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Factors Affecting Compliance with Development Control Regulations in Lokoja, Kogi State Nigeria

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Abstract

The study assesses the state of urban planning standards and the level of development control compliance in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria. Rapid urbanization has placed significant pressure on planning institutions, often resulting in irregular land use and unregulated physical development. This research employed a mixed-methods approach, including the review of planning documents, administration of questionnaires to residents and officials, and field observations. Key factors influencing non-compliance included lack of updated development plans, high professional fees, political interference, urban poverty, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms. The consequences of poor compliance ranged from environmental degradation to the collapse of buildings. Comparative insights from Botswana and Singapore were used to frame best practices. The study concludes that effective enforcement, public participation, and streamlined approval processes are essential for improved compliance and sustainable urban development. Recommendations include enhancing planning institutions' capacity, adopting flexible zoning systems, and increasing awareness of planning regulations among the populace.

Keywords: Urban planning; Development control; Compliance; Spatial planning, Urban Development

1.0 Introduction

There is always the need for control and balance for any system to function as expected which is a form of regulation for smooth and effective operation. In a physical environment, the control and balance needed in a system is being provided by development control regulations. These development control regulations are made available by the various development control tools which ranges from development plans to development legislations. Development control tools are targeted at providing the strategic framework and policy context for all local planning decisions. The introduction of development control on both the public and private development is to achieve safety and better health objectives in order to create an improved environment for the community's benefits (Dissanayake, 1987).

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Effective urban planning is essential for ensuring orderly spatial development, environmental sustainability, and enhanced quality of life in growing cities. Development control, a key component of urban planning, provides regulatory frameworks that guide the use of land and buildings through tools such as master plans, zoning ordinances, and planning standards (Dissanayake, 1987; Groves, 2000). In Nigeria, development control practices are entrenched in the Nigerian Urban and Regional Planning Law (Decree 88 of 1992), which mandated local and regional authorities to enforce planning standards. Lokoja, the capital of Kogi State, is experiencing rapid urban growth due to its strategic location, population increase, and land demand (Owolabi, 2019). Yet, this expansion often occurs without adequate compliance to development control regulations, posing threats to sustainable urban development.

Several studies have investigated the challenges of implementing development control in Nigerian cities. Ogundele, Odewumi, and Aigbe (2011) highlighted that non-compliance often results from poor enforcement, lack of awareness, and the absence of updated development plans. Aluko (2011) and Ojo-Fajuru (2012) also identified widespread violations of planning standards, such as setbacks and zoning laws, especially in cities like Lagos and Akure. While these studies provide valuable insights, most of them focus on major metropolitan areas, leaving a research gap in smaller but rapidly developing cities like Lokoja. Furthermore, case studies from countries such as Botswana and Singapore demonstrate how effective enforcement and public participation can significantly improve planning compliance (Mosha, 1996; Yuen, 2007).

The growing population and spatial transformation of Lokoja have intensified land fragmentation, unauthorized constructions, and non-compliance with building regulations (Kogi State Town Planning Development Board Report, 2017). Despite the existence of legal frameworks, poor enforcement mechanisms, high professional fees, and political interference hinder effective implementation of planning standards (Architectural Association of Kenya, 2011; Opata et al., 2013). This study assesses the

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factors influencing compliance with development control in Lokoja with a view to enhancing effective implementation of the existing regulations for sustainable urban growth and development.

2.0 Research Methodology

2.1 Study Design

This study adopted survey research design involving both quantitative and qualitative methods to assess development control compliance in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive analysis of the development control activities, compliance levels, influencing factors, and their spatial effects on urban development. A mixed-methods research design was adopted for this study. Data were collected through structured questionnaires, interviews with stakeholders, and field observations across selected development zones in Lokoja. Secondary sources, such as planning regulations and policy documents, were also reviewed to contextualize findings. The analysis focuses on the interplay between regulatory frameworks, institutional capacities, and socio-economic dynamics affecting development control compliance. This approach offers a holistic understanding of planning practices in Lokoja and proposes actionable strategies for improving regulatory adherence. The mixed-method design facilitated the triangulation of data from primary and secondary sources, ensuring depth and reliability of findings.

