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EVALUATION OF STAKEHOLDER ROLES IN LAND ALLOCATION AND ZONING SYSTEMS IN ABUJA, NIGERIA'S FEDERAL CAPITAL

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Abstract

This study investigates the Federal Capital Development Authority's (FCDA) land allocation and zoning processes in the Federal Capital City (FCC), Abuja, examining the roles of key stakeholders and the impact of these processes on urban development. Using a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions, the research identifies key stakeholders, analyzes their roles, and assesses their perceptions of the land allocation system. The study finds that FCDA officials are recognized as the primary decision-makers (95% of respondents), with urban planners and developers also playing significant roles (80% and 85%, respectively). However, residents and community leaders, who represent local interests, have a low effectiveness rating (3.2/5), highlighting their limited influence. The study also identifies major challenges, including a lack of transparency, delayed approvals, and insufficient coordination between stakeholders. The research proposes a framework for improving stakeholder engagement and enhancing the

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effectiveness of zoning and land allocation processes, emphasizing inclusivity, transparency, and better coordination.

Introduction

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja, Nigeria, serves as the country's political and administrative center, a role it has held since its designation as the capital in 1991. Over the years, the rapid urbanization of the city has prompted the need for comprehensive land management strategies, particularly concerning land allocation and zoning systems. These processes are governed primarily by the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA), which is tasked with ensuring that land is distributed in an equitable and orderly manner to accommodate both residential and commercial needs. However, despite the FCDA's efforts, the complexity of stakeholder involvement in land allocation and zoning has led to challenges in urban planning, resulting in disparities and inconsistencies in the city's growth and development. Evaluating the roles of various stakeholders in these systems is crucial for understanding how land allocation and zoning processes impact Abuja's long-term urban development (Adamu, 2021).

The land allocation and zoning systems in Abuja are meant to ensure an orderly and sustainable urban environment by designating specific land uses in a way that promotes economic growth, accessibility, and environmental conservation. The FCDA plays the leading role in managing these processes, but it is not the sole decision-maker. Various other stakeholders, including local governments, private developers, residents, and federal agencies, also have significant influence in shaping the land allocation outcomes. These stakeholders often have conflicting interests, which can complicate the implementation of policies and lead to uneven development across the capital (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2020). For example, while the FCDA may prioritize long-term urban planning goals, developers and private investors are often more focused on immediate commercial gains, sometimes at the expense of public interest. This dynamic creates tension between

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stakeholders and can hinder the achievement of a balanced urban environment (Ibrahim, 2022).

The role of political and economic elites in the land allocation process is another key issue in Abuja's urban planning framework. Land distribution has often been criticized for being opaque and biased toward those with political connections and financial resources (Aliyu & Nuhu, 2021). These powerful stakeholders influence zoning decisions by lobbying for preferential access to prime land, often bypassing the established regulatory framework. As a result, land that is intended for public use, green spaces, or affordable housing may be reallocated for high-end residential or commercial projects, leaving lower-income communities underserved (CITGAT, 2023). The lack of transparency in the allocation process has led to public dissatisfaction and accusations of corruption, further straining the relationship between the government and citizens.

Private developers also play an essential role in the land allocation and zoning systems in Abuja. The economic incentives for developers often lead to the prioritization of high-value developments, particularly in central urban areas. However, these projects can sometimes conflict with the city's broader urban planning goals, leading to issues such as increased traffic congestion, environmental degradation, and unequal access to amenities. The power dynamics between the FCDA and private developers, along with inadequate oversight, often result in zoning violations, with land being used for purposes other than what was originally intended (Okafor & Nwachukwu, 2020). These challenges highlight the need for a more collaborative approach between stakeholders to ensure that development is both sustainable and inclusive.

