

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO URBAN EXPANSION AND LAND GRABBING IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF OYO STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the community response to land grabbing and urban expansion in Oyo State, Nigeria, with particular focus on the Ibadan metropolis and its surrounding peri-urban areas. The increasing rate of urbanization, population growth, speculative land acquisition, weak land governance, and the activities of land speculators have intensified the incidence of land grabbing and accelerated urban expansion across the state. These developments have resulted in the displacement of indigenous landowners and farmers, environmental degradation, inefficient urban development, violations of land rights, and increased land-related conflicts. The study aims to analyze the relationship between land grabbing and urban expansion, investigate their socio-economic and environmental impacts on communities, assess community responses to these challenges, and propose sustainable solutions. A mixed-method research approach is adopted, combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Primary data are obtained through interviews with individuals directly connected to land grabbing and urban expansion, while secondary data are sourced from books, journal articles, government publications, and relevant literature. Findings from the study reveal that weak land administration systems, the dual land tenure structure, speculative investments, and inadequate enforcement of existing laws are major drivers of land grabbing in Oyo State. The study concludes that land grabbing and uncontrolled urban expansion pose significant threats to sustainable development, social stability, and environmental sustainability in Oyo State. It recommends strengthening land governance institutions, improving transparency in land administration, digitizing land registration systems, enforcing existing laws effectively, and promoting community participation in land-related decision-making processes to ensure equitable and sustainable urban development.

Keywords: Land grabbing, urban expansion, community response, land governance, land rights, Oyo State, Ibadan, sustainable development.

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INTRODUCTION

Land grabbing and urban sprawl are major and interrelated issues in Oyo State, especially in the Ibadan city. The situation is the result of a complicated mix of rapid population expansion, inadequate administration, speculation by powerful individuals and groups and the difficulties of a dual land tenure system. The problem is a continuing and expanding one that undermines lawful land ownership, displaces vulnerable groups, worsens social and economic inequalities, and contributes to substantial environmental degradation. (Adeniran, 2025)

Land grabbing and urban growth in Oyo State are most visibly experienced in and around the Ibadan metropolitan districts. Ibadan is the economic and administrative capital of the state and has experienced fast, often unplanned, growth resulting in speculative land acquisition and land-use change, especially in peri-urban locations. This has resulted to significant conflicts over land ownership, displacement of farmers and environmental deterioration (Salam, 2025).

The inflow of individuals from rural areas into Ibadan, rapid urbanisation and population increase is a major contributor to land grabbing (Alade & Olayiwola, 2018). This demographic pressure causes a great demand for housing and commercial land, pushing development outward onto the city's periphery and producing an active land market in these places. Weak land governance and ineffective land administration institutions, coupled with a dual land tenure system (formal and customary) provide gaps that speculators exploit Shiyabola et al. (2024).

Some unscrupulous individuals and government officials rig the system to take away the property of rightful owners.

State-led land acquisition has been driven by government policies and infrastructure projects, large-scale government initiatives, such as road construction and new housing developments (e.g. Ajoda New Town) (Ayodele & Fayomi, 2025). Although generally for the welfare of the public, these acquisitions occasionally led to inadequate compensation and resistance from indigenous landowners (Obuene et al., 2021).

Speculative activity, when wealthy people and developers buy land in peri-urban areas and retain it as an investment until the rising land values resulting from urban expansion may provide a profit (Integrity Research Journals). This has been stimulated by increase in land prices as highlighted in reports by (Adewoyin et al., 2023).

Locally, land grabbing is strongly related with the operations of "omo-onile" or land speculators who hijack land by intimidation, fraudulent sales and use of force (Elijah, 2024). These groups sometimes operate with the backing of community chiefs or traditional rulers.

A gradual but sustained process of urban expansion into peri-urban areas as a result of a rush for land is a widespread phenomenon in peri-urban areas in Nigeria. This has created uncertainties for large segments of the population's livelihood options. A study examining the impacts of urban land-grabbing on the livelihood opportunities of small-scale farmers around Ibadan, Nigeria, found that land-grabbing has led to a depletion of livelihood options for some farmers and changes in livelihood options for others, especially from on-farm or off-farm activities

to non-farm activities. There is a nexus between land-grabbing and urban expansionism, with significant negative impacts on agricultural productivity in the study area. Between 1986 and 2021, the built-up areas increased significantly owing to the demand for land for other uses apart from agricultural use. Poor land governance, incoherent land policy, and inefficient interaction among emerging local actors in land relations are key determinants of urban land-grabs. Hence, the study recommends the adoption of smart growth strategies in urban centers to mitigate unplanned city expansion that could affect sustainable land resources management in peri-urban and rural areas.

