



NIGERIA - May 2017

TENEMENT RATE CRITICAL TO AMAC REVENUE GENERATION – CANDIDO 1

Tenement rate critical to AMAC revenue generation – Candido

How is AMAC faring in the face of dwindling allocation from the Federal Government?

So far so good, the little we have has been harnessed in the best manner across the 12 wards in AMAC.

The civil servants who are our major residents have been taken care of in the best way and where we have to explain reasons for not meeting up, we don't hesitate to explain our challenges and they have keyed into our agenda because communication is vital.

We will not keep the civil servants in the dark, they have to be in the picture of things. So far so good, by next week we are going to be one year in office which is worthy of celebration.

How has it been in terms of revenue generation?

We approach revenue generation with all vigour, unfortunately certain arm of government seems not to be comfortable with the way and manner we approach it. That has reduced our speed but we seem to have struck an understanding with it; at first it seemed not to understand why we have been going all out collecting revenue in some areas.

This arm of government has power and supervision over us. When we were told not to collect revenue and enforce its collection, those were the challenges. All said and done, the National Assembly has agreed with us and it is the custodian of the constitution. It is the constitution that guarantees us to collect this revenue; it is the constitution that we are exploiting and not any power from anywhere.

The National Assembly has finally agreed with us and I think very soon things will not be the same again. We have also exploited additional areas where revenue can still come in under our by-laws and what the constitution also guarantees. Whatever I do, I never go outside the law.

What led to the controversy surrounding the collection of tenement rate?

AMAC is only privileged to be domiciled within the capital city unlike other area councils in the FCT. We in the capital city have relationship with other institutions of government such as the Presidency, FCTA, and the National Assembly.

Nigerians don't seem to differentiate between these different arms of government and even if they do, some don't know the responsibilities that each of these arm is saddled with. If they do, there shouldn't be any reason for controversy over who collects tenement rate. It is the constitution that guarantees collection of tenement rates by the local government and as for the city council here which is also a local government enjoying the facility of what that constitution provides. As a local government within the capital city we assume that we should be the one to go all out to collect tenement rate.

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The local governments are not the same and they can't be the same; some are in the rural areas while some are in the capital cities in all the states. But ours happens to be in the capital city of the country but it is still a local government and therefore it should be allowed to exercise its responsibilities.

In some areas, the FCT Administration will say it provides infrastructure in the capital city and question why we (AMAC) collect tenement rates; our position is tenement rates are not the same with property tax.

Whereas the FCTA is saddled with the responsibility of collecting tax from the property, the collection of tenement rates is by the local government. Sometimes there is this conflict between the area council and FCTA, so the citizens are confused as to who actually should collect this or that but we stand our ground to tell who cares to listen that the collection of tenement rates even in the capital city anywhere globally is done by the local government.

Nigerians don't seem to understand that we only value property that the constitution guarantees us. And because we don't have a State Assembly, the National Assembly stands for the FCT as their own assembly and that informs the wisdom of the National Assembly to create committees on FCT and area councils. These two committees are standing as our own state assembly. So, whatever we have valued on every property in the city, we now take it to the National Assembly and it is their own responsibility to fix an approved rate for the property. The valuation rate is not the tenement rate people are supposed to pay, but we can't say this is what the property owner should pay as tenement rate. That is not our responsibility but that of the National Assembly to determine by a ratio of a percentage.

If they tell us to collect one naira, it is that one naira that we will issue demand notices on and collect.

Nigerians, especially the elite who live in the cities are continually being put in the dark; they never differentiate who values the property and who fixes the tenement rates. After collection, it forms part of the revenues that we put together to provide services.

Sometimes, I look at the controversy as fashioned in such a manner that people will begin to say there is multiple taxation. People who are shying away from paying are the ones creating this kind of confusion so that people will not know who to pay tenement rates to. The fact is it is the area council and as far as the capital city is concerned the local government within the capital city is AMAC.

The fact that we are a local government does not make the FCT Administration or Federal Government bigger than us. I will continue to defend the sanctity of this local government as created by the law so that the residents of AMAC would not get short-changed.

How do property owners have a say in these processes?

After assessment of the property, there is what they call claims and objections. The act that allows this assessment also mandates us to display what we have assessed against each of these property and with a time frame. In the history of AMAC, this is the only administration that has exercised that responsibility; having done the assessment, we gave a time frame of a month and we went to the media to say the property assessed by AMAC has been displayed at a location that is within the secretariat and that any objection can be raised by the property owners. And then there is a committee set up to listen to these complaints. At least 80 per cent of the people in the city came here to check the list, made objections, and corrections were made.

We finally submitted a clean copy to the National Assembly for them to now exercise their responsibility. It is expected of them to do the needful and they have done that and the area council is now ready to hit the ground again by serving demand notices.

I think the demand notices are already being served because by our engagement with the National Assembly, we have been given a clean bill of health to commence collection. After the demand notices were issued, there is also a time frame which citizens would be given. It is not coercion. We are not intimidating people even if you don't have money at that particular time, you have every reason to request for more time. If you want to pay by instalments the council will still have every reason to agree with you because we are not after inflicting pains on anybody.

Then why did the council enforce the collection of tenement rates without following these processes when you assumed office?

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We just did not start a new area council, it is a government that succeeded another government. We met a system and that system, you will agree with me, that government is transient. There are some technical partners that were not engaged by this government, but we have to keep moving and of course I don't want litigation unnecessarily to set me backward. I had to allow the status quo to remain. We believe that that system was wrong. So the committee place to assess property came up three months after we assumed office and it took time going around assessing all the property.

How would you describe the response of residents to the council's revenue generation drive?

Sincerely the residents of Abuja have been very supportive except for the last five months when a policy came that they should not pay.

The NNPC is our tenement here but then the property owners were put in confusion; that don't pay statement made things difficult for this area council. Otherwise they had been paying and it had been making things work for the area council.

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