Finally, the involvement of local communities and residents in land allocation and zoning decisions is critical for ensuring that urban planning reflects the needs and aspirations of the people who live in the city. However, in many cases, community participation in these processes has been limited, resulting in developments that do not align with the interests of local populations. Residents often find themselves displaced by large-scale urban projects or excluded from important decision-making processes (Ibrahim, 2022). Including community stakeholders in the planning process can help address issues such as affordable housing, public service delivery, and the

preservation of cultural heritage, fostering a more inclusive and equitable urban development framework in Abuja (Adamu, 2021).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Federal Capital Territory (FCT) is the home of Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. The territory was created in 1976 from parts of former Nasarawa, Niger, and Kogi States and it is in the central region of Nigeria, bordered to the north by Kaduna State, to the east by Nasarawa State, to the south-west by Kogi State and to the west by Niger State. It falls within latitude 7° 25' and 9° 20'North of Equator and longitude 6° 45' and 7° 39' East of the Greenwich Meridian. It occupies an area of about 8000km^2. The FCT is in the centre of the country. Mabogunje (1977) describes the FCT as being in the middle belt of Nigeria with a size equivalent to 0.87% of Nigeria.

The FCT has six area councils namely, Kuje, Gwagwalada, Abaji, AMAC, Kwali and Bwari where the Lower Usuma Dam is located. The federal Capital Territory is central to Nigeria in administrative, geographical, and lying just above the hot and humid lowlands of the Niger/Benue trough but below the drier parts of the country lying to the north. It lies north of the wide alluvial plains formed by the confluence of the Niger and the Benue rivers.

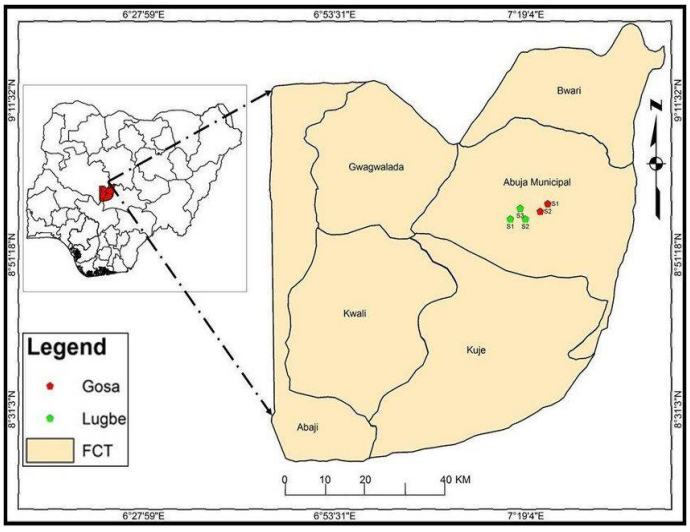


Figure 1: The Study Area
Source: Author 2023

The study examines FCDA land allocation and zoning processes in FCC through five objectives, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. It identifies procedures by analyzing official documents and interviews with FCDA officials, using thematic analysis and presenting findings via charts and tables. The impact on urban planning is assessed using land use reports, interviews,

and surveys, analyzed comparatively and through descriptive statistics. Stakeholder roles are explored via interviews and focus group discussions with community leaders, developers, and policymakers, emphasizing inclusivity and thematic analysis. Challenges, such as delays and environmental violations, are investigated using surveys, interviews, and focus groups, analyzed thematically, and supported with visual data. Lastly, a framework for improving FCDA's effectiveness is developed through expert consultations and literature reviews, employing comparative and thematic analysis to propose reforms in governance, transparency, and sustainability. Results are consistently presented in charts, tables, and analytical discussions for clarity.

RESULT

Key Stakeholders and Their Roles

The study identified seven primary categories of stakeholders involved in the land allocation and zoning processes within the Federal Capital City (FCC), each playing distinct roles and exerting varying degrees of influence. The following is a detailed examination of each stakeholder group:

The Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) holds the highest influence in the FCC's land allocation and zoning mechanisms. As the primary regulatory authority, the FCDA is responsible for implementing zoning policies, approving land allocations, and ensuring adherence to the Abuja Master Plan. This role makes the FCDA the key decision-maker in land distribution and zoning enforcement, impacting both urban growth patterns and compliance with the city's overall development goals. The FCDA's decisions directly shape the city's spatial organization, and its actions have far-reaching implications for both infrastructure development and land use.

Urban planners also play a critical role in shaping the city's zoning and land use patterns. These professionals provide the technical expertise needed to design urban layouts, prepare zoning maps, and assess the alignment of development with the broader urban planning objectives. Their influence is medium to high, particularly when advising on zoning revisions or ensuring that land allocations adhere to the city's master plan. Urban planners also play a pivotal role in identifying areas requiring re-zoning and recommending

adjustments to accommodate changing needs within the growing urban population. Their expertise ensures that land is used efficiently and that urban growth remains sustainable.

