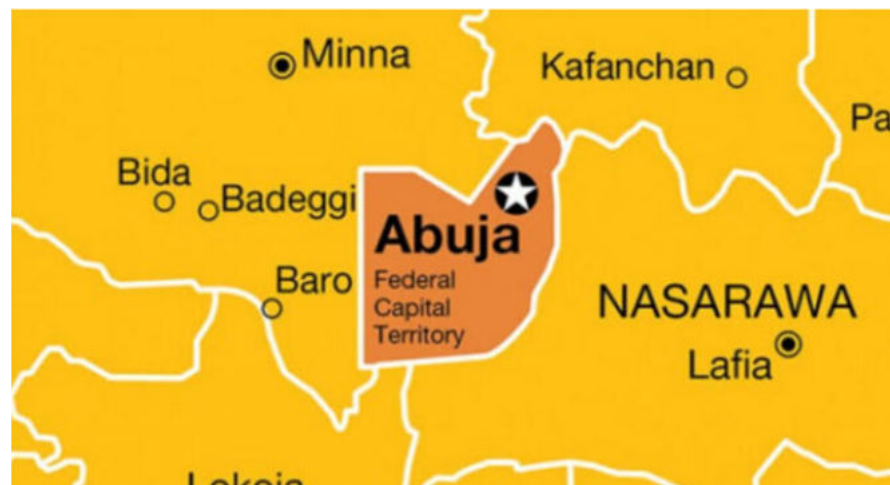
The event with the theme, 'Building Resilience, Fostering Recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants And the Struggle for Social Justice' was part of activities marking this year's United Nations (UN) International Day of World Indigenous Peoples celebrated every August 9.

The participants called on the government to return all occupied spiritual sites or pay compensation where necessary.

^[31] <https://dailytrust.com/buhari-urged-to-appoint-fct-indigenes-into-fec/>

^[32] <https://www.thecable.ng/fct-indigenes-lament-political-exclusion-seek-federal-integration-policy>

FCT indigenes lament political exclusion, seek federal integration policy³²



August 15, 2022 | Samuel Akpan

A group, identified as the 'FCT Original Inhabitants', has asked President Muhammadu Buhari and the national assembly to set up a framework that will lead to their "recognition and integration". Members of the group, who identified themselves as indigenes of the federal capital territory (FCT), spoke at an event jointly organised by the Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civil Education (CHRICED) and the Original Inhabitants with Disabilities Multipurpose Cooperative Society, to mark the 2022 international day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The International day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is celebrated every August 9.

According to a communiqué issued after the event and signed by Ibrahim Zikirullahi, executive director of CHRICED, Lazarus Nyalolo of the FCT Original Inhabitants, Journalists for Democratic Rights (JODER), among other stakeholders, the FCT indigenes said they have been subjected to "cultural, economic and political exclusion" since 1976 when Abuja was named the nation's capital. The indigenes, who represented Bassa, Koro, Ebira, Gbwari, Ganagana, Nupe and other communities, also said immediate actions should be taken to prevent the "existential threats" they are facing "from various dimensions". "We call on President

Muhammadu Buhari, the national assembly and the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCTA) to listen to our cries," the communiqué reads.

"We have been neglected by various governments. It is time to pay attention to the needs of the indigenous peoples in Abuja

“Aware that the Original Peoples of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) are indigenous to their territories, their ancestral land which they have lived for centuries. That they own the land; the land is their livelihood, their dignity and pride. They have cultivated the land which is their greatest material and spiritual asset.

“In 1976, the history of the original people of FCT was deconstructed with the movement of the federal capital from Lagos to Abuja by the military government. The movement led to dramatic changes in the sociology, the land ownership, control and management effected through the military decree 6, all of which affect the past, present and future of FCT indigenous peoples.

“The indigenous peoples in the FCT are nine ethnic groups with their own culture and civilisations that continue to face existential threats from various dimensions.”

In their recommendations to the presidency and the national assembly, the group said they want their rights to “be viewed in the context of the national question which demands immediate resolution”.

The original peoples of the FCT should be integrated into the local and national framework of economic, political and social development,” they added. They also resolved to develop a national network of indigenous peoples, which would focus on driving the “peaceful demands for the resolution of grey areas that undermine the rights of indigenous peoples in the FCT and in Nigeria”. The group also said FCT indigenes “want integration and not resettlement”, and urged the government “to return all occupied spiritual sites or pay compensation where necessary”.

In recent years, the indigenous inhabitants of the FCT have been protesting the alleged takeover of their ancestral lands for infrastructural purposes without getting adequate compensation.

Meanwhile, in January, a bill seeking to create a board to oversee the compensation and resettlement of indigenes in FCT passed second reading at the house of representatives.

Abuja Indigenous People ask Buhari, National Assembly for Recognition, lament loss of ancestral land, culture³³



August 18, 2022 |

President Muhammadu Buhari and the National Assembly have been asked to put in place the legal framework that will lead to the recognition and integration of indigenous peoples in the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT). The indigenous peoples also plan to engage the various Presidential aspirants to ask them what they have in stock for them. The nine indigenous peoples who own the ancestral land speaking under the coalition, FCT Original Inhabitants said since 1976 when the Federal Capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja, the indigenous peoples have been subjected to cultural, economic and political exclusion.

The representatives of Bassa, Koro, Ebira, Gbwari, Ganagana, Nupe and other indigenous peoples spoke at the event marking of the United Nations World Indigenous Peoples organised by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civil Education, (CHRICED), Original Inhabitants With Disabilities Multipurpose Cooperative Society, (FCT), other civil society groups with the support of MacArthur Foundation. The event was attended by experts from across Nigeria and abroad.

“We call on President Muhammadu Buhari, the National Assembly and the Federal Capital Development Authority, (FCT) to listen to our cries. We have been neglected by various governments. It is time to pay attention to the needs of the indigenous peoples in Abuja,” the participants stated in the communiqué issued at the three-day event. The conference was convened to keep stakeholders abreast of the socio-economic and cultural issues affecting the Original Peoples of the FCT.

