



# **MANUAL** ON REPORTING **INDIGENOUS ISSUES**

*for media practitioners*



## Acknowledgement

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## CHAPTER 1

# THE GIST OF THE MATTER

**F**or centuries, indigenous people have existed all over the world. Why migration and dynamics in human population have displaced or even extinguished many indigenous peoples in Asia, Africa, Europe, indigenous people have survived the whirlwind. They are the original inhabitants of a territory, being the first to inhabit the space. They are pre-colonial people who had sustained their own values, cultures, heritage and civilisations before colonisation. Indigenous people maintain a unique **social, cultural, economic, and political identities that distinguish them from the associating or assimilating cultures.**

**They are often physically and spiritually attached to their land and natural resources.** They have a long history entrenched in geography, sociology and culture.

### Key Identities

- Indigenous people recognise their history and their ancestral territory.
- Their languages, belief system and culture are unique.
- Indigenous people have 'Historical continuity with pre-colonial societies'
- They are blood-bound to territories, land and environment

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These issues  
refer to  
'inequities and  
challenges'  
which dot the  
lives of  
indigenous  
peoples  
worldwide.



### Indigenous Peoples Across Continents

**Africa:** Examples of Indigenous people in Africa are Abuja Original Inhabitants like the Koro, Ebira, Ganagana, Gbayi, the San of Southern Africa and the Amazing of North Africa. They have for centuries lived in their ancestral home.

- **The Americas:** Examples of indigenous peoples are found in the United States, Canada, the Aztecs, Mayans, and Incas. They had lived in their territories for thousands of years before the coming of Europeans.
- **Australia:** The Aboriginal Australians are indigenous. They have one of the oldest civilisations with carbon dating going to some 65,000 years.



- **Asia:** The indigenous Ainu of Japan, the tribal communities of India (Adivasis), and hill tribes in Southeast Asia are known to have ancient civilisation.
- **Europe:** Indigenous live in the Arctic. They could be found in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. They conserve their cultural heritage amidst invasion of their land. Indigenous people have their history marked by:
- Colonization and forced displacement



- Cultural violations
- Resistance and resilience
- Associated with modern groups leading campaigns for recognition, rights, and even reparations.

# WHAT ARE INDIGENOUS ISSUES?

**T**hese issues refer to '**inequities and challenges**' which dot the lives of indigenous peoples worldwide. Such issues include but not limited to political, social, economic, environmental, and cultural marginalisation. Examples are:

- **Land Rights and Resource management:** Indigenous communities often wage intensive campaigns to gain control over their indigenous territories. The violators are usually government or corporate institutions.
- **Threats to Culture and language.** Many Indigenous people have lost their languages, their values, their tradition and their time-tested culture to globalisation and the impact of the assimilators.
- **Political rights violations:** Indigenous people contend with issues of denial of equal access to political participation.
- **Lack of Recognition:** Governments fail to recognise indigenous peoples and their rights. Many Governments even believe that they do not exist.
- **Environmental Rights:** Indigenous communities face encroachment on their land and territories.



The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is a comprehensive international instrument adopted by the United Nations General Assembly





They face deforestation, destruction of sacred groves and water pollution. They are confronted with Logging, mining, and industrial projects without prior and informed consent of indigenous people.

- **Socio-Economic Rights:** Indigenous people are denied access to the essentials of life like water, food, housing and access to health, education and job opportunities.
- **General Human Rights Violations:** Indigenous people face extortion, discrimination, violence and inequality.

## WHO ARE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE?

The term “**Indigenous peoples**” refer to people who were the first inhabitants of a territory. They are identified by their ancient language, cultural identity and self-identification.

“**Indigenous peoples,**” are identified as ‘**descendants of the original inhabitants**’ of a region, who maintain distinct cultural, linguistic, spiritual, and social identities **distinct from dominant national populations.**

**UN Working Definition (José Martínez Cobo, 1983):**

*“Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a*



They are identified by their ancient language, cultural identity and self-identification.

*historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies... consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories.”*

**According to the United Nations, the Core Characteristics of Indigenous Peoples are**

### 1. Historical Continuity

- Ties to specific territories or ancestral lands before colonization or the formation of the modern state.

### 2. Distinct Cultural Identity

- Languages, customs, knowledge systems, governance, spiritual beliefs and festivals.

### 3. Self-Identification and Recognition

- Indigenous peoples identify themselves as such and are recognized by their communities.

### 4. Non-Dominance

- Indigenous communities are typically marginalized or excluded from dominant political, economic, and social institutions.

### 5. Desire to Preserve Distinctiveness

- They seek to maintain and pass on their traditions, languages, and relationships with nature.

### 6. Collective Rights

- Indigenous peoples emphasize collective rights (e.g., over land and culture), rather than purely individual rights.

### Global Population and Spread

- It is believed that some 476 million Indigenous peoples live in 90 countries, representing about 6% of the world's population.
- They inhabit 25% of the Earth's surface. They are responsible for the protection of 80% of global biodiversity.





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Protection of  
Indigenous  
peoples  
against  
exploitative  
labor  
conditions

# Regional Examples:

Region	Indigenous Groups
North America	First Nations, Inuit, Navajo, Cherokee
Latin America	Quechua, Aymara, Mapuche, Guarani
Asia	Adivasis (India), Karen (Thailand), Igorot (Philippines)
Australia	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
Africa	San (Bushmen), Tuareg, Amazigh (Berbers), Batwa, Ogiek, Abuja Original Inhabitants

## Other Examples:

- **Nigeria:** Ogoni, Ijaw, and Itsekiri peoples in the Niger Delta.
- **Canada:** First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.
- **United States:** Native American tribes like the Navajo and Cherokee.
- **Latin America:** Quechua and Aymara in the Andes.
- **Asia:** Naga of India, Ainu of Japan.

## Indigenous Peoples in Africa

Africa has passed through of tortuous history. Though the idea of indigenous people is contested in Africa, this is informed by the peculiar colonial history and the various ethnic and cultural diversities across the continent. However, many groups are recognised as indigenous people in the context of the following:

- Marginalization
- Cultural uniqueness
- Traditional lifestyles
- Exclusion from national development

In Nigeria, discussions about indigenous people are often complicated by 'ethnic diversity, colonial boundaries, and political classifications.' Using international standards, many groups in Nigeria meet the standard definition of Indigenous status:

Examples:

- **Ijaw, Itsekiri, Urhobo, and Ogoni (Niger Delta):** marginalized despite living in resource-rich areas.
- **Tiv, Idoma, Gbagyi,** Ganagana, Ebira, Nupe, Birom, Angas, Igala, Koro. They are culturally and historically underrepresented and displaced.
- **Egun, Ilaje,** and other coastal communities who face chllenges of oil spillage, environmental degradation and marginalisation



### These groups often experience:

- Land dispossession
- Environmental degradation (especially oil spills and flooding)
- Political underrepresentation
- Cultural erosion

## Misconceptions

Myth	Reality
All ethnic minorities are Indigenous	Not necessarily—indigeneity is about distinct identity, history, and marginalization
Indigenous peoples are “primitive”	Indigenous peoples are <b>innovative</b> , with valuable ecological and cultural knowledge
Indigenous issues are “rural” only	Urban Indigenous populations also face discrimination and invisibility
Indigenous identity is fixed	It can evolve while still maintaining continuity and cultural uniqueness

### The importance of indigenous Issues

Across the world, Indigenous issues are crucial to understanding social, economic and cultural dynamics in democracy. Addressing these issues help in many ways to resolve contradictions by dealing with the quality of representations and the form of marginalisation experienced by indigenous people. The following are important reasons why we should understand indigenous issues:

- It furthers **social justice** and **human rights**
- Leads to recognition of cultural rights.
- Promotes preservation of biodiversity
- Preserves civilisation, language, culture and heritage of a people
- Upholds **human rights and international law**
- Helps in **peacebuilding** and conflict prevention.



## CHAPTER 2

# UNITED NATIONS DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (UNDRIP)

Indigenous people maintain a unique social, cultural, economic, and political identities that distinguish them from the associating or assimilating cultures.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is a comprehensive international instrument adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on **13 September 2007**. It sets the **minimum standards** for the survival, dignity, and well-being of the world's Indigenous peoples. Adopted by 144 Countries, though not legally binding, it sets a global standard for the dignity, survival, and well-being of Indigenous communities.

### UNDRIP aims to:

- Recognize Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination



- Affirm their right to maintain and strengthen their institutions, cultures and traditions
- Address historic injustices resulting from colonization and dispossession
- Promote non-discrimination and equality for Indigenous communities globally
- Right to land, territories, and resources traditionally owned or used
- Free, prior, and informed consent before any development on their land
- Protection from forced assimilation or destruction of culture

#### STRUCTURE:

The Declaration consists of **46 articles** grouped around several thematic areas:

#### 1. Self-Determination & Autonomy (Articles 3–5)

- Indigenous peoples have the right to **freely determine their political status** and pursue economic, social, and cultural development.
- They may **autonomously govern** their internal affairs.

#### 2. Cultural Rights and Identity (Articles 8–13)

- Right to practice, revitalize, and transmit **cultural traditions and languages**
- Protection from **forced assimilation** or destruction of culture

#### 3. Land, Territories and Resources (Articles 25–32)

- Indigenous peoples have the right to **own, use, develop and control** lands and resources they traditionally possess.
- States must obtain Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) before approving any project affecting Indigenous lands.