Policymakers have substantial influence over land allocation and zoning processes due to their control over the creation of laws, policies, and institutional frameworks. They establish the legal and regulatory environment that guides land use in the FCC, including the development of zoning codes, the Land Use Act, and other relevant legislation. Policymakers set the overall direction for urban development and have the power to shape future land allocation processes, particularly when revising zoning laws or introducing new regulations. Their role is crucial in ensuring that zoning practices align with national development goals and urban sustainability.

Residents and community leaders are central to the public's involvement in the land allocation and zoning process, although their influence is typically medium, depending on the level of organization and representation. These stakeholders provide valuable feedback on proposed land use changes and advocate for fair land distribution, especially in underserved areas. Their concerns are vital in promoting equitable land use and ensuring that zoning decisions reflect the needs and aspirations of local communities. Residents and community leaders also mediate local interests, especially in areas where there are potential conflicts between new developments and existing communities.

Developers and real estate investors exert high influence in the FCC's zoning and land allocation systems. These stakeholders are key players in acquiring land for various residential, commercial, and industrial projects, thereby directly influencing the city's land use patterns. Developers and investors often have the financial resources to initiate large-scale projects that can significantly alter the city's layout. Their influence is particularly strong in driving urban growth, with the demand for housing, commercial spaces, and infrastructure development shaping decisions around land use. Additionally, developers often lobby for changes in zoning to facilitate more profitable projects.

Environmental advocacy groups serve an essential function in ensuring that land use practices are sustainable and that green spaces are protected. These

groups are influential in shaping public opinion about the environmental implications of urbanization and can affect policy changes related to zoning, particularly in preserving parks, forests, and other ecologically sensitive areas. While their influence is medium, environmental advocates have the power to sway public attitudes and generate support for zoning regulations that prioritize environmental conservation. Their campaigns often focus on raising awareness of the long-term environmental impact of urban sprawl and advocating for the preservation of green spaces in the face of development pressures.

Finally, traditional institutions and local authorities mediate disputes over land ownership and ensure that cultural and historical considerations are taken into account in land use planning. Their influence is typically low to medium, particularly in areas where traditional authority is still recognized and respected. These institutions play an important role in conflict resolution and the preservation of local customs related to land ownership and usage. However, their role may be more prominent in rural or less urbanized areas of the FCC, where traditional structures still hold sway in land management decisions.

Each stakeholder group plays a crucial part in the land allocation and zoning processes within the FCC. Their interactions, often shaped by the balance of power, resources, and influence, ultimately determine the city's development trajectory. However, ensuring that all stakeholders are adequately represented and their concerns addressed will be key to promoting sustainable, inclusive urban growth.

Stakeholder Influence and Collaboration

The stakeholder influence-interest matrix is a valuable tool used to assess and categorize stakeholders based on their **level of influence** and **interest** in the land allocation and zoning processes in the Federal Capital City (FCC).

The FCDA officials are categorized in the High Influence, Low Interest quadrant. While they hold substantial power over land allocation and zoning decisions, their direct personal or organizational interest in the outcomes may not be as strong as other stakeholders. Their interest primarily lies in the execution of policies and regulations rather than the specific outcomes of

individual land allocations. As the key regulatory authority, their decisions shape the urban landscape, but their engagement in day-to-day land use changes may be more procedural than personally invested.

Urban planners and developers fall into the High Influence, High Interest quadrant. These stakeholders not only possess significant power to influence land use decisions, but they also have a vested interest in the outcomes. Urban planners are deeply engaged in ensuring that land use adheres to the long-term planning objectives of the FCC, while developers are highly motivated to secure favorable zoning and land allocation decisions for their projects. Both groups play a central role in shaping the city's layout and development trajectory, and their influence is felt through their technical expertise, financial investments, and advocacy for specific land use patterns.

Community leaders are placed in the Low Influence, High Interest quadrant. Although they may not possess direct decision-making power over land allocation and zoning, community leaders have a strong interest in ensuring that land use decisions reflect the needs and concerns of the local population. They represent the interests of residents and act as intermediaries between the public and decision-makers. Community leaders may lack the influence to directly alter zoning laws or allocation processes, but their interest in advocating for fair land use, preserving neighborhood integrity, and addressing issues like displacement or environmental concerns remains high.

