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URBAN WEALTH, INDIGENOUS POVERTY

CONFRONTING ECONOMIC INJUSTICE IN
NIGERIA'S FEDERAL CAPITAL



...Fighting for Justice to Guarantee Peace

URBAN WEALTH, INDIGENOUS POVERTY

*CONFRONTING ECONOMIC INJUSTICE IN
NIGERIA'S FEDERAL CAPITAL*

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The Resource Centre for Human
Rights & Civic Education
(CHRICED)



FCT
Original
Inhabitants

The John D. and
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...fighting for Justice to Guarantee Peace

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ABOUT THIS POLICY BRIEF

This policy brief presents a comprehensive analysis of the economic injustices experienced by the Abuja Original Inhabitants (AOIs) since the establishment of the Federal Capital Territory in 1976. Drawing on empirical evidence, community testimonies, and CHRICED-supported interventions, the brief exposes the structural drivers of Indigenous economic marginalization and outlines actionable policy reforms to restore justice, dignity, and economic opportunity.

The document is designed for policymakers, legislators, development partners, civil society organisations, and the media. It provides:

- A historical and human-rights-based

account of AOI displacement

- Evidence of livelihood losses, compensation failures, and exclusion from the urban economy
- Analysis of governance structures that perpetuate inequality
- Policy recommendations grounded in global best practices
- A call to action for inclusive development and institutional reform

The brief aims to influence national dialogue, strengthen advocacy, and catalyse coordinated action to ensure that AOI communities become rightful stakeholders in the prosperity generated on their ancestral land.

DEDICATION

This policy brief is dedicated to the Abuja Original Inhabitants—the Gbagyi, Gwari, Gade, Bassa, Koro, Ganagana, Amwamwa, Egbira, and Gwandara peoples—whose resilience, cultural heritage, and unbroken spirit continue to illuminate the true history of Nigeria's capital.

It is also dedicated to the women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities who have carried the weight of displacement with dignity, and who continue to demand justice not only for themselves, but for generations yet unborn.

Your courage inspires this work.

Your stories guide its purpose.

Your rights remain non-negotiable.

The Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED) expresses deep appreciation to the Indigenous communities across the Federal Capital Territory who opened their homes, shared their histories, and trusted us with their lived experiences. This policy brief would not exist without your voices, your insights, and your unwavering commitment to justice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We acknowledge the invaluable contributions of:

- Community leaders and traditional institutions who provided guidance and historical context
- Women's groups, including the Mairo Women Foundation, for documenting the collapse of pottery and craft livelihoods
- Youth-led AOI initiatives whose research and advocacy shaped the evidence base
- Helpline Social Support Initiatives for highlighting the experiences of widows and persons with disabilities
- CHRICED sub-grantees and grassroots organisers who facilitated town halls and community dialogues
- Researchers, field officers, and data analysts whose rigorous work strengthened the credibility of this brief

We extend our gratitude to the MacArthur Foundation whose support made this research and advocacy possible. Your commitment to equity and human rights continues to empower Indigenous communities across the FCT.

Finally, we acknowledge the CHRICED Board, Executive Director, and staff team for their leadership, dedication, and tireless efforts to advance justice for Abuja's Original Inhabitants.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“A City Built on Their Land, A Future Denied: Restoring Economic Justice to Abuja's Original Inhabitants”

Abuja is widely celebrated as a symbol of national unity and modern development, yet beneath its polished surface lies a profound injustice that has endured for nearly five decades. The Abuja Original Inhabitants (AOIs)—including the Gbagyi, Gwandara, Koro, Gade, Bassa, Ganagana, Amwamwa, Gwari, and Egbira peoples—are the custodians of the land on which Nigeria's capital was built. Their displacement, beginning in 1976 with the establishment of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), was executed through compulsory land acquisition that uprooted entire communities from ancestral territories without adequate consultation, fair compensation, or long-term livelihood planning.¹

The creation of Abuja was framed as a national necessity, but the process ignored the economic, cultural, and spiritual significance of Indigenous land. The loss of farmland, forests, rivers, and sacred spaces dismantled economic systems that had sustained AOI communities for generations. As Abuja expanded into a hub of political and commercial power, the very people whose land made this development possible were pushed to the margins—geographically, economically, and socially.

Today, Abuja generates immense wealth through real estate, commerce, and government investment. Yet AOIs remain among the most economically excluded populations in the FCT. Their exclusion is not incidental; it is the result of structural governance arrangements that centralize land control, prioritize elite interests, and

disregard Indigenous rights. The FCT Administration's exclusive authority over land allocation has enabled speculative land practices and elite capture, while Indigenous communities face barriers to land access, compensation, and economic participation.

The consequences of this displacement are severe. A 2019 study by Kabir & Adedeji found that displaced Indigenous households experienced 40–60% income decline within five years of relocation.² Traditional livelihoods—pottery, farming, fishing, crafts, and local trade—collapsed due to loss of land and access to natural resources. Many AOIs were forced into unstable informal work, lacking social protection or pathways to upward mobility. Food insecurity, unemployment, and intergenerational poverty have become entrenched realities.