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Provides a  
global platform  
for Indigenous  
communities to  
directly engage  
with UN bodies

#### 4. Participation in Decision-Making (Articles 18–19)

- Right to participate in political, legal, economic, social and cultural life.
- States must **consult and cooperate** with Indigenous peoples through representative institutions

#### 5. Education, Health & Development (Articles 14–24)

- Equal access to culturally appropriate education, health care and employment
- States must **ensure non-discriminatory access** to services and support Indigenous-controlled education systems

UNDRIP has become the **most comprehensive international framework** on Indigenous rights and has influenced:

- National constitutions and laws (e.g., Bolivia, Canada, Norway)
- Development project guidelines (e.g., World Bank, UNDP)
- Environmental justice and climate change policies
- Indigenous governance structures and empowerment movements

#### Status in Nigeria and Africa

- **Nigeria** voted in favor of UNDRIP in 2007, but **domestication and implementation are lacking.**
- No national legal framework explicitly aligned with UNDRIP principles.
- Land use and development projects (e.g., Abuja masterplan, Niger Delta oil extraction, Lagos-Calabar



# UNITED NATIONS PERMANENT FORUM ON INDIGENOUS ISSUES (UNIPFII)

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is the highest-level advisory body within the UN system dedicated to Indigenous peoples. It was established in July 2000 by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) following years of global Indigenous activism.

## Mandate:

- Advise the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- Raise awareness and promote integration of Indigenous concerns in UN programs
- Monitor and report on human rights conditions
- Hold annual sessions to bring together governments, NGOs, and Indigenous representatives

It plays a vital role in giving Indigenous peoples a voice at the global level.

## Key Focus Areas

Each year, the Forum adopts a **theme** to guide its discussions and outputs. Examples include:

- Indigenous Youth, Education, and Indigenous Languages
- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions
- Climate Change and Biodiversity
- Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC)
- Indigenous Women and Gender Equality



Gbagyi Indigenous of FCT protesting over alleged marginalisation by the Federal Government.

“Preserves civilisation, language, culture and heritage of a people”

## Outcomes and Impact The UNPFII issues:

- Reports and policy recommendations to ECOSOC and UN agencies
- Statements and declarations advocating Indigenous priorities
- Follow-up assessments on progress toward Indigenous rights
- Collaborations with UN bodies like UNDP, UNESCO, WHO, and FAO

## Examples of Influence:

- Inclusion of Indigenous peoples in the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- Promotion of language revitalization during the UN Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032)
- Mainstreaming of Indigenous issues into climate and environmental policy discussions

## Importance to Indigenous Peoples

- Provides a global platform for Indigenous communities to directly engage with UN bodies
- Enables dialogue with states and international actors
- Helps build solidarity and collective action across regions and identities
- Serves as a monitoring and accountability mechanism for Indigenous rights



## CHAPTER 3

# ILO CONVENTION NO. 169 ON INDIGENOUS AND TRIBAL PEOPLE (1989)

ILO Convention No. 169 is a binding international treaty adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on 27 June 1989. It replaced the earlier ILO Convention No. 107 (1957), which was considered assimilationist.

Convention 169 aims to recognize and protect the land, culture, identity, and rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples within their national territories.

### The importance of the ILO Convention 169

It is the **only international treaty** that:

- It is **legally binding on member states**.
- **The Convention is indigenous people specific**
- The Convention ensures states work and **consult with Indigenous peoples**
- Promotes the protection of indigenous **land, labor, and human rights**

The Convention has changed the lives of many indigenous people across the world. It has influenced policies in many countries across the world in

favour of indigenous people.

It is important to note that not all countries have ratified the convention, yet it continues to be a driving force for the enforcement of indigenous rights all over the world.

Across the world, only 24 countries have ratified as of 2025. Nigeria is yet to ratify the Convention.

### Key Features and Principles of the Convention

#### 1. Recognition of Indigenous Identity (Article 1–2)

- Indigenous and tribal peoples are defined not by race, but by self-identification, social, cultural, and economic conditions, and historical continuity.

#### 2. Equality and Non-Discrimination (Article 3)

- Indigenous peoples must enjoy the full range of human rights and freedoms, without discrimination.

#### 3. Cultural Integrity (Article 5–7)

- States must respect Indigenous values, practices, and institutions.
- Indigenous peoples must participate in decisions affecting their development, education, and cultural expression.

#### 4. Land and Natural Resources (Article 13–19)

- Indigenous peoples have rights to lands, territories, and resources they traditionally occupy or use.
- No relocation should occur without Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and compensation.

#### 5. Consultation and Participation (Article 6)

- Governments must consult Indigenous peoples in good faith through their representative institutions before adopting measures that may affect them.



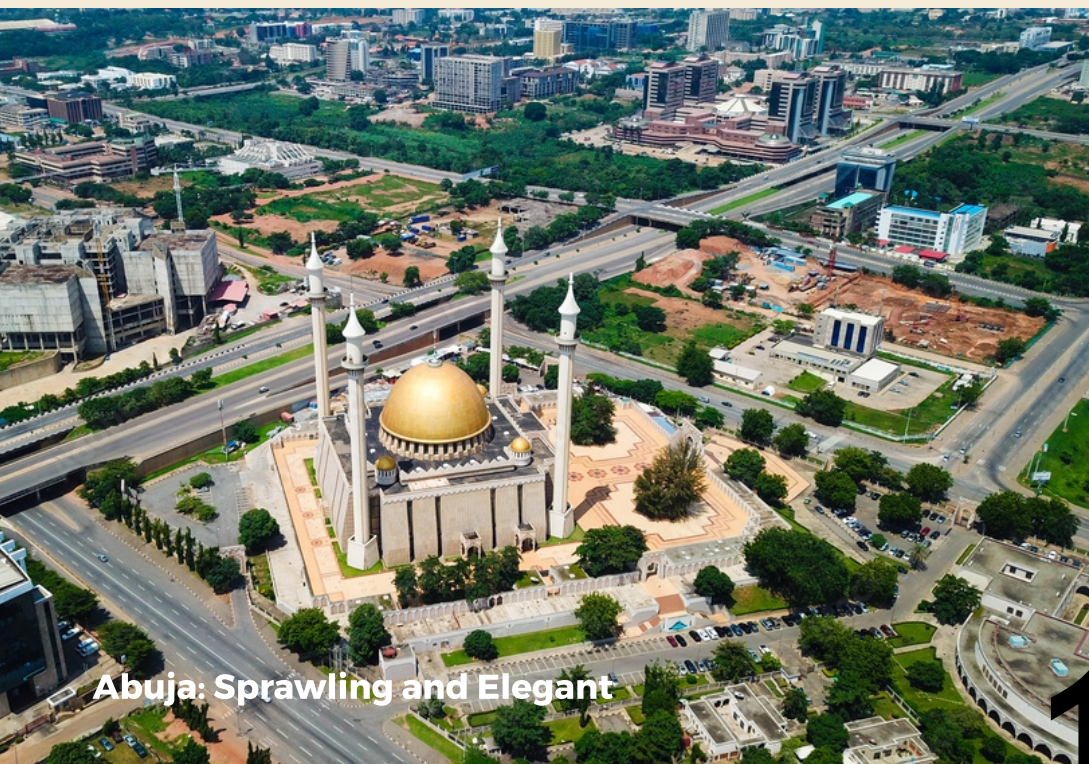
The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) is the highest-level advisory body within the UN system dedicated to Indigenous peoples.





## Poverty and misery

An Indigenous Community in Abuja.



## Abuja: Sprawling and Elegant

### 6. Education and Language (Article 26–31)

- Indigenous children have the right to education in their own languages and cultures.
- Literacy programs and educational curricula should reflect Indigenous realities.

### 7. Employment and Economic Rights (Article 20–24)

- Protection of Indigenous peoples against exploitative labor conditions
- Equal access to employment, social security, and vocational training

### Adoption and Ratification

- **Adopted:** June 27, 1989
- **Entered into force:** September 5, 1991
- Counting up to the year 2024, only **24 countries** have ratified the Convention.
- The countries that have ratified the convention includes but not limited to: Norway, Mexico, Bolivia, Brazil, Nepal, Chile among others.
- **Though the Nigerian officially joined the ILO in 1960, the country is yet to ratify the convention.**

### Binding Legal Status

- **Convention 169 is binding** on countries that ratify it.
- States must submit regular reports to the ILO on their implementation efforts.
- Indigenous organizations can submit **observations or complaints** to the ILO Committee of Experts.

### Convention 169 and Nigeria

- Nigeria has **not ratified** Convention 169.
- Indigenous communities in Nigeria continue to face:
- Abuja Original Inhabitants for instance



**Indigenous peoples must enjoy the full range of human rights and freedoms, without discrimination.**



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## Protection of Indigenous peoples against exploitative labor conditions

continue to face displacement and dispossession of ancestral land

- Marginalization in development projects (e.g., Lagos-Calabar Coastal Highway)
- Cultural and linguistic endangerment

### Why Nigeria needs to ratify ILO 169

**One of the major responsibilities of the civil society in Nigeria is to ensure the country ratifies ILO 169.**

It would set the pace for other African countries to recognise the rights of indigenous people.

It would address the challenges of inequality,

injustice and lack of representation suffered by indigenous people.

It would provide Indigenous Nigerians with a stronger legal framework for protecting their rights. The ratification by Nigeria will resolve a lot of the lingering conflict in indigenous communities. The civil society in Nigeria, the media and indigenous people need to work together to ensure the ratification of Convention 169.

# CHALLENGES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN NIGERIA

Indigenous peoples face various challenges which range from cultural, social and economic deprivation. The challenges are often interlinked.

