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SULEJA: PROGENITOR OF THE NASCENT NATION'S CAPITAL

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Abstract

This lead paper seeks to establish the multifaceted dimensions on how Suleja Emirate contributed to the establishment of the Federal Capital of Nigeria, there on becoming a satellite town to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). Its sacrifice made the choice of Abuja possible as the appropriate location for the Federal Capital of Nigeria. However, the consequences of its generosity and benevolence outweigh its reward. A once-vibrant town in Nigeria, Suleja is currently plagued by the challenges emanating from its huge landmass loss, due to seizure by the Federal Government in 1976, during the relocation of the Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja. We posit the word seizure albeit from the wordings and Principle of the 1976 Decree that expropriated the large chunk of the Emirate's land mass without any provision of recompense. Through a comprehensive analysis of historical records, socio-economic factors, and contemporary case studies, this research aims at foregrounding Suleja's contributions to the establishment of the FCT, and unraveling the underlying consequences of such magnanimity. It further explores potential strategies for rejuvenation, emphasizing the imperative of sustainable urban planning and community engagement to breathe life back into this dwarfed settlement. The paper also forwards recommendations such as increase in the federal presence in Suleja Emirate, and employment of indigenes as several of the ways the Federal Government can impact the town for growth and development.

Keywords: Suleja Emirate, Contribution, Compensation, Federal Capital, Nigerian Government

Introduction

The emirate's wooded savanna area of about 2,980 square kilometres (1,150 sq mi) originally included four small Koro chiefdoms that paid tribute to the Hausa kingdom of Zazzau. After warriors of the Fulani jihad (struggle/War) captured Zaria (Zazzau's capital, 220 km (140 mi) north-northeast) about 1804,

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Muhamman Makau, Sarkin ("king of") Zazzau, led many of the Hausa nobility to the Koro town of Zuba (10 km or 6 mi south). Abu Ja (Jatau), his brother and successor as Sarkin Zazzau, founded Abuja town in 1828, began construction of its wall a year later, and proclaimed himself the first Sarkin Abuja. Suleja is a city in Niger State, Nigeria and located in the present Niger State of Nigeria. It has remained the headquarters of Suleja local government area since 1976. Suleja is the third largest town in Niger State after Minna and Bida towns. The local government shares common boarders with Kaduna State and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja.

It is sometimes misconstrued with the nearby city of Abuja, due to its proximity, and the fact that it was originally called Abuja before the Nigerian government adopted the name from the then Emir Sulaiman Barau for its new federal capital in 1976.[24]Apart from its closeness to the Nigerian federal capital, it is also recognized as a centre of excellence for traditional West African pottery, namely the world-famous LadiKwali Pottery Centre, established by Michael Cardew in 1950. The leading exponent of this school of pottery was Dr. Ladi Kwali, who received worldwide acclaim for her works, the originals of which are on display worldwide. Today, Suleja is well known as an exporter of Gbari pottery. Cotton weaving and dyeing, with locally grown indigo, and mat making are traditional activities, but farming remains the chief occupation. Local trade is primarily in agricultural products. In addition to the Pottery Centre, a government secondary school and a hospital are located in the town. This paper queries government's undermining of Suleja's contribution to the development of the FCT, and asserts that whatever criteria used in identifying the contributions of other states or regions, as pivotal to the development of the FCT, Suleja qualifies much more. Suleja has been the gateway and a feeder town to the Federal Capital Territory-Abuja, since its inception. This has overstretched the facilities and contributed to the insecurities in Suleja (The Nigerian Voice, 2011). It provides low-cost housing and living for a large percent of the civil servants, who could not afford the overpriced housing and lifestyle in the FCT. There is ample Scholarship on the contribution of Suleja to the development of the FCT, albeit to the detriment of the Town.

