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Abuja: Modern City With Inadequate Fire Stations

David Aduge-Ani (http://leadership.ng//reporter/david-aduge-ani/)
— *Oct 11, 2014* | 5 Comments (http://leadership.ng/features/386714/abuja-modern-city-inadequate-fire-stations#comments)

The nation's capital city has in recent times witnessed fire incidents that sometimes led to the loss of life and property worth millions of naira. This can be traced to the lack of fire stations in the various districts in the capital city as stipulated in the Abuja master plan. DAVID ADUGE-ANI writes on the fire emergency response situation in Abuja

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There is no doubt that fire outbreaks in many homes and offices have caused a lot of colossal damages to lives and property in various parts of the federal capital territory in recent times. The most recent fire incident in the territory was that of the the Glass House, home of the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF) in Zone 7, Wuse, Abuja which destroyed pieces of furniture and documents.

On June 15, 2013 there was also a fire incident in Gwarimpa, Abuja at the residence of one Ms Maria. The fire which started in the kitchen of the victim was as a result of a faulty gas cylinder. All efforts made by the lady and some of her neighbours to put out the fire proved abortive as the fire spread from her kitchen to the bedroom and then to other parts of the apartment.

Although men of the FCT fire service later came to assist to put off the fire, before their arrival at the scene, which was about one and half hours after the fire started, a colossal damage had been done to the victim's property. For instance, her entire kitchen housing her deep freezers and other cooking materials got burnt. The fire also extended to other parts of the building including the roof, wardrobe, furniture and other personal belongings were torched.

A neighbour to the victim who gave his name as Johnson told LEADERSHIP Weekend that some of the woman's property could have been saved if the FCT fire service had arrived on time. "Shortly after the fire started, a neighbour to the woman called the fire service for assistance. Although they responded, before their arrival, many of her property had been burnt to ashes," he said.

According to records, property worth N41.3 million was lost to fire in the FCT in November 2009. Also, in November 2011, property worth an estimated N63.7 million was lost to fire and two lives lost. Similarly, a total of 69 lives and property worth N765.7 million were lost to incidences of fire in and around the FCT in 2012, with estimated value of property lost between January and February only, put at N53 million. Also, a total of 239 lives with property worth N3.17 billion were saved from inferno in the same year, according to statistics made available to newsmen by the minister of the FCT, Sen Bala Mohammed.

The Abuja master plan was earlier designed to bring forth an integrated and sustainable city. Among several other things, the master plan had conceptualised that there would be districts, with a population of 5,000 people and above, and facilities including a secondary school, health and shopping centres, market, post office, police and fire stations. The present reality however is the contrary.

Investigations by LEADERSHIP Weekend reveal that at the moment, the FCT has 64 districts and only 13 of the districts have fire stations to fight emergency fire cases. These fire stations are located in Asokoro, Games Village, National Judicial Institute, Kubwa, Gwarimpa, Garki Market, Kaura Market and one station each in the area councils of the territory. Similkarly, there are other fire stations that are under construction at the moment in Maitama, Wuse 2, Mbora, Utako, Gaduwa and Kaura districts.

As a result of the inadequate fire stations, the response to fire incidence is often delayed because of the distance. The deputy comptroller, operations, FCT Fire Service, Opetunsi Julius told our reporter that all the 13 fire stations in the territory are functional. "In FCT, at the moment, we have 13 fire stations. We also have one each in all the area councils, while we have six in the city centre. There is also the Kubwa fire station; this makes it seven stations in all at the moment. All the 13 fire stations are functional," he said.

Opetunsi maintained that it's not possible to have fire stations in all the districts in the FCT at the moment, because of the cost of setting up a fire station, but added that the services make used of the available stations to cover all the areas in the territory whenever there is a fire incident.

"We have been trying our best to make sure that we meet up with our response time which is five minutes. For now, what we normally do is to try and cover the city very well. However, we are also mindful of the satellite towns and other areas. For instance, if there is fire outbreak in a place like Nyanya, we usually dispatch fire fighters from Asokoro here to the area."

The director general, FCT Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Abbas Idriss, told LEADERSHIP Weekend in an interview that the responce time to any emergency in the FCT depends on the location and the terrain of the area. "Our minimum time in case of fire incident is five minutes, depending on the location, the terrain of the area, that is how accessible is that area. If it is a bomb blast, globally we don't just go there within five minutes even if you tell us because we have to allow the anti-bomb police squad to clear the area in case there is any bomb that has not exploded there," she said.

Opetunsi disclosed that the major challenge the fire service usually faces in fighting fire incidents is that of traffic. "In Nigeria, many people don't respect emergencies but in western countries, when people hear the fire service siren or ambulance siren, they give way for them to pass, but it is not the same in Nigeria."

He also frowned that many people usually call the fire service very late after a fire incident, adding that before "our men reach such areas, a lot of damage must have been done. We also notice that many fire victims do not remember to call us. Sometimes, it is passers-by that call us. We normally tell people to always call so that we can be at the scene on time to avoid much damage. We also have a department to tell people on how to prevent fire in their homes and offices," he said.

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