### Cultural challenges

- Threat to language
- Lack of recognition
- Repression of identities

### Economic marginalisation

- Poor access to education, healthcare, and housing
- Poverty and lack of jobs.
- Discrimination

### Political:

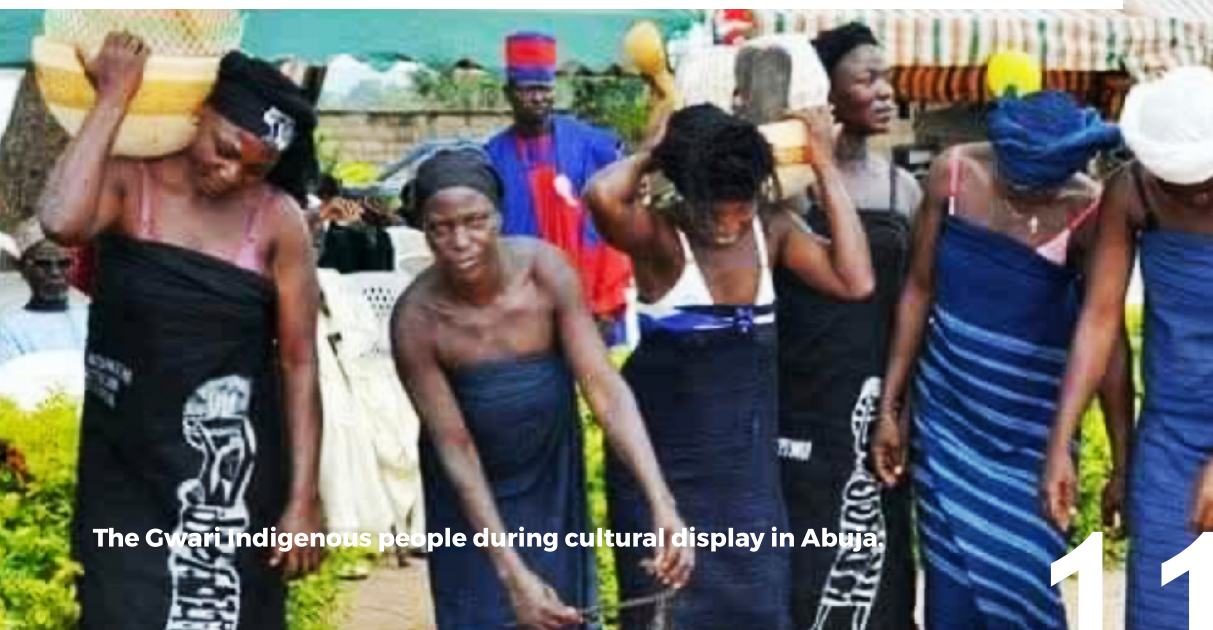
- Little or no representation
- Inadequate legal recognition
- Limited or no participation in decision-making

### Economic:

- Exploitation of lands and indigenous resources without fair prior and informed consent.
- Limited access to economic opportunities

### Environmental:

- Indigenous people face challenges of displacement and exploitation. Often they are not paid adequate compensation when their resources are exploited or their land seized by the government.



The Gwari indigenous people during cultural display in Abuja.



- Indigenous peoples face challenges of deforestation and pollution which impact on their livelihoods.
- Other challenges include the Loss of language and traditions, Cultural assimilation and threats to spiritual values.

## CHAPTER 4

# JOURNALISTS AND INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Journalists are key to addressing the challenges faced by indigenous people. Media practitioners play a very important role in building the bridges between the government and indigenous people through adequate coverage of issues that affect indigenous people.

Media practitioners should focus on the following issues:

- **Land dispossession.**
- **Political marginalization**
- **Threats to cultural identity.**
- **Environmental injustice.**

Journalists need to provide voices, echo the aspirations of indigenous people. Other roles are:

- Emphasis on Indigenous struggles and achievements

- Engage the various authorities of government and corporations to make them accountable
- Promote indigenous people access to the essentials of life
- Adequate coverage of the needs and aspirations of indigenous people.
- In other parts of the country where indigenous issues are contested or suppressed, media practitioners should encourage robust debate on issues affecting indigenous people, protect cultural heritage, promote justice and support accountable governance.

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Journalists need to provide voices, echo the aspirations of indigenous people

**Key Indigenous Issues that should interest media practitioners:**

### 1. Land and Resource management

- What is the role of indigenous people in access to land and resources?
- How do indigenous people, who are often poor and dispossessed defend their rights in the face of Illegal land grabbing
- The media should hold the government and corporate organisations accountable especially regarding Mining, Oil exploration, Logging and deforestation
- The media should show keen interest on issues like Government or Corporate mega projects and how such affect indigenous peoples.



Abuja Indigenous people

## 2. Culture conservation

- The media should expose threats to indigenous civilisations and languages facing peril.
- The media should discourage cultural distortion and misrepresentation

## 3. Environmental Justice

- Indigenous people are custodians of bio-diversity. The media should promote this legacy.
- The media should bring into the front burner issues like pollution, flooding and bio-iniquities.

## 4. Health

- **The media should expose all forms of degrading policies that undermine the health of indigenous people.**
- **Indigenous people are forest dependent. The preservation and conservation of their health is germane to their medical survival.**
- **National health policies should not undermine indigenous knowledge on health.**
- **The media should discourage the stigmatisation of traditional knowledge in many areas like conflict resolution, music, art, culture and medicine**

## 5. Political Participation and Self-Determination

- Indigenous people are often marginalised from main stream politics which should be of deep concern to the media.
- There is the need for qualitative and quantitative representation of indigenous voices at both Local, state and National levels.

## 6. Human Rights Violations

- Original inhabitants suffer various forms of human rights violations orchestrated by security agencies. This should be of concern to the media.
- Indigenous people are often weak and vulnerable. The media should provide voices for them through constant monitoring.



Indigenous knowledge of Art and Science should be preserved.

### Media obligation to indigenous peoples in time of challenges

- Valley Echoes: Journalists to report the angle of indigenous peoples, not just as victims but as a major stakeholder in sustainable development.
- **The media should endeavour to be balanced and objective, never to shut down indigenous perspectives.**
- Historical contexts are important in every narrative
- **Investigative Report:** This requires consistent follow-up mechanism to expose cases of injustice and infringement regarding indigenous people.
- **Cultural Right:** The media should avoid derogatory use of language when reporting indigenous issues.
- **Capacity Development:** The media should have creative ways of supporting indigenous peoples which may include supporting their local communication and information initiatives, giving them adequate air or print time.
- **The media should avoid stereotypes when reporting indigenous issues.**

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Indigenous people are often weak and vulnerable. The media should provide voices for them through constant monitoring.”





The heritage of Indigenous people is timeless.

### Journalism Ethics

1. **Objectivity:** Give enough coverage to indigenous people
2. **Have respect for their values and culture**
3. **Appreciate their vulnerability and often weak access to economic and political power.**
4. **Seek their opinion and consent**
  - When interviewing indigenous people, it is important to be guided by their freewill.
5. **Truth:** The media should report bearing in mind the truth.
6. **Inclusion:** Indigenous issues is not just about their leaders, it is also about the people themselves, women, youths, People with Disability, etc
7. **Set Agenda:** The media should have in mind the need to set agenda for peace, conflict prevention and sustainable livelihood.
8. **Stories on indigenous issues should be enriched with history, colonial experiences, marginalisation and deprivation.**

### Tips for Journalists Covering Indigenous Communities

Tip	Why It Matters
Build relationships	Trust must be earned. Work with local leaders and elders.
Avoid parachute journalism	Stay long enough to understand the full story.
Use inclusive language	Say “Indigenous peoples,” not “tribes” (unless contextually appropriate).
Ask about what matters	Let the community set the agenda—not your editor.
Acknowledge Indigenous names and locations	Use Indigenous terms for places, titles, and names where possible.
Recognize diversity	Don’t lump all Indigenous groups together—highlight their distinct cultures and issues.

### Story Angles to Explore

- Profiles of Indigenous educators, healers, farmers, and leaders
- Investigations into environmental degradation in Indigenous areas
- Features on traditional festivals, crafts, and music
- Data journalism on how national budgets neglect Indigenous territories
- Explainers on land tenure systems or customary law
- Conflict reporting with Indigenous peace building perspectives



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These issues refer to ‘inequities and challenges’ which dot the lives of indigenous peoples worldwide.

## Challenges Journalists Face

Challenge	Impact
Limited access to remote areas	Hinders first-hand reporting
Language barriers	Can distort nuance or exclude voices
Government censorship or pressure	Prevents critical coverage
Corporate influence	Mutes or biases stories involving extractive industries
Safety threats	Journalists covering Indigenous resistance face harassment or violence

## Collaboration Opportunities

- **Work with Indigenous journalists** and community media outlets
- **Partner with NGOs** and research centers working on Indigenous rights
- Join networks like:
- **Cultural Survival**
- **International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)**
- **Network of Journalists on Indigenous Issues (NEJII)** in Nigeria

## Training and Resources

- **UNESCO Indigenous Media Frameworks**
- **UNDRIP (2007)** – A rights-based lens for storytelling
- **ILO Convention 169** – Legal context for land and labor stories
- **UNPFII Reports** – Annual updates on global Indigenous issues
- **Community media guides** by Indigenous organizations



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Stories on indigenous issues should be enriched with history, colonial experiences, marginalisation and deprivation.

It's not just about photos, indigenous people have ancient logic behind their actions.



# ABUJA ORIGINAL INHABITANTS: CRIES OF A FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

**ADEWALE ADEOYE**

**T**here is an old saying in Yoruba cosmology: *Ti a ko ba tete pa eka iroko, ebo ni maa gba l'ojo iwaju* meaning if an Iroko tree is not nipped at its earliest bud, in the future, the tree would assume the role of a god difficult to assuage.

At the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT), bottled up grievances among the 2 million-strong indigenous people may find outlets in unpleasant manners. It is time for the Federal Government to look into the plight of Abuja indigenous peoples. These first inhabitants of the current FCT have an intriguing history. They had lived in the FCT for over 1000 years with

preserved culture, heritage, civilisation and values, honoured their ancestral land and resources which they argue have been plundered by successive governments to their own peril.