The focus of existing studies on land grabbing in Nigeria has been on acquisition by foreign investors for their socio-economic gain, usually supported by the national government (Adnan, 2011). However, narratives on land grabbing by government through the Land Use Decree and the consequent resistance deployed by the indigenous landowners are scarce. The Accumulation by Dispossession theory and an exploratory design were combined with qualitative methods to gather data from 41 participants through a combination of key informant and in-depth interviews and focus groups in Ajoda New Town. Data were ethnographically and content analyzed and findings revealed that locals resisted government activities consequent upon their exclusion from compensatory and resettlement activities promised by the government. Displacement from patrimonial inheritance led to resistance, though government claimed it discharged its financial and moral responsibilities. Resistance took the form of violent, economic and civil protests.

Land conflicts are widespread in African countries, arising from opposing interests of

different stakeholders. To handle these disputes effectively, it is important to understand the interests, beliefs, and roles different stakeholders play in the protection of their property rights (Shiyanbola et al., 2024).

A study on land conflicts in Oyo State, Nigeria was conducted to analyse the roles of stakeholders for the purpose of providing relevant information for better land conflict management. The study employed a case-study technique with mixed-method data collecting and analysed the data through thematic and narrative analysis.

Findings found that the interests and beliefs of stakeholders determine the forms, stages, intensity and resolution of land conflicts in Oyo State. These disputes vary between rural and urban locations, with some forms and stakeholders being prevalent in each. But, the cities have more varied types of conflicts and the stakeholders have more important responsibilities as both actors and solvers of land disputes. The profound cultural importance of land as a symbol of identity and generational inheritance has caused individuals to physically fight and even kill and destroy property to defend it.

Considering the interests and roles of stakeholders in decision making is essential to reduce conflict over land. Thus, the participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process and the establishment of a functional framework are key to successful land conflict management in Oyo State (Shiyanbola et al., 2024).

This research aims to critically examine the response of the community to land grabbing and urban expansion in Oyo State, Nigeria. Other objectives of the research are below:

to analyze the relationship between land grabbing and urban expansion in Oyo State and to examine how land grabbing and urban expansion affects the people of Oyo State.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research will be done through the use of both the Qualitative and Quantitative methods of analysis. The Quantitative will be through the means of interviewing 10 individual that are directly connected to land grabbing and urban expansion in Oyo State, Nigeria. While the Qualitative method will be through the use of articles, books, and journals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Land Grabbing

Land grabbing refers to the large-scale acquisition of land through legal manipulation, coercion, deception, or force, often at the expense of vulnerable populations. According to Adnan (2011), land grabbing is a process of dispossession driven by capitalist expansion where powerful actors acquire land from weaker groups under unequal power relations. In the Nigerian context, Olatubara (2021) describes land grabbing as the forceful or fraudulent takeover of land belonging to indigenous communities, frequently justified under development policies.

In Oyo State, land grabbing manifests through:

1. State acquisition for infrastructure projects
2. Speculative purchases by developers
3. Activities of “omo-onile” groups
4. Fraudulent documentation and double sales

Elijah (2024) explains that “omo-onile” groups in Ibadan use intimidation, illegal levies, and violent tactics to control land transactions. Similarly, Shiyانبola et al. (2024) argue that weak land governance structures enable land grabbers to exploit institutional loopholes.

Land snatching is the large-scale acquisition or ownership of land by powerful individuals, private investors, companies or governments, typically by coercion, deception or legal manipulation that undermines the rights of legitimate landowners or users. According to Adnan (2011), land grabbing is not simply the acquisition of land, but a process of dispossession, embedded in the rise of neoliberal capitalism, through which economically and politically strong actors collect land at the expense of marginalised groups. It is based on unequal power relations where poor landholders have no institutional capacity to protect their rights.

Similarly, Olatubara (2021) describes land grabbing in Nigeria as the forcible or planned taking of land from its indigenous owners, usually disguised as a development policy but often resulting in dispossession and social conflict. This term is particularly pertinent in peri-urban Ibadan, where the expansion of the city has boosted land value and speculative acquisition. Additionally, Shiyانبola et al. (2024) suggest that land snatching is facilitated by inadequate land governance institutions, administrative inefficiencies, and overlapping tenure patterns in Oyo State. Thus, land grabbing is not only an economic phenomenon but also a governance and institutional one.

Land snatching in Oyo State has become a complex and multidimensional phenomena that is intricately associated with growing urbanisation, governance flaws, speculative economic interests as well as the deeply ingrained cultural connotations related to land. In peri-urban Ibadan, land grabbing is marked by a clear power imbalance between politically connected elites, property developers and organised “omo-onile” organisations on the one hand, and vulnerable landholders such as smallholder farmers and indigenous families on the other. The asymmetry allows for the easier use of pressure, intimidation and extortion in land deals. Elijah (2024) demonstrates how “omo-onile” organisations use violence, harassment, and threats to extract unlawful payments from landowners and developers, strengthening a system where access to power decides access to property security.

CONCEPT OF URBAN EXPANSION

Urban expansion is the outward physical spread of cities into surrounding rural and peri-urban areas as agricultural land, forests and open spaces are converted into residential, commercial and infrastructural uses. Recent studies characterize urban expansion as a dynamic process of land-use transition that is promoted by population growth, economic development and infrastructural investment. For example, Kasim et al. (2023) define urban expansion as the observable growth of built-up regions over time, especially in fast-growing cities like Ibadan. Their geospatial analysis of Ibadan shows a large rise in built-up area from 1986 to 2021, with accelerated growth in recent years driven by housing demand and commercial operations.