This situation violates multiple national and international legal frameworks. Section 17 of the 1999 Constitution mandates equitable distribution of resources and social justice.³ The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights guarantees the right to economic development.⁴ The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) protects the right to work, livelihood, and adequate living standards.⁵ The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms Indigenous peoples' rights to land, resources, and economic systems.⁶ Yet these commitments remain largely unimplemented in the FCT.

CHRICED's interventions across AOI communities reveal a consistent pattern:

1. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), Section 44 & 17.
2. Kabir, A. & Adedeji, O. (2019). *Socioeconomic Impacts of Displacement in the FCT*.
3. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), Section 17.
4. African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Articles 21–22.
5. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Articles 6–11.
6. United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), 2007.

economic exclusion is deepening, but targeted support can reverse the trend. Women's groups report the collapse of pottery and craft industries due to loss of clay deposits. Widows and persons with disabilities face disproportionate hardship due to exclusion from compensation lists. Youth—despite living in the heart of Nigeria's capital—face some of the highest unemployment rates in the region. However, where microenterprise support, skills training, and community-driven initiatives have been introduced, resilience and income recovery are evident.

This policy brief argues that restoring economic justice to AOIs is not only a moral imperative but a constitutional and developmental necessity. Abuja cannot claim to be a symbol of national unity while its foundational communities remain excluded from the prosperity their land sustains. Addressing this injustice requires structural

reforms: establishing an Abuja Original Inhabitants Development Commission (AOIDC), revising compensation frameworks, recognizing Indigenous land tenure, and embedding AOI economic rights into FCT planning.



CHRICED's interventions across AOI communities reveal a consistent pattern: economic exclusion is deepening, but targeted support can reverse the trend.

The future of Abuja must include the people of its past. Economic justice for AOIs is essential for social cohesion, sustainable development, and the legitimacy of Nigeria's capital as a city for all.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

“A Capital Built on Displacement: The Historical Roots of Indigenous Economic Injustice”

The story of Abuja's creation is often narrated as a triumph of national unity—a deliberate effort to build a neutral capital that transcends ethnic and regional divides. Yet this narrative obscures a deeper truth: Abuja was built through the large-scale dispossession of Indigenous communities whose histories, economies, and cultural identities predate the Nigerian state itself. The Abuja Original Inhabitants (AOIs)—including the Gbagyi, Gwandara, Koro, Gade, Bassa, Ganagana, Amwamwa, Nupe, and Egbira peoples—were not passive occupants of the land; they were custodians of complex agrarian systems, cultural institutions, and communal governance structures that sustained their societies for centuries⁷.

1.1 Abuja's Creation and the Dispossession of Indigenous Communities

The establishment of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) under Decree No. 6 of 1976 marked a turning point in the lives of AOI communities. The decree authorized the compulsory acquisition of approximately 8,000 square kilometres of land—an area larger than some Nigerian states—without consultation or consent from the Indigenous populations.⁸ Although the government justified the acquisition as a national development project, the process violated emerging global norms on Indigenous rights and free, prior, and informed consent.⁹

For AOIs, land was not merely a physical asset; it was the foundation of identity, spirituality, and economic survival. The forced displacement dismantled long-standing agrarian economies, disrupted social cohesion, and severed communities from ancestral burial grounds, sacred forests, and cultural heritage sites. The trauma of this loss continues to reverberate across generations.



The Abuja Original Inhabitants (AOIs)—including the Gbagyi, Gwandara, Koro, Gade, Bassa, Ganagana, Amwamwa, Gwari, and Egbira peoples—are the custodians of the land on which Nigeria's capital was built.

1.2 A Capital Built on Centralized Power and Land Speculation

Abuja's governance structure further entrenched AOI marginalization. The FCT Administration was granted exclusive authority over land allocation, effectively removing Indigenous communities from decision-making processes related to their own territories.¹⁰

This centralization created fertile ground for:

- Elite capture of land allocation processes
- Speculative real estate practices
- Rapid conversion of Indigenous land into high-value commercial and luxury districts

As government districts, diplomatic zones, and high-income neighbourhoods expanded, Indigenous settlements were pushed to the periphery—often without infrastructure, services, or economic opportunities. The contrast between Abuja's gleaming urban core and the impoverished AOI communities surrounding it is a visible manifestation of structural inequality.

1.3 Long-Term Economic Consequences

The economic consequences of displacement have been severe and enduring. AOIs lost access to fertile farmland, grazing fields, forests, and rivers—the backbone of their livelihoods. Traditional

7. Oral histories documented by CHRICED community engagements (2024).

8. Federal Military Government of Nigeria, Decree No. 6 (1976).

9. FCT Act and Land Use Administration Framework (1976–1990).

10. UNDRIP, Articles 10 & 32 (2007).

micro-economies such as pottery, blacksmithing, fishing, and craft production collapsed due to loss of raw materials and market access. Many AOIs were forced into precarious urban labour, including low-wage construction work, petty trading, and informal services.¹¹

A 2019 study by Kabir & Adedeji found that displaced Indigenous households experienced 40–60% income decline within five years, accompanied by rising food insecurity and job precarity.¹² Women and youth were disproportionately affected, as they relied heavily on land-based livelihoods and community-driven economic networks.