'Each time I look at the beauty of Abuja, the industry, the flashy cars, the convoys, the majestic buildings compared with the squalor in the settlements we now live after our displacements in 1976, I cry. My children who are now adults can't understand what happened,' Micheal Abukar an indigene of Abuja and official of a local association told me penultimate week after a visit to his community. He said every day, the original inhabitants are worried and agitated. There are some nine

indigenous ethnic groups who originally own Abuja, the country's capital: Gbwari, Nupe, Ganagana, Ebira, Koro and others.

The paradigm shift in their history began with Decree 4 of February 4, 1976, the Federal Capital Territory, (FCT) was created by the Military Government of late General Murtala Mohammed. Before then, the territory itself had been in existence for centuries with her own first inhabitants. The city officially replaced Lagos on December 12, 1999 as the new capital of the country. Construction work in the city started in 1979 following the recommendation of



**“**  
**Indigenous issues is not just about their leaders, it is also about the people themselves.**



compensation. Those in Wuse and Asokoro were relocated to Sabon Wuse. Some were sent to Karshi, Kurudu, Nyanya, Idu, Gwabwa, Kanwu, Zuba, Kanwa Sherre among others. While some settled in the surrounding villages, many of them relocated to neighbouring states of Niger, Nasarawa and Kaduna.

Yet, the FCT continues to expand, shrinking the space for the ancient land of these indigenous peoples. While compensation was paid to certain people and communities, the leaders of the Abuja Original Inhabitants insist that only peanuts were paid as compensation while many communities were forcefully relocated against their wish.

Added to this is the ceaseless political and economic marginalisation raised constantly by leaders of Abuja

indigenous peoples. They lay claim to the cultural, political, social and economic domination which threaten their culture, livelihood and survival. The Abuja Original Inhabitants claim that their land, some portions of which they have spiritual attachment to, have been usurped by the sprawling city while the political economy in the FCT keeps them in the back bench.

In January this year, 17 Abuja Chiefdoms decried marginalisation by the Federal Government. Apart from not being considered for strategic positions in the FCT, the people also cite the recent constitution of the North Central Development Commission, (NCDC) which they say is without any representative

Abuja as the Federal Capital by the Justice Akinola Aguda panel. The Government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari first planned the relocation to Abuja from 1986 but the plan was aborted due to military intervention. The International Planning Associates (IPA) was commissioned in June 1977 by the Federal Capital Development Authority to work on the Abuja Master Plan to ensure International standards.

Today, Abuja remains the most beautiful city in Nigeria with sprawling residential buildings, Federal and private companies. Abuja is the seat of foreign missions, local and international relations in Nigeria. The city hosts national and international institutions in its 50 districts.

The city's history is depicted with the 400 meter Aso Rock, the seat of power in a country of 200 million people. The population of Abuja grew by 139.7 percent between 2000 and 2010 making her the fastest growing city in the world. Abuja has become the nectar that draws millions of people from across Nigeria. They hope to be close to power and also, explore the burgeoning economy and for some relative peace.

But for Gwandara, Basa, Gbayi, Ganagana and others like Nupe, Epira, Dibo and Koro, the greatness of Abuja brings them misery. Their ancestral homes were taken over by the Federal Government with little or no



**Stories on indigenous issues should be enriched with history, colonial experiences, marginalisation and deprivation.**





**Indigenous community during a marital rite in Abuja.**

from the FCT Indigenous people, according to Abuja Inhabitants Youths and Empowerment Organisation, (AOYEO). In 2023, the Original Inhabitants took their case to the United Nations led by Executive Director, Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civil Education, (CHRICED), Dr Ibrahim Mauleen Zikirullahi. He told the world at the 16th session of the Expert Mechanisms on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that Abuja Original Inhabitants face a variety of challenges including threats of cultural extinction. He said successive governments have refused to compensate Abuja indigenous peoples while their livelihood is characterised by lack of basic amenities like water, employment and good roads to their often remote settlements. He said some landmark Judgments of the Supreme Court in favour of indigenous peoples were ignored. It is not as if the Federal Government has not done anything. Other voices like MacArthur Foundation, are drawing global attention to the plight of Abuja original inhabitants in order to avoid a major crisis or uprising. Also, two years ago, for the first time in history, the Federal Government appointed Hon Zaphaniah Bitrus Jisalo as the Federal Minister for Special Duties. He is from Abuja indigenous peoples, after more than four decades of having no Ministerial position from FCT indigenes and not a single person in the Federal Executive Council, (FEC). Yet, no Abuja indigene has ever been picked for the position of the FCT Minister. However, the Federal authority needs to do more by creating incentives and legal framework within the FCT to protect and preserve the heritage, rights and civilisation of indigenous people for the peace and prosperity of Abuja and Nigeria as a whole. Such steps may also include edicts that ensures Abuja indigenes are given priority in government and private employments in the ever expanding city.

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**Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control lands and resources they traditionally possess.**

## CHAPTER 5

# Editorial

## LANDLESS, VOICELESS, FORGOTTEN – THE ABUJA NATIVES DESERVE JUSTICE NOW

JULY 13, 2025



In the heart of Nigeria's seat of power, beneath the towering structures of governance and the sleek expressways of Abuja, lies a story of erasure. It is not the kind of story that headlines national debates or makes its way into federal policy rooms. But it is a story that must be told—and acted upon. The story of the Abuja Original Inhabitants (OIs) is one of dispossession, exclusion, and silent suffering. It is Nigeria's unhealed wound.

At the 17th session of the UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Geneva, Switzerland, Dr. Ibrahim Mualeem Zikirullahi, Executive Director of CHRICED, did what the Nigerian government has long failed to do—speak the truth about the plight of the indigenous peoples of the Federal Capital Territory. He told the world what we at home have refused to hear: the Original Inhabitants of Abuja, over 2.5 million in

number, remain landless, stateless, and voiceless nearly five decades after their ancestral lands were taken in the name of national development.

Since 1976, when Abuja was declared the new Federal Capital, the nine tribes and seventeen chiefdoms that once flourished in this region have watched their lands swallowed by urban expansion, their voices drowned by political silence, and their culture pushed to the brink of extinction. They have been displaced without adequate compensation, stripped of political representation, and denied the right to govern themselves in a territory they have always called home.

Let us be clear: the absence of a Governor and State House of Assembly in the FCT is not just a constitutional anomaly—it is a democratic injustice. Unlike every other Nigerian citizen, the people of Abuja cannot elect a governor or a legislature that speaks directly for their local interests. And despite

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Indigenous communities are typically marginalized or excluded from dominant political, economic, and social institutions.”



Cultural display of Ebira Indigenous people



court rulings affirming their rights, their demands continue to fall on deaf ears.

Even with token appointments—such as naming a native Minister or creating a Civil Service Commission—the system remains rigged against indigenous inclusion. As Dr. Zikirullahi pointed out, almost all principal officers of new FCT governance structures are non-natives. These cosmetic gestures cannot mask the deeper structural injustice.

To make matters worse, indigenous settlements are still being demolished with little regard for human dignity. Basic services—clean water, roads, schools, healthcare—are lacking in many communities. Yet these are the very people whose forefathers gave up their land in trust for a national project that now excludes them.

This is not just a local issue. It is a human rights issue. The cry from Geneva must not go



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**Indigenous  
people  
recognise  
their  
history  
and their  
ancestral  
territory.**

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unheeded. Nigeria cannot champion democracy on the global stage while denying its own indigenous citizens the right to political participation and cultural survival at home. If we are serious about nation-building, we must begin with justice. Real justice. Not gestures. Not political crumbs.

We therefore join CHRICED in calling on the international community to hold Nigeria accountable to its obligations under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. More importantly, we call on the Nigerian government—our government—to end decades of silence and act decisively.

The Abuja Original Inhabitants are not asking for pity. They are asking for justice—land justice, political justice, and cultural justice. And in a land that belongs to all, no one should be treated as a stranger in their own home.

Enough is enough. It is time to give Abuja natives their voice,

# ELEMENTS OF INDIGENOUS ISSUES

**P**eoples - must have rights to their lands and territories, as well as to their knowledge and genetic resources, if successful conservation is to occur. It emphasizes that utilization and effective application of traditional resources are enmeshed in existing international laws and customary practices that defend collective and individual human rights. Too frequently the knowledge and resources of indigenous, traditional and local communities are usurped without the sharing of benefits. Even basic respect for prior informed consent, full disclosure and privacy are ignored. The chapter provides a critique of the inadequacies of existing Intellectual Property Rights laws and the need for the development of a global dialogue to develop new, appropriate and effective systems to enhance control by local communities.

***Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity*** concludes with some general recommendations based on the contributions contained in the volume. By the end, the reader will hopefully have been presented with compelling evidence that the future of biodiversity must not be left only to technical, scientific and economic experts, but rather depends upon respect for and protection of the myriad views, values and visions that together form the mosaic of life.



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Indigenous  
people have  
'Historical  
continuity  
with  
pre-colonial  
societies'”

Spirituality is the highest form of consciousness, and spiritual consciousness is the highest form of awareness. In this sense, a dimension of traditional knowledge is not local knowledge, but knowledge of the



universal as expressed in the local. In indigenous and local cultures, experts exist who are peculiarly aware of nature's organizing principles, sometimes described as entities, spirits or natural law. Thus, knowledge of the environment depends not only on the relationship between humans and nature, but also between the visible world and the invisible spirit world.

Local knowledge embraces information about location, movements and other factors explaining spatial patterns and timing in the ecosystem, including sequences of events, cycles and trends. Direct links with the land are fundamental, and obligations to maintain those connections form the core of individual and group identity.

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Indigenous  
people are  
often physically  
and spiritually  
attached to  
their land  
and natural  
resources.”