Attended by over 100 people, traditional rulers, Government Officials, the media, labour, peasants, several representatives of

^[33] <https://pmexpressng.com/abuja-indigenous-people-ask-buhari-national-assembly-for-recognition-lament-loss-of-ancestral-land-culture/>

indigenous peoples, Diplomats including but not limited to association of Original Inhabitants, Environmental Rights Action, (ERA), Green Peoples Environmental Network, (GREPNET), FCT Original Inhabitant and Secretary, Garki Chieftdom among many others.

The communiqué signed by the Executive Director, CHRICED, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, Dr Lazarus Nyalolo of the FCT Original Inhabitants, Journalists for Democratic Rights, (JODER) and many other leaders of rights groups said indigenous peoples are distinguished by their ancestral land, their distinct language, culture and time honoured values which are treasured and have been preserved for centuries.

“Aware that the Original Peoples of the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT) are indigenous to their territories, their ancestral land which they have lived for centuries. That they own the land; the land is their livelihood, their dignity and pride. They have cultivated the land which is their greatest material and spiritual assets,” the participants said.

They observed that in 1976, the history of Original People of FCT was deconstructed with the movement of the Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja by the military government.

The movement led to dramatic changes in the sociology, the land ownership, control and management effected through the military Decree 6, all of which affect the past, present and future of FCT indigenous peoples.

They noted further that the indigenous peoples in the FCT are nine ethnic groups with their own culture and civilisations that continue to face existential threats from various dimensions.

Some of the recommendations at the end of the event sent to stakeholders including the National Assembly are that the rights of indigenous people in the FCT should be viewed in the context of the National Question which demands immediate resolution;

“The original peoples of the FCT should be integrated into local and National framework of economic, political and social development. Participants resolved to develop a National Network of Indigenous Peoples with a plan of action driven by peaceful demands for the resolution of grew areas that undermine the rights of indigenous peoples in the FCT and in Nigeria;

“They said that the indigenous peoples want integration and not resettlement and call for corporate responsibility on the part of the Government and other economic stakeholders on indigenous territories Participants called on the Nigerian Government to return all occupied Spiritual sites or pay compensation where necessary.

Abuja indigenous people and the ticking time bomb³⁴



August 19, 2022 | Adewale Adeoye

This August, President Muhammadu Buhari should at this moment, have an important memo on his table. The brief should be on the fear and trembling among nine indigenous peoples of Abuja, the seat of power. If he has none, then, some people are definitely not doing their job or are treating the President's authority with absolute contempt.

If Nigeria works effectively, the President should be having a memo telling him to take a number of actions on the boiling grievances of original inhabitants of the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT). He or his top officials could visit them or at least send a fact-finding mission to ascertain their grievances, which may soon find a violent outburst if nothing is done. But I doubt if this has happened. I doubt if it will ever happen, at least, not so soon, judging from the tradition of Nigerian authorities that are notorious for ignoring warning signals.

Let history be a witness: If the Federal Government does not address the growing concern of Abuja indigenous peoples, the ancestral owners of Nigeria's most honoured city, the government may not be able to sleep soundly in the nearest future. On August 9, 2022, I was a witness to their hues and cries, to their passion and to their bottled up disenchantment. They are alarmed that their history and civilisation flounder in their very eyes, a sordid scene they can no longer continue to watch in silence. Many times the youths have threatened to block all the Abuja highways, but are calmed by their elders.

They complain that in 1976, the military government asked them if they would wish to stay on the land or quit. Out of fear, many of them left their homeland. Those who stayed back, the leaders said, were given stipend. One leader said the government would pay

^[34] <https://guardian.ng/politics/abuja-indigenous-people-and-the-ticking-timebomb/>

some N5,000 for crops on a piece of land but sell the same plot for N50m. They are worried that their shrines, sacred groves and burial sites have been usurped. They said the Aso Rock and the location of the Abuja National Stadium used to be ancient territories for traditional worship.

At the Abuja old pack on August 9, the nine indigenous peoples came together for the first time through the Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education with the support of MacArthur Foundation.

I have always known about the indigenous people, who now refer themselves to as the Original Inhabitants of Abuja, but I honestly was ignorant of how rich their culture is and less aware of the level of deprivation and the seething rage and anger. On this day, myself with many visitors from across Nigeria and the world stood in awe as the indigenous people exhibited civilisations dating back to 1300s when their forebears first occupied today's FCT. Masquerades of different types and shape, drum men, locals with time ancient costume came out with ancient harp, lire and flute. It was the first time many of us were seeing Abuja in its raw, original. "Our history was deconstructed in 1976 by the Nigerian central government. Our children are asking questions. They are worried that their land have been taken away and their civilizations almost extinct" one of the participants, who was born in 1976 told me.

Overwhelmed by industrialisation, skysrise buildings, a rainbow of people from diverse culture, the original people are deeply troubled about what they now consider as the complete lost of their treasure and humanity. Some of the nine indigenous ethnic groups in Abuja are: Koro, Gbwari, Gade, Nupe, Gwandara, Dibo, Bassa and Epira. In 1976, the General Murtala Mohammed military administration issued Decree 6 that took away the Federal Capital to Abuja following the recommendation of the Justice Akinola Aguda Panel. The people under the FCT Original Inhabitants now argue that their history was deconstructed with the movement of the Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja. The movement led to dramatic changes in the sociology, land ownership, control and management. All over the world, indigenous peoples are recognised by their own history and values backed by international instruments like the International Convention on Indigenous Peoples, the ILO Convention 169 all of which emphasise the protection of indigenous peoples, including their intellectual and cultural property.

The UN, as far back as 1982 had started to affirm the rights of indigenous peoples following protests across the world. On December 23, 1994, the UN General Assembly resolution 49/214 adopted the International Day of Indigenous Peoples. Nigeria is a signatory. The UN went further to establish the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Peoples and the first decade of indigenous people in

1995. The Forum encourages leaders of indigenous peoples all over the world to meet at the UN where their address world leaders using their native languages. I was the West African Regional Secretary of International Alliance on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the Tropical Forest, (IAITPTF) based in Chiangmai, Thailand and have had the privilege to attend the Forum at the UN Headquarter in New York and also their regional meetings in Europe and South East Asia.