1.4 Rights and Legal Frameworks

The marginalization of AOIs violates multiple national and international legal frameworks.

- Section 17 of the 1999 Constitution mandates equitable distribution of resources and social justice.
- The African Charter on Human and

Peoples' Rights guarantees the right to economic development and cultural preservation.

- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) protects the right to work, livelihood, and adequate living standards.
- The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms Indigenous peoples' rights to land, resources, and economic systems.

Despite these commitments, implementation in the FCT remains weak, inconsistent, and often symbolic rather than substantive.

Abuja's development story cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the historical injustices that shaped it. The displacement of AOIs is not a closed chapter—it is an ongoing reality that continues to define their economic and social conditions today.

11. FCT Act and Land Use Administration Framework (1976–1990).

12. CHRICED Field Reports on AOI Livelihoods (2023–2024).

PATHWAYS OF ECONOMIC DISPLACEMENT

“How a Capital City Unmade Indigenous Livelihoods: The Mechanisms of AOI Economic Exclusion”

The economic marginalization of Abuja's Original Inhabitants (AOIs) did not occur by chance; it emerged through a series of interconnected pathways that systematically dismantled Indigenous livelihoods, weakened community resilience, and entrenched long-term poverty. These pathways—loss of ancestral land, failed compensation systems, and exclusion from the urban economy—form the architecture of economic injustice that AOI communities continue to confront today.

2.1 Loss of Ancestral Land and Agrarian Economies

Land was the central pillar of AOI economic, cultural, and social life. It provided fertile fields for farming, grazing routes for livestock, forests for gathering, rivers for fishing, and sacred spaces for cultural continuity. The compulsory acquisition of AOI land for the Federal Capital Territory severed these lifelines, dismantling the economic systems

that had sustained communities for generations.¹³

The destruction of farmland and natural resources did more than eliminate income sources—it erased generational wealth. AOI families who once relied on multi-crop farming, livestock rearing, and forest-based livelihoods suddenly found themselves without productive assets. The loss of land also meant the loss of inheritance systems, as younger generations were deprived of the economic foundation their ancestors had built.¹⁴

This rupture created a cascading effect: food insecurity increased, household income collapsed, and communities were forced into survival-based coping strategies. Women, who traditionally relied on clay deposits, firewood, and local markets for pottery and craft production, lost access to essential raw materials. Youth, who once inherited

13. Federal Military Government of Nigeria, Decree No. 6 (1976).

14. CHRICED Community Oral Histories (2024).



A woman displaced by recent demolitions in Kuchibena, Gwarinpa, Abuja, lost in thought as others stand nearby. Photo: CHRICED

land-based occupations, were thrust into an urban economy for which they had neither training nor networks.¹⁵

2.2 Compensation and Resettlement Failures

Compensation was intended to mitigate the impact of displacement, but in practice it became another pathway of dispossession. Compensation processes were characterized by inadequate valuation of communal assets, exclusion of women and youth, and inconsistent or incomplete payments.¹⁶ Many AOI families received lump-sum payments that did not reflect the true economic value of their land, nor the long-term livelihood losses they would endure.

Resettlement sites, where they existed, were often poorly planned and lacked basic infrastructure such as water, electricity, schools, and markets. These sites were typically located far from economic opportunities, making it difficult for displaced families to rebuild their livelihoods. Without access to land, credit, or training, many AOIs were pushed into low-income informal work, perpetuating cycles of poverty.¹⁷

“**Compensation processes were characterized by inadequate valuation of communal assets, exclusion of women and youth, and inconsistent or incomplete payments.**”

The absence of transparent grievance mechanisms further deepened the injustice. Communities had no effective channels to challenge unfair compensation, report exclusion, or demand accountability. Widows, persons with disabilities, and youth were disproportionately affected, as they were frequently omitted from compensation lists due to patriarchal norms and administrative irregularities.¹⁸

2.3 Exclusion from the Urban Economy

Despite living in the heart of Nigeria's capital, AOIs remain largely excluded from the economic opportunities that Abuja generates. Structural barriers—including limited access to formal employment, lack of credit facilities, and discrimination in business registration—prevent AOIs from participating meaningfully in the urban economy.¹⁹

“**The pathways of economic displacement—loss of land, failed compensation, and exclusion from the urban economy—form a cycle that continues to trap AOI communities in poverty.**”

Many AOIs lack the educational qualifications required for formal sector jobs, a direct consequence of displacement that disrupted schooling and community stability. Those who attempt to start businesses face bureaucratic hurdles, limited access to capital, and competition from better-resourced urban migrants. As a result, AOIs are overrepresented in low-wage informal work such as petty trading, manual labor, and domestic services.²⁰

This exclusion is not merely economic—it is psychological and cultural. AOI youth often feel alienated in a city built on their ancestral land yet structured to exclude them. The contrast between Abuja's wealth and AOI poverty reinforces a sense of injustice that undermines social cohesion.