## Recognizing indigenous and local communities

Western science may have invented the words 'nature', 'biodiversity' and 'sustainability', but it certainly did not initiate the concepts. Indigenous traditional and local communities have sustainably utilized and conserved a vast diversity of plants, animals and ecosystems since the dawn of Homo sapiens. Furthermore, human beings have moulded environments through their conscious and unconscious activities for millennia - to the extent that it is often impossible to separate nature from culture. Some recently 'discovered' 'cultural landscapes' include those of aboriginal peoples who, 100,000 years before the term 'sustainable development' was coined, were trading seeds, dividing tubers and propagating domesticated and non-domesticated plant species. Sacred sites act as conservation areas for vital water sources and also for individual species by restricting access and behaviour. Traditional technologies, including fire use, were part of extremely sophisticated systems that shaped and maintained the balance of vegetation and wildlife. Decline of fire management and loss of sacred sites when aboriginal people were centralized into settlements led to the rapid decline of mammals throughout the arid regions.

Science and technology seldom embrace the values of local knowledge and traditions, and very rarely employ the language of rights and local control over access to resources. Meanwhile, economists would have us believe that markets provide 'level playing fields' that do not moralize globalization and, therefore, work more efficiently to advance the causes of environmental conservation.



**Indigenous peoples are identified as 'descendants of the original inhabitants' of a region**

Source: Cultural and Spiritual Values of Biodiversity (A publication of UNEP)



# SOME PRINCIPAL RIGHTS AFFIRMED BY THE DRAFT DECLARATION ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

- Right to self-determination, representation and full participation.
- Recognition of existing treaty arrangements with indigenous peoples.
- Right to determine own citizenry and obligations of citizenship.
- Right to collective, as well as individual, human rights.
- Right to live in freedom, peace and security without military intervention or involvement.
- Right to religious freedom and protection of sacred sites and objects, including ecosystems, plants and animals.
- Right to restitution and redress for cultural, intellectual, religious or spiritual property that is taken or used without authorization.
- Right to free and informed consent (Prior Informed Consent).
- Right to control access and exert ownership over plants, animals and minerals vital to their cultures.
- Right to own, develop, control and use the lands and territories, including the total environment of the land, air, waters, coastal seas, sea-ice, flora and fauna and other resources which they have traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used.
- Right to special measures to control, develop and protect their sciences, technologies and cultural manifestations, including human and other genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs and visual and performing arts.
- Right to just and fair compensation for any such activities that have adverse environmental, economic, social, cultural or spiritual impact.

## Principles for 'Equitable Partnerships' Established by the International Society for Ethnobiology

**1. Principle of Self-Determination.** Recognizes that indigenous peoples have a right to self-determination (or local determination for traditional and local communities) and that researchers shall as appropriate acknowledge and respect such rights. Culture and language are intrinsically connected to land and territory, and cultural and linguistic diversity are inextricably linked to biological diversity; therefore, the principle of self-determination includes: (i) the right to control land and territory; (ii) the right to sacred places; (iii) the right to own, determine the use of, and receive accreditation, protection and compensation for, knowledge; (iv) the right of access to traditional resources; (v) the right to preserve and protect local language, symbols and modes of expression, and (vi) the right to self-definition.

**2. Principle of Inalienability.** Recognizes that the inalienable rights of indigenous peoples and local communities in relation to their traditional lands, territories, forests, fisheries and other natural resources. These rights are both individual and collective, with local peoples determining which ownership regimes are appropriate.

**3. Principle of Minimum Impact.** Recognizes the duty of scientists and researchers to ensure that their research and other activities have minimum impact on local communities.

**4. Principle of Full Disclosure.** Recognizes that it is important for the indigenous and traditional peoples and local communities to have

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Many  
Indigenous  
people have  
lost their  
languages,  
their values,  
their tradition  
and their  
time-tested  
culture.”

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They inhabit  
25% of the  
Earth's surface.  
They are  
responsible  
for the  
protection of  
80% of global  
biodiversity.

disclosed to them (in a way that they can comprehend), the manner in which the research is to be undertaken, how information is to be gathered, and the ultimate for which such information is to be used and by whom it is to be used. purpose



**8. Principle of Respect.** Recognizes the necessity for Western researchers to respect the integrity of the culture, traditions and relationships of indigenous and traditional peoples with their natural world and to avoid the application of ethnocentric conceptions and standards.

**9. Principle of Active Protection.** Recognizes the importance of researchers taking active measures to protect and enhance the relationships of communities with their environments, thereby promoting the maintenance of cultural and biological diversity.

**5. Principle of Prior Informed Consent and Veto.**

Recognizes that the prior informed consent of all peoples and their communities must be obtained before any research is undertaken. Indigenous peoples, traditional societies and local communities have the right to veto any programme, project or study that affects them.

**6. Principle of Confidentiality.** Recognizes that indigenous peoples, traditional societies and local communities, at their sole discretion, have the right to exclude from publication and/or to be kept confidential any information concerning their culture, traditions, mythologies or spiritual beliefs and that such confidentiality will be observed by researchers and other potential users. Indigenous and traditional peoples also have the right to privacy and anonymity.

**7. Principle of Active Participation.** Recognizes the critical importance of communities to be active participants in all phases of the project from inception to completion.

**10. Principle of Good Faith.** Recognizes that researchers and others having access to knowledge of indigenous peoples, traditional societies and local communities will at all times conduct themselves with the utmost good faith.

**11. Principle of Compensation.** Recognizes that communities should be fairly, appropriately and adequately remunerated or compensated for access to and use of their knowledge and information.

**12. Principle of Restitution.** Recognizes that where, as a result of research being undertaken, there are adverse consequences and disruptions to local communities, those responsible will make appropriate restitution and compensation.

**13. Principle of Reciprocity.** Recognizes the inherent value to Western science and humankind in general of gaining access to the knowledge of indigenous peoples, traditional societies and local communities and the desirability of reciprocating that contribution.



## CHAPTER 6

# This is our story of history, of time, of heritage and a timeless civilization

### *We Are the Original Inhabitants of Abuja*

#### A Legacy of Land, Spirit, and Struggle

For thousands of years, we lived in harmony with the land now called Abuja. We farmed its soil, sang with its birds, prayed under its skies, and built our communities among its trees and flowers.

We are Amwamwa, Bassa, Egbira, Gade, Ganagana, Gbagyi (Gwari), Gbari, Gwandara, and Koro—over 2 million strong, across 17 chiefdoms. We are the soul of this region.

But in 1976, a military decree created the Federal Capital Territory, and our lives changed forever.

#### What We Lost

- Our ancestral lands were seized
- Our homes and farms were destroyed
- Our voices and identity were erased

We were declared stateless—in our own homeland.

#### What We Stand For

We want to live with dignity, with the same rights granted under United Nations treaties and Nigeria's Constitution.

We fight for:

- Access to clean water and quality education and health services
- Job opportunities and healthy environments
- Preservation of our culture, heritage, and values
- Representation in political and economic life



We support democracy, free speech, and good governance. But we demand inclusion—not invisibility.

Take Action — Help Us Reclaim Our Future

- Tell our story until it echoes in every corner of Nigeria and beyond
- Speak to your leaders: the President, lawmakers, and policymakers must hear us
- Amplify our voices in the media and on social platforms
- Join our movement for justice, equality, and cultural survival

*The Abuja Original Inhabitants deserve recognition, restoration, and respect.*

Issued by: *Network of Journalists on*

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**Indigenous  
peoples have  
a right to  
self-deter-  
mination  
(or local  
determination  
for traditional  
and local  
communities)**

*Indigenous Issues (NEJI)* with support from *Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education (CHRICED)* and *MacArthur Foundation*

- Nigeria needs to ratify the ILO Convention 169
- We call on the National Assembly to ratify ILO Convention 169
- It is a key international treaty focused on the rights of indigenous peoples
- It will be of benefit to Abuja Original Inhabitants, (AOI)
- It will also strengthen democracy;
- It aims to ensure indigenous people are empowered, have control over their own development and participation in decisions affecting their lives.
- The convention stresses importance of respecting their cultures, traditions, and institutions and heritage;
- It helps to promote the right to land and natural resources.

#### **ILO Convention 169 key focal points**

##### **Recognition and protection of rights:**

The convention acknowledges the unique cultural and social identities of indigenous and tribal peoples and their right to maintain and develop their distinct ways of life.



**Indigenous traditional and local communities have sustainably utilized and conserved a vast diversity of plants, animals and ecosystems**

##### **Participation and consultation:**

Governments to consult with indigenous on matters that affect them, ensuring their free, prior, and informed consent before any actions are taken that impact their lives.

##### **Land and resource rights:**

It recognizes indigenous peoples' rights to the lands and territories they traditionally occupy and to the natural resources found within them.

##### **Development priorities:**

The convention stresses the right of indigenous and tribal peoples to determine their own priorities for development.

##### **Social, cultural, and economic rights:**

Promotes the protection of their social, cultural, and economic well-being, including right to their own institutions, customs, and traditions.

##### **Education and language:**

Calls for education programs that embraces histories, knowledge, and languages



**In indigenous and local cultures, experts exist who are peculiarly aware of nature's organizing principles, sometimes described as entities, spirits or natural law.**





# CHALLENGES OF ABUJA ORIGINAL INHABITANTS: A STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION, RIGHTS, AND JUSTICE

**S**ali Amuda is 90. All over his ten decades of living, he has only one regret: The taking over of a sacred forest once dedicated to the worship of his ancestors. 'For over 1000 years, we preserved that heritage. One day in 1977, the government of Nigeria came and bulldozed everything in less than four hours. Something preserved for over 1000 years was destroyed in few hours,' he said adding that he lost his being and essence.

The situation of Amuda depicts the story of indigenous people that were displaced from their ancestral homes by the Nigerian authority. The Abuja Original Inhabitants comprising the indigenous peoples of Gwari (Gbagyi), Bassa, Gade, Koro, and other ethnic communities have faced relentless marginalization since the declaration of Abuja as Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in 1976.