2.2 Study Area

The research was conducted in Lokoja, the capital of Kogi State, located within latitudes 7°45′N and 7°51′N and longitudes 6°41′E and 6°45′E. It lies at the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers, covering an estimated area of 63.82 square kilometers. Lokoja has experienced rapid urbanization due to its strategic location, administrative functions, and proximity to Abuja. The town exhibits a mix of formal and informal developments, making it a relevant case study for development control research.

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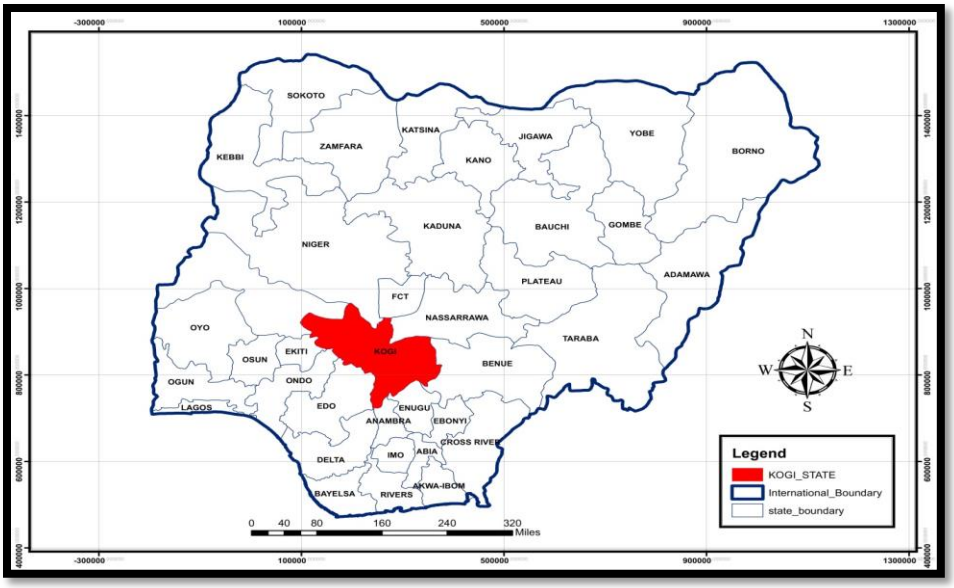


Figure 1.1: Map of Nigeria Showing Kogi State
Source: Researchers' Digitized Work, (2019).

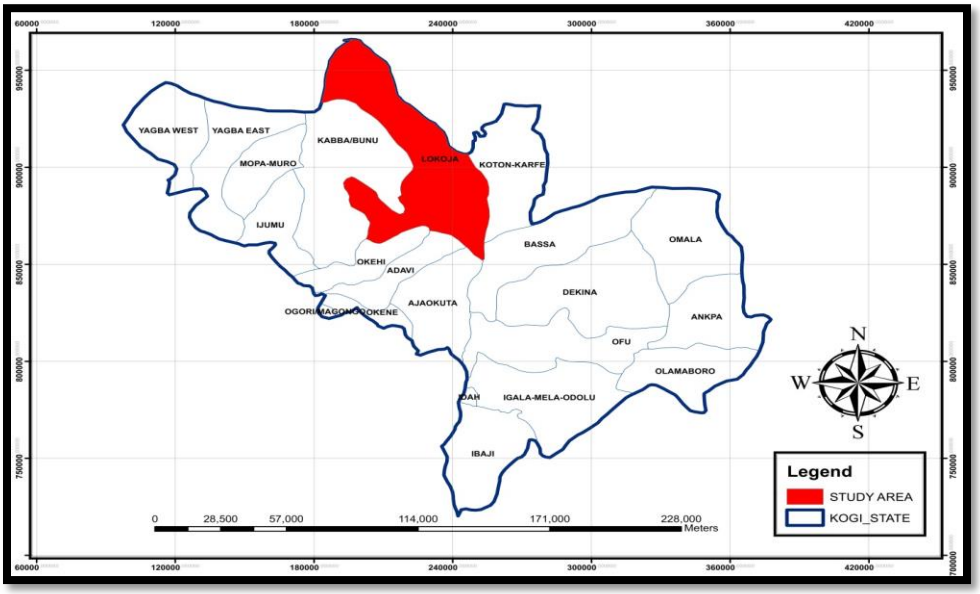


Figure 1.2: Map of Kogi State Showing Lokoja.
Source: Researchers' Digitized Work, (2019).