The pathways of economic displacement—loss of land, failed compensation, and exclusion from the urban economy—form a cycle that continues to trap AOI communities in poverty. Understanding these pathways is essential for designing policies that restore economic justice and rebuild Indigenous livelihoods.

15. Mairo Women Foundation Field Notes on Pottery Livelihoods (2023).

16. FCT Administration Compensation Records Review (2018–2022).

17. CHRICED Livelihood Assessment Reports (2023).

18. Helpline Social Support Initiatives, Vulnerability Mapping Report (2024).

19. FCT Economic Inclusion Baseline Survey (2022).

20. Youth-Led AOI Economic Realities Study (2024)

EVIDENCE FROM CHRICED -SUPPORTED INTERVENTIONS

“Listening to the Margins: What AOI Communities Reveal About Economic Exclusion”

The lived realities of Abuja's Original Inhabitants (AOIs) cannot be fully understood through policy documents or historical records alone. Their experiences emerge most clearly through community-level engagement, participatory research, and grassroots interventions. CHRICED's work across multiple AOI settlements provides a rare, evidence-based window into how displacement, exclusion, and structural inequality shape everyday life. These interventions—spanning women's groups, youth initiatives, disability-focused support, and community town halls—reveal both the depth of economic injustice and the resilience of Indigenous communities striving to rebuild their livelihoods.

3.1 Women's Livelihoods: The Collapse of Pottery and Craft Economies

For generations, AOI women sustained their families through pottery, weaving, craft production, and small-scale trading. These activities were not merely economic—they were cultural practices passed down through matrilineal lines, reinforcing identity and community cohesion.²¹ However, the loss of clay deposits, forests, and traditional market spaces following displacement has devastated these industries.

CHRICED's partnership with the Mairo Women Foundation documented how the destruction of clay-rich lands—once central to pottery production—forced many women

21. Mairo Women Foundation, Pottery Livelihoods Assessment Report (2023)..



L–R: Dr. Zikirullahi M. Ibrahim, Executive Director of CHRICED, and Stephanie Platz, Managing Director of Programs, MacArthur Foundation, at the Ushafa Pottery Centre, Abuja Photo: CHRICED



A young Original Inhabitant boy learning pottery-making at Mairo Women Foundation, Ushafa, Abuja, during school holidays. Photo: CHRICED

to abandon their craft entirely.²² Without access to raw materials, transportation, or designated market stalls, women who once produced hundreds of pots per month now struggle to generate even minimal income. Some have resorted to low-wage domestic work or petty trading, often earning less than a fraction of their previous income.

The collapse of these industries has had ripple effects:



Household food security has declined.



Girls who once learned pottery from their mothers have lost a key cultural inheritance.



Women's economic autonomy has weakened, increasing vulnerability to exploitation.

These findings underscore how displacement disrupts not only income but also cultural continuity and gendered economic systems.

3.2 Vulnerable Groups: Widows and Persons with Disabilities

CHRICED's collaboration with Helpline Social Support Initiatives revealed that widows and persons with disabilities face disproportionate hardship in compensation and resettlement processes.²³ Many were excluded from compensation lists due to patriarchal norms that recognized only male household heads. Others lacked documentation, literacy, or mobility to navigate bureaucratic procedures.

Interviews with affected women revealed stories of profound injustice: widows who lost both land and housing without receiving a single naira in compensation; persons with

disabilities who were relocated to sites without accessible infrastructure; families forced into homelessness due to administrative errors. These experiences highlight systemic discrimination embedded within compensation frameworks.

The exclusion of vulnerable groups is not only a governance failure—it is a violation of Nigeria's constitutional commitment to equality and the rights of persons with disabilities.²⁴

3.3 Youth Realities: Unemployment in the Shadow of Opportunity

Despite living in Nigeria's most economically dynamic city, AOI youth face some of the highest unemployment and underemployment rates in the FCT. CHRICED's youth-led research initiatives documented widespread frustration among young people who feel excluded from the opportunities that surround them.²⁵

Key barriers include:

- Limited access to quality education due to displacement-related disruptions
- Lack of vocational training aligned with Abuja's job market
- Discrimination in formal employment
- Absence of capital for entrepreneurship

Many AOI youth expressed a sense of alienation—living in a city built on their ancestral land yet feeling like outsiders within it. This emotional dimension is critical: economic exclusion fuels resentment, weakens social cohesion, and undermines trust in public institutions.

3.4 Community Town Halls: Collective Voices, Shared Priorities

CHRICED-supported town halls across AOI settlements provided a platform for communities to articulate their priorities directly. Across all locations, the same

22. Mairo Women Foundation, Pottery Livelihoods Assessment Report (2023).

23. Helpline Social Support Initiatives, Vulnerability Mapping Report (2024).

24. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), Sections 14 & 42.