Shiyanbola, Todorovski, and Zevenbergen (2024) also argue that institutional inadequacies in land governance are directly linked to urban expansion in Oyo State, which allows for rapid and often unregulated spatial growth. For them, urban expansion is not simply a demographic rise but a shift of land relations driven by governance.

Urban expansion refers to the outward physical extension of a city into surrounding rural and peri-urban areas, characterised by the ongoing conversion of agricultural land, woods, wetlands, and open spaces into residential, commercial, industrial, and infrastructural purposes. It is the tangible expression of urbanisation in space where the rise of population, the change of economy and development of infrastructure become obvious in the changing landscape of a city. In recent studies (2020–2026), urban expansion is more and more viewed as a complex process of land-use transformation driven by governance systems, real estate markets, and socio-economic factors, rather than a rise in population alone.

Recent empirical research have shown that urban expansion results in observable land cover change, with a constant increase in built-up territory and a concomitant reduction in vegetation and cropland. In their geospatial study of Ibadan, Kasim et al. (2023) reveal that the spatial organization of the city has been drastically affected due to the rapid growth of residential estates and commercial buildings. Their findings reveal that expansion is particularly visible in the peri-urban areas where agricultural land is gradually transformed to housing layouts and infrastructure. This is in line with the general

finding that African cities are growing faster outward than upward.

Concept of Land Tenure System

The land tenure system is the set of regulations, institutions and social structures that determine how land rights are defined, assigned, utilised, transferred and enforced in a society. It defines who is entitled to land, for how long, under what conditions, and by what means rights can be protected or transferred. Land tenure relates to both formal statutory systems recognised by government legislation and customary systems based on tradition, genealogy and community recognition. Tenure security is strongly linked to clarity of ownership, effective documentation and the enforceability of rights, all of which affect investment decisions and land use patterns in contemporary land governance literature (Todorovski, 2024). Clear and enforceable rights provide incentives for landholders to participate in sustainable land management and development. In contrast, if there are no clear rights or rights are poorly safeguarded, insecurity rules and conflicts are common.

In many developing countries, like Nigeria, land tenure regimes are pluralistic, with statutory and customary arrangements operating side by side, frequently with overlapping power (Shiyanbola, Todorovski & Zevenbergen, 2024). Such heterogeneity is particularly obvious in Oyo State where the coexistence of formal legal frameworks with deeply rooted traditional landholding practices is palpable. The statutory framework is founded on the Land Use Act which confers land rights in the state and authorises the government authorities to issue Certificates of Occupancy to the lawful

holders. The object of the Act was to bring land administration under one roof and to formalise property rights. But much of the rural and peri-urban land in Nigeria, particularly around Ibadan is still under customary tenure systems where family lands, community holdings and allocations by lineages are still dominant. Statutory and customary tenure coexist, leading to overlapping claims and administrative complexity, therefore raising the chances of disputes and manipulation (Shiyanbola et al. 2024).

The basic elements of any land tenure system are ownership rights, use rights, transfer rights and exclusion rights. Ownership rights describe recognised claims to land, either registered formally or confirmed by community recognition. Todorovski (2024) contends that safe ownership hinges on the unambiguous division of land portions, official registration, and legal acknowledgement of claims. However, in fact, most customary landowners in Oyo State depend on social legitimacy and not statutory documents, making them less enforceable in official institutions (Shiyanbola et al., 2024). Use rights determine how a piece of property is used, for example for agriculture, housing, grazing or commercial operations. In urban fringe communities where urban growth is taking place, customary use rights are typically not formally documented and landholders are vulnerable in statutory systems that give priority to registered titles (Adewoyin et al., 2023). The transfer and alienation of land rights govern how land may be sold, leased or mortgaged. In statutory systems, a legal transfer must be formally registered; in customary systems, transactions can be made through the heads of lineages or

community elders. Undocumented customary transfers often lead to several sales of the same property, fraud and dispute, note Shiyانبola et al. (2024). Ineffective enforcement measures also undermine landholders' rights of exclusion of unauthorised occupation, therefore leaving land open to encroachment.

Land tenure security exists when land proprietors are assured that their rights will be recognised and protected by both customary authorities and statutory institutions. Secure tenure fosters investment, boosts livelihoods and minimises the occurrence of disputes. Tenure insecurity, on the other hand, exists where paperwork is ambiguous, overlapping claims exist, or customary rights are not recognised by statute. In peri-urban Oyo State, tenure insecurity is acute with indigenous landholders having no official titles despite occupying and using the land for centuries (Shiyانبola et al., 2024). Todorovski (2024) notes that this insecurity raises the likelihood of dispossession, as landholders without recognised paperwork struggle to make claims in courts or land registry offices. This provides chances for speculators, developers and organised groups to exploit documentation gaps for personal advantage.