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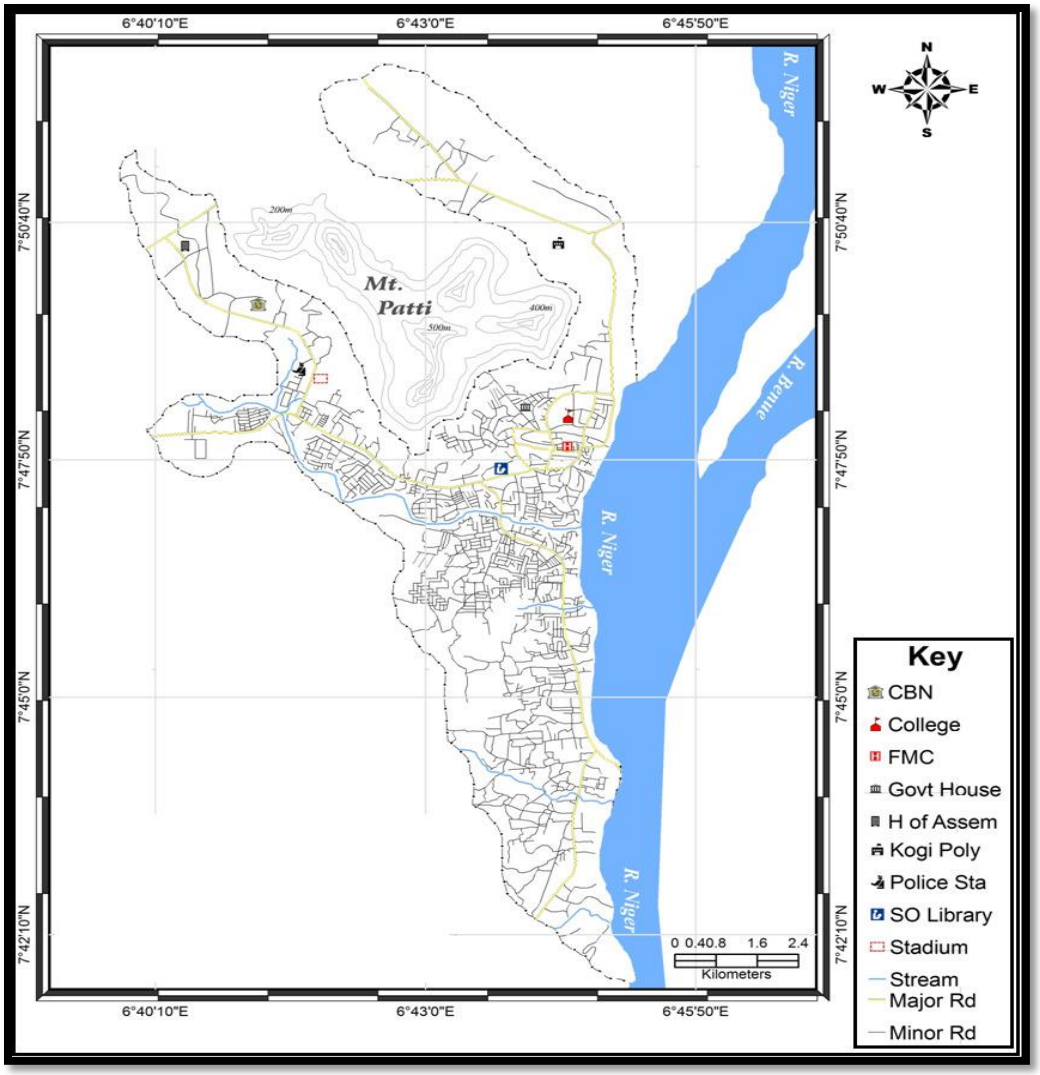


Figure 1.3: Map Showing Lokoja Meteropolis
Source: Researchers' Digitized Work, (2019).