The UN describes the indigenous peoples as "holders of unique languages, knowledge systems and beliefs and posses invaluable knowledge for sustainable management." UNESCO says there are 4,000 to 5,000 of the 6,000 languages in the world spoken by indigenous peoples. The UN also classified them as those "having historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that have developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories or parts of them. They form at present non dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ethnic identity as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system."

Nigeria should not only meet her international obligations, it should domesticate the various international conventions that will strengthen the indigenous communities in Abuja, protect their culture, include them in the political and economic development processes, so as to avoid upheaval and outburst of the growing social discontent. This may include the FCT allocating, for a start, five percent of its yearly budget to the education, health, cultural preservation of indigenous peoples of Abuja."

It will mean giving them access to political and economic opportunities on their land, which they had held for centuries only to be taken over by the whirlwind of our own concept of civilisation, which annul the identities of the original owners of the land. The Federal Government should also immediately open up a window for constructive engagement to address all grievances before it is too late.

Cut off from ancestors, FCT indigenes want compensation for desecrated graves³⁵



August 27, 2022 | Ihuoma Chiedozie

OFFICIALLY, it is known as Apo Hill. But for the indigenous community whose forefathers lived in the area before the creation of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) – the Gbagyis of Garki Chiefdom – it is Garki Hill. And, for the natives, amidst other rocky hills that dot the landscape of the FCT, Garki Hill sticks out like a painful sore thumb. And the pain will not go away.

A frown appeared on the Palace Secretary, Lazarus Nyaholo's face as he glanced in the direction of Garki Hill, looming in the background, during an interview with The ICIR at the palace of the Sa'peyi – the Chief of Garki. For the people of Garki Chiefdom, one of the major communities of original inhabitants in the FCT, the Garki Hill is not only a cultural and spiritual heritage, but the wide, expansive hill also spotlights the marginalisation and deprivation that had been the lot of the original-inhabitant population of Abuja, Nigeria's capital territory.

Over the years Garki Hill served as a final resting place for Garki chiefs – according to the natives, 16 Sa'peyis were buried on the hill. Also, in previous times, they took their children up the mountain during some major cultural events. The hill was a pilgrimage site for the natives. But things are no longer the same.

Separated from the roots Nyaholo, palace secretary of the Garki Chiefdom, explained how the fortunes of the hill and the Garki indigenous community took a different turn following an action taken by the Nigerian government through the Ministry of the Federal Capital Territory Administration (MFCTA), the ministry that oversees the FCT.

“Garki Chiefdom has had 17 chiefs out of which 16 were buried on that (Garki) hill. Annually we used to have some cultural events during which we take our young ones up the hill and tell them the history of the community. The hill is our cultural heritage. It is the abode of our ancestors because 16 kings are buried on top of that hill. Even as we speak when a king dies we will do ceremonies and take his body to the top of that hill for burial. But because the part of the hill from where we used to have access to the top of the hill has been allocated to Hot FM (a radio station) to mount its transmission equipment, we no longer have access to the hill. We can no longer climb up there because that area has been blocked by Hot FM,” Nyaholo said.

The indigenous people were not consulted before the allocation was made. That is the case in all land allocations made by the FCT authorities, in line with the law which recognises the territory as ‘no man's land’. “We only noticed that construction work was going on on the hill and when we asked, we were told that the government allocated the place to the radio station,” Nyaholo added. The indigenes protested. It was an exercise in futility.

It is bad enough for the natives that the presence of Hot FM has made it impossible to access the hill. The situation is made more unbearable by the activities of the radio station. “If you listen to Hot FM they will say they are broadcasting from Apo Hill because that hill happened to fall within the FCT demarcation of Apo District. But in actual fact it is not Apo Hill, it is Garki Hill,” the palace scribe said, “Our heritage is being buried.” It is against the backdrop of the situation with Garki Hill that the FCT original inhabitants are now demanding compensation from the government and individual developers for the ‘desecration and destruction of their heritage.

Shuaibu Espata, District Head of Ake community in Kuje Chiefdom, under the Kuje Area Council of the FCT, in an interview with The ICIR, said the natives are asking for compensation for the desecration and destruction of the graves of their forefathers and other departed family members when they are forced to vacate their ancestral lands to make room for development of the FCT.

“We are relocated from our ancestral lands, leaving the graves of our forefathers and family members behind and they will now be destroyed. The desecration and destruction of our graves is a big issue which deserves huge compensation but they don't pay any compensation for that. They don't consider the heritage that is destroyed,” Espata said.

Serah Tukurah, an indigenous advocate, said the government should have taken note of “heritage sites” of original inhabitants in the conception of the FCT. The sites, if properly managed, could have served as tourist sites, attracting revenue for the government.

^[35] <https://www.icirnigeria.org/cut-off-from-ancestors-fct-indigenes-want-compensation-for-desecrated-graves/>



Serah Tukurah, indigenous advocate “The impression that Abuja had no history, and that there were no cultures and civilisation here before the creation of the FCT is wrong and unjust,” Tukura told **The ICIR**.

The management of Hot FM did not respond officially to the issues raised by the natives. Senior staff of the media organisation did not speak on the record. But a management staff, who pleaded anonymity, told The ICIR that the “ownership of the land” is not in doubt.

Faulty foundation

The present situation of Garki Hill illustrates the story of forced displacement that had been their lot since their ancestral habitation was designated as Nigeria’s capital in 1976. The FCT was formed from parts of the old Kwara, Niger, and Plateau states. The bulk of the landmass was carved out of the old Niger State.

Nyaholo told **The ICIR** that the marginalisation of the original inhabitants was a result of the faulty foundation of the FCT project. The FCT was created upon the promulgation of Decree Number 6 of 1976. The need for a new capital city followed the realisation that Lagos, hitherto Nigeria’s capital, had become congested with little or no space for expansion. Decree 6 of 1976 gave the Federal Government rights over land within the location chosen as the new capital territory. Official government records stated that the population density of the territory prior to the takeover was [sparse with a population of 120,000 residents living in 840 villages](#).