The dual tenure arrangement in Nigeria adds to these problems. The Land Use Act creates a statutory structure that vests land in trust with the state and formalises rights by Certificates of Occupancy. The framework attempts to standardise land governance, however bureaucracy and administrative bottlenecks sometimes impair its efficacy (Todorovski, 2024). At the same time, conventional tenure systems still govern

access through traditional norms and lineage links. While socially acceptable, customary tenure is often unrecorded and consequently legally uncertain in statutory circumstances (Shiyانبola et al., 2024). The relationships between these systems result in overlapping claims, administrative uncertainty, frequent litigation, and potential for elite exploitation.

The ramifications of the tenure system for development are important. Secure tenure enables efficient land markets through transparent sales, leasing and mortgage transactions. But insecure tenure distorts land markets and promotes speculative activities. Adewoyin et al. (2023) illustrate that speculative land markets in some sections of Oyo State thrive in insecure contexts, with faked documents and intermediate claims allowing multiple sales of the same plots. Urbanisation increases these pressures as peri-urban agricultural land becomes attractive for residential and commercial development. Shiyانبola et al. (2024) suggest that indigenous landholders without formal titles are disadvantaged when developers use statutory methods to legitimise competing claims. In such circumstances, weak tenure systems are fertile grounds for land grabbing and dispossession as powerful actors take advantage of institutional uncertainties (Todorovski, 2024).

Concept of Community Response and Resistance

Community response and resistance denote the collective activities, techniques, and behavioural patterns employed by local populations in response to perceived threats to their land, livelihoods, rights, or social wellbeing, especially in scenarios of urban

growth and land appropriation. In Oyo State, the swift urban expansion surrounding Ibadan has heightened land pressures, prompting a community response that is neither passive nor incidental; it is a proactive demonstration of social agency influenced by identity, culture, institutional frameworks, and power dynamics. Recent study highlights that resistance transcends simple defiance and must be perceived as coordinated and purposeful action intended to safeguard land access and contest dispossession processes (Salam, 2025; Akingunola & Adewuyi, 2024). In this context, community response is integrated within larger conflicts around justice, acknowledgement, and fair growth.

Empirical research conducted between 2020 and 2026 indicate that community responses in southwestern Nigeria vary according on the level of perceived injustice, resource availability, and the socio-political context. Peaceful protests and public demonstrations are prevalent methods employed to articulate discontent with land acquisition policies. Salam (2025) chronicles cases in which peri-urban landowners orchestrated protests to contest involuntary land transfers executed without sufficient compensation, employing public demonstrations to garner media attention and wider communal empathy. Legal challenges have grown increasingly significant. Akingunola and Adewuyi (2024) note that impacted communities often pursue injunctions and initiate legal actions against governmental entities or private parties engaged in disputed property acquisitions. Litigation signifies institutional opposition, when communities utilise official judicial institutions to contest the legality of acquisition processes and uphold traditional claims.

HISTORY OF LAND GRABBING IN NIGERIA

Colonial Root of Land Grabbing

Land grabbing in Nigeria is the acquisition of land by governments, companies, elites or powerful actors on a huge scale, frequently to the detriment of local community. Land disputes have been a legacy of colonial authority but the situation has been exacerbated by urbanisation, agriculture development, climate change and weak land governance in the 21st century (Edohen & Egharevba, 2025). Recent studies reveal that land dispute cases now constitute a substantial part of court proceedings and violent conflicts making land governance one of Nigeria's most crucial socio-economic concerns (Nigeria Real Estate Blog, 2025).

The colonial period was not only about administrative control, it was about a fundamental re-design of the way the Nigerian soil was valued and controlled. The British, when they arrived, found a complicated system of customary norms in which land was not a commodity but a common legacy. The formalisation of "Crown Lands" began soon after the Cession of Lagos in 1861. By declaring land as a legal asset of the British Sovereign, the colonial authorities effectively bypassed centuries of indigenous control. Before 1861, land in most Nigerian communities was held in trust by traditional rulers (Obas, Obis, Emirs) or heads of families. It was generally inalienable meaning it couldn't be sold away from the community. The British introduced statutory titles and deeds. This shifted the power from the

community to the individual (or the State). If a community couldn't "prove" ownership via a British-style document, the land was often declared "waste" or "unoccupied," even if it was being used for fallow farming or ritual purposes. This produced a "legal vacuum" which permitted the colonial state to appropriate territory legitimately under their own laws.

This permitted government acquisition for plantations and infrastructure, the primary purpose of colonial land policy was economic extraction. The colonial authority needed large contiguous areas of land to meet the industrial needs of Europe which customary fragmented ownership could not offer. Ordinances conferred wide powers to the Governor-General to acquire land for "public purposes". While this included railroads and harbors, it was frequently extended to private commercial interests. Huge portions of fertile land were cleared for rubber, cocoa, and palm oil plantations. Local farmers often found themselves transformed from "owners" of the land to "tenants" or laborers on their own ancestral soil, a precursor to the "land grabbing" we see today by large-scale agricultural investors (Meinzen-Dick, 2020).

