

Article

Impact of Insecure Land Tenure on Sustainable Housing Development: A Case Study of Urban Housing Lands in the Republic of Benin, West Africa

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Abstract: This study focuses on land tenure in an urban environment. Specifically, it intends to elucidate the influence of land tenure security on access to housing in urban communities. The conurbation of Grand Nokoué, which is an agglomeration of five cities in the Republic of Benin, West Africa, captures attention due to its particular features as a developing city. Based on the literature, this study outlined three major factors of insecure land tenure, namely, lack of recognition by authorities, lack of protection from eviction or expulsion, and informal community-based rights. In addition, we examined four characteristics of relevant housing issues, namely, the development of shantytowns, the multiplicity of precarious housing, the loss of housing for the development of public projects, and exposure to house demolition under judicial decision, to formulate our hypotheses. The results of field observation and semi-structured interviews supported the hypotheses and demonstrated that legal access to land, the protection of the population from anarchic eviction, and informal community-based rights may positively influence the development of sustainable urban housing.

Keywords: insecure tenure; land tenure; urban housing; conurbation; Republic of Benin



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1. Introduction

Various studies have revealed that tenure security has become an essential part of a major programmatic push that aims to increase inclusive investment in land, agricultural production, sustainable natural resource management, and the move toward market economies [1]. The literature reveals that efforts are increasingly focusing on multiplying the effects of secure tenure and property rights from various sources. Accordingly, scholars in the field of development have examined ways to expand secure land tenure and property rights (LTPR) by supporting efforts to recognize and respect the customary rights to use, manage, and allocate rights to land and resources as a strategy for contributing to economic growth and sustainable natural resource management. Nevertheless, a notable reminder is that secure tenure is not a one-size-fits-all solution. As such, a range of categories of tenure status exists, any of which may be sufficiently secure to fulfill individual needs.

Tenure security is also real and perceived. For example, a family living in an underprivileged area for years without any formal documentation to prove the purchase of their home lacks real or formal security; nevertheless, they may believe that they are highly unlikely to be evicted for various reasons, such as the city providing electrical service to the area. In this case, the family has perceived security. As described by a Food and Agriculture Organization report [2], security of tenure in this case is the perception of people that their rights to land will be recognized and protected in the event of specific challenges. People frequently feel secure when they possess a full set of use and transfer rights of sufficient duration to recoup any labor and capital that they invest in land or property, and when they can enforce these rights against the claims of others. Moreover, the complexity of land tenure and access to housing resides in the fact that they involve a

wide range of approaches and practices that typically fall under regulatory frameworks. However, land tenure practices are often related to cultural perceptions. Since they respond to deeply embedded historical processes and contexts, they vary considerably across countries. Whether legally or customarily defined, land tenure denotes the relationship between people, as individuals or groups, with respect to land. Simply put, we assume that land tenure systems determine who can use what resources for how long, and under what conditions. Ref. [2] sustains this assumption, stating that land tenure refers to “the conditions under which land resources are held and used”. A study on land tenure security in 15 countries conducted by [3] assessed the issue to underline the still precarious state of tenure security in many countries and identify a range of issues for improving tenure security through pragmatic approaches. Along a continuum of factors of insecure land tenure, the most important ones fall under three basic categories according to a literature review, namely, (i) lack of recognition by authorities; (ii) lack of protection from eviction or exclusion; (iii) and informal community-based rights.

The current study focuses on land tenure in the urban environment and seeks to assess the impact of insecure land tenure on housing development. Specifically, it aims to understand the potential influence of land tenure security on access to housing in urban communities. Accordingly, the conurbation of Grand Nokoué in the Republic of Benin warrants investigation due to its progress into high urbanization and its recent policies for managing the use and occupation of land. Therefore, by exploring five cities in Grand Nokoué, the study intends answer to the question of whether or not land tenure factors influence housing conditions. Based on the literature, we outlined the major factors of insecure land tenure and the characteristics of relevant urban housing issues to formulate our hypotheses. We conducted a field observation in Cotonou (an economic pole and densely built-up city in the conurbation of Grand Nokoué) and Abomey-Calavi (a mostly residential city) to reveal the vulnerable state of housing. Through the semi-structured interview method, we investigated the perception of land actors and householders on the influence of the factors of insecure land tenure on relevant housing issues. Discussions enabled us to interpret the outcome and answer the question of the correlation between housing conditions and the factors of land tenure.