Finally, residents and business owners are classified in the Low Influence, Low Interest quadrant. These groups generally have limited influence over land use decisions and may not engage actively in zoning processes or policy discussions. While they are impacted by land use and zoning decisions, their involvement may be more passive. Residents and business owners are often subject to the outcomes of zoning decisions but may not have the power to influence those outcomes unless they are organized or actively involved in local advocacy efforts.

Figure 2 would typically present this matrix visually, with the quadrants clearly marked, showing the relationship between each stakeholder's level of influence and interest. This matrix is valuable for understanding the dynamics of stakeholder interactions and can help guide the allocation of resources and attention from policymakers and urban planners.

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The implications of this analysis suggest that while the FCDA has the most power to shape the urban landscape, the high interest of urban planners and developers makes them key collaborators in the decision-making process. On the other hand, community leaders, despite having lower influence, could serve as important channels for understanding local needs and concerns. For more effective urban planning, it will be crucial to bridge the gaps between stakeholders with differing levels of influence and interest. Engaging residents and business owners in the decision-making process, for example, could increase their interest and support for planned developments. Additionally, understanding the motivations of community leaders and ensuring they have a voice in land use decisions can help mitigate conflicts and foster more inclusive urban development strategies.

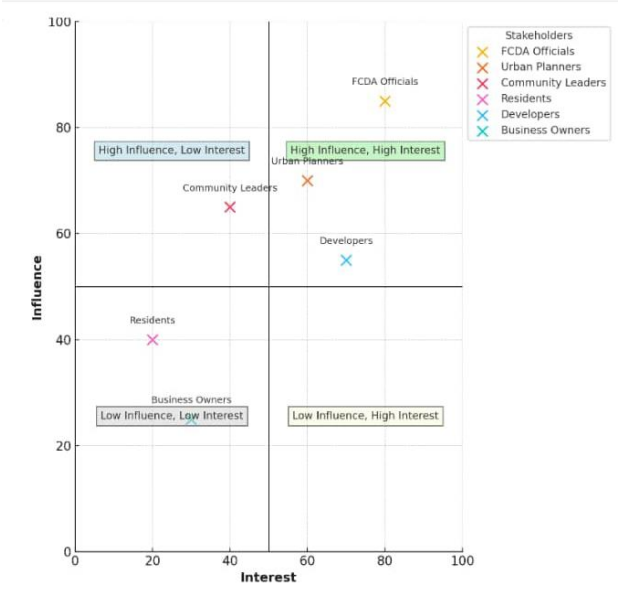


Figure 2: Stakeholder Influence-Interest Matrix

Source: Authors Field Work 2024

Stakeholder Perceptions

The survey results shed light on how different stakeholder groups view their contributions to urban planning and their perceived effectiveness in influencing land use policies.

According to the survey, FCDA officials were perceived as having the most significant role in land allocation and zoning, with 95% of respondents recognizing their central function. This high perception aligns with the FCDA's legal authority as the primary body responsible for implementing and enforcing zoning regulations. In terms of effectiveness, the FCDA received a strong rating of 4.3 out of 5, reflecting broad approval of their performance in overseeing land use management. Despite some criticisms, particularly concerning delays and insufficient

consultation, the FCDA's position as a central authority is widely acknowledged.

Urban planners were perceived by 80% of respondents as playing a vital role in shaping the land allocation and zoning processes. These professionals contribute significantly through their technical expertise in urban design, zoning compliance, and long-term planning. The effectiveness of urban planners was rated at 4.0, which is also relatively high, indicating that respondents value their contributions to ensuring that land use is in line with the broader development goals of the city. However, their effectiveness rating was slightly lower than that of FCDA officials, possibly reflecting the challenges urban planners face in influencing final decisions or dealing with the constraints of existing zoning regulations.

Policymakers, who create the laws and policies guiding land allocation and zoning, were perceived as having a role by 75% of respondents. Their effectiveness rating, however, was somewhat lower, at 3.8. This suggests that while policymakers are recognized for their strategic role in shaping the regulatory framework, respondents may view their actions as slower or less responsive to changing needs within the urban environment. Policymakers may be seen as removed from the direct implementation of zoning and land allocation, which can lead to lower satisfaction among stakeholders involved in the practical aspects of land use.