Since large parcels of land were donated to the FCT by Suleja, the town itself suffers the dearth of expansion land. Inhabitants now build on rocks, mountains and hills. Aside the potential environmental hazards emanating from this, it is grossly inconvenient and restrictive of growth and development for Suleja. This begs the questions on the existence, and the adequacy of rewards for Suleja's sacrifice in the establishment of the FCT. Salient research questions would include;

- To which extent did Suleja contribute to the development of the FCT?
- Were there promises made by government to compensate Suleja for its contributions to the development of the FCT?
- Are there fallouts from government's inadequate compensation of Suleja for its

contributions to the FCT?

These research questions would be the guiding light of this lead paper. They are raised with the hope that adequate gleanings from them would navigate our discourse, and constitute robust engagement of the issues at hand on the development of Suleja, as the most important bordering towns of the FCT.

This paper, by way of exposition, leans on existing researches on the ongoing topic to shout from the rooftops; the unfair neglect of Suleja's welfare, and the continual default/renege by the Federal Government of Nigeria, in its promises to the good people of Suleja.

The paper advances issues of unavailability of land, potential health hazards, inadequate infrastructure, lack of health facilities, environmental degradation and pollution, lack of entertainment and touristic centres, among others necessaryforthewell-beingoftheinhabitantsofSuleja.Itforegroundsthe implications and consequences of government's neglect of the welfare of the inhabitants of Suleja, while proffering solutions to the problems through actionable recommendations.

Quest for a Suitable Federal Capital Territory: A Landmass Affair

One of the most important requirements for locating a Federal Capital Territory is landmass. Without the generous concession of large parcels of land by Suleja to Government, it would have failed that important requirement. Hence, Suleja's contribution is grossly instrumental to the establishment of Abuja, as the Federal Capital Territory. According to the Aguda Panel report of 1975, on the relocation of the Federal Capital from Lagos, overpopulation ranked number one, among other problems emanating from Lagos as the Federal Capital, and the State Capital of Lagos State at the same time. The panel reported that the city [Lagos] was in capable of playing this role in view of the overwhelming problem of inadequate land space for meaningful development commensurate with its status as the Capital of Nigeria". As at then, the estimated land mass of Lagos available for development was 67.12 km2, which was judged largely insufficient for the operation of a Federal Capital. Therefore, among the criteria recommended by the Aguda Panel for selecting the new Federal Capital, land availabilities (in the plural) ranked number three (Federal Ministry of Information, 1976). As at today, Abuja having a land mass of 7,315 km2, obviously is much larger than Lagos which has 3,345 km2 and the smallest state in land mass. In its report, the Aguda Panel submits that:

> *…it is generally agreed that this country [Nigeria] shall, sooner or later, have to move the Federal Capital away from Lagos as a result of the impediment to further development of the city caused by inadequate land space and associated problems [to land space]*

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Hence, after much deliberations and consultations by the Aguda Panel, the Federal Capital was moved from Lagos to Abuja December 12, 1991 (Opeyemi, 2023, Infomedia NG, 2023, Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2023).

Conceptual Clarification

Suleja: The Progenitor

Dictionary.Com online (2023) defines the word Progenitor as:

A biologically related ancestor;

A person or thing that first indicates a direction, originates something, or serves as a model; predecessor, precursor, one that helps to produce or bring forth something.

The second meaning of the word sits well with the mind of this paper. It describes the roles of Suleja in actualizing the FCT Abuja-dream. As a precursor, pained and ostracized by the Federal Government from the multiple assistance rendered to other states and regions of the nation. Suleja is like the proverbial motor grader, which is forbidden from using the road it helped in constructing. It is a sad experience to be discarded, after service to one's nation. Moreover, it is the joy of every primogenitor to carry the neonate, kiss the baby at birth, and watch the baby grow to maturity. However, an ancestor that remains unpaid for her services, and further prevented from benefiting, or deriving joy from the successful delivery of the baby, remains unsatisfied and disgruntled with the parents of the baby.