25. Youth-Led AOI Economic Realities Study (2024).

themes emerged consistently:

- Land access remains the most urgent concern.
- Livelihood restoration is essential for long-term resilience.
- Transparent compensation is necessary to rebuild trust.
- Youth empowerment is critical for community survival.

These town halls demonstrate that AOI communities are not passive victims—they are active agents with clear visions for their future. What they lack is not capacity, but institutional recognition and equitable access to resources.

3.5 Evidence of Resilience: What Works

Where targeted support was provided—such as microenterprise funding, skills training, or community-driven value-chain development—AOI communities demonstrated remarkable resilience.²⁶ Women revived small-scale craft production, youth launched microbusinesses, and community groups strengthened local governance structures. These successes show that with the right support, AOIs can rebuild sustainable livelihoods.

26. CHRICED Microenterprise Support Evaluation (2024).

STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC INJUSTICE

“Systems That Exclude: How Abuja's Governance Architecture Produces Indigenous Poverty”

The economic marginalization of Abuja's Original Inhabitants (AOIs) is not the result of isolated policy failures or accidental oversights. It is the predictable outcome of structural arrangements that concentrate power, distort land governance, and prioritize elite interests over Indigenous rights. These structural drivers—centralized land administration, exclusionary development models, and weak enforcement of economic rights—form the backbone of the inequality that AOI communities continue to face.

4.1 Centralized Land Governance and Rent-Seeking

The most significant structural driver of AOI economic injustice is the centralization of land administration under the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA). Unlike other Nigerian states where land is held in trust by state governors, the FCT places all land under the direct control of the Minister of the FCT.²⁷ This arrangement effectively removed AOI communities from any decision-making role regarding their ancestral territories.

This centralized system has enabled:

- Elite capture of land allocation processes
- Opaque land titling procedures
- Speculative land practices that inflate property values
- Displacement of Indigenous settlements to make way for high-value real estate

The absence of community representation in land governance has allowed powerful actors—political elites, developers, and speculators—to benefit disproportionately from Abuja's rapid urbanization.²⁸

Meanwhile, AOIs, who bear the greatest cost of land loss, receive the least benefit from the wealth generated on their ancestral land.

This governance structure incentivizes rent-seeking behavior, where access to land is determined not by need or justice but by political connections. The result is a city where land is treated as a commodity for profit rather than a cultural and economic asset for Indigenous communities.

4.2 Development Models that Exclude Indigenous Economies

Abuja's master plan, while ambitious in its vision, was designed with a narrow conception of development that prioritized government districts, diplomatic zones, and elite residential areas.²⁹ Indigenous economies—agriculture, pottery, crafts, fishing, and local markets—were not integrated into the city's development blueprint.

This exclusion manifests in several ways:

- Traditional markets were demolished to make way for commercial centers.
- Agricultural lands were rezoned for luxury estates and government infrastructure.
- Cultural and heritage sites were erased or repurposed without community consent.
- Indigenous value chains were disrupted, leaving AOIs without viable economic alternatives.

The development model treated AOI communities as obstacles to modernization rather than partners in development. This

27. FCT Act and Land Administration Framework (1976–1990).

28. FCTA Land Allocation Audit Review (2019).

29. Abuja Master Plan Review Committee Report (2008).

approach contradicts global best practices, which emphasize inclusive urban planning and the integration of Indigenous economies into city development.³⁰

The result is a dual economy: a wealthy, formal urban economy dominated by elites and migrants, and a marginalized Indigenous economy struggling for survival on the city's periphery.

5.3 Weak Enforcement of Economic and Indigenous Rights

Nigeria's legal frameworks— constitutional provisions, human-rights treaties, and Indigenous rights commitments—provide strong protections for economic justice. However, these protections remain largely unimplemented in the FCT.

Key failures include:

- Lack of institutional mechanisms to enforce AOI land and economic rights
- Absence of Indigenous representation in FCT planning bodies
- Weak monitoring of compensation processes
- Failure to integrate AOI data into development planning
- Limited accountability for rights violations

Despite constitutional guarantees of equity and social justice³¹, AOI communities continue to face discrimination in access to land, employment, and public services. International commitments—such as the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples—are rarely referenced in FCT policy decisions.³²

This gap between legal commitments and practical implementation perpetuates a cycle of exclusion. Without enforcement, rights remain symbolic rather than transformative.

5.4 The Human Cost of Structural Injustice

These structural drivers have produced a city where Indigenous poverty grows alongside urban wealth.

AOI communities experience:

- Loss of generational wealth
- High unemployment and underemployment
- Food insecurity
- Cultural erosion
- Social exclusion and psychological trauma

The injustice is not only economic—it is existential. A city built on their land has become a city in which they struggle to belong.

30. UN-Habitat, Inclusive Urban Development Guidelines (2015).

31. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), Section 17.

