

COMMUNIQUÉ ISSUED AT THE END OF THE MAIDEN ANNUAL LECTURE OF THE NATHANIEL ATEBIJE FOUNDATION FOR PLANNING ADVOCACY HELD AT SHEHU MUSA YAR’ADUA CONFERENCE CENTRE, CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT, ABUJA ON TUESDAY, 5TH MAY 2026

Theme: *“Renewed Hope Agenda: The Physical Planning Perspective”*

1. Introduction

The Nathaniel Atebije Foundation for Planning Advocacy held its maiden Annual Lecture on Tuesday, 5th May 2026 at the Shehu Musa Yar’Adua Conference Centre, Abuja, bringing together distinguished members of the political class, professionals, policymakers, academics, development practitioners and stakeholders in the built environment. The Guest Lecturer was Prof. Jeremiah Ojediran, FNSE, the Vice Chancellor of Bells University of Technology, Ota, Ogun State of Nigeria. The participants examined the Federal Government’s Renewed Hope Agenda from the physical planning perspective, with the objective of assessing its relevance, identifying achievements and gaps and proposing practical recommendations for strengthening its impact on Nigeria’s urban and regional development.

2. Observations

After extensive deliberations, the following observations were made:

2.1 Relevance of the Renewed Hope Agenda.

Participants at the lecture acknowledged that the Agenda:

- is a timely policy framework aimed at addressing critical national challenges, including neglect of physical planning and its regulations, impunity, slums, urban sprawl, housing deficit, and deficient infrastructure development and economic revitalization;
- aligns with the urgent need for improved living conditions, inclusive growth and sustainable urban development;
- increased attention to housing as a national priority, though without consideration of the environmental perspectives;
- noted the ongoing efforts to stimulate infrastructure development;
- recognized the need for economic and social inclusion; and,
- focused on improving living standards.
- Achieving sustainable development goals especially Goals 3 and 11.

3.0 Challenges to the Implementation of the Renewed Hope Agenda.

The participants observed the following limitations of the initiative in its implementation.

- i. That Nigeria's urban growth is disorderly and unsustainable. The participants established that Nigeria is not experiencing organized urbanization but chaotic expansion driven by weak planning systems. Cities are growing without structure, leading to congestion, flooding, environmental degradation and proliferation of informal settlements. This is not development; it is unmanaged urbanization with escalating economic and social costs.
- ii. That physical planning as a process is not being recognized as the core driver of development. Planning is treated as secondary rather than foundational. Policies are designed without adequate spatial grounding. Hence policies remain abstract and fail to produce tangible impact for lack of adequate planning.
- iii. That development is occurring without spatial coordination. While there are visible projects under the Renewed Hope Agenda; roads, housing, and infrastructure are often not spatially integrated, projects risk becoming isolated interventions and physical development is being mistaken for physical planning, leading to fragmented and unsustainable outcomes. Limited Integration of Physical Planning i.e. housing delivery without spatial framework. Hence, housing initiatives under the Agenda risk being implemented without proper integration into broader urban systems. This would definitely lead to poorly serviced estates and unsustainable urban expansion, the end result of which will be a diametrical negation of the whole concept of Renewed Hope Agenda.
- iv. That even where there are plans, they suffer failure of implementation, hence projects are abandoned, capital budgets are poorly executed and the plans are not enforced. The country suffers from a deep and persistent implementation crisis. This failure has created a dangerous cycle of policy promises without physical and hence social transformation.
- v. That infrastructure development is reactive rather than being strategic, hence roads are expanded after congestion, drainage is addressed after flooding, housing is provided after slums emerge. Nigeria is reacting to crises rather than being proactive by preventing them through planning. This reactive approach has been identified not only as a troubling pattern but it also significantly increases costs and reduces efficiency, more so when intentional maintenance is not in place.

- vi. That governance weakness is at the heart of planning and development failure in Nigeria. The urban crisis in Nigeria is fundamentally a governance problem expressed in space. Weak coordination, poor enforcement and inconsistent policy execution have collectively undermined planning outcomes.
- vii. That there is a dangerous disconnect between policy and reality. Despite ambitious frameworks like the Renewed Hope Agenda, implementation remains uneven and outcomes are not fully visible in cities and communities; hence, Nigeria continues to experience a gap between national vision and everyday reality.
- viii. Lack of adequate understanding of housing to be beyond shelter. Housing must be seen to include the houses and adequate infrastructure that makes the environment livable.
- ix. That institutional fragmentation of MDAs has turned development into a disjointed, inefficient and wasteful process incapable of delivering coherent spatial outcomes. Federal, state, and local systems should have planning coordination agency as provided for in the Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Law.