Several studies have examined the effects of insecure land tenure to offer a contribution to the field of land use management and adaptation. Most of these works related to the improvement of land tenure security address land policies in African countries, for instance [4–12]. Land challenges are also addressed through the ten facts about land systems for sustainability developed by [9]. That study explains the challenge of sustainability by the fact that we live on a used planet where trade-offs are prevalent, claims are overlapping and contested, and benefits from land are unequally distributed; and because actors mobilize multiple, sometimes conflicting, visions of justice. This is complemented by many other studies [13–22] that confirm the land challenges in many African countries. A report of the Integrated Land and Resource Governance (ILRG) under the United States Agency for International Development [18] sustains the above statements and proposes that efforts to provide secure tenure and property rights across several decades specifically focus on land law, titling/registration, administration, and the redistribution or restitution of land. They also acknowledge the remaining challenges that need to be overcome in order to attain sustainable urban development. However, few studies have focused on specific issues such as housing and land ownership that the present paper investigates through a participatory approach to the land tenure question involving stakeholders. Moreover, none of the above-mentioned studies has deeply emphasized unclear land policies and community-based rights management for sustainability. These aspects are indeed fundamental in order to cope on a fair basis with land issues targeting cities and communities. Considering the above, the present paper represents a major contribution to the literature in the special field of balanced communities and their living space as guarantors of sustainable development, for the benefit of scholars and professionals.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Empirical Definition of Land Tenure Security and Its Nuances around the Globe

Much controversy accompanies the meaning of land tenure security in developing countries. In more developed societies, the concept of land tenure security is well established; however, its meaning in developing countries is surrounded by far more uncertainty. This is promoted by arguments that there is no one-size-fits-all definition of land tenure security [23]. However, this notion impedes the growing body of research focused on land tenure security in developing contexts: a great variety of definitions prevail, many of them narrow, Western-oriented, and reduced to legal or economic aspects [24–26]. These approaches do not adequately align with many of the tenure systems used in developing contexts. While they illustrate high levels of land tenure security from one perspective, other important perspectives are ignored. The narrow approaches impede analysis that is more complete, and discourses of land tenure security undertaken in developing contexts. More specifically: (1) it affects land policy formulation; (2) designing and evaluating land tenure security improvement interventions is likely to be flawed; and (3) it prevents scholars from empirically investigating the content of the total security to be enjoyed by a landholder.

Contemporary literature illustrates awareness of the above theoretical limitation [27], as does the Global Land Tool Network; however, few attempts have been made to fill the gap. Refs. [24,27] propose revised versions of the tenure security concept. Other pro-poor models such as the Land Administration Domain Model and its specialization (Social Tenure Domain Model) have also been developed [28]. While these are useful starting points, the efforts are driven by economic or technical motivations. A study on the law and psychology of land tenure security resulted in the tripartite model incorporating three different conceptions of tenure security: (1) tenure security as perceived, (2) legal tenure security, and (3) de facto tenure security [26]. The generalized approach emphasizes how the three forms of tenure security are elements of one composite concept. However, the three elements may not generate a full picture of security for any land tenure system: they may not reflect all interactions that explain security.

Indeed, all societies have a system to govern property rights—whether formally defined by law or informally established through customary systems—and these rules evolve and change. While each society has land tenure systems, each system has a unique set of rules, and no single system of governance is universally applied. Tenure systems define who can hold and use resources, for what length of time, and under what conditions, but these rules may be well-defined or ambiguous and open to misinterpretation and exploitation. When both formal and informal systems exist within a society, tenure rules can overlap, leading to confusion and insecurity. Accordingly, different land tenure systems have shown advantages and disadvantages throughout the years. Among these, Ref. [3] emphasizes the case of customary systems and individual land ownership. According to the authors, while customary systems have facilitated social cohesion, these have not been able to withstand increasing pressure on land and resources either from within or outside communities. On the other hand, statutory systems have the advantage of providing written legal rules or written case law. Moreover, the public (or state) land ownership which withholds land for conservation purposes or public land management aiming to facilitate more equal access to prime locations has led to poor land use and land management outcomes as a result of bureaucratic inactivity and corruption.

On the one hand, the above-described features underline the importance and topicality of the land tenure issue from a worldwide perspective, and, on the other hand, may support the transferability of the results from the present study to other case studies. This prompts the need to deeply investigate land tenure systems in urban environments considering the drastic urbanization that occurred over the course of the past century.

2.2. Land Tenure Systems in Urban Environments

The pace of urbanization and the number of people living in urban settings has increased exponentially over the course of the past century, with more than half of the world's population now living in urban areas. It is estimated that half of the population of Asia will live in cities by 2020, and Africa will reach that proportion by 2035. At present, one billion people are living in informal settlements that lack basic services and 60% of urban dwellers are physically exposed to natural hazards and pollution. The urban slum population is projected to increase to 2 billion people by 2030 [22]. The prediction supplemented the one stating that Africa's population will more than triple over 40 years, from 395 million in 2010 to 1.38 billion in 2050, corresponding to 21% of the world's projected urban population [16]. Moreover, the same revision of the World Urbanization Prospects estimated an increase in the African population to 2.5 billion people by 2050, 55% of whom will be living in urban environments. Therefore, getting ready to face the challenges associated with the above-mentioned urbanization feature becomes a major concern. Among these, access to housing remains important.