Nyaholo claimed that information made available to the Federal Government by a committee that recommended the territory as Nigeria’s new capital was faulty. Nigeria’s Head of State at the time, Murtala Muhammed, a General, declared the FCT, Abuja, as the country’s capital in a broadcast on February 3, 1976, following the acceptance of the recommendations of a committee set up in August 1975 to review the need for a new federal capital city and the suitability of Abuja for that purpose.

The committee headed by Akinola Aguda, a retired judge, also include Mohammed Isma (Secretary), Ajato Gandonu, a geography professor and town planner, Tai Solarin, an educationist, Owen Feibai, O.K. Ogan and Pedro Martins.

Nyaholo argued that the committee did a shoddy job. “When the foundation is faulty, even when the building is completed there will be problems. The faulty foundation of the FCT was when during the creation of the FCT, the committee gave the Federal Government

the impression that the indigenous people here are sparse and as a result, they can be easily resettled. The reason for this was that during the assignment they did not go down to visit the indigenous communities, they were flying by air. The only places they visited physically are Suleja and Keffi which are not even part of the FCT. But they visited Suleja and Keffi because they were the local government headquarters of this area as of then. “The recommendation by the committee was what the Federal Government used in taking the decision that all the indigenous people in this area would be resettled within their former states.”

Resettlement blues

The entire FCT was 8000 sqm and at the time, it was decided that it is only in the city centre (250 sqm) that people will be resettled. For other indigenous people within the area designated as the FCT, the option of staying or resettling was given. As a result, with the FCT being formed from parts of the old Kwara, Niger and Plateau states, indigenes affected by the creation of the new capital were resettled in areas within any of the four states they happened to come from.

Indigenes from the former Plateau State were resettled in areas such as Nyanya, Karu, Jikwoyi, and Mararaba, which are now in present-day Nasarawa State. The old Kwara State contributed towns such as Abaji and Rubochi to the FCT and the indigenous communities were largely not resettled, as the areas were far away from the FCT city centre. The old Niger State contributed most of the areas in the FCT city centre and the indigenous populations in Wuse and Asokoro all relocated from their ancestral homes.

Based on the option of staying or relocating given to original inhabitants that were not in the city centre at the time, Maitama natives initially chose to remain in the FCT. However, when development caught up with them they were resettled in the Maitamayi and Kukwaba areas of Kubwa, a satellite town in the FCT.



Garki Hill / Apo Hill.

Photo: Ihuoma Chiedozie, ICIR

Nyaholo observed that the Kukwaba people, who are now in Kubwa, had their ancestral home at the current location of the Moshood Abiola National Stadium, Abuja. The Kubwa Maitamayi natives had their ancestral home at the present location of the Transcorp Hilton.

However, the Garki natives stayed put in their ancestral homes located within the FCT city centre and have since resisted a series of attempts by the government to resettle them.

Nyaholo said the Garki natives refused to relocate because of the injustice and unfair practices that characterised the resettlement of other indigenous communities. He said, “For Garki and other communities that are still within the city centre, there is resistance to attempts by the government to resettle. The question is if you remove the indigenous people from this area, and you are not building schools or hospitals or industries here, you are removing them to bring in other Nigerians – what is the justification for that?”



An indigenous community resettlement area in the FCT

For purposes of urban planning, some members of the Garki indigenous community whose houses are affected by infrastructural projects – such as road expansion and other government

projects – are relocated to places like Apo Resettlement – a habitation set up for FCT original inhabitants within the city centre. “The initial idea was that the indigenous people will be resettled but because of the experience from other resettlement done in the past, which were never tidy, the indigenous people have rejected that option, unless when it is very necessary,” Nyaholo added. For the purpose of construction of the Jabi Dam, the indigenes living at the location were resettled in Bwari, an area council on the outskirts of the FCT.

Nyaholo was critical of the resettlement arrangement. “The first thing the government constructed for the indigenes who were resettled were zinc houses known as batchers. But wind destroyed the zinc houses so they had to build block houses for them but, if you look at the structures, if you are six feet tall, you cannot lie down and stretch your legs properly. That was the type of houses that were built for them.”

It was the same story for the Maitama natives that were relocated to Kubwa. “It was the same type of houses that were built for them and they don’t even have spaces for expansion. At that time two bedroom houses were built for families. That was more than 40 years ago. Those families have increased in size since then but they have no space for expansion. There was no consideration for future expansion of these indigenous families,” Nyaholo observed.



The indigenous community resettlement at Kubwa, FCT

Beyond accommodation challenges inherent in the resettlement process, the arrangement also created conflict among different communities of indigenous people. Most often, resettled natives are relocated to live in areas where there are existing indigenous communities. Lazarus blamed the government for cases of communal crises that resulted from the arrangement. n“For the Maitama people that were relocated to Kubwa, there was an already existing indigenous community there known as Kubwa which has its own inhabitants. So the Maitama people that were relocated became strangers in that community and that now led to conflict among the communities. The Kubwa people were already farming on the available farmlands. When the Maitama people came they couldn’t see any land to farm. It became a source for conflict.”



Palace of the Chief of the indigenous community in the Maitama settlement area of Kubwa, FCT Espata, District Head of Ake community in Kuje Chiefdom, lamented the inherent injustice in the resettlement process in an interview with The ICIR.

The septuagenarian noted that the indigenes are shortchanged in the resettlement process. The process usually involves the enumeration of individuals in various households that are to be resettled. The number of persons in the various households is used to determine the size of plots and other amenities to be allocated to them in the resettlement area.

“Government officials go from house to house to count people. What we have experienced in the past is there is no justice in the resettlement process. For example, during the enumeration, you will

see households that have 20 persons but they will count and say there are only 16 persons. What happens to the remaining persons?”

In line with plans to develop the Gude district, a new layout in the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) of the FCT, the government is planning to relocate indigenes in the earmarked area to the Kuje Chiefdom. This is to enable the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) develop the new district. Espata added, “They want to bring people from AMAC to our place. We welcome them but what we are saying is the movement should be justified. Because in the past there was no justification and our people were cheated because they misrepresented the number of economic trees and number of children above 18 years in our households. It is based on the number of persons in households that plots are allocated among the indigenes. If less than the available number of children above 18 are reported, what happens to those not captured? Where will the head of the household get land for them?” The district head added that the natives are demanding a review of the amount paid as compensation for economic trees in their farmlands which are taken over by the government.