This displacement, conducted under the guise of national development, has led to the systematic erosion of their cultural identity, land rights, political representation, and economic opportunities. Nearly five decades later, the Original Inhabitants of Abuja continue to confront multi-layered challenges in asserting their place in a city built on their ancestral lands.

## 1. Displacement and Land Dispossession

Perhaps the most defining challenge faced by the Original Inhabitants of Abuja is the forced displacement from their ancestral lands. When Abuja was chosen as Nigeria's capital, the federal government acquired a vast expanse of land—estimated at over 8,000 square kilometers—without adequate compensation, resettlement, or consultation with the indigenous communities. Many families were evicted without

“  
The unique  
cultural and  
social identities  
of indigenous  
peoples and  
their right to  
maintain and  
develop their  
distinct ways  
of life.”



compensation, leading to the loss of farms, homes, sacred sites, and communal heritage. While the Abuja Master Plan promised relocation and integration, the reality for most communities has been one of exclusion. Furthermore, the process of land allocation within the FCT is heavily centralized, controlled by the Federal Capital Development Authority (FCDA) and the Ministry of the FCT. This has made it nearly impossible for Original Inhabitants to reclaim or secure formal titles to their own lands. As Abuja expands, indigenous communities have watched helplessly as their lands are converted into government estates, commercial zones, and luxury developments without compensation or recognition.



## 2. Political Exclusion and Lack of Representation

Despite being the first citizens of Abuja, the Original Inhabitants have little political voice in the governance of the territory. Unlike other states in Nigeria where indigenes can aspire to positions such as governors, commissioners, or traditional rulers with constitutional backing, the FCT operates as an administrative region governed directly by the President through the FCT Minister.

The absence of elected structures like a state governor or a state House of Assembly means that the FCT's indigenous peoples lack mechanisms to influence decisions affecting their lives. Their political participation is restricted to a single Senator and a few House of Representative members, with no control over local governance structures. This deliberate political exclusion has perpetuated a system in which their needs are ignored, and their development aspirations remain unmet.

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Most indigenous communities in Abuja lack access to basic infrastructure such as quality roads, schools, hospitals, clean water, and electricity.”

## 3. Cultural Erosion and Identity Loss

The influx of diverse populations from across Nigeria into Abuja has led to the rapid urbanization of areas that were once traditional indigenous settlements. Indigenous languages, traditions, festivals, and customs are being lost at an alarming rate as communities are either assimilated into dominant urban cultures or scattered across informal settlements with little cohesion.

Many young people from these communities are disconnected from their heritage, unable to speak their indigenous languages or participate in cultural rites due to the erosion of communal life. Sacred forests, shrines, and heritage sites have been erased in the name of development, with little regard for their historical or spiritual values. This cultural dilution has left the Original Inhabitants in a state of identity crisis, struggling to preserve who they are in a city that increasingly sees them as strangers.

## 4. Poverty and Economic Marginalization

The Abuja Original Inhabitants remain among the most economically disadvantaged populations in the FCT. Despite Abuja being one of the richest and fastest-growing cities in West Africa, the Original Inhabitants have largely been excluded from its wealth and economic opportunities. Their traditional means of livelihood—farming, hunting, and trading—have been disrupted by urbanization, without being replaced with meaningful alternatives.

Most indigenous communities in Abuja lack access to basic infrastructure such as quality roads, schools, hospitals, clean water, and electricity. Youth unemployment is high, and there are limited opportunities for skill acquisition or job creation. While non-indigenous elites benefit from federal contracts and political appointments, the Original Inhabitants are often left at the margins of economic development.



## 5. Lack of Legal Recognition and Protection

One of the most complex challenges for Abuja's Original Inhabitants is the absence of robust legal frameworks recognizing them as indigenous peoples with specific rights under Nigerian law. Unlike countries that have ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 or enacted domestic legislation protecting indigenous rights, Nigeria does not have a clear policy or legal mechanism that acknowledges the Original Inhabitants of Abuja as indigenous peoples entitled to special protection. This legal vacuum means that land expropriations, cultural destruction, and systemic discrimination can occur without legal recourse. Efforts by civil society and advocacy groups to push for inclusion, justice, and redress are often met with bureaucratic inertia or political resistance.

## 6. Environmental Degradation

Urban expansion and unregulated construction have led to severe environmental degradation in and around Original Inhabitant communities. Deforestation, loss of biodiversity, air and water pollution, and indiscriminate waste disposal are common. With little involvement in environmental planning or access to environmental justice, indigenous communities bear the brunt of climate-related risks without support or adaptation resources.

## 7. Human Rights Violations and Intimidation

There have been reports over the years of security forces intimidating or violently evicting indigenous communities, particularly those resisting displacement or demanding compensation. Activists and traditional leaders who speak out

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Many young  
people  
from these  
communities  
are disconnected  
from their  
heritage,  
unable to  
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indigenous  
languages

on these issues often face threats or are sidelined through political manipulation. The denial of the right to organize, protest, or even claim ancestral heritage openly, further entrenches a climate of fear and helplessness.

## Conclusion

The Abuja Original Inhabitants continue to bear the costs of a national capital that was built on their ancestral soil but offers them neither recognition nor inclusion. Their story is one of resilience in the face of systemic injustice. Addressing their challenges requires more than token gestures—it demands constitutional reforms, inclusive governance, land restitution, cultural preservation, and respect for human rights.

As Nigeria aspires toward democratic development and equity, it should reckon with the injustices done to the Abuja Original Inhabitants and take bold steps to correct the historical wrongs. Their survival, dignity, and future depend on it, so does the credibility of the Nigerian state.



## CHAPTER 7



# TROUBLE LOOMS AS ABUJA ABORIGINES BLOW HOT

Saturday, August 13, 2022.

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

Caught in the complex web of a burgeoning city, indigenous peoples of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja speak on their fears and aspirations in a land they had occupied for close to a thousand years but are now faced with threats of extinction. ADEWALE ADEOYE, who was on a week-long visit to Abuja indigenous communities, reports. breathe. Our lives matter.' Idris Adamu, a cab driver from Jigawa State, who took the reporter to the event, whispered his fears in thick Hausa accent: 'I hof (hope) this fefu (people) are not trying to chase us away.'

Musa Ndua, a Bassa of indigenous extraction who overheard him, shot back: 'We are not asking you people in Abuja to go. We are the original owners of this land. We have fought for 40 years for recognition, no one listens. We want integration. Our civilisation, our values, our tradition, our humanity are being destroyed.' Adamu returned a dry, conspiratorial grin, hopped into his cab and zoomed off even as another cab operator honked, shouting 'Abuja is no man's land'; the common cliché that is distasteful to Bassa, Dibo, Ganagana, Egbira, Gwandara, Gade, Koro, Anwanwa and Gwarri indigenous peoples whose forefathers had lived in the FCT since the 12th Century. Their



population is more than 15 million. The Gbwari alone are about 5.8 million people in the FCT and beyond. The ancestral owners of the FCT land under the aegis of Original People Inhabitants seized the August 9 window offered by the United Nations International Day of Indigenous Peoples to reassert themselves collectively as a people being squeezed by the spiralling Abuja industrial and commercial grandeur. On that Monday, for the first time in a long history spanning centuries, the cries of marginalised indigenous peoples of the FCT echoed from the deep valley. It was the week the UN had proclaimed as the International Day of Indigenous Peoples, coined for the first time in 1994 following global outcries of several indigenous peoples across the globe who had called global attention to the threats they face.

The nine ethnic nationalities that own the FCT say that their land, their cultures, their traditional knowledge and even their spirituality have been trampled or even thrown into the trash bin in the face of onslaught of civilisation, economic upheav

“indigenous communities bear the brunt of climate-related risks without support or adaptation resources.”



and the invasion of their land by capital and the prowess of multinationals. The people list lack of statehood, denial of access to opportunities, occupation of ancestral shrines, threat of extinction of their languages and outright display of arrogance by land occupiers who, for decades, continue to magnify the 'Abuja is No man's land' slogan. Aba Ahmed from Koro, in a chat with our correspondent, said he was 15 in 1976 when the Nigerian military government announced the transfer of the seat of power from Lagos to Abuja. He recalled that his parents and thousands of the indigenous peoples were invited and asked one question almost at gun point: 'Do you want to stay on this land or you want to be evacuated?' He said frightened by blistering gun nozzles, the majority of the people said they would wish to leave the land their forebears had treasured for centuries. The landless people then moved to neighbouring states where they rented apartments with their families. Ahmed said the military branded those among them who said they would stay on the land as rebels. "There is no land that is ungoverned. Abuja belongs to some people. We have been cultivating the land since 1300s. The land is ours. We need to be recognised as a people," Lazarus Nyanolo who holds a PhD and official of FCT Original Inhabitants and Secretary, Garki Chiefdom told our correspondent, his eyes cloudy with suppressed tears. As a matter of fact, many youths from the communities, who spoke to our correspondent, said the issue at hand is like a molten magma waiting to erupt.

“  
We are  
guests of  
this place.  
We have been  
thinking of  
how we can  
be good  
guests to  
our people



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

On Monday, our correspondent visited some of the ancestral homelands. In Kubwa, Paska, Dutse, Dankoru, Kute and several rural communities, poverty is etched on the face of the land. In some communities a mushroom of mud huts dot the landscape. Excited but ignorant children ran helter-skelter, some half naked, some in pampers; nearby, women tender domestic animals while some prepared food in ramshackle makeshifts. In general, the visitor is confronted with extremely poor population that eke out a living in the most difficult ways: no access to electricity, bad roads, limited land for cultivation and lack of access to potable water. Most residents rely on the dwindling forest for their livelihood, including their source of wealth. But close by is a chain of sky rise buildings and the opulence associated with Abuja.