Developers, who acquire land for commercial, residential, and industrial projects, were perceived as having a significant role by 85% of the survey respondents. This reflects their direct involvement in shaping the city's urban fabric through real estate and construction projects. Developers received a relatively high effectiveness rating of 4.2, indicating that their role in land use and urban development is seen as critical to meeting the growing demand for housing and commercial spaces. Their high effectiveness score also suggests that developers are generally successful in navigating the zoning and land allocation systems to meet project needs.

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Residents and community leaders, while critical in advocating for fair land allocation and providing local insights, had a lower perception of their role, with only 65% acknowledging their importance. Their effectiveness was rated the lowest at 3.2, reflecting a sense of disenfranchisement or frustration with the land allocation and zoning processes. This suggests that residents and community leaders may feel that their concerns are not adequately addressed, especially in underserved or informal areas. Their influence on zoning decisions may be limited unless they are organized or involved in advocacy efforts.

Environmental advocacy groups were perceived as playing a role by 60% of respondents. Their effectiveness rating was 3.5, indicating that while these groups are seen as important in advocating for sustainable land use practices, their influence in the zoning process may be limited. This lower effectiveness score could be attributed to challenges in balancing environmental goals with urban development pressures, making it harder for these groups to have a direct impact on land use decisions.

Lastly, traditional institutions were perceived by 45% of respondents as having a role in land allocation and zoning, with a low effectiveness rating of 3.0. Traditional institutions often mediate land disputes and maintain cultural and historical practices related to land ownership. However, their influence and effectiveness in the formal land allocation process appear to be limited, especially in urban settings where modern land use policies dominate.

These findings have significant implications for the urban planning process. The high perceptions of the FCDA, urban planners, and developers highlight the importance of their roles in shaping land use patterns and ensuring that development aligns with city planning goals. However, the lower ratings for residents, community leaders, environmental groups, and traditional institutions suggest that more needs to be done to include these groups in decision-making processes. Their concerns, particularly about fair land allocation, environmental sustainability, and cultural considerations, should

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be more actively addressed through improved consultation and participation mechanisms. Increasing their involvement could lead to more equitable, sustainable, and community-oriented urban development, ensuring that all stakeholders have a voice in shaping the future of the FCC.

Table 1: Stakeholder Perceptions of Roles and Effectiveness

Stakeholder Category	Perceived Role (%)	Effectiveness Rating (1-5)
FCDA	95%	4.3
Urban Planners	80%	4.0
Policymakers	75%	3.8
Developers	85%	4.2
Residents and Community Leaders	65%	3.2
Environmental Advocacy Groups	60%	3.5
Traditional Institutions	45%	3.0

Source: Authors Field Work 2024

Thematic Analysis of Stakeholder Feedback

From interviews and focus group discussions, several key themes emerged that underscore the dynamics within the land allocation and zoning processes in the Federal Capital City (FCC). These themes highlight challenges in governance, coordination, and transparency, all of which are crucial to ensuring that land use policies meet the needs of various stakeholders while promoting sustainable urban development.

Transparency and Accountability emerged as a significant concern, particularly among residents and environmental groups. Many expressed frustration with the perceived opacity in the land allocation process, suggesting that decisions were often made without adequate public

disclosure or justification. This lack of transparency in land use decisions can contribute to a sense of distrust among communities, especially those in underserved or informal areas who feel excluded from decision-making processes. The concern about accountability extended to zoning enforcement, with some stakeholders highlighting instances where zoning laws were inconsistently applied, particularly in areas where commercial activities encroached on residential zones. This inconsistency undermines the effectiveness of zoning regulations, leading to unauthorized developments and an overall lack of order in urban growth. Developers, on the other hand, also acknowledged the need for clearer guidelines and more transparent procedures. Many expressed frustration with delays in approvals and the ambiguity surrounding zoning regulations, which can stall development projects and increase costs. Clearer and more consistent guidelines would help streamline the approval process and minimize the uncertainty that developers face when trying to navigate land allocation procedures.