2.3 Population and Sampling Techniques

The study population included residents, developers, and planning officials in Lokoja. A multi-stage sampling technique was used. First, the town was stratified into five development zones based on their planning characteristics and intensity of development:

- Zone A: Old Lokoja Core (e.g., Kabawa, Lokongoma Phase 1, Ganaja Road)

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- Zone B: Modern Low-Density Layouts (e.g., Government Reserved Areas, 500 Housing Units)
- Zone C: New Peri-Urban Developments (e.g., Crusher, Felele)
- Zone D: Unplanned/Informal Areas (e.g., Adankolo, Paparanda Square)
- Zone E: Institutional/Commercial Districts

From each zone, respondents were randomly selected. A sample size of 160 respondents was determined using Taro Yamane's formula (1967) for known populations. This included:

- 120 household heads and developers
- 20 town planning officers
- 20 staff from the Kogi State Urban Development Board

2.4 Data Collection Instruments

Primary data were collected using:

- Structured questionnaires: Administered to residents and developers to assess their awareness, compliance, and perceptions of development control standards.
- Key informant interviews: Conducted with planning officials to gain expert insights into regulatory practices, enforcement mechanisms, and institutional constraints.
- Field observations: Used to verify physical development patterns, level of compliance with planning standards, and presence of control signage or permits on site.

Secondary data were obtained from:

- Official documents and planning policies from the Kogi State Urban Development Board
- Past urban development plans
- Scholarly articles and books on development control and compliance

2.5 Data Analysis

The quantitative data from questionnaires were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations were used to summarize the data. Qualitative data from interviews and field observations were analyzed thematically and integrated into the interpretation of statistical results.

Spatial analysis was conducted using maps and physical development assessments across the different zones. The research specifically

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analyzed the presence or absence of building approvals, compliance with setbacks, plot coverage, and other planning standards. This multi-method analysis enabled the study to evaluate not only compliance levels but also the effectiveness of development control tools in Lokoja.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Development Control Tools in Lokoja

Several tools guide development control in Lokoja. However, most are outdated, underutilized, or poorly enforced, leading to inconsistencies in implementation across different zones.

Table 1: ***Existing Development Control Tools in Lokoja***

Tool/Instrument	Year	Status/Remarks
Lokoja Master Plan	1974	Obsolete, not fully implemented
Zoning Working Plan	1992	Limited enforcement
Interim Development Order	1991	Still referenced, but weakly enforced
Planning and Development Edict (Kogi State)	1991	Institutional guide
Town & Regional Planning Standards & Regulations	2018	Zoning working plan

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2019.

Despite their existence, enforcement is inconsistent due to a lack of updated data, institutional coordination, and implementation capacity.

3.2 Compliance with Planning Standards

The level of compliance was assessed across several development control parameters. Although many developers reported having building plan approvals, but their level of compliance with existing regulations, such as setbacks and plot coverage, were poor. This is clearly shown in Table 2.

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Table 2: ***Level of Compliance with Development Control Standards in Lokoja***

Compliance Parameter	Compliance (%)	Remarks
Building Line	42.5	Often violated in informal settlements
Setbacks	53.8	Partially adhered to; especially the front.
Road Access Width	55.3	Many developments undersized access roads
Plot Coverage	48.9	Violated due to space maximization
Building Height	74.5	Mostly respected
Right use of Land	51.5	Residential zones converted to Commercial uses.
Overall Average Compliance	59.5	Moderate but with significant irregularities

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2019.

Although 88% of developers claim to possess approvals, but thorough field observations revealed major issues in design implementation and alterations of the approved designs.

3.3 Factors Influencing Non-Compliance to Development Regulations

Both socio-economic and institutional constraints affect compliance. Respondents identified several reasons to non-compliance to development control guidelines as expressed in Table 3.