The allegory of the predecessor describes the predicament of Suleja, in the face of blatant neglect and undermining by the government, regardless of her self-restricting and self-effacing sacrifice.

The Contribution of Suleja to the development of the FCT-Abuja Suleja conceded 80% of its original land to the government, to provide the much needed land space for the creation of the New Federal Capital Territory in its present location. Furthermore, it was the host community that lodged the administrators, team of scientists and engineers that built the FCT-Abuja for over five years. Of all the satellite towns and neighboring states, none gave and sacrificed as much as Suleja town. Suleja accommodated several government parastatals, before they were eventually relocated to the FCT. Prominent among these are the NTA Channel 5, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN), and the School of Nursing and Midwifery (Adamu &Afaha,2017). Hence, the Federal Government of Nigeria owes debt of gratitude to pay its vows of compensation to the indigenes of Suleja. As a peaceful and benevolent people, the Suleja indigenes provided the much needed ambience and accommodation for the successful construction work of the Capital City. Most of the early builders and workers in the Capital City, as well as the administrators lived in Suleja Town. Having in mind that The Aguda report recommended Ethic Accord, as one of the salient criteria for selecting a New Federal Capital (Federal Ministry of Information, 1976). If the ethnic groups in Suleja had been hostile and

unaccommodating towards the administrators and workers in the New Federal Capital Territory, Abuja itself might not have existed. The Federal Government needs to be mindful of the sacrifices of Suleja.

Out of the 79.11% landmass contributed by three districts of Niger state to the establishment of the FCT, Suleja alone contributed 75%. Consequently, of the 845 villages in the FederalCapitalTerritory,82.5%belongedtoNigerState,dueto Suleja's loss of vast expanse of land in government's seizure. Plateau lost 16.6%, while Kwara lost a paltry 6.6% (Adamu &Afaha, 2017).

Moreover, Suleja did not only sacrifice its landmass, it paid the ultimate price of sacrificing its very identity for the establishment of the Federal Capital Territory-Abuja. Suleja's original name is Abuja, right from its inception in 1828. However, in 1979 at the 150th anniversary of Old Abuja, the military government intending to name the FCT Abuja, made official request to the Niger State Government, which in turn besought the late Alhaji Sulemanu Barau, the sixth and last Emir of Old Abuja (nowSuleja), and incidentally the first Emir of the new Suleja, named in honour after him, as emir during the establishment of the FCT (Adamu & Afaha, 2017, The Nigerian Voice, 2011). After exhaustive deliberations by the emirate, the name Abuja was ceded to the FCT, to give form and personality to the expanse of land Suleja gave in sacrifice for the establishment of the New Federal Capital Territory. Hence, the newly amalgamated space for the Federal Capital spanning Izom, Lehu, Semasu, Zui, Bassa, Ebagi, Ahinza Buga, Odu, Karshi, Karu, Bwari and Zuba (Federal Ministry of Information, 1976), which had no collective name to give them a unified identity became Abuja. Suleja sacrificed its original name, which carries all its history, culture and pride, and bequeathed it to the unnamed space, and called it ABUJA, while embracing the name SULEJA of its incumbent emir of the time. Kwara, Nassarawa, Kogi, and Plateau states did not christen the new birth, Suleja-Niger state did. Principal actor in these negotiations and deliberation is the incumbent Emir whose celebration we are now anchoring, when he was the Permanent Secretary in charge of Special Duties and Resettlement with the Niger State Government during the period.