More often than not, land tenure practices are simply culturally accepted, responding to deeply embedded historical processes and contexts, so they vary considerably from country to country. Whether legally or customarily defined, land tenure is the relationship between people, as individuals or groups, with respect to land. In simple terms, "land tenure systems determine who can use what resources for how long, and under what conditions" [2]. According to this definition, urban land tenure can be categorized into four types of property rights regimes: (1) the private regime (individuals and groups, commercial and non-profit); (2) the communal regime (where each member has a right to use the community assets independently); (3) the open access regime (specific rights are not assigned to anyone and no one can be excluded); and (4) the state regime (property rights are assigned to some authority in the public sector). However, Ref. [1] demonstrates that in some cases, property rights can be subject to different regimes governing land and housing ownership: regarding the former, owners own the land and immovable property (e.g., house, building, etc.), and in the second case, owners just own the immovable property and not the land. It is also common to find references in the literature for land tenure security, understanding it as "...the certainty that an individual's rights to land will be recognized by others and protected in cases of specific challenges; or, more specifically, the right of all individuals and groups to effective government protection against forced evictions" [29]. This security as certainty would also apply to housing occupancy [30].

Land administration—formal or informal—encompasses land tenure rules and how they are applied. This includes formalization, registration, rights transfer mechanisms, regulation enforcement, valuation, and taxation, among others. However, formal and informal mechanisms can coexist, generating ambiguities that hinder the definition of the legal status of land, with local tenure practices prevailing in most cases [2]. While formal property rights are those that are explicitly acknowledged by the authority, informal property rights are those that lack official recognition and are considered—in many instances—illegal. In some countries, there is a third status, called "extra-legal", where the rights are not against the law, but not recognized by the law either. Ref. [29] interprets access to land and housing as the "opportunities for temporary or permanent use and occupation of land for purposes of shelter, productive activity or the enjoyment of recreation and rest". The authors classify access to use and uses of land into four different categories: (1) direct occupation, (2) exchange, (3) inheritance, or (4) allocation by government or management authorities. Despite this, insecure land tenure remains critical.

2.3. Outline of the Major Insecure Land Tenure Factors and Characteristics of Urban Housing Issues in Africa

The rapid urbanization rates and lack of urban planning have resulted in very large housing deficits, defined as the difference between the number of households and the number of permanent dwellings. The deficit can be estimated for a given period of time

(flow), for example, an annual deficit, or it can be at a given date, in which case it is sometimes referred to as housing backlog (stock). Without an up-to-date census of dwellings in African countries, accurate information on housing backlogs is not readily available; however, various estimates are cited by government officials and housing professionals in several countries.

Following extensive research and interviews with stakeholders in several countries [31], assembled the largest existing database of Africa's housing backlog, with estimates for 42 countries. Although the author used the latest information available, the estimates in some countries are a few years old. The study reveals that countries such as Tunisia, Botswana, and Mauritius do not have an overall deficit as there are more dwellings than households, but deficits exist for the lowest income categories. On the other end of the spectrum, Nigeria—the most populous country, with an urbanization rate of 4.8% since 2000—is estimated to have a deficit of at least 17 million. This figure has been cited since 2010. However, given the annual demand of 700,000 units and annual supply of less than 100,000, the current backlog should be at least 20 million. Whether 17 or 20 million, reducing the housing backlog in Nigeria requires a fundamental change in housing delivery. Three other countries have backlogs of at least 3 million housing units: the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Egypt, and Tanzania. All three countries have large populations but different urbanization trends. Egypt is the most urbanized, with an urban share of 43.1% in 2015. Its urbanization rate for 2000–2015 was 1.7%, and that figure is expected to increase slightly to 1.8% in the next 15 years. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), with an urban share of 42% in 2015, has experienced an urbanization rate of 4.0% since 2000. However, this trend is expected to slow down to an average of 3.6% in the next 15 years. Combined with an annual housing deficit of 240,000 units (mid-2000s estimate), the housing situation is expected to worsen. Tanzania started with a low urban share but experienced one of the highest urbanization rates, at 5.2%, since 2000. Another group of countries, comprising Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, and South Africa, has housing backlogs of at least 2 million units. This figure is increasing annually, given the large supply shortfall and high urbanization rates.