No more farmlands for indigenes

Espata was particularly unhappy with the impact of the resettlement process on the livelihood of the indigenous population – who are largely peasant farmers.



Shuaibu Espata, District Head, Ake indigenous community, Kuje Chiefdom

The old man spoke angrily when he told The ICIR that indigenes in the Kuje Chiefdom no longer have lands to farm. Their farmlands have been allocated out and are now the property of ‘strangers’.

“We no longer have any place to farm in Kuje Chiefdom. Somebody will come from Lagos, or any other part of the country, even from abroad, and tell us ‘this is my land’ because the government has given him allocation. And there is nothing we can do.”

Some civil society organisations have urged the government to carve out farm settlements for the natives. Espata said the indigenes need farmlands in order to survive. “We want the government to take another look at the areas that were allocated, like my area Kuje, Gwagwalada, and others, we want the government to earmark places for us to farm. There is no land for farming in Kuje now. But the government will be allocating 50

hectares, 100 hectares to individuals to erect buildings.” The plots of land allocated for the construction of buildings were hitherto farmlands cultivated by several indigenous households. It was their sole means of livelihood.

Resistance

In some instances, natives who are being dislodged from their ancestral homes by developers who have obtained government allocation for land tried to put up resistance. But they ultimately lose out on the superior resources available to the developers. The police are usually deployed to drive away the uncooperative natives. To avoid losing out totally, some residents resort to negotiating compensation with the developers. Economic crops on the farmlands the natives are giving up are usually leveraged for the negotiations. But in the end, the natives only receive a mere pittance – sums such as N100,000, N200,000, or N300,000 – as compensation before the allottees take control of the allocated plots. It is just a matter of time before development catches up with them in the new location – the place will also be allocated to different individuals and the indigenes will be forced to move again. “I don’t know how long our people will continue moving. Maybe until we are pushed to the wall, then we will retaliate,” Espata wondered.

Some youth groups among the FCT indigenous communities had threatened to embark on militancy to protest against the marginalisation of the original inhabitants. A representative of the FCT indigenous youths, who pleaded anonymity, told The ICIR that the Federal Government only listened to the cries of the people of the Niger Delta – Nigeria’s oil producing region – after their youths embarked on militancy. The Niger Delta militants targeted Federal Government oil infrastructure, including pipelines which were routinely blown up, disrupting the country’s oil production capacity.

The FCT youths are considering launching attacks on Federal Government assets in Abuja, including office buildings and other public infrastructure. “That is an option we are looking at,” the youth representative said. But Espata informed The ICIR that the elders have advised the youths to refrain from taking up arms. “We don’t want them to go into militancy, we want to do things legally, constitutionally. That is what we are telling our youths.”

On August 17, 2022, FCDA bulldozers rolled into Durumi 3, an indigenous community around the FCT city centre. The Durumi natives have resisted moves by the FCTA to relocate them. The bulldozers demolished a local market operated by the natives. Some houses and a church belonging to natives were also brought down.



Demolition at Durumi 3, an indigenous community in the FCT, on August 17, 2022

The demolished structures were tagged ‘illegal structures’ by the government. Elisha Yakubu, Deputy Youth Leader of the Original Inhabitants Development Association (OIDA), an umbrella body of FCT indigenous people, questioned the rationale behind the ‘illegal’ tag.

Elisha Yakubu, FCT Original Inhabitants Development Association (OIDA) youth leader “What is illegal? Is my house as an indigene an illegal structure? Am I an illegal person in my land?” Yakubu stressed that before the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, and the creation of the FCT in 1976, the Durumi community was already in existence at its present location



“So the people calling our houses illegal structures, don’t they have houses in the states where they came from?” he asked rhetorically, noting that members of the community would not agree to leave their ancestral homes for other Nigerians.

“Some people have been coming to meet us that the government allocated them plots on our lands. How can you allocate my ancestral land to someone that is just like me to build his own house? What is the justification for that?”

Conspiracy of Nigeria against Nigerians

The FCT is bigger than many states in the country but due to its ‘no man’s land’ nature, the territory is administered by a ministry – the FCTA – and as such, is treated like a parastatal of the Federal Government. Unlike the 36 states governed by elected governors, a minister presides over the FCT. The natives do not have the luxury of electing their governor. Also, unlike the states which have three senators, the FCT has just one senator. The territory is also not represented in the Federal Executive Council (FEC).

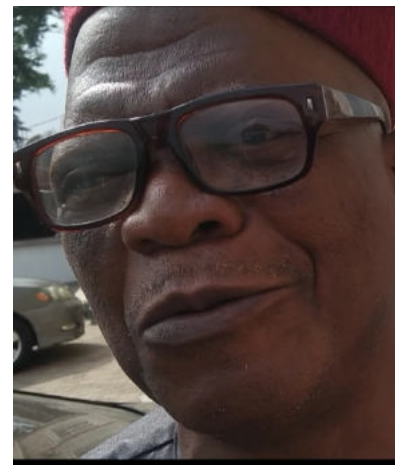
It was largely to address these imbalances that the natives, with the support of some civil society organisations, pushed for the creation of an Office of the Mayor of the FCT, and the nomination of a minister from the FCT to the Federal Executive Council, in the Constitution Review process. The intention was that the Mayor and the minister would be selected from among FCT original inhabitants. The National Assembly voted against the proposals. “I call it conspiracy of Nigeria against Nigerians. There is a judgment of the Supreme Court that said we shall be given a ministerial slot but it has not been enforced,” Nyaholo said.

Clement Wassa, a journalist and community leader, told **The ICIR** that the situation of the FCT original inhabitants demands empathy from other Nigerians.

Clement Wassa, community leader

“Our status as indigenes is not even recognized by law because official documents say this place is a no man’s land,” Wassa said. “Unfortunately most Nigerians are not empathetic, they can’t place themselves in the shoes of the other person.”

Wassa said the situation has affected the economic wellbeing and self-worth of the indigenous people.