Government's Promise of Compensations to Suleja for its Land Mass Loss

According to the Federal Ministry of Information (1976), the Implementation Schedule of 'The New Federal Capital, according to the Aguda Panel report, under item ii, states that "The indigenes of the area are to be resettled in new places of their choice outside the Federal Territory at the expense of the Federal Government." Furthermore, item vi states that "Compensation would be paid for the economic tree and other developed immovable assets in the Federal Territory." Also, The Federal Capital Territory Decree 1976, under Decree No. 6, section 6, subsection 1 and 2, items a, b, and c goes on to elaborate the nature and extent of the compensation promised to the affected indigenes of the Suleja Emirate. However, as a satellite town to the FCT, Suleja does not receive enough attention from the Federal Government. This is in spite of the Federal Government's promise to take the welfare and security of the neighboring towns

seriously, during the relocation of the Federal Capital from Lagos to Abuja, (The Nigerian Voice, 2011). It is on these grounds of compensation that the Suleja Emirate would wish to interrogate the extent which government has kept its promises of compensation to the indigenes, whose land and livelihood were taken away when the Federal Government seized their lands to build the Federal Capital Territory Abuja.

Fallouts of Inadequate Compensation to Suleja for its Contributions to the FCT

Consequent upon Suleja's donation of land to the Federal Capital Territory-Abuja, to its own detriment, the following challenges are emergent:

Unavailability of Land for Development in Housing, Commerce, Farming and Recreation
Of all the fastest dwindling natural resources on earth; land ranks 2nd after water. Land is already a scarce natural resource in many parts of the world (National Intelligence Council Report, 2013). In tandem, housing has been affected grossly in Suleja. The inhabitants of Suleja now build on mountainous rocks and hills, a times with the indigenes becoming tenants in the hands of their hitherto visitors. The latter wouldn't care in paying any amount from area dyseller of a piece of land to erect a building for either residential or commercial purposes. This is a trend that the Emirate Council is seriously battling to contain. Buildings perching on hills can be seen from Madalla, Kwankwashe, Rafin Sanyi, and most part of the town. Suleja is in need of bigger market spaces, modern malls and supermarkets, due to its population explosion by workers in the FCT, Abuja, who live in Suleja. Agriculture has also suffered immensely due to this paucity of arable lands.

Dwindling Quantity and Quality of Water
According to Okunlola et al (2014), The Nigerian standard for drinking water, compared with the World Health Organisation Water Quality Index (WQI), shows that the water that flows into Suleja from the Gurara dam in Kaduna, is of poor quality, and not fit for drinking. Water treatment plants and boreholes are needed to remedy the lack of portable water in the town, since there is an existing dependable source of water.

Lack of Proper Waste Management and Pollution
There are no adequate drainage and waste disposal systems in Suleja. These have inadvertently added to the poor quality of drinking water in Suleja. The landscape of Suleja encourages waste spillage into the roads, encroaching refuse dumps dots the roads and streets of Suleja. These wastes are eventually washed into the water supply during rainy seasons, and eventually block the drainages and exacerbate floods. This constitutes environmental pollution and toxicity of water.

Environmental Degradation Due to Erosion and Deforestation
Floods are great harbingers of erosion. Heavy rain falls lead to floods, which in turn cause erosion. Visible signs of land erosion, and deforestation are all-over Suleja. From the former SDP Secretariat, Osato road, Kwamba, and all the way to Kantoma Bridge, the streets, roads and bridges all over Suleja are threatened by gradual, but continuous erosion. Urbanization usually begets deforestation. The little forests in Old Suleja has

given way to urbanization, due to paucity of leftover lands, after the Federal Capital Territory was given most of Suleja's developmental lands.