32. African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; UNDRIP (2007).

POLICY GAPS AND INSTITUTIONAL FAILURES

“When Systems Fail the First People: Why AOI Exclusion Persists”

The persistent economic marginalization of Abuja's Original Inhabitants (AOIs) is not simply the result of historical displacement—it is sustained by contemporary policy gaps and institutional failures that prevent Indigenous communities from accessing justice, compensation, and economic opportunity. These failures are embedded in governance structures, legal frameworks, data systems, and planning processes that consistently overlook or undervalue Indigenous rights. Understanding these gaps is essential for designing reforms that can meaningfully address AOI exclusion.

5.1 Absence of an Institution Dedicated to AOI Rights

One of the most significant policy gaps is the lack of a dedicated institution mandated to protect AOI land, cultural, and economic rights.³³ Unlike other regions with Indigenous populations—such as Kenya's National Land Commission or South Africa's Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities—Nigeria has no statutory body responsible for safeguarding the rights of the communities displaced to build its capital.

In the FCT, AOIs are treated as stakeholders without legal recognition, political representation, or institutional protection. This vacuum leaves them vulnerable to inconsistent compensation processes, arbitrary displacement, and exclusion from development planning. Without a dedicated institution, AOIs have no structured platform

to negotiate with government agencies, monitor land use, or advocate for their economic entitlements.³⁴

5.2 Outdated and Inadequate Compensation Frameworks

Compensation policies in the FCT are outdated, opaque, and poorly aligned with international standards on displacement and resettlement. Current frameworks focus narrowly on land valuation rather than comprehensive livelihood restoration, ignoring the long-term economic impacts of displacement.³⁵

Key weaknesses include:

- Compensation based on outdated land valuation methods
- Failure to account for communal land ownership systems
- Exclusion of women, youth, and vulnerable groups from compensation lists
- Lack of mechanisms to address historical injustices
- Absence of independent oversight or appeals processes

These gaps violate global best practices, including the World Bank's Environmental and Social Standard 5 (ESS5), which requires compensation to restore or improve pre-displacement living standards.³⁶ Instead, AOIs often receive one-time payments that cannot sustain long-term livelihoods, pushing families into cycles of poverty.

33. CHRICED Policy Review on AOI Governance (2024).

34. FCT Institutional Mapping Report (2023).

35. FCTA Compensation Framework Review (2018–2022).

36. World Bank Environmental and Social Standard 5 (ESS5), 2017.

5.3 Lack of Participatory Planning Mechanisms

Despite being the original custodians of the land, AOIs are largely excluded from FCT planning processes. There are no formal mechanisms requiring Indigenous participation in decisions related to land allocation, zoning, infrastructure development, or resettlement.³⁷

This exclusion contradicts the principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) recognized under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.³⁸ Without participatory structures, AOIs have no influence over policies that directly affect their land, livelihoods, and cultural heritage. As a result, development projects often proceed without consideration of Indigenous economic systems, cultural sites, or community priorities.

5.4 Absence of Indigenous Economic Data in FCT Planning

Another critical gap is the lack of disaggregated data on AOI livelihoods, income levels, land loss, and compensation outcomes. FCT development plans rely heavily on urban demographic data that excludes Indigenous communities or treats them as part of the general population.³⁹

This data invisibility has several consequences:

- AOI poverty is underestimated or ignored
- Budget allocations do not reflect Indigenous needs

- Livelihood restoration programs are poorly targeted
- Compensation audits lack accuracy and accountability

Without reliable data, policymakers cannot design evidence-based interventions, and AOI communities remain invisible in official statistics.

5.5 No Recognition of Cultural and Heritage Economies

AOI cultural economies—pottery, crafts, festivals, traditional markets, and heritage sites—are not recognized as economic assets within FCT development frameworks.⁴⁰ This omission erases Indigenous contributions to Abuja's cultural identity and deprives communities of opportunities to develop tourism, creative industries, and cultural enterprises.

The failure to integrate cultural economies into development planning reinforces the perception that AOI livelihoods are outdated or irrelevant, rather than valuable components of Abuja's social and economic fabric.

These policy gaps and institutional failures form a system that perpetuates Indigenous poverty while enabling urban wealth accumulation. Without structural reforms—rooted in rights, representation, and accountability—AOI exclusion will continue to deepen.

37. Abuja Master Plan Review Committee Report (2008).

38. UNDRIP, Articles 10, 19 & 32 (2007).

39. FCT Development Data Audit (2022).

40. CHRICED Cultural Economy Assessment (2023).

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

“From Displacement to Justice: A Blueprint for Restoring AOI Economic Rights”

The economic marginalization of Abuja's Original Inhabitants (AOIs) is neither inevitable nor irreversible. It is the result of policy choices—and it can be corrected through policy reforms grounded in justice, accountability, and inclusive development. The recommendations below provide a comprehensive roadmap for federal authorities, legislators, civil society, and the media to restore Indigenous economic rights and ensure that AOIs become genuine stakeholders in the prosperity their land continues to generate.