Living a hair's breadth away from the wealth and power of Abuja, the original inhabitants are enveloped in penury. One aged woman said any time she visited Abuja city centre, she felt like someone who had been raped and

robbed in daylight. "They talk of compensation, but they gave nothing or at best peanuts. They forced thousands of people away from their lands," she said in a ghostly voice that fits her old and fragile physique. She said the Federal Government sometimes paid like N30,000 only for the crops on plots of land owned by indigenous people while the same land would be sold to someone else at about N30 million. She said when the FG paid stipends as compensation in 1976 there were few educated people among the indigenous peoples.

But that today, those children of yesterday are now highly educated and are desperate to



deconstruct the historical injustice. In those rural communities, from distance, daily locals are enraged watching the beautiful, electrified Abuja skylines, dotted with reflections of energy, beauty and affluence. It was partly the tempestuous condition that drew the conference organised by Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education, (CHRICED) with the support of MacArthur Foundation in collaboration with FCT Original Inhabitants, a coalition of groups from the nine ethnic groups that traditionally own the land Abuja now stretch her vast wings. The event drew indigenous peoples and other stakeholders who gathered together for constructive engagement on the plight of indigenous peoples of the FCT. The conference extended to an African regional meeting held on Tuesday with participants from several African countries and representatives of the diplomatic communities. Some of the resource persons were Dr Quinter Akinyi Onyango of the University of Free States, South Africa; Prof Emily Choge of Religious and Philosophy Department, Moi University, Kenya; Prof Ismail Adegboyega Ibraheem, Director of International Relations, Partnerships and Prospects, University of Lagos; Prof Oshita O. Oshita, Executive Director, Ubuntu Centre for Africa Peace Building and Development, (UCAP) in Abuja among many

others. Speaking at the conference, His Royal Highness Alhaji Ismaila Danladi Mohammed, said the government should engage the people for a peaceful resolution of the lingering problem. The Etsu Kwari said: “They took the land, took our sacred places and left us naked.”

Another youth told the audience which included top government officials: “If you think you are enjoying today without our recognition, you are murdering sleep.” He said the culture and civilisations of the people have been lost to the fleeting time and to them, the illusion of splendour occasioned by the overwhelming infrastructure in the FCT mostly do not add value to the economic conditions of largely poor and vulnerable indigenous peoples in the FCT. A woman leader in the community said Aso Rock, the seat of power, was one of the sacred places

taken away by government. She said: “We told them Aso Rock is our spirituality. If they don't return it to us, there will never be peace in Aso Rock.” She said some of the sacred traditional groove taken from the people included a spiritual site where the spirits of the dead were invoked from the ancient times. CHRICED's Executive Director, Ibrahim Zikirullahi, said his group and international partners want to promote dialogue, peace and justice.

He said: “This is the first time in history that we have come together to speak about the tribulations of indigenous peoples of the FCT as a united front.” He said part of the reasons for the conference was to initiate robust discussions for a peaceful resolution of the problems. A traditional ruler said the indigenous peoples are neglected and treated as second class citizens right in their ancestral homelands. “It is excruciatingly painful that the

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**Our civilisation,  
our values,  
our tradition,  
our humanity  
are being  
destroyed.**



original inhabitants who made enormous sacrifices to give Nigeria its centre of unity have been rendered stateless and left to wallow in despair and regret,” he lamented. The representative of MacArthur Foundation, Dr Kole Shettima, said it is the first of its kind in the history of the community that a regional conversation around indigenous issues would be held. “We are guests of this place. We have been thinking of how we can be good guests to our people,” he said. Another representative of the traditional chiefs in the FCT said: “The indigenous people are very peaceful. We are saying give us our right.” He said in other countries like Germany, Brazil where the capital cities were moved, adequate compensation was paid while inclusion was a policy. Indigenous peoples claim over ancestral land is a global phenomenon. This compelled the UN on July 28 to adopt the process of dealing with the problem. In 1993, following the recommendation of the World Conference on Human Rights, the UN General Assembly proclaimed the International Decade of Indigenous peoples (1995-2004). The UN described the indigenous peoples as “holders of unique languages, knowledge systems and beliefs and possess invaluable knowledge for sustainable development.” In some countries, lack of government intervention has led to armed uprising against the state. Abdulkareem Tijani, who leads a civil society promoting indigenous rights, said: “Though certain things are being done, much needed to be done.” The traditional rulers of Gbware said: “We cannot do anything that will destabilise Nigeria.

We will not do it. We just want the government to listen to us. “We are like fatherless children. You have become our parents. Please hold us. We need to be considered as the real indigenous people. “We must have our full rights.” He said when the rest of the country elects state governors, Abuja indigenous people go to sleep. They are also denied statehood by virtue of the legal requirements that one must have a state of origin to be gainfully employed or to gain admission into higher schools. “Our people are compelled to claim Nassarawa, Kogi, Kwara and other states to be included where states of origin is required for opportunities since Abuja is not a state,” he lamented. Section 263 of the 1979 Constitution says that

the FCT will be treated like a state, but that only exists on paper. He said the whole country is keeping quiet in the face of bottled up stinging bees that can force their way out at any time. He said the various governments have broken



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

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**Indigenous  
peoples  
claim over  
ancestral  
land is a  
global  
phenomenon.**

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**The indigenous people expressed support for peaceful means of expressing their grievances to local and international authorities**

“When land is taken away from you, it means everything on earth has been taken away.” One participant said the law in FCT says “we do not have the right to allocate our land to our children. When you refuse us, whether you like it or not, we will take it by force unless we are all killed so that the land can become virgin.”

Nyanolo said the FCT by land mass is more than Bayelsa and Lagos. “So why should we have only one senator? “Some states have 20 people in the

House of Reps

but we have only two. How can they lobby over 360 lawmakers? “We as a people are being administered as a ministry. Are we indigenes of a ministry? “When others are electing their governors, we are busy sleeping, disenfranchised.” He said his people went to court that they should be represented at the Federal Executive Council (FEC) up to the Supreme Court, adding that his people won but the FG failed to comply. “The land we own is being reallocated to us. They valued what we planted 1000 metres at N30,000. Someone from somewhere who got the land will sell it for N30 million.” The challenge came in 1976 when the then Gen. Murtala Mohammed administration wanted to move the

federal capital away from Lagos. A panel was set up, led by Justice Akinola Aguda. Other members of the panel were social critic Dr Tai Solarin, Col. Monsignor Pedro Martins, Prof O.K Ogan, Prof. Ajato Gandonu, Alhaji Mohammed Musa Isma and Chief Owen Fiebai. The committee suggested some 30 cities including Ile-Ife, Makurdi, Okene, Osara, Kafanchan, Agege, Agera, Auchu and Abuja. Some of the considerations for choosing Abuja were security, excess land, low population, soil, ethnic accord, health, climate and centrality. It was thought that Lagos was identified with only one group, the Yoruba; a situation considered as a “threat to national unity.”

At the FCT, an official who did not wish to be named told our correspondent





that the authority was looking into the grievances of the indigenous people. “We are aware of some of the challenges. They cannot say compensation has not been paid. They can only say it may not be enough,” he said. After the conference, the indigenous people expressed support for peaceful means of expressing their grievances to local and international authorities while urging the Nigerian government to meet her international obligations like the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) where member states affirm that before developments take place in indigenous communities, the people must have 'free, prior and informed consent' among other things. Some challenges: The indigenous people are yet to develop their alphabets while many of their cultures have been eroded through contact with bigger ethnic groups in the FCT. Nyanolo said it was not a problem, adding that his people are already developing their alphabets. In February next year, the indigenous people also hope to mark, for the first time, their Heritage Day. Nyanola was right when he said while some of the older generation are appealing for calm the youths are boiling with anger. Saliu Idris, 25, a Nupe who came from Warri where he grew up, said his father told him the family lost over 1,000 acres to the FCT.

He is a graduate but has no job and watches cars in Warri. He appears to sum up indigenous youths' lack of trust in government's various promises. He said: “Bros, we are tired.” Informed about Federal Government's plans to address the problem, he took off his fez cap in a dramatic response: “Bros, wicked people no dey change. Winch (Witch) no dey get mercy.” But Zikirillahi said his group will work with the Nigerian government and international partners to ensure justice is done in the shortest time possible to avoid breeding a rebellious movement in the FCT at a time the authorities are almost dazed with terrorists threats in Abuja, once Nigeria's safest city.

**Source: The Nation**

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A traditional ruler said the indigenous peoples are neglected and treated as second class citizens right in their ancestral homelands.



# ABUJA ORIGINAL INHABITANTS: A NEW PATHWAY

## Opening Statement

### Group begins project to amplify voices of Abuja indigenous people

A media concern has launched a comprehensive strategy to echo the voices of Abuja Original Inhabitants in a bid to draw the attention of stakeholders to the plight of a people known to be the first to settle in the Federal Capital Territory in the pre-colonial era. In a statement on Saturday, the Network of Journalists on Indigenous Issues (NEJII), said the 15-month campaign is aimed at building the capacity of journalists for effective focus on the plight of Abuja first nation and also developing the mechanism that would create a paradigm shift in perspectives of state and non-state actors on indigenous issues. This landmark initiative seeks to promote greater awareness, visibility, and inclusion of the indigenous communities of Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), who have long faced systemic marginalization and displacement.

'Through media empowerment, policy engagement, and civic dialogue, NEJII will work with the media to bring the Original Inhabitants of Abuja to the center of public discourse and national development priorities. They have suffered in silence and their voices in the valleys have not echoed enough to be heard,' the statement signed by NEJII's National Coordinator, Adewale Adeoye and the Programme Officer, Mr Ologeh Joseph Chibu stated. The project is with the support of MacArthur Foundation through the Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education, (CHRICED).