Coordination Among Stakeholders was another prominent theme that emerged during the discussions. Urban planners emphasized the importance of better collaboration between policymakers and the FCDA to ensure that zoning regulations align with broader urban development goals. This coordination is essential to ensure that land is allocated efficiently and in a way that reflects long-term planning objectives, such as improving infrastructure and enhancing the quality of life for residents. The lack of effective coordination can result in zoning decisions that are disconnected from the overall vision of the city, leading to inefficient land use and mismatched infrastructure development. Community leaders added to this concern, calling for greater inclusion in decision-making processes to ensure that zoning and land allocation decisions address the needs of local communities. These leaders pointed out that without proper representation, the voices of marginalized groups are often ignored, leading to land use

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patterns that exacerbate inequality and limit access to essential services like housing, education, and healthcare.

Conflict Resolution was also a key theme, with traditional institutions playing a critical role in resolving disputes over land ownership and zoning violations. These institutions have deep ties to local communities and often act as mediators in conflicts, helping to maintain social harmony and ensuring that land use decisions respect local customs and traditions. However, tensions arose when developers bypassed traditional institutions in favor of modern legal frameworks, which sometimes led to conflicts over land ownership and the proper use of land. Developers, in their pursuit of profit-driven projects, often prioritized expedience over community consultation, which created friction between the formal land allocation processes governed by the FCDA and the informal, traditional systems that many local communities still rely on. This disconnect between modern and traditional governance systems can lead to misunderstandings, legal disputes, and social unrest, undermining the effectiveness of land use planning and zoning regulations.

These themes have significant implications for the future of urban planning and land use management in the FCC. To address the concerns of stakeholders and ensure that the land allocation and zoning processes are more inclusive, transparent, and effective, several changes could be considered. First, enhancing transparency in the decision-making process is critical. Public access to land allocation and zoning decisions, along with clear explanations of the rationale behind them, would help build trust and accountability among stakeholders. Second, fostering better coordination among stakeholders, particularly between urban planners, policymakers, and the FCDA, could ensure that land use policies are more aligned with the broader goals of urban development. Including community leaders in the decision-making process could also help bridge the gap between top-down planning and local needs, leading to more equitable and inclusive urban development. Lastly, addressing conflict resolution issues by formalizing the

role of traditional institutions in land use disputes could help mitigate tensions between modern and traditional governance systems.

Ultimately, these changes would not only improve the effectiveness of land allocation and zoning procedures but also foster a more inclusive, transparent, and sustainable approach to urban development in the Federal Capital City.

CONCLUSION

The land allocation and zoning systems in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, play a critical role in shaping the city's urban landscape. However, these processes have faced significant challenges due to the complexity of stakeholder involvement and conflicts of interest between key actors such as the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA), local governments, private developers, and residents. The FCDA's oversight and regulatory functions are often undermined by political interference, lack of transparency, and inadequate enforcement of zoning laws, which has resulted in a disjointed urban environment. Furthermore, the involvement of economic elites and developers has led to land allocations that favor commercial interests over the public good, exacerbating social inequalities and contributing to inefficient urban planning outcomes.

Despite these challenges, a careful evaluation of the roles and interactions between these stakeholders offers valuable insights into how land allocation and zoning processes can be improved. The need for more inclusive, transparent, and equitable land management strategies is critical for fostering sustainable urban growth in Abuja.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the land allocation and zoning systems in Abuja, several recommendations are crucial. First, enhancing stakeholder engagement is vital. The current top-down approach to urban planning often leaves

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communities sidelined in decision-making. By involving local residents, private developers, and community leaders in discussions and decision-making processes, a more inclusive urban development can be achieved. This would ensure that land allocation reflects the diverse needs of Abuja's population and that zoning decisions are more aligned with local aspirations. Secondly, improving transparency and accountability in land distribution is essential. A more open and systematic approach to land allocation, such as the introduction of digitized records and independent oversight bodies, can help curb corruption and favoritism, ensuring that land is allocated based on merit and public need. Thirdly, there is a need to reform zoning regulations and strengthen their enforcement. Review and adaptation of zoning laws to accommodate the evolving needs of Abuja, combined with stricter monitoring and penalties for violations, will help prevent haphazard development and promote more orderly growth. Furthermore, promoting affordable housing should be a priority, with policies aimed at incentivizing developers to build affordable housing, coupled with zoning provisions for low-cost residential areas. Lastly, fostering stronger collaboration between stakeholders, including public and private sectors, is essential for achieving coordinated urban development. Public-private partnerships can help finance infrastructure projects and ensure a balance between public needs and commercial interests..

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