Inadequate Healthcare Facilities and Specialist Services

Population explosion due to inadequate landmass for development, inadequate supply of portable water and lack of proper waste management are major contributors to health hazards in any given community. Given that these aforementioned problems are existent in Suleja, it is expected that Suleja, as a feeder town of the FCT, would possess some of the most ultramodern Federal Government owned healthcare facilities and specialist services in the country. Since a large part of the federal civil servants working in the FCT-Abuja, actually live in Suleja town — mostly for economic reasons — their proximity to good medical facilities is a no-brainer. Since, most of the health institutions in Suleja are privately owned; there is need for Federal Government owned health institutions in Suleja. This paper is a cry out for more Federal Government presence in the town of Suleja, and an example of such is the ongoing Two months ago, the first case of Anthrax in Nigeria occurred in Niger State, and it was traced to Suleja (Okwe, 2023). However, this does not undermine the efforts in bovine care and control culture in Suleja. In fact, it was largely due to professional capacity that it was hastily contained. Cattle handling in Suleja markets and abattoir have been much hygienic. This is evident in the care and control of the cattle slaughtered in Suleja's abattoir by veterinary and health workers. However, the abattoir, despite its commendable efforts, could still enjoy upgrades and expansion. For instance, the abattoir needs more functioning boreholes, vans for meat conveyance, cold-rooms, standby generators for preserving leftover meat and better qualified helps to support the staff members. Leftovers are sometimes taken out of the market for refrigeration, due to inadequate power supply (Umar, 2021),

Insecurity Due to Poor Security Architecture

The Population explosion in Suleja, was mainly due to inflow of people from all over the country, looking for job in the New Federal Capital Territory, and also spillover from the FCT- Abuja, is one of the causative factors of insecurity cases recorded in the town in the past decades. Most businessmen and women, middle and low income civil servants prefer to live in the much cheaper town of Suleja. Suleja's population has risen significantly from 207,130 in 2001 to 216,578 in 2006 with the release of the 2006 official census figures. Moreover, the Federal Government should take the security architecture of Suleja more seriously in the light of the terrorist attacks in Suleja in the last decade, where several lives were lost, and property worth millions of Naira were destroyed (The Nigerian Voice, 2011, Sotunde, 2011, Osuala & Omonayin, 2020, Adamu&Afaha,2017). Since security ranks among the Aguda Panel's recommended criteria for selecting a Federal Capital Territory, it is then not in the best interest of the FCT that security matters in the satellite towns such as Suleja be handled with laxity (FederalMinistryofInformation,1976).

Increasing Rate of Unemployment

Rise in the population of Suleja town has contributed to considerable level of joblessness. Many that are not gainfully employed turn to social vices and eventually crime (The Nigerian Voice, 2011). An early morning drive through Berger Paint Junction-Rafin Sanyi,

would give a glimpse of the rate of unemployment in the town, as both young and old sit on the benches there, hoping for a day's hire.

Traffic Congestion Due to Bad Road Network

From Minna Motor Park, all the way to the Suleja Market, the road network is bad. The roads are in poor condition, and do not adequately intersect. Aside the problem of encroaching refuse dumps into the road, making the road dirty and congested, from Kwamba, KwanKwashe, and all the way to the very busy and popular Madalla, the traffic jams due to the narrowness of Suleja's roads is another problem. Lack of proper connectivity in the road construction does not provide much allowance for Ins and Outs. The transportation system is also poor, with limited public transportation options.

Shortage of Quality Educational Institutions

Federal presence in education is grossly lacking in Suleja. The Bill to establish a National University of Medicine and Health Sciences in Suleja needs a re-enactment by the 10th National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This Speaker, in 2021, wrote a well itemized memorandum to the senate, in contribution to the public hearing called by the Senate of the National Assembly. His submission strongly supports the Bill for an Act to establish the university in Suleja (Haruna, 2021). Aside this, several efforts were made by concerned indigenes and illustrious sons and daughters of the Suleja Emirate, to bring more federal presence to Suleja town.

Limited Recreational and Cultural Amenities

All work and no play is said to make Bala a dull boy. The population of Suleja lacks befitting place to celebrate their festivities, and play. It appears that the closest thing to a recreational centre in Suleja town is the Suleja Race Course. This is essentially an open field without any recreational facility, along Madalla road. Suleja lacks a zoo, a museum, artisanal centres, ultramodern sport complexes, befitting municipal hall for events, an amusement park and touristic centres, despite its great recreational and touristic potentials. Suleja possess quite an array of nature's delight in rivers, gorges, numerous streams and beautiful falls, among which is the popular Gurara Falls. These alone, could provide sufficient water parks and amusement centres for the leisure of the inhabitants (Adamu&Afaha,2017).