All of these created the long-term land disputes that persist today. The most "successful" (and damaging) legacy of colonial land policy was the creation of a dual legal system. Nigeria currently operates under a mix of customary law and statutory law, which are often in direct conflict. Modern Nigerian land law specifically the Land Use Act of 1978 is essentially a "post-colonial remix" of these

British ordinances. It vested all land in the State Governor, mirroring the way the British Crown once held the land. Because the state technically "owns" the land, the government can still displace communities with minimal compensation. This has resulted in the modern-day evictions witnessed in locations like Lagos (Owolabi, 2021) and the Benin region (Edohen & Egharevba, 2025), where traditional dwellers find their lack of formal paperwork leaves them defenceless against state-backed developers. Many of the cases cluttering Nigeria's courts today are families trying to reconcile colonial-era surveys with oral traditional limits that have existed for centuries (Ogungbile, 2025).

EXPANSION OF LAND GRABBING IN THE 21st CENTURY

Land has moved from being a communal resource to being one of Nigeria's most fought-over financial assets in the 21st century. The scale of dispossession has shifted from local skirmishes to systemic displacement, driven by a mix of "city-fication" and a worldwide land grab for fertile soil.

As Nigeria's population grows, land in places such as Lagos and Abuja has become "white gold." Efforts to modernise these hubs sometimes pit state-driven "development" against the rights of the urban poor. That huge gap in formal housing has opened up a lucrative market for private entrepreneurs. But the desire has been for luxury, not economical housing, \$300,000 to \$500,000. As a result, property is frequently "grabbed" from low-income communities for high-end

estates, so pushing the original inhabitants out of their own neighbourhoods (Nubi, 2021).

For large developments like the Lekki Free Trade Zone or new rail corridors, large expanses of land are needed. Although these are termed as public goods, the process of acquisition often bypasses adequate compensation resulting in “forced evictions” in the name of progress (Enemark, 2021). Governments frequently cite “urban renewal” as a reason to dismantle informal communities. Take the 2021 demolition of over 400 homes in Lagos for housing developments, which rendered hundreds of citizens homeless and without a legal safety net (Owolabi, 2021). Such “evictions” are commonly targeted at places where residents have not been given proper statutory titles, even if they have lived there for generations.

The cities are spreading and the countryside is being chiselled away by “agribusiness.” Following the rise of global food prices in the late 2000s, Nigeria became one of the major destinations for mega agricultural projects. Rich domestic elites and international companies are increasingly buying up thousands of hectares for cash crops like oil palm and cassava. Research in the Benin region of Edo State by Edohen & Egharevba (2025) has shown that these acquisitions are often encouraged by the state administration, sidestepping the traditional rights of the local villagers. For many rural Nigerians, land is not only a means of cultivation, but the foundation of their social identity. Large businesses fence off extensive territory, denying communities access to forests for hunting, water sources and fallow fields needed for traditional “shift” cropping (Anseeuw, 2022).

The shift from smallholder subsistence to large-scale commercial farming has set off a cascade of socioeconomic crises:

Many displaced farmers are unable to work in industry. When they lose their land, they lose their major safety net, resulting to a “proletarianization” whereby they become unpaid labourers on land they once managed (Wegerif et al., 2025). The irony is that these large-scale farms tend to produce export crops or industrial raw materials (e.g. biofuels or rubber) rather than local food staples. Hunger is worsening as local food prices increase due to smallholders who produce most of Nigeria’s food being pushed off arable soil (Oloja, 2025). In addition to farming, the “grabbing” of communal lands undermines secondary livelihoods including hunting, herbal medicine gathering, and artisanal fishing, forcing adolescents in these communities to have few options other than migrating to already congested cities (Meinzen-Dick, 2020).

HISTORY OF LAND GRABBING IN OYO STATE: FOCUS ON OGBOMOSHO

The history of land grabbing in Oyo State is a story of changing legal frameworks from traditional communal trust to state-centric management. This shift has often resulted in “tenure insecurity” as the vacuum between customary rights and statutory law has been exploited by state and corporate entities.

The following sections describe the historical trajectory of land acquisition and dispossession in the region.

Pre-Colonial and Early Colonial Foundations

Before the formal British annexation, land in the Oyo Empire and its various principalities (including Ibadan and Ogbomoso) was held under customary tenure. Land was seen as an ancestral heritage held in trust by traditional rulers (Obas) and family heads (Mogajis).

Historically, land could not be sold; it was allocated for use based on lineage and community membership. The arrival of British administration introduced the concept of Crown Lands. Beginning with the 1861 Cession of Lagos the influence of which spread inland to the Oyo hinterlands the colonial government began asserting "Eminent Domain." This allowed the state to seize land for "public purposes" such as railways and administrative quarters, often disregarding the communal ownership structures already in place (Ogungbile, 2025).

The 1978 Land Use Act: The Turning Point

The Land Use Act of 1978 was the most powerful driver of systemic land grabbing in Oyo State. This legislation effectively "nationalized" land by putting all urban territory in the hands of the Governor. The Act substituted the conventional ownership by a "Right of Occupancy." This created a legal vulnerability, in that if a community in Ibadan or Ogbomoso could not provide a state-issued Certificate of Occupancy (C of O), their ancestral claim became legally "invisible." In subsequent regimes in Oyo State, customary rights are being withdrawn on the ground of "overriding public interest" for government initiatives. However, a historical grievance that has long existed in the state is that land acquired for public purpose (such as for hospitals or schools) has

often been subdivided and sold to private developers for luxury estates (Olayiwola & Adeleye, 2022).

Urban Expansion and the Ibadan Metropolis

Ibadan, the state capital, has been the main location for urban land grabbing. The fast growth of the metropolis into the peri-urban areas has produced a 'speculative boom'. As the city borders moved into the rural periphery, affluent speculators started buying large swaths of land from family heads, frequently without the agreement of the larger family unit. This "internal grabbing" has resulted in several decades of litigation within the Oyo State courts. Urban regeneration programs, in some instances, have resulted in the relocation of informal settlements. These inhabitants often lack the legal resources to contest the state's "public purpose" statements, resulting in displacement without proper compensation (Enemark, 2021).

Institutional and Agricultural Grabbing: Ogbomoso as case study

The history of land acquisition in Ogbomoso, the second-largest metropolitan center in Oyo State, is a complex account of the shift from traditional agrarian land tenure to contemporary institutional and commercial ownership. Although the majority of writing regarding Oyo State emphasises the Ibadan city, Ogbomoso offers a distinctive case study in which educational expansion and agricultural demand serve as the principal catalysts for land dispossession.

In the Ogbomoso region, the catalysts for land appropriation have been institutional and

agricultural rather than exclusively residential.

Educational Expansion:

In 1990, the value of land increased dramatically with the development of the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH). This essentially transformed the land economy of Ogbomosho North and South. The families in the surrounding areas such as Under-G, Adenike had their lands purchased for the university and the students' housing and often these matters were contested in terms of "fair market value" of the compensation given to them (Akinola, 2021).

They were purchased in large tracts under the "public interest" clause of the Land Use Act. While initially intended for educational advancement, many original families of landowners in places such as Under-G, General, and Adenike claimed that recompense was either nonexistent or woefully inadequate (Olayiwola & Adeleye, 2022). With the growth of the university, private developers hurried to put up hostels. The case of "speculative grabbing" is a case in point. Powerful people bought community land from heads of households at low prices without the complete agreement of their relatives which has led to decades of litigation that continues to clog the local courts in Ogbomosho (Akinola, 2021).

Agribusiness in Oriire LGA:

In some parts of the rural Ogbomosho zone, such as Oriire Local Government Area, land grabbing is for large-scale agricultural purposes. The state "re-allocates" the land of smallholder farmers, who have been

practicing fallow farming for generations, to commercial agribusinesses (Adeyemi, 2023).

Outside the urban core, the five Local Government Areas which constitute "Greater Ogbomosho" (North, South, Oriire, Surulere and Ogo Oluwa) are the agricultural "breadbasket" of Oyo State. The region has been a focus for large scale agricultural investment. For the past two decades transnational interests and domestic elites have been chasing thousands of hectares for cashew and cassava plantations. Research shows that "land grabbing" in rural Ogbomosho is usually achieved through the manipulation of the 1978 Land Use Act. Traditional titles may be revoked by the state in order to provide Statutory Rights of Occupancy to commercial organisations. This often leaves local smallholder farmers, reliant on fallow systems and communal grazing, with nowhere to go (Adeyemi, 2023).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Accumulation by Dispossession Theory

David Harvey's 2003 theory of Accumulation by Dispossession, an extension of Karl Marx's concepts, provides a useful lens to understand modern land grabs and urban development. Harvey contends that under the present neoliberal capitalism wealth is increasingly created through the dispossession of marginalised groups from their land, resources and public assets, and not merely through production. Dispossession happens through processes like the privatisation of public resources, the commodification of land, state led land acquisition, legal manipulation and the use of coercive authority. Dispossession is transformed into a structural strategy for capital accumulation,

rather than an unintentional by-product of development. This allows elites and state actors to centralise wealth, while underprivileged populations are denied access to their traditional means of livelihood.

The patterns of land grabbing in Oyo State, especially around Ibadan, are very similar to Harvey's framework. The state has acquired land for projects such as Ajoda New Town and substantial road building under the guise of overwhelming public interest, which has displaced indigenous landowners (Obuene, Akanle, & Omobowale, 2021). These purchases are sometimes justified as development but have often involved inadequate compensation, exclusion from the relocation process and unfulfilled promises of economic inclusion. Sometimes indigenous landholders are only paid for the products cultivated on the land, and not the land itself. This in effect deprives them of patrimonial inheritance and long-term security. This process shows how ancestral land, originally part of community and familial systems, is changed into commercial wealth for the advantage of developers and politically linked elites.

The main law for this is the Land Use Act, which vests all land in a state in the Governor and authorises government bodies to acquire land for public reasons. The Act in its attempt to simplify land administration centralises ownership often at the expense of customary claims. According to Todorovski (2024), statutory systems that privilege formal titles over customary rights put indigenous families at risk of legal dispossession. Shiyabola, Todorovski and Zevenbergen (2024) further note that the simultaneous existence of statutory and customary tenure systems

generates overlapping claims and administrative complexity that can be exploited by speculators and powerful parties. In practice, this dual system permits politically connected persons to falsify papers, establish fake ownership and consolidate landholdings under the pretence of legitimacy.

Urban growth increases these dynamics by opening up new horizons for accumulation. Population expansion and infrastructural development are pushing the borders of Ibadan into peri-urban settlements such as Ologuneru and Eleyele, and the value of land increases significantly. Popoola (2025) reports that road development projects considerably increase the values of adjacent land, even tripling it, and this attracts speculative investors. In such situations, land markets are speculative (Adewoyin et al., 2023) – speculators buy land for future value rather than current productive usage. This speculative accumulation typically results in the conversion of agricultural land into residential estates and commercial developments, displacing small scale farmers dependent on farming for survival. The upshot is what Harvey defines as accumulation by dispossession: wealth is concentrated while original landholders are pushed into precarious non-farm livelihoods.

This study is further deepened by Political Economy theory that highlights the role of political power, institutional structures and economic interests in shaping urban growth and land ownership. This concept is drawn from the work of Henri Lefebvre who believed that urban space is socially constructed and controlled by dominant interests. In this view, urban expansion is not

just a function of demographics but is a politically mediated process. The Oyo State land administration institutions are poor, corrupted, captured by elites and incoherent, hence creating loopholes for dispossession. (Shiyanbola et al., 2024). As emphasised by Oshokha (2025), the inadequate execution of the Oyo State Real Property Protection Law of 2017 is a case in point of how governance failings allow coercive actors—such as “omoniile” groups—to operate with relative impunity. Elijah (2024) details the oppressive activities of such groups, demanding several payments from developers and making claims of ownership through coercion. Urban expansion, thus, becomes a mechanism for capital accumulation, driven by state policy and elite interests, rather than by equitable development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter covers the description and discussion on the various techniques and procedures used in the study to collect and analyze the data regarding community responses to land issues in Oyo State. For this study, a qualitative research design was adopted. This design was chosen to provide an in-depth and accurate means of assessing the lived experiences of a population affected by urban changes. The interview-based approach was considered appropriate because it enables the researcher to elicit behavioral responses, personal narratives, and perceptions from the target population regarding the impact of land grabbing and urban expansion in Oyo State. The population for this study consisted of residents and community leaders in selected areas of Oyo State, Nigeria, affected by urban

expansion. A total of 10 potential participants were identified within the target communities from which the interview sample was drawn. The choice of Oyo State is informed by the researcher’s proximity to the area and the high rate of urban development therein.

FINDINGS BASED ON RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Objective One: Examine the Extent of Land Grabbing and Urban Expansion in Oyo State Communities

Participants were asked how the physical landscape of their communities had changed and the extent to which residents had been required to surrender land for development projects.

Three major themes emerged:

- 1 Rapid physical transformation of communities
- 2 Reduction in agricultural land
- 3 Increased pressure from developers

Most participants observed significant changes in land use patterns within the last decade.

One participant stated:

"What used to be farmland is now occupied by buildings and estates. Development is progressing extremely rapidly."

Another respondent commented:

The roads have widened and there are numerous new enterprises in the area but farmers are losing their land.

Many participants said that private developers and government representatives had sought

community members to purchase their land for residential and commercial development.

A reoccurring problem was the building of dwellings on ancient sites without appropriate consultation.

Theme Analysis

The data reveal that urbanisation has profoundly affected the physical and economic structure of communities in Oyo State. There is increasing conversion of agricultural land to residential and commercial use which is creating tension between development and traditional land ownership regimes.

Objective Two: Examine Community Perception of the Credibility and Transparency of Land Acquisition Processes

Participants were asked about the reliability of promises made by developers and government agencies and whether legal acquisition procedures were transparent.

Analysis revealed three dominant themes:

- 1 Distrust of developers
- 2 Lack of transparency
- 3 Weak community participation

Most of the participants doubted the trustworthiness of the developers and the government authorities.

One participant noted: "

Developers promise money and jobs, but many of those promises are not realised.

Another participant said:

"Often the common people are not included in the discussions though community leaders are sometimes consulted.

A few respondents felt that the legal procedures had been followed adequately.

Theme Analysis

Findings indicate that opinions of justice and transparency remain poor among affected groups. Many citizens feel that land acquisition decisions are done without enough engagement, eroding trust in public institutions and private enterprises.