Compensation is done in line with international best practices – FCDA

The Department of Resettlement and Compensation of the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) handles issues relating to resettlement and compensation in the FCT. The FCDA, under the Ministry of the Federal Capital Territory Administration (MFCTA) was created by Decree No. 6 of 1976, with responsibilities of planning, development and administration of the Federal Capital City and the Federal Capital Territory as a whole.

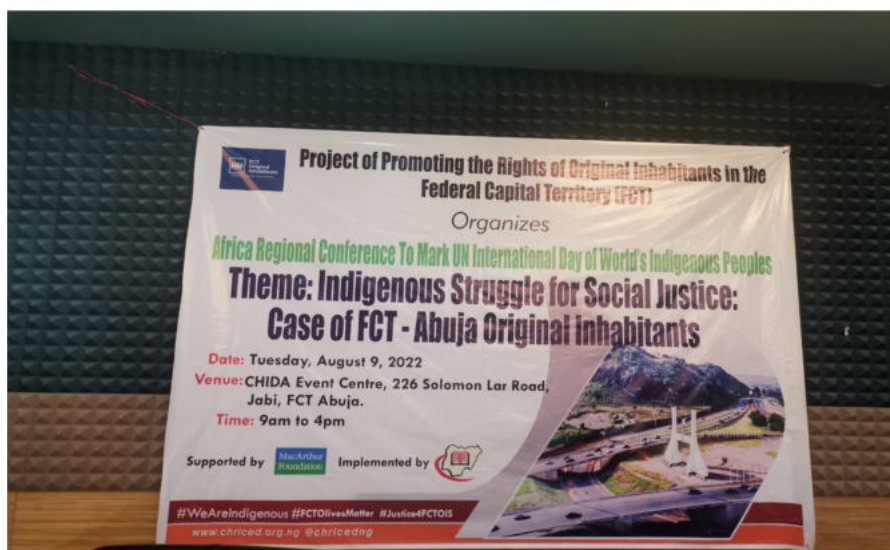
The ICIR contacted the Department of Resettlement and Compensation over the FCT natives' demand for compensation for 'desecration of graves'. Public Relations Officer of the department, Felicia Okoro, told The ICIR that compensation in the FCT is done in line with international best practices. "When it comes to compensation in the FCT we don't do anything outside the laid down rules and guidelines. It may interest you to know that government does not come to any community unless they are fully compensated and resettled before any work is carried out in that community. Even if a project is in overriding public interest, unless the community is moved and resettled, we cannot start the project. Compensation in the FCT is done according to international best practice."



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CALDHIS participation in World Indigenous Peoples Day in Abuja, Nigeria: CALDHIS at the heart of the event³⁶

(Original Article in French) August 14, 2022



August 14, 2022 Caldhis at the heart of the event

The African Centre for Support to Leadership, Human Rights and Social Innovation (CALDHIS) participated, on August 09, 2022, in the Africa Regional Conference to talk about the struggle of indigenous people for social justice: the case of the original inhabitants of the Federal State of Abuja (FCT), held in Abuja, Nigeria. Organized as part of the celebration of the United Nations' International Day of the World's Indigenous People, the meeting is an initiative of the Resource Center for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED), with the support of the John D. And

Indeed, the Executive Director of CHRICED, Dr. Ibrahim M. Zikirullahi, explains that "the disruption and dislocation suffered by the inhabitants of the FCT since the resettlement of the territory of Lagos is evident in the loss of their fundamental political, cultural and economic rights. The relocation of the nation's administrative center has had a significant impact on the lives, livelihoods, economic opportunities and cultural repositories of the inhabitants of the FCT. There seems to have been a clash of histories, cultures, and civilizations, with indigenous FCT faring less well in several respects. Due to the denial of their basic rights and the expropriation of their resources, especially their chosen lands, with little or no compensation, the people of FCT have seen their plight worsen. Without land after taking control of their ancestral lands, indigenous people suffer from higher rates of poverty, homelessness, insecurity and malnutrition. Low literacy and lack of access to basic services such as health and education have contributed to the decline in their quality of life."

He added, "Before the relocation of the nation's capital from Lagos to Abuja, the original inhabitants or peoples of FCT inhabitants, Abuja possessed vast tracts of territory rich in natural resources. Living primarily in farming communities, FCT residents owned cash crops, including economic trees of immense value. They also had a wealth of intellectual and cultural assets, and could continue their main agricultural activity without the disturbance caused by their contact with the general presence of the federal government and other dominant groups, which moved aggressively into the new Federal Capital Territory. Despite ceding land of at least 8,000 square kilometres to accommodate the nation's capital and its bordering territories, the inhabitants suffered the most injustices in the form of political marginalization, disenfranchisement and induced cultural atrophy. The plight of the population has been exacerbated by state-sanctioned acts of discrimination, such as the denial of political and economic rights, which other Nigerians fully enjoy.

An obvious example of discriminatory practices against these inhabitants? He cites "the fact that while Nigerians in all 36 states have the right to vote for a governor to preside over the affairs of their respective states, the indigenous people of the FCT do not have that same inalienable right, which other Nigerians take for granted. In addition, each state in the federation appoints a minister to the Federation's Executive Council, also known as the Federal Executive Council (FEC). This same right is not granted to the people of FCT who have made monumental sacrifices to give Nigeria its "center of unity". Successive governments have become accustomed to selecting non-Aboriginal ministerial candidates for the position of Minister of the Territories. Another dimension of the political strangulation of the FCT is evident in the practice in which

^[36] <https://caldhis.org/actualites/journee-mondiale-des-autochtones/>

the National Assembly legislates for the federal capital as well as for the rest of the FCT, while other Nigerian citizens across states have their Houses of State Assembly, which legislate for them. The situation is similar to that of the legislative branches of the bureaucracy, in that agencies such as the Federal Capital Development Agency and the Federal Capital Territory Administration report to the federal government. Thus, alienating themselves and remaining insensitive to the democratic aspirations of the indigenous FCT at the grassroots. Although the FCT is known for appointing a commissioner to the Federal Character Commission (FCC), there have been a litany of complaints that individuals taking advantage of the FCT slot are not original residents."