6.1 Recommendations to the President and Minister of the FCT

1. Establish the Abuja Original Inhabitants Development Commission (AOIDC)

A statutory body dedicated to AOI rights is essential to address decades of exclusion. The AOIDC should have powers to:

- Protect AOI land and economic rights
- Oversee compensation and resettlement
- Coordinate livelihood restoration programs
- Represent AOIs in FCT planning processes⁴¹

Such a commission would mirror global best practices, including Indigenous rights institutions in Kenya, Canada, and South Africa.⁴²

2. Conduct an Independent Audit of Compensation Claims

A comprehensive audit—conducted by independent experts and civil society observers—is necessary to identify unpaid claims, discriminatory exclusions, and administrative irregularities.⁴³ The audit must

include:

- Gender-disaggregated data
- Youth-specific data
- Documentation of vulnerable groups (widows, persons with disabilities)

This process would restore transparency and rebuild trust between AOIs and government institutions.

3. Revise Compensation Policies to Reflect True Economic Loss

Current compensation frameworks focus narrowly on land value rather than livelihood restoration. Revised policies should align with the World Bank's Environmental and Social Standard 5 (ESS5), which requires compensation to restore or improve pre-displacement living standards.⁴⁴

This includes:

- Long-term livelihood support
- Access to land-for-land options
- Skills training and enterprise development
- Social protection for vulnerable households

6.2 Recommendations to the Senate Committee on the FCT

4. Enact Legislation Recognizing AOI Land Tenure and Economic Entitlements

Legal recognition of AOI land rights is essential for justice and stability. Legislation should:

- Affirm Indigenous land tenure systems
- Protect communal ownership
- Prevent arbitrary displacement
- Guarantee AOI participation in land governance⁴⁵

41. CHRICED Policy Review on AOI Governance (2024).

42. Comparative Indigenous Rights Institutions Study, UN-Habitat (2019).

43. FCT Compensation Audit Preliminary Findings (2023).

44. World Bank Environmental and Social Standard 5 (ESS5), 2017.

45. African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, Articles 21–22.

Such legislation would align Nigeria with international Indigenous rights standards.

5. Mandate Annual Reporting on AOI Economic Inclusion Indicators

The Senate Committee should require the FCTA to publish annual reports on:

- AOI employment rates
- Access to land and compensation
- Livelihood restoration outcomes
- Youth and women's economic participation⁴⁶

This would institutionalize accountability and ensure continuous monitoring.

6. Allocate Dedicated Budget Lines for Indigenous Livelihood Restoration

Budgetary commitments must reflect the scale of historical injustice. Dedicated funding should support:

- Agricultural revitalization
- Cultural and creative industries
- Skills training and enterprise development
- Community infrastructure⁴⁷

Without targeted funding, policy commitments remain symbolic.

6.3 Recommendations to Civil Society Organisations

7. Develop an Indigenous Economic Data Observatory

Civil society should establish a platform to track:

- Land loss
- Income trends
- Compensation outcomes
- Livelihood indicators⁴⁸

Reliable data is essential for advocacy, policy influence, and donor engagement.

8. Co-Design Livelihood and Value-Chain Programs with AOI Communities

Programs must be community-driven, culturally grounded, and economically viable. Priority sectors include:

- Pottery and crafts
- Agro-processing
- Tourism and heritage industries
- Youth-led digital enterprises⁴⁹

9. Build Regional and International Advocacy Alliances

Partnerships with African and global Indigenous rights networks can amplify AOI voices and attract international support.⁵⁰

6.4 Recommendations to the Media

10. Amplify Indigenous Economic Narratives

Media organizations should highlight AOI stories, data, and lived experiences to shift public perception and influence policy.

11. Investigate Land Allocation and Compensation Processes

Investigative journalism can expose corruption, elite capture, and administrative failures that perpetuate AOI exclusion.

12. Highlight Success Stories of Livelihood Regeneration

Positive stories inspire public support and demonstrate the potential of well-designed interventions.

These recommendations offer a pathway from historical injustice to economic restoration. Implementing them requires political will, institutional reform, and sustained collaboration across government, civil society, and the media. Justice for AOIs is not only a moral obligation—it is essential for building a fair, inclusive, and stable Federal Capital Territory

46. FCT Development Indicators Report (2022).

47. National Budget Office, Social Inclusion Expenditure Analysis (2023).

48. CHRICED Indigenous Data Systems Proposal (2024).

48. CHRICED Indigenous Data Systems Proposal (2024).

49. AOI Youth Enterprise Mapping Report (2024).

50. International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) Partnership Framework (2022).

CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

“Justice Cannot Wait: Restoring Dignity and Economic Rights to Abuja's First Peoples”

The story of Abuja's Original Inhabitants (AOIs) is not merely a historical footnote—it is a living injustice that continues to shape the social and economic landscape of Nigeria's capital. Nearly five decades after the compulsory acquisition of their ancestral lands, AOI communities remain excluded from the prosperity their land sustains. The skyscrapers, government complexes, and luxury estates that define Abuja's skyline stand as daily reminders of a development model that enriched the nation while impoverishing its first custodians.⁵¹

This policy brief has shown, through evidence and lived experience, that AOI marginalization is not the result of natural economic forces. It is the product of deliberate policy choices, structural inequities, and institutional failures that have denied Indigenous communities their rights to land, livelihood, and cultural survival.⁵² The consequences are profound: intergenerational poverty, cultural erosion, youth unemployment, weakened community resilience, and deepening social inequality.

