

# CONTRASTING HOUSING TRANSFORMATION IN CORE DHAKA AND PERI-URBAN ABUJA

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## ABSTRACT

Informal settlements constitute the bulk of urban housing stock. Culture specific dwelling units in the developing countries are transforming fast to commercial style housing due to drastic urbanization, globalization and their attendant acculturation. This paper focuses on establishing commonalities and disparities of the situations in Abuja, Nigeria, and Dhaka, Bangladesh, in terms of the transformation process, the predicated denominator, and the driving force. It will make comparative analysis of the changing residential patterns in these two developing world cities in Africa and Asia over a period of several decades. This research qualitatively contrast physical, social and psychological adjustments observed in traditional family compounds typical of Abuja; and the commercial subdivision of old Dhaka houses.

In line with the post positivists' epistemology, an emergent-grounded theory triangulates with quantitative evidence and field observation. The findings suggest a fusion of isolated Gbagyi housing units into hollowed-out structure physically; and fission of the tribal group socially. Individualism replaces communal responsibility, with Islam and Christianity as moderators in Abuja, while the core Dhaka housing transformation pattern emphasizes on spatial economization through subdivision, addition-subtraction, conversion and reconstruction, motivated by convenient fraternity of respective socio-economic classes that are united in housing themselves. These findings give evidence of economic precedence over cultural sustainability in the process of housing transformation. However, the capitalist tendency of the twenty first century for income first, jeopardizes local identity, rhythm and modernity. This could have a global implication on cultural sustainability of vernacular housing in the urban environment.

**Key words:** *Informal settlements, cultural sustainability, housing transformation, informal delivery.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Transformation of housing, a physical manifestation of society's culture that is dynamic, is an inevitable response to changing needs brought by socio-economics of survival. As is universally observed, families require satisfactory dwelling environment throughout their respective life cycles. Housing transformation, whether by moving, improving or a combination of both seeks to obtain satisfactory habitat. Transformation also takes place due to changing needs and aspirations, some with priorities. Family requirements, need for comfort, duration of living, and tenure type and security also vary over time. These are important causes, particularly in the developing countries, that see changes in its infrastructure, services, density, economy and the society as a whole.

Shifts in population distribution and mobility and economic and political forces have changed societies and the urban environments in Abuja and Dhaka— cities of developing countries. Today, in large cities with high demographic and social mobility, neighbours have become strangers, individual identity is lost, and the feeling of community and pride in ones own place are gone (Rahman & Islam, 2004). Socially accepted unwritten controls on the environment and people no longer exist. The internal dynamics and the external stimuli bringing about changes are too intense and too fast for the transformed society to absorb and assimilate, without altering and damaging the context beyond recognition. The dynamics of change has divested the community of the socially accepted framework; there is no mechanism to manage it without losing the essential character.

The paper mainly contains four sections. Following this introduction are outlines of core Dhaka and Peri-urban Abuja settlements. The second section deals in a comparison of the two transformation profiles. The third section is on apparent spatial transformation profile. The fourth section concludes the paper with recommendations.