"The original inhabitants were also victims of the tactical use of violence to intimidate and coerce them in order to prevent them from asserting their fundamental rights as enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution and other international human rights instruments. There have been discriminatory laws, which have combined to prohibit the activities of grassroots residents as acts deemed illegal and punishable by imprisonment, torture and death. As a result, the original inhabitants suffered a wave of forced evictions from their ancestral lands, jeopardizing their economic and cultural survival. Many of these forced evictions are carried out by the government and its agents with the aim of exploiting and expropriating natural resources and taking possession of high-quality land, without paying compensation. There have been several cases where agencies using the coercive instruments of State power have forcefully occupied prime agricultural land belonging to residents, resulting in the loss of lives and livelihoods. In April 2019, a coalition of FCT residents' groups launched a protest march in the National Assembly to voice their grievances over the destruction of economic trees and the subsequent takeover of farmland by the Nigerian military. The march protesters alleged extrajudicial executions, human rights violations and harassment by different branches of the armed services in order to take possession of their land."

Other important themes were developed during this meeting. These were: "First Inhabitants of the FCT: Difficulties and Quest for Social Justice"; "Building Resilience: Africa's Indigenous Struggle for Social Justice"; "The Role of African Indigenous Women in the Preservation and Transmission of Traditional Knowledge". As a reminder, Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED) is a Nigerian non-profit organization focused on knowledge. platform of active citizens working to promote human rights, the rule of law, democracy and accountability. CHRICED uses civic action, advocacy and awareness-raising to mobilize vulnerable and marginalized segments of the population, including youth, women and persons with disabilities (PH), to engage in the governance process, protect their rights and be responsible citizens.

Stakeholders task FG on exclusion of Abuja indigenous peoples³⁷

August 27, 2022 | Samuel Ogunsanya

Civil society groups from Nigeria and across Africa and ancestral peoples of the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT) who met in Abuja to mark the United Nations World Day of Indigenous peoples have expressed deep concern over what they consider as the continues socio-economic exclusion of indigenous peoples in Abuja. The groups said the situation is a time bomb that should be addressed without delay. Hundreds of stakeholders celebrated the August 09 event in the FCT with a regional conference, a workshop and a day dedicated to the promotion of indigenous heritage when thousands of indigenous peoples gathered at the Abuja Old park to showcase the culture and of their people. They insist that their land taken away represent the most significant historical injustice they suffer.

The conference organized by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civil Education, (CHRICED) and the MacArthur Foundation was attended by hundreds of people, traditional rulers from the various kingdoms, Government Officials, Civil Society Organisations, (CSOs), Executive Director, CHRICED, Mr Ibrahim Zikirullahi, the media, labour, peasants, several representatives of indigenous peoples Environmental Rights Action, (ERA), Prof A B Ahmed of the Faculty of Law, Bayero University, Executive Director, Centre for Transparency and Accountability, (CTA), HRH Alhaji Ismaila Danladi Mohammed, Journalists for Democratic Rights, (JODER), and the members of the FCT Original Inhabitant Association. There are nine indigenous ethnic groups in the FCT namely the Gbwari, Koro, Bassa, Ebira, Ganagana, Nupe, Gade, Gwandara and Dibo.

Since 1976 when the Nigerian Capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja, the original owners of the land claim that have been subjected to all forms of socio-cultural repression. They said peanuts was paid to them which does not meet up to the worth of their land. In a communiqué issued at the end of the National stakeholders dialogue on Rights of Original inhabitants of FCT and signed by Dr Ibrahim Zikirullahi and leaders of several civil society groups the stakeholders said the bottled up anger of indigenous peoples in the FCT should be addressed to avoid possible outbursts. The conference theme was Building Resilience, Fostering Recovery: FCT Original Inhabitants And the Struggle for Social Justice. The stakeholders said indigenous peoples are distinguished by their ancestral land, their distinct language, culture and time

^[37] <https://irohinodua.org/stakeholders-task-fg-on-exclusion-of-abuja-indigenous-peoples/>

honoured values which are treasured and have been preserved for centuries; They noted that in Nigeria, the rights of indigenous peoples in the FCT are a major challenge in the search for sustainable development, peace and stability.

The stakeholders in the communiqué said ‘we are aware that the Original Peoples of the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT) are indigenous to their territories, their ancestral land which they have lived for centuries. That they own the land; the land is their livelihood, their dignity and pride; they have cultivated the land which is their greatest material and spiritual assets.’ That the indigenous peoples in the FCT are about nine with their own culture and civilisations that continue to face existential threats from various dimensions; Participants noted that in 1976, the history of Original People of FCT was deconstructed with the movement of the Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja by the military government.

The movement led to dramatic changes in the sociology, the land ownership, control and management effected through the military Decree 6, all of which affect the past, present and future of FCT indigenous peoples; ‘That indigenous peoples in FCT are recognised by their own history and values backed by international instruments including but not limited to International Convention in Indigenous Peoples, the ILO Convention 168 all of which emphasise the protection of indigenous peoples including their intellectual and cultural property’. On December 23, 1994, the UN General Assembly resolution 49/214 adopted the International Day of Indigenous Peoples to address the fears over ancestral land and associated lost resources.

The communiqué said that the FCT 1976 Decree 06 has affected the history, spirituality, indigenous knowledge, environment, culture, civilisations and heritage of indigenous peoples of the FCT; ‘That indigenous peoples in the FCT have been consistently denied their right to land and capacity to own property in a territory that historically belongs to them. Other forms of discrimination and exclusion manifest through denial of access to ancestral land, lack of economic, political, cultural opportunities and identities, denial of statehood, denial of access to utilities like health, quality education and job opportunities’ they said



FCT Indigenes With Disabilities Clamour For Economic Empowerment

by The Explainer - September 8, 2022. In Governance, Human Rights. Reading Time: 3 mins read



September 8, 2022 | Armsfreee Ajanaku

For many Nigerians in the economic bracket considered rich or the middle class, the heady days of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic devastation it left in its wake, may have since been forgotten. Same cannot be said of the multitude of poor and vulnerable citizens, who are yet to recover from the devastation imposed by the crisis. Many of such vulnerable Nigerians have been struggling to cope, especially as the recovery plans and stimulus packages had no inclusive enough strategies. As such, those who lost their jobs, businesses and other sources of livelihoods have been in the limbo.