Overall, Ref. [31] concludes that 17 African countries have housing deficits of more than 1 million units. If nothing is done to dramatically change the situation, poor urban planning and inadequate housing supply will severely constrain Africa's structural transformation. The above-described shortage of housing will lead to the development of slums and shantytowns, which are associated with a number of social problems: overcrowding, poor sanitation, and high crime rates. The context suggests that although the housing sector varies across countries and regions, the common reality among urban developing markets has been a surge in the demand for housing, effectively driving up housing prices and pushing quality housing out of reach for the majority of those who are in need, especially poor and middle-income households. The situation led in many cases to the multiplicity of precarious housing with its wide range of consequences including domestic disaster risks. Simultaneously, slum populations have continued to grow, as social housing cannot keep up with the demand from those in the bottom half of the income distribution. Affordability issues are preventing households from getting their foot on or moving up the housing ladder. The rapid and often uncontrolled growth of urban areas in developing economies has focused attention on the need to improve legal access to land and services for the existing and future urban populations.

In a study on informal settlement management approaches, Ref. [32] pointed to the fact that common policies for improving tenure security in informal settlements, as well as increasing access to credit and services, aimed to provide individual freehold titles to land and property. The author of [33] stated the assumption that formal titling would raise property values. In turn, residents would be able to use the enhanced value of their properties as collateral to obtain formal credit, improve their properties, and invest in a business to lift themselves out of poverty. The author concluded that with improved

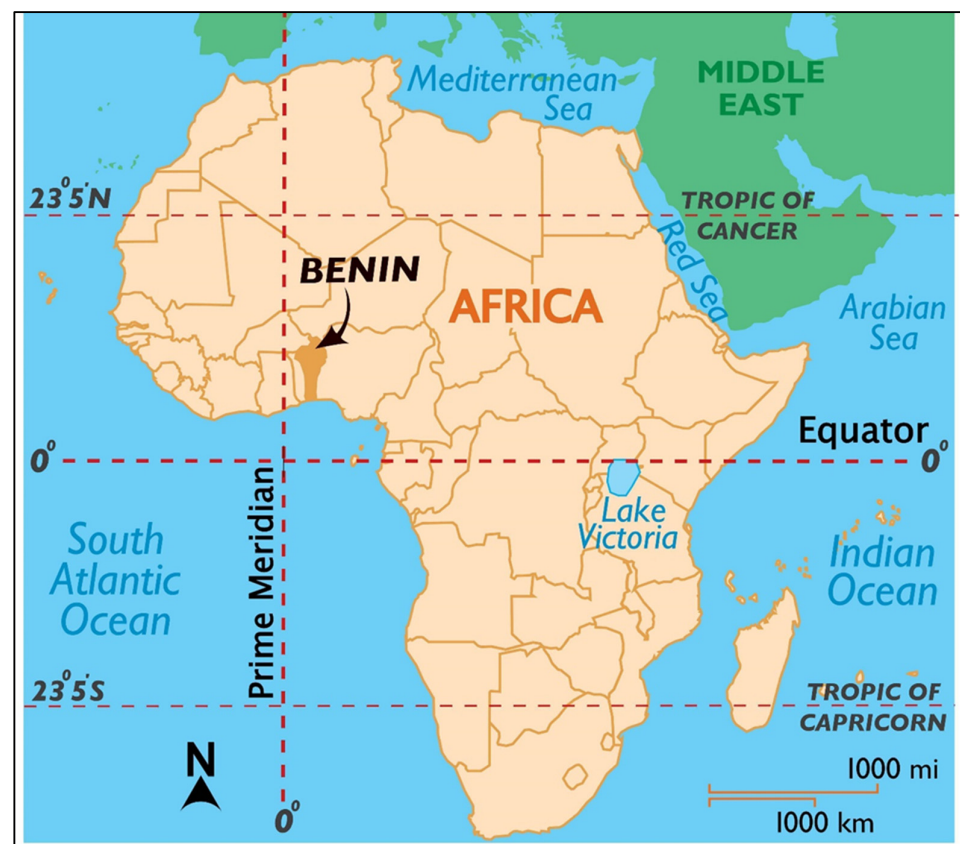
security, residents do improve their housing stock, and often build and improve home-based businesses.

On the other hand, a UN-Habitat synthesis report [20] stated that given the complexity of urban land tenure and property rights and the limited capability (or willingness) of government at national and local levels to meet the increasing challenge, no single form of tenure can meet the diverse and changing needs of large urban populations. For various reasons, the number of evicted populations accompanied by house demolition under judicial decisions has been drastically increasing in recent decades. Among these, the lack of legal access to land is a major concern [34], the provision of which, even in the name of new infrastructure or public project development, allows residents to claim compensation and appropriate resettlement [33].