The Imposing Magnificence of the Zuma Rock alone is worth millions in Internally Generated Revenue, as a tourist site. Its closeness to Suleja could draw tourist traffic in individual, school and corporate excursions. Suleja is dotted with rich tourist sites in cultural architecture, textiles, and historical artifacts, among others with potentials to rake in millions of Naira annually. The Federal Government only needs to look at the great potential of the Emirate, and invest in its development as a satellite town to the FCT.

Recommendations

Although a number of recommendations have been made earlier in the paper, nevertheless, the following are additional suggestions to remedy the forwarded challenges in Suleja town:

- Since the Bill establishing National University of Medicine and Health Sciences in

Suleja is in need of re-enactment; this paper recommends that the Executive Governor of Niger State, the Senator representing Niger East — which covers Suleja — and His Royal Highness the Emir of Zazzau Suleja, should do all within their powers to prevail on the National Assembly for the passing of the Bill, and on the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for the assent of the Bill. The signing of this Bill will create a ripple effect that will solve a whole lot of problems, and spur growth and development in Suleja Emirate.

- In the light of the recent boom in the FCT Ground Rent collection by the minister, it is not farfetched to recommend that a percentage of this revenue currently being enjoyed by the FCT administration, be allocated as compensation to Suleja as original owners of the land. This way, the FCT and the government of Nigeria give back to Suleja for her contributions to the FCT's existence.
- Since, a sizable percentage of the landmass of Suleja has been given to the FCT, it behooves the Federal Government to help in the preservation of the existing landmass in Suleja, through various environmental preservation programs to curb land degradation such as erosion, deforestation and pollution. The zonal office of the Environmental Protection Agency in Suleja should be put into better use.
- The Federal Government should allocate an appreciable percentage of federal employments and job opportunities to Suleja, as compensation for the accommodation of the indigenes during the construction of the New Federal Capital City in Abuja. This would goal a long way to cushion the effect of unemployment and poverty among the indigenes.
- The Federal Government should provide better urban infrastructures in road networks especially the dualization of the main artery that traversed the town from Madalla to Maje earlier surveyed and designed health and educational institutions, amenity and recreational centres, sport complexes, ultramodern markets, housing and office accommodation among others.
- Suleja covets the federal presence as in other regions of the nation; therefore, government should create in Suleja, zonal offices of federal agencies, parastatals, institutions and ministries.
- The Security of Suleja as a border town to the FCT is also the Security of Abuja. The Federal Government should deploy Federal security apparatus to Suleja. Zonal offices of the security agencies should by logic exist in Suleja, which is usually the first point of call be for entering the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

Conclusion

From the ongoing, it is easy to deduce that despite the immense sacrifice of Suleja town, to its own detriment, in the establishment of the New Federal Capital Territoryin1976,the Federal Government of Nigeria has not been forthcoming with compensations and appreciations of this unusual act of generosity, albeit forced on Suleja when the lands were seized with a Federal Might. However, the people of Suleja and the Suleja Emirate as a whole sue for peace and understanding, as they are wont to do, in the resolution of this dilemma.

Suleja as a town is in need of much Federal attention and presence, especially as it accommodates a large percentage of Federal civil servants, and private contributors to

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the economic growth and development of the FCT. It is expected that the Federal Government in its considerations and magnanimity, appreciates and rewards the goodwill and generosity of the townsmen. Afterall, the Federal Government and the Capital City also benefits from the ethnic accord that established the Federal Capital, among other recommended criteria that established the FCT in Abuja, which Suleja greatly assisted in fulfilling.

This paper advocates for a fair hearing of the grouses of Suleja's indigenes vis-à-vis unkept promises of compensation on the part of the Federal Government, and the implementation of the recommendations made towards the development and growth of the Suleja Emirate. Government could not do less in true appreciation of the town and its people.

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