In the absence of direct government programmes to alleviate these sufferings, some of these groups of marginalised and disempowered citizens have had to find ways to get their voices heard and draw attention to their plight.

One such marginalised group is the over 3000 Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Original Inhabitants living with disabilities. Led by Mr. Festus Yakubu, a visually impaired, but passionate advocate, the group has been consistent in clamouring for the promotion of the economic rights of its members.

^[38] <https://theexplainer.com.ng/fct-indigenes-with-disabilities-clamour-for-economic-empowerment/>

Organised under the platform of the FCT Original Inhabitants with Disabilities Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society, the group's advocacy recently resulted in some measure of succour. The timely intervention to address their plight, came in the form of a MacArthur Foundation funded project being implemented by the Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED). At the launch of the project recently, hundreds of people living with disabilities were in a jubilant mood, just as they expressed happiness that the project would contribute immensely to alleviating their sufferings.

At the formal launch of the project recently, the President of the Original Inhabitants with Disabilities Multi-Purpose Cooperative Society, Mr. Yakubu enthused that the project was the first of its kind since the formation of the association. He said: "For so many years, FCT Original Inhabitants with Disabilities were ignored and left to remain in pains. During the COVID-19 lockdowns, many of our members suffered due to lack of basic necessities, such as food, water and other supplies needed to survive those tough times." According to him, the suffering of the Original Inhabitants with disabilities was worsened by the failure of the government to ensure palliatives reached them.

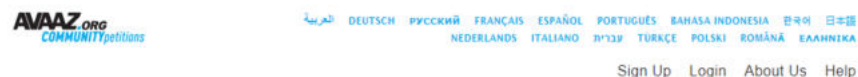
The society's helmsman was however upbeat that with the new project, the stories of pain and anguish, which they experienced in those difficult times have come to an end. He said: "Looking at the objective of this project, which is to promote the economic and livelihood opportunities of FCT OI with disabilities, I will say it would not have come at a better time.

"Although FCT Original Inhabitants with disabilities are faced with many challenges, the biggest of them all, is the poverty, and economic marginalization they face. For FCT OI with disabilities to be able to participate in the bigger struggle to address the injustices against FCT Original Inhabitants, we must first be able to address the problems of lack of jobs, food, shelter and education for our children. Therefore, the importance of what CHRICED/ MacArthur have done for us is that they have not just given us an opportunity to have our own sources of livelihoods."

Subsequently, FCT Original Inhabitants with disabilities called on government agencies to implement similar interventions to reach people with disabilities. According to the group, the government and its agencies should realise that as FCT Original Inhabitants with disabilities are citizens of Nigeria, and should be treated as such. His words: "CHRICED and MacArthur Foundation have shown the way; government agencies like National Directorate for Employment, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN), National Commission for Disabilities, and even the Federal Capital Territory Administration should give FCT Original Inhabitants with disabilities the attention they have for long been waiting for."

On his part, CHRICED Executive Director, Comrade Dr. Ibrahim M. Zikirullahi, who was represented by Programmes & Communications Manager, Mr. Armsfree Ajanaku commended the group for its resilience and dedication. He explained that since last year, CHRICED has been working in concert with Original Inhabitants to equip them with the skills and technical capacities required to sustainably and lawfully advocate for the promotion of their fundamental rights and interests. He said: "An important part of the project is ensuring the needs of people with disabilities, women and the youth are integrated. This is important because without gender and social inclusion, the project would leave behind people with special needs. We are much elated that FCT Original Inhabitants living with disabilities can now use this project as a launching pad to get the attention of the government and its agencies so that the various issues affecting them can be speedily addressed."

Also in attendance at the programme were government officials from the Federal Capital Territory Administration and the Social Welfare Department of the FCTA who all promised to do more to promote the welfare and well-being of Original Inhabitants with disabilities.



Help get Justice for Nigeria's Abuja Original Inhabitants³⁹



September 9, 2022 | Zikirullahi M

Approximately two million (2,000,000) Abuja Original Inhabitants (OIs) of the Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), comprised of nine tribes and seventeen chiefdoms, face the challenges of landlessness, statelessness, decolonization, deprivation, redress of historical wrongs, and a seemingly obliterated future. The so-called transformation of Abuja (one of the world's fastest-growing cities) is

^[39] https://secure.avaaz.org/community_petitions/en/president_of_the_federal_republic_of_nigeria_and_t_help_get_justice_for_nigerias_abuja_original_inhabitants/?cDFyKmb&utm_source=sharetools&utm_medium=copy&utm_campaign=petition-1648830-help_get_justice_for_nigerias_abuja_original_inhabitants&utm_term=cDFyKmb%2Ben

a painful reminder of the original inhabitants' pains, dashed hopes, stolen present, destroyed past, and seemingly hopeless future if nothing drastic is done to rectify the injustice done to them. In fact, it is one of the many paradoxes of the Nigerian situation that the Original Inhabitants, whose lands were parceled out by virtue of Military Decree 6 of 1976 to make room for Nigeria's capital and unity, are being neglected and treated as second-class citizens in their ancestral homelands.

A visit to Abuja OI communities, just a few hours' drive from the beautiful Abuja City Centre, would expose the filthy underbelly of the people's deprivation. A visit of this nature would reveal the reality of communities lacking functional health and educational facilities, deplorable roads, potable water, sanitation, and hygiene facilities. The lack of Abuja OI representation in the governance structures responsible for service delivery worsens the reality of the Abuja OIs. And unlike other Nigerian citizens in various states who have the right to vote for a Governor and a State House of Assembly, Abuja OIs do not. The OIs have done everything possible over time to bring attention to the obvious discrimination and pervasive injustices they face, but the Nigerian government has refused to listen. Therefore, let's join voices to loudly echo the pains of disappointment, betrayal and an unending search for justice, fairness and equity by the original owners of Abuja displaced for the sake of creating a new capital for the country, and demand a STOP to the rape and deprivation of their right of belonging, history and legacy. Nigeria MUST fulfil its constitutional and international human rights obligations to address the plight of the Abuja Original Inhabitants without delay.

World Indigenous People Day 2022