Table 3: ***Perceived Factors Influencing Non-Compliance (n = 160)***

Factor	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of awareness of regulations	40	25.0
High professional/statutory fees	35	21.9
Weak enforcement mechanisms	28	17.5
Political interference	18	11.3
Lack of updated development plans	15	9.4
Poor staffing/logistical constraints	14	8.8
Ignorance/corruption among professionals	10	6.3

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2019.

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These findings aligned with findings in Ogundele et al., (2011) and Opata et al., (2013) who identified underfunding, politicization, and institutional fragmentation as major barriers to non-compliance of developmemt regulations in most Nigerian cities.

3.4 Effects of Non-Compliance to Development Control Guidelines

The implications of poor compliance were examined, and the most reported effects included environmental and spatial degradation as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Reported Effects of Non-Compliance on Lokoja's Urban Structure

Effect on Urban Structure	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Environmental degradation	50	31.3
Risk of lives and property loss	45	28.1
Urban congestion	37	23.1
Loss of neighborhood aesthetics	18	11.3
Inadequate public purpose/open spaces	10	6.2

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2019.

These reflect growing spatial disorganization and social vulnerability, in consonance with findings in AAK (2011) and UN-Habitat (1990).

3.5 Residents' Views on Possible Solutions

Respondents proposed different strategies for improving compliance, with a strong preference for combined interventions. These are outlined in Table 5.

Table 5: ***Preferred Solutions to Improve Compliance (n = 160)***

Suggested Intervention	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Zoning and master plan enforcement	45	28.1
Capacity-building for local planning authorities	35	21.9
Improved monitoring and inspections	25	15.6
Public awareness campaigns	21	13.1
Affordable plan/design processing	10	6.3
Strict enforcement alone	24	15.0

Source: Authors' Field Survey, 2019.

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4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Conclusion

This study assessed the level of compliance with urban planning standards and development control regulations in Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria. Findings revealed moderate compliance (average of 59.5%) across planning parameters, with significant violations occurring in setbacks, road widths, and land use conformity. Although most developers possessed building plan approvals, field assessments revealed that actual implementation frequently deviated from approved standards.

The research identified several factors influencing non-compliance, including lack of awareness, high statutory fees, weak enforcement, outdated development plans, and political interference. These constraints have led to negative outcomes such as environmental degradation, urban congestion, and building collapse. The study also found that the existing development control tools though well-documented are not effectively enforced, thereby reducing their practical relevance.

Overall, the research confirms that development control in Lokoja is hindered by a combination of institutional inefficiencies and socio-economic limitations. If not addressed, these issues could further deteriorate the spatial structure and sustainability of the city. However, the study also demonstrates that there is strong public support for improved regulatory systems, suggesting that meaningful reforms are both needed and feasible.

4.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings made in the study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance compliance with development control regulations in Lokoja:

1. Updated and Enforcement of Development Plans: The 1974 master plan and other outdated instruments should be reviewed to meet the current trend of development. Implementation must be enforced with rigorous monitoring by the planning authorities.
2. Improved Public Awareness and Participation: Awareness campaigns

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should be conducted through media, community meetings, and local NGOs to educate developers and residents about planning standards and the importance of compliance.

3. Streamline Approval Processes and Reduce Costs: Professional and statutory fees should be reviewed to ensure affordability; especially, for low-income developers. Fast-tracking development permit approvals can also discourage informal development.
4. Strengthen Institutional Capacity: The Kogi State Urban Development Board should be equipped with adequate manpower, training, mobility, and digital tools to monitor and enforce development control more effectively.
5. Decentralize and Digitize Planning Services: Satellite offices and electronic permit systems (e.g., e-permitting) can bring services closer to citizens and reduce corruption in approval processes.
6. Implement Responsive Zoning Systems: Zoning practices should be flexible enough to accommodate changing land use demands while ensuring compatibility and sustainability — similar to practices in Singapore and Botswana.
7. Enforce Sanctions for Non-Compliance: Enforcement mechanisms, including stop-work notices and fines, must be consistently applied without political interference to deter irregular developments.

By adopting these recommendations, Lokoja can enhance urban planning outcomes, reduce physical disorganization, and promote a healthier, more sustainable urban environment.

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