Yet the AOI story is also one of resilience. Despite displacement, exclusion, and decades of neglect, Indigenous communities continue to assert their identity, protect their heritage, and rebuild their livelihoods. Women have revived craft traditions in the face of lost clay deposits. Youth have organized to document their economic

realities and demand inclusion. Community leaders have mobilized to articulate shared priorities through town halls and advocacy platforms.⁵³ These efforts demonstrate that AOIs are not passive victims—they are active agents seeking justice, recognition, and partnership.

A Moral Imperative

At its core, the AOI struggle is a human-rights issue. The right to land, the right to work, the right to cultural identity, and the right to equitable development are enshrined in Nigeria's Constitution, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and international treaties to which Nigeria is a signatory.⁵⁴ The continued exclusion of AOIs violates these commitments and undermines the moral legitimacy of the Federal Capital Territory.

A capital city cannot symbolize national unity while perpetuating structural injustice against the very communities whose land made its existence possible. True unity requires fairness, recognition, and restitution.

A Development Imperative

Restoring AOI economic rights is not only a moral obligation—it is a development necessity. Inclusive development strengthens social cohesion, reduces conflict risk, and enhances the legitimacy of public institutions. When Indigenous communities thrive, the entire FCT benefits from:

51. Federal Military Government of Nigeria, Decree No. 6 (1976).

52. CHRICED Policy Review on AOI Governance (2024).

53. CHRICED Community Town Hall Synthesis Report (2024).

54. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999); African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights; ICESCR; UNDRIP (2007).

- Expanded local value chains
- Increased employment
- Cultural tourism and creative industries
- Stronger community-government relations
- More equitable distribution of urban wealth⁵⁵
- Development partners must support livelihood restoration, cultural economy development, and institutional strengthening.
- The media must shine a light on both injustice and resilience, shaping public opinion and influencing policy.

Ignoring AOI exclusion undermines Abuja's long-term stability and contradicts global best practices in inclusive urban development.

A Call to Government, Civil Society, and Development Partners

The path forward requires coordinated action across multiple sectors:

- Government must lead with bold reforms—establishing the Abuja Original Inhabitants Development Commission (AOIDC), revising compensation frameworks, recognizing Indigenous land tenure, and embedding AOI representation in planning processes.
- The National Assembly must enact legislation that protects AOI rights and mandates accountability mechanisms.
- Civil society must continue to amplify Indigenous voices, generate data, and build advocacy coalitions.

No single actor can solve this injustice alone. But together, they can transform Abuja from a symbol of displacement into a model of inclusive development.

A Future Worth Building

The future of Abuja must include the people of its past. AOIs deserve not only recognition but restitution—economic justice, cultural protection, and meaningful participation in the city's development. Their rights are not negotiable; they are foundational to the legitimacy of Nigeria's capital.

This is the moment for decisive action. The choices made today will determine whether Abuja becomes a city that heals historical wounds or deepens them. Justice for AOIs is not charity—it is a constitutional duty, a human-rights obligation, and a moral necessity.

The time to act is now.

55. UN-Habitat, Inclusive Urban Development Guidelines (2015).

About CHRICED

The **Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED)** is a trailblazing Nigerian nonprofit with nearly two decades of impact in advancing human rights, democratic governance, and civic empowerment. With **special consultative status at the United Nations ECOSOC** and certification by **NGOsource** as equivalent to a U.S. public charity, CHRICED offers donors a **high-impact, low-risk investment** in community-led development.

We believe that **informed citizens are the bedrock of democracy**—and we've built a reputation for turning that belief into measurable change.

Mission & Strategic Alignment

CHRICED exists to build a **democratic, inclusive, and accountable society** by empowering citizens to actively shape governance and demand transparency. Our work is rooted in globally recognized frameworks:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights
- Nigerian Constitution

We align seamlessly with donor priorities such as:

- Strengthening democratic institutions
- Promoting transparency and accountability
- Supporting marginalized and indigenous communities
- Advancing gender equity and social inclusion
- Expanding access to education and healthcare

What Sets CHRICED Apart

We don't just implement projects—we **design scalable solutions** that shift systems. Our core strengths include:

- Evidence-based research & advocacy
- Civic education & grassroots mobilization
- Project management & rigorous M&E
- Strategic communication &

public engagement

- Legislative advocacy & policy reform
- Coalition-building across sectors

Our multidisciplinary team, robust financial systems, and proven donor compliance make us a **trusted partner for long-term impact.**



The Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED)



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