NEJII said Nigeria is a signatory to various regional and international treaties and conventions that uphold the rights of indigenous people, including, but not limited to

the International Labour Organisation, (ILO) Convention 169 which in part mandates state parties to address the cultural, social and economic marginalisation of indigenous peoples. Abuja original inhabitants, mainly Gbwari, Gwandara, Dibo, Gade, Ebira, Ganagana, Koro, Nupe and others have for long been exposed to a variety of right violations, including lack of access to the essentials of life, denial of ancestral land, deforestation, terrorist invasion coupled with economic and political marginalisation. The group said constructive media engagement is necessary to tell the stories of Abuja indigenous people within historical contexts that addresses their fears and aspirations. Key activities are production of Training Manual for journalists, capacity-building workshops for media practitioners, development of Education, Information Communication (IEC) materials and advocacy visits to stakeholders all combined to ensure greater inclusion and also bring the plight of indigenous issues into the front burner of national discuss.

NEJII will host training sessions in Abuja and Lagos to equip journalists with the tools and knowledge to effectively report on indigenous rights, cultural identity, land justice, and development challenges faced by Abuja Original Inhabitants.

NEJII said the Training Materials are a comprehensive

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Indigenous inclusion is a democratic and developmental imperative, and the media should play a leading role in shaping a more just narrative.”

educational resources and toolkits to guide ethical, accurate, and rights-based reporting on indigenous issues. 'Through coordinated campaigns and storytelling initiatives, the project will highlight the lived experiences, struggles, and aspirations of Abuja's indigenous communities across local and national media platforms while the advocacy engagement entails visits to Original Inhabitant communities to listen, document, and share their concerns, while also engaging key policymakers and institutions to drive legislative and policy changes that respect and protect indigenous rights in the FCT.

Speaking on the project, the NEJII National Coordinator stated: "This initiative is about giving a platform to historically silenced voices. It is also a call to action for the media and policymakers to recognize and uphold the rights and identity of Abuja Original Inhabitants. "Indigenous inclusion is a democratic and developmental imperative, and the media should play a leading role in shaping a more just narrative."

NEJII calls on the media, civil society, government institutions, and the international community to support the rights of Abuja Indigenous inhabitants towards justice, representation, and sustainable inclusion in the political and Through media

Through media empowerment, policy engagement, and civic dialogue, NEJII will work with the media to bring the Original Inhabitants of Abuja to the center of public discourse and national development priorities.



# STATEMENT BY THE RESOURCE CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS & CIVIC EDUCATION (CHRICED)

18th Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland – July 14, 2025

Delivered by: Dr. Ibrahim M. Zikirullahi, Executive Director, CHRICED

Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Experts, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am Dr. Ibrahim M. Zikirullahi, Executive Director of the Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED). I am joined by six delegates—with the support of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation—to bring a renewed urgent global attention to the worsening plight of the indigenous peoples of Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Today, over two million indigenous people of FCT, Abuja, otherwise known as Original Inhabitants (OIs)—representing nine tribes and seventeen chiefdoms—face systematic exclusion, land dispossession, political disenfranchisement, and cultural

erasure. Without urgent and decisive action, these communities risk extinction. The roots of their suffering trace back to Military Decree No. 6 of 1976, which forcefully appropriated their ancestral lands to establish Nigeria's new capital. Since then, successive governments have failed to provide compensation, resettlement, or legal recognition. Not even Supreme Court judgments affirming their rights have moved the Nigerian state to honour its obligations. In addition to the systemic

marginalization faced by Abuja's Original Inhabitants (OIs), We underscores the critical importance of data sovereignty and the right to data as a cornerstone of Indigenous Peoples' self-determination and development. Despite the existence of research by bodies such as UNESCO and UNICEF affirming the presence and identity of Indigenous Peoples in the FCT, the Nigerian government has failed to collect, disaggregate, and utilize this data to inform inclusive policies. This omission perpetuates invisibility and exclusion in national development planning, budgeting, and service delivery.

The consequences of this neglect are devastating:

- Abuja indigenous communities lack basic amenities—functional healthcare, quality education, clean water, sanitation, and infrastructure.
- Their traditional livelihoods—farming, fishing, hunting, and craftsmanship—are endangered by unchecked urban sprawl and ecological degradation.
- Politically, they are denied fundamental rights. The indigenous people of Abuja cannot elect a governor or state legislature, rendering them stateless in their homeland.

These injustices contravene both Nigeria's constitutional guarantees and its obligations under international human rights law—particularly the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which enshrines the rights to self-determination, cultural preservation, and land ownership. CHRICED therefore calls on this Expert Mechanism, member states, and all relevant stakeholders to hold the Nigerian government accountable and to support the following urgent actions:

- 1. Legal Recognition:** Formally recognize Abuja's Original Inhabitants as Indigenous Peoples with full legal status and protections.
- 2. Political Inclusion:** Ensure their participation in democratic governance, including the right to elect local and regional representatives.
- 3. Equitable Development:** Enact inclusive policies that guarantee access to land, natural resources, and economic opportunities.



**4. Cultural Preservation:** Support grassroots initiatives to safeguard indigenous languages, traditions, and sustainable practices.

**5. Recognition of Indigenous Data Sovereignty:** Abuja's OIs must have the right to control, access, and benefit from data concerning their communities, lands, and resources.

**6. Inclusive and Disaggregated Data Collection:** Nigeria must collect and publish data that accurately reflects the socio-economic realities of OIs, disaggregated by tribe, gender, age, and location.

**7. Community-Led Data Initiatives:** Support for Indigenous-led research and data systems that preserve traditional knowledge and inform culturally appropriate development.

Without accurate and inclusive data, the lived realities of Abuja's Original Inhabitants remain obscured, and their rights continue to be denied. Data is not just a technical tool—it is a vehicle for justice, visibility, and empowerment.

**Madam Chairperson, Distinguished Experts,** The survival of Abuja's Original Inhabitants—and the preservation of their identity, dignity, and heritage—depends on urgent and coordinated intervention. Development must never come at the cost of dispossession or cultural extinction.

Let us act—now. Justice delayed is dignity denied.

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Indigenous inclusion is a democratic and developmental imperative, and the media must play a leading role in shaping a more just narrative.”

# FURTHER GUIDE FOR JOURNALISTS ON REPORTING INDIGENOUS ISSUES

- Focus on political, socio and economic issues.
- Let the indigenous people tell their own story.
- Their lack of access to western education, does not diminish their ability to express themselves logically and factually.
- It may be important to seek an interpreter when having interviews with indigenous people who do not speak English or the national language.
- Journalists need to be patient when reporting indigenous issues.
- Official statements from authorities should be investigated, because they could be false. For the fact people occupy powerful institutions, does not mean they can not lie.
- Journalists should experience the living stories of indigenous people by visiting their communities and interacting with them.
- Journalists should be conscious of class conflicts, even within indigenous communities and therefore should engage all aspects of the social spectrum.
- Indigenous issues are not just about festivals, dances and rituals, they are also about economic, political and cultural rights of the people.
- Budget tracking is a viable tool for journalists to appreciate the place of the indigenous people on the development scale.
- The inter and intra disagreements among indigenous peoples are reflections of the dynamics of human nature, not necessarily a sign of perpetual disunity and lack of organisation amongst indigenous peoples.
- Journalists should endeavour to focus on strengths, capabilities and potential of indigenous peoples and not fixated on weaknesses.



# JUSTICE FOR THE ORIGINAL INHABITANTS OF ABUJA, NIGERIA: A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH.

Presented by Professor Ahmed Abdulmumini Bala on behalf of the Lawyers Network of Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED) at the 18th Session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), Palais des Nations, Geneva – July 15, 2025

Madam Chair, Distinguished Experts, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We stand before you today on behalf of over two million Original Inhabitants (OIs) of Abuja, Nigeria—communities whose ancestral lands, cultural heritage, and fundamental rights were erased in the name of national progress. Since the creation of Abuja as the Federal Capital of Nigeria in 1976, nine indigenous tribes and seventeen chiefdoms have been forcibly displaced, without proper consultation, informed consent, or adequate compensation. These communities, whose history is entwined with the very soil of Nigeria's capital, now face systemic exclusion from political, economic, and socio cultural life. Their identity has been marginalized, and their voices silenced. The continued marginalization of Abuja's Original Inhabitants in Nigeria's governance and development processes, is reinforced by the lack of accurate, disaggregated, and publicly accessible data. When data is absent, recognition is denied. And without recognition, justice remains out of reach.

We urgently call on Member States and this Expert Mechanism to champion the operationalization of the globally endorsed CARE Principles—Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics—in all indigenous data practices. For the Abuja OIs, this means:



- Community-led data governance
- Authority to participate in matters that affect them,
- Responsible use of data to assert their rights
- Ethical handling of their socio-cultural heritage.

Only by reversing decades of exclusion, through intentional, ethical, and transparent data mechanisms can we ensure meaningful participation in decisions that affect the lives, lands, and future of these communities. We therefore recommend immediate action across the following areas:

**1. Reparation and Restitution:** Acknowledge and redress the historic displacement through financial and symbolic compensation. Restore sacred sites. Support livelihoods lost to dispossession.

**2. Constitutional and Legal Reforms:** Amend Nigeria's Constitution and other legal instruments to recognize the OIs' distinct status, customary land rights, and guaranteed representation.

**3. Cultural Revitalization:** Fund and protect indigenous education, language preservation, oral histories, and heritage institutions. Prevent cultural extinction through urgent revitalization.

The survival of Abuja's Original Inhabitants is inseparable from our global commitment to justice, dignity, and human rights. Their history should not be footnotes—it should be foundation.

Let us move beyond tokenism. Let us pursue restorative justice through evidence, empathy, and action.

Thank you.



MacArthur  
Foundation



RESOURCE CENTRE  
for HUMAN RIGHTS  
& CIVIC EDUCATION

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🌐 [www.netjii.org](http://www.netjii.org)