The above-revealed insecure land tenure factors with their associated possible related issues (based on the literature) regarding access to land and/or housing are summarized in Table 1 below. The present study assumes that those factors and housing issues are applicable to the conurbation of Grand Nokoué (Figure 1).

Table 1. Insecure land tenure factors and their associated housing issues.

Insecure Land Tenure Factors and Their Major Characteristics	Associated Housing Issues Promoted by Insecure Land Tenure Factors
(i.) Lack of recognition by authorities: characterized by a default of property rights or inappropriate land occupancy (ii.) Lack of protection from eviction or exclusion: characterized by insufficient compensation or inappropriate resettlement (iii.) Informal community-based rights: characterized by unclear customary rights	(1) Development of shantytowns (2) Multiplicity of precarious housing (3) Loss of housing for public project development (4) Exposure to house demolition under judicial decision



(a)

Figure 1. Cont.

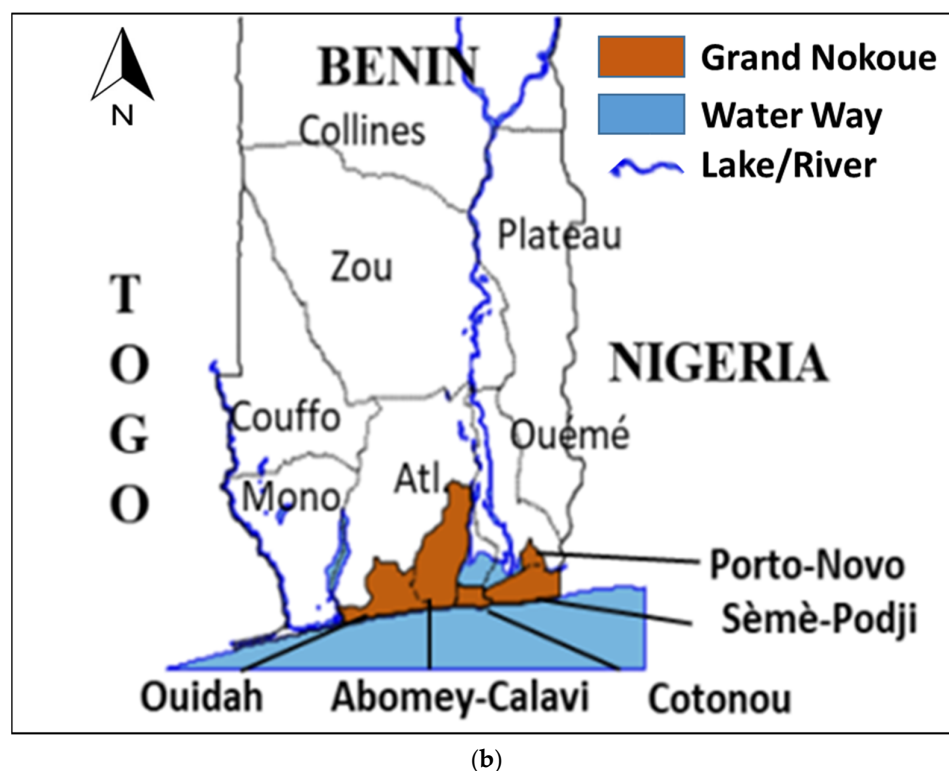


Figure 1. (a) Location of Benin in Africa. Source: adapted from a WorldAtlas.com map, 2018. (b) Location of Grand Nokoue. Source: adapted from a WorldAtlas.com map, 2018.

3. Methods

3.1. Outline of the Study Area

The case study of this research addressed the conurbation of Grand Nokoué, a set of five cities in southern Benin in West Africa (Figure 2). Concentrated on the limited coastline of Benin, the conurbation of Grand Nokoué is characterized by a 33 km sand bank, which lies along the marine coast, from Nigeria (east) to Togo (west). A review of the trends, conditions, nature, and occupation of land in Grand Nokoué in recent decades allows an understanding of the state of urbanization before the vote to approve the new land law 2013-01 of 14 August 2013. More specifically, the 2013 census of population and housing in Benin highlights that in recent decades, Benin's urbanization has been drastically increasing due to demographic growth. This led to the continuous intensification and land occupation of the outlying districts of Cotonou, Abomey-Calavi, and Seme-Podji, and uncommon land occupation. The conurbation of Grand Nokoué indeed constituted a major national and regional hub of 1,984,425 inhabitants in 2013, the majority of which lived in the cities of Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi. Simulations predict that it will have reached 3 million inhabitants by 2025, while as of 2023, Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi alone have already reached 2 million inhabitants.