4.0 Concerns for the Federal Capital City

- i. The participants lamented the continued encroachment on green areas, wetlands and environmentally sensitive zones in Abuja which has gone as low as 17% as opposed to the 33% provided for in the masterplan. Recent invasion and assaults on green areas in the city are fast turning Abuja from being the green city it was conceived to become a brown one.
- ii. There are also unprocedural and unprofessional illegal changes of other landuses in Abuja with impunity which undermines the essence of relocating the national administrative headquarters to Abuja to build a planned and sustainable city from the scratch, achieve climate resilience and ecological balance.
- iii. Unauthorized developments are widespread; zoning regulations are routinely violated; informal expansion continues unchecked and planning regulations have effectively become optional guidelines rather than binding instruments of order especially by the political class in power. This action is highly condemnable and should be reversed immediately to enhance sanity in our physical development efforts.

5.0 Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing, the participants call on the Federal Government to:

- i. As a matter of urgency, engage indigenous physical planners to facilitate the integration of physical planning into the Renewed Hope Agenda. Planning must be recognized as the foundational framework upon which all development initiatives are built. Without the active involvement of professional planners, the Agenda risks producing fragmented and unsustainable outcomes.
- ii. Establish a clear spatial planning framework to guide all development initiatives. Government policies and investments must be spatially coordinated to ensure coherence, efficiency, and long-term sustainability. A national spatial framework will provide direction for balanced regional and urban development. We call for a speedy completion of the National Physical Development Plan which has been on the drawing board for over fifteen years.
- iii. Ensure that housing, infrastructure and economic programs are anchored in approved plans. All development initiatives should derive from and align with legally approved masterplans and structure plans. This will prevent haphazard growth and ensure that investments deliver maximum social and economic value.
- iv. Ensure that all urban and semi-urban areas have up-to-date masterplans, failing which Federal Government projects may be withheld in such locations. This measure will compel states and local governments to prioritize planning as a prerequisite for development. It will also prevent the siting of federal projects in areas lacking proper spatial organization.
- v. Enforce strict adherence to approved plans. Masterplans must be treated as binding instruments rather than optional guidelines. Consistent enforcement will restore order, credibility, and discipline in the management of urban growth.
- vi. Recruit and train qualified urban planning personnel. Effective planning requires competent human resources equipped with modern skills and tools. Continuous capacity building is essential to strengthen institutional performance and service delivery.
- vii. Apply sanctions consistently for violations. Violations of planning regulations must attract prompt and impartial penalties, irrespective of the status of offenders. Consistent enforcement will deter impunity and reinforce respect for the rule of law.
- viii. Halt further encroachment on designated green and open spaces in Abuja and other cities and reverse existing violations. Green and open spaces are critical for environmental sustainability and urban liveability. Immediate action must be taken to protect these areas and restore those that have been unlawfully converted.
- ix. Promote public education on planning regulations. Citizens must be adequately informed about planning laws and their rights and responsibilities. Increased awareness will encourage compliance and strengthen public support for planning initiatives.

- x. Encourage community participation in planning processes. Inclusive planning enhances legitimacy, ownership, and sustainability of development outcomes. Communities should be actively involved in decision-making processes affecting their environments.
- xi. Strengthen professional discipline and ethical standards. The integrity of the planning profession must be upheld through strict adherence to ethical codes and professional accountability. This will restore public confidence in planning institutions.
- xii. Promote planning as a public trust and moral responsibility. Planning must be repositioned as a duty owed to society and future generations, not merely a technical exercise. Ethical leadership should guide all planning decisions and actions.

6.0 Conclusion

The Maiden Annual Lecture of the Nathaniel Atebije Foundation for Planning Advocacy concluded that:

The success of the Renewed Hope Agenda is fundamentally dependent on the integration of sound physical planning principles. Without a strong planning framework, development efforts risk being unsustainable, inefficient and inequitable. The Foundation therefore calls for a renewed commitment to order, sustainability and ethical leadership in Nigeria's urban and regional development. Nigeria must move decisively from plans on paper to plans in practice. The era of fragmented projects, weak enforcement and uncoordinated growth must end. We call on the Federal Government and other tiers of leadership for a national reset of planning governance anchored on spatial discipline, institutional coordination, transparent systems and ethical leadership so that development becomes orderly, inclusive, and sustainable.

7.0 Appreciation

The Foundation expresses its gratitude to all participants, especially the Chairman, Special Guest of Honour, Guest Speaker, Panel of Discussants, partners, planning committee and members of the press for their contributions to the success of this maiden lecture. We believe in a prosperous nation, through physical planning, Nigeria shall be great; let us therefore continue to propagate the gospel of physical planning to enable the manifestation of the desired growth and development of Nigeria.

Signed:

TPI. Barnabas Atiyaye, FNITP

Chairman, Maiden Lecture Planning Committee

TPI. Nathaniel M. Atebije, FNITP.

Convener

For: Nathaniel Atebije Foundation for Planning Advocacy.

Abuja, Nigeria.

5th May 2026.