Discussion of Findings

This study's findings indicate that urban growth has profoundly altered the physical and socio-economic environment of villages in Oyo State. Participants indicated extensive transformation of agricultural land into residential developments, business establishments, and infrastructure initiatives. This finding aligns with the observations of Akinyemi and Olajide (2023), who indicated that accelerated urban expansion in southwestern Nigeria has heightened strain on peri-urban land resources, leading to significant alterations in conventional land-use patterns. Akinmoladun and Oluwoye (2022) contended that the rising demand for housing and urban infrastructure has hastened the expansion of cities into rural and agricultural regions, especially near significant urban centers like Ibadan. The results indicate that urban expansion fosters economic growth and enhances infrastructure, however it simultaneously generates competition for land resources and jeopardises the viability of traditional livelihoods.

The research additionally revealed that numerous residents saw land purchase

procedures as deficient in transparency and equity. Numerous participants articulated apprehensions regarding insufficient consultation, ineffective communication, and the inability of developers or governmental entities to honour commitments made during land acquisition discussions. This discovery supports the research of Adeniyi and Owoeye (2024), which indicates that public confidence in land administration institutions in Nigeria is persistently poor due to perceived shortcomings in transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement. Olayiwola and Adeleye (2023) noted that inadequate stakeholder engagement in land acquisition processes frequently results in opposition, conflicts, and discontent among impacted populations. Ineffective communication and restricted public participation may jeopardise the validity of urban development initiatives and exacerbate ongoing disputes around land ownership and compensation.

A notable discovery was the detrimental effect of urban growth and land appropriation on rural livelihoods. Participants, especially farmers, indicated a loss of access to arable land, a decrease in agricultural productivity, and heightened economic instability. This discovery corroborates the assertion of Fabusoro and Akinbola (2022), who determined that urban encroachment on agricultural land in southwestern Nigeria has diminished farming operations and undermined the economic resilience of rural households. Adewumi and Omisore (2024) observed that the displacement of agricultural villages resulting from urban development projects frequently results in diminished household income, food insecurity, and heightened poverty among the impacted populations. The findings demonstrate that the advantages of urban expansion are not

uniformly allocated, and that vulnerable populations, particularly smallholder farmers, often incur the highest expenses related to land conversion.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study highlight the complex relationship between urban expansion and land grabbing in Oyo State, suggesting that the two processes are not only mutually reinforcing but also enmeshed in broader socio-economic and institutional dynamics. In this way, urban expansion, which is sometimes regarded as a natural result of population increase and economic development, has become a key driver of land-related conflicts and dispossession.

At the heart of it is the rising monetisation of land. As metropolitan areas expand into peri-urban and rural areas, land shifts from a mostly cultural and subsistence asset to a highly valued economic commodity. This shift creates tremendous incentives for a variety of actors, including private developers, speculators, and even local elites, to appropriate land through statutory and informal ways. This procedure is often at the price of vulnerable groups that lack the legal expertise, financial capacity, or institutional backing to protect their land rights.

The study also points out that the persistence of land grabbing is largely facilitated by systemic deficiencies in land governance. The lack of a strong, transparent and responsible land administration system fosters an atmosphere in which overlapping claims, fake documents and repeated transactions of the same plot of land can flourish. This institutional instability is accentuated by

corruption, bureaucratic inefficiency and poor enforcement of current land laws, all undermining the public's trust in formal processes.

Another important facet that has emerged from the investigation is the conflict between the customary and statutory land tenure systems. Customary systems continue to play a role in land allocation and ownership, particularly in rural and peri-urban areas, but are often not formally recognised in statute law. The result is a legal grey area that is often exploited by those looking to cash in on the situation. This means that people with valid customary rights can be dispossessed when confronted with formal legal claims backed by documents or the power of the state.

The socio-economic consequences of these processes are great. Apart from physical dislocation, land grabbing also affects livelihoods, especially those relying on agriculture and other land-based livelihoods. The loss of land means typically loss of income, food insecurity and greater vulnerability to poverty. Additionally, the arguments that arise often lead to conflicts that endanger social cohesion and destabilise communities.

Importantly, the report also implies that the problems linked with land grabbing are expected to worsen if urban expansion trends are allowed to continue unchecked. As growing urbanisation is expected to continue, the demand on the land resources will increase, thereby increasing competitiveness and the risk of violence. If not managed in a timely and effective way, the situation can escalate into a more complicated problem of widespread tenure insecurity and entrenched inequality.

To sum up, the problem of land grabbing in Oyo State calls for more than piecemeal policy solutions; it calls for a holistic and integrated strategy to tackling the core causes of the problem. Strengthening institutional capacity, harmonising land tenure systems, fostering transparency, and guaranteeing inclusive urban planning are all key ingredients of a sustainable solution. In the final analysis, equal and secure access to land is necessary to mitigate conflict and to promote long-term socio-economic growth and stability in the region.

Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Government agencies should enhance land administration through accurate paperwork, transparent land registration processes and effective records keeping systems. Digitisation of land records could reduce disputes and fraudulent transactions to a large extent.
2. Review and strengthening of the existing land laws to meet appropriately the present difficulties related with urban expansion and land grabs. Policy should clearly clarify land ownership rights and safeguard disadvantaged groups.
3. Formal legal frameworks should be aligned with customary land tenure systems. Formalising and recognising customary land rights can decrease conflicts and increase tenure security.

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