3.2. Mapping and Calculation of the Residential Housing Ratio

For the purpose of this study, we calculated the residential housing ratio of the five cities making Grand Nokoue to identify the scope of investigation areas in the whole conurbation. The ratio shows the specific features of each city in terms of the density of residential areas. For so doing, we used the Q-GIS 3.32.3 (geographical information system) software based on adapted maps from the Google Earth website that delineate the surveyed area among the total area of each commune, city, or town. This allowed us to highlight the most suitable cities for the investigation of Grand Nokoue.

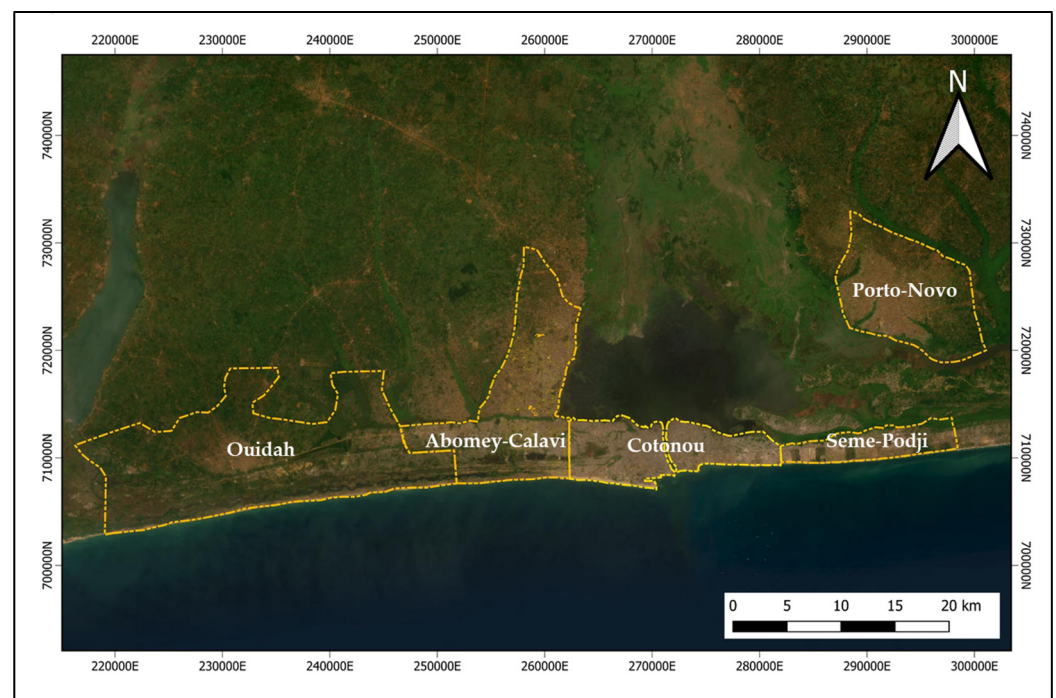


Figure 2. Demarcation of Grand Nokoué. Source: adapted map from the Google Earth website.

3.3. Field Observation

Field observation conducted in October 2021 enabled us to show examples in relation to housing issues in Grand Nokoué. The cities of Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi warrant investigation due to their specific features of densely built-up cities with the greatest housing ratio. The observation was made by driving a car and walking around designated areas to determine the visual characteristics that enable the identification of one or many of the abovementioned issues in relation to the factors of insecure land tenure. Photos of specific features of the surveyed areas were taken to support the hypothesis based on the observed issues.

3.4. Interview Survey

The semi-structured interview method based on a questionnaire was used to obtain objective evidence that demonstrates the relationship between the factors of insecure land tenure and housing issues. The study identified and examined three factors, namely, lack of recognition by authorities, lack of protection from eviction or expulsion, and community-based rights. The informants' perception of the correlation between these three factors and the related housing issues, namely, the development of shantytowns, the multiplicity of precarious housing, the loss of housing for the development of public projects, and exposure to house demolition under judicial decision, was examined. The informants were asked to rate the extent to which insecure land tenure factors are affected by housing issues. More specifically officers, experts, and householders were asked to point out, based on their experience, the relevant aspects of each housing issue that affect the above insecure land tenure factors.

Primary data were obtained in October 2021 by interviewing local government officials (two from each city from the conurbation of Grand Nokoué) and experts in charge of land administration (two from each city as well) in various positions at mayors' offices. The respondents were selected using convenience sampling, taking into consideration their busy schedules and the difficulty of contacting them at their offices. In addition, we used a database of surveys among householders from a previous study conducted in 2018 by the authors in 8 residential/popular boroughs among the 13 that compose the city of Cotonou. These districts were surveyed again in 2021 to update the available data and

information. Four out of the nine districts that comprise the Abomey-Calavi commune were also surveyed in 2021. Table 2 provides the basic information of the respondents. All relevant answers (outcomes of the semi-structured interviews) were selected among the respondents' comments. The most common and similar answers were summarized and combined into one. The summarized answers were carefully analyzed and discussed to find their correlation with one or more of the insecure land tenure factors in discussion.

Table 2. Category and origin of the informants.

Area of Survey	Respondents from Each Category		
	Officers	Experts	Householders
Cotonou	2	2	6
Abomey-Calavi	2	2	6
Seme-Podji	2	2	4
Porto-Novo	2	2	4
Ouidah	2	2	4

4. Results

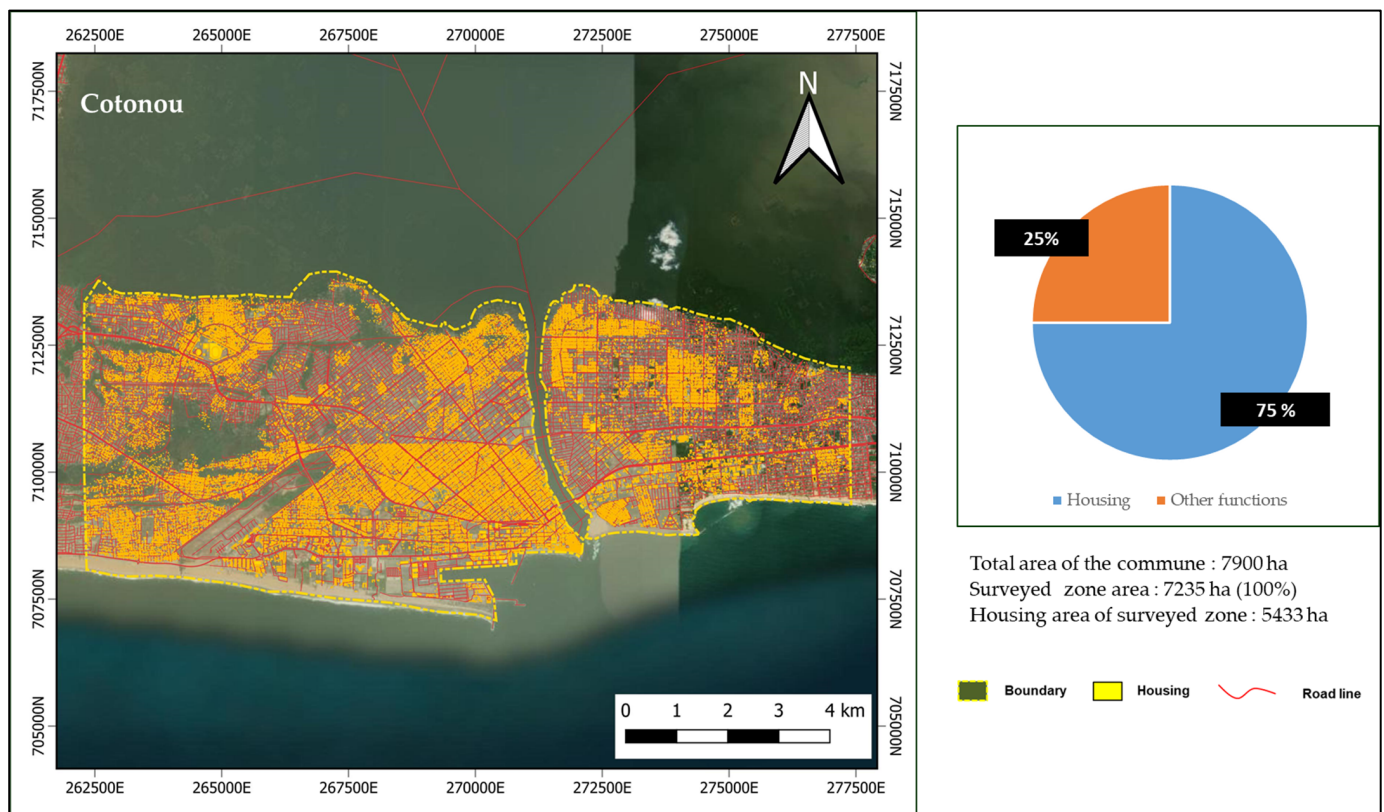
4.1. Outcome of the Mapping and Calculation of the Residential Housing Ratio

Figure 3a–e present the outcomes of the calculation of the residential housing ratio of the five cities in Grand Nokoue, which show the scope of the target areas of this study. The communes of Abomey-Calavi (76%), Cotonou (75%), and Porto-Novo (67%) indicate a relatively higher ratio compared to Seme-Podji (26%) and Ouidah (13%).

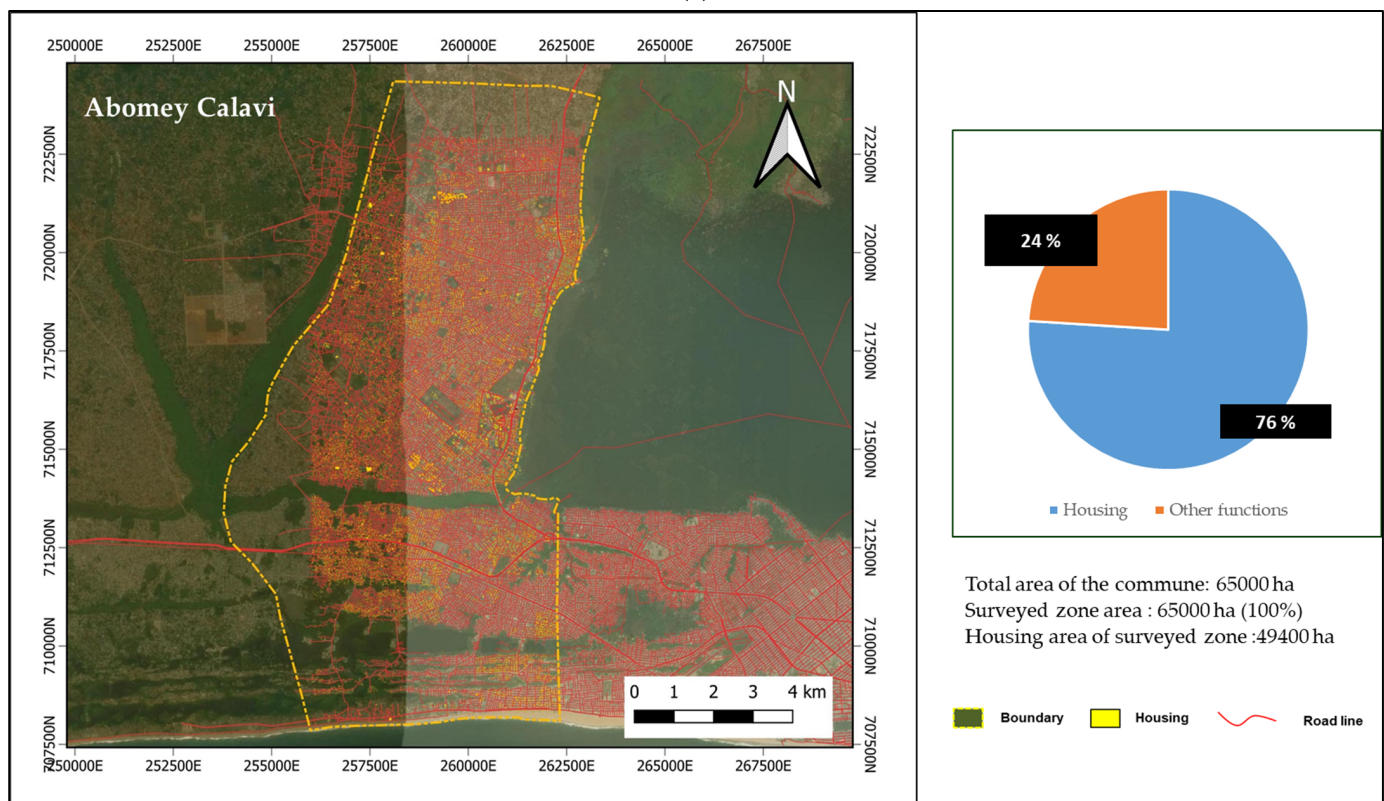
4.2. Outcome of the Field Observation

The study observed an increasing number of people moving to Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi for life and business reasons. Alternatively, the study observed indigenous settlements on inappropriate land without minimum access to basic services, the majority of whom invaded the land without permission or ownership rights granted by the government. Figure 4 summarizes the observed housing issues in Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi.

More specifically, the observation found that the development of shantytowns, precarious housing, and the loss of houses in the name of public project development was more predominant in Cotonou boroughs than in Abomey-Calavi City, which provided more images of house demolition for judicial decision. The observation recorded four cases of shantytowns (in Cotonou), seven cases of precarious housing (five in Cotonou, two in Abomey-Calavi), two cases of loss of houses to public project developments (the most tangible of which was in Cotonou), and two cases of house demolition under judicial decision in Abomey-Calavi at the time of the observation. The following sections illustrated by Figures 5–10 describe the real state of housing conditions observed in the surveyed districts of the conurbation of Grand Nokoue. The sections present the phenomenon of the development of shantytowns characterized by a multiplicity of precarious housing in the urban developing area. The sections emphasize the need for public project implementation for the development of Grand Nokoue and the major consequences of the absence thereof, such as the demolition and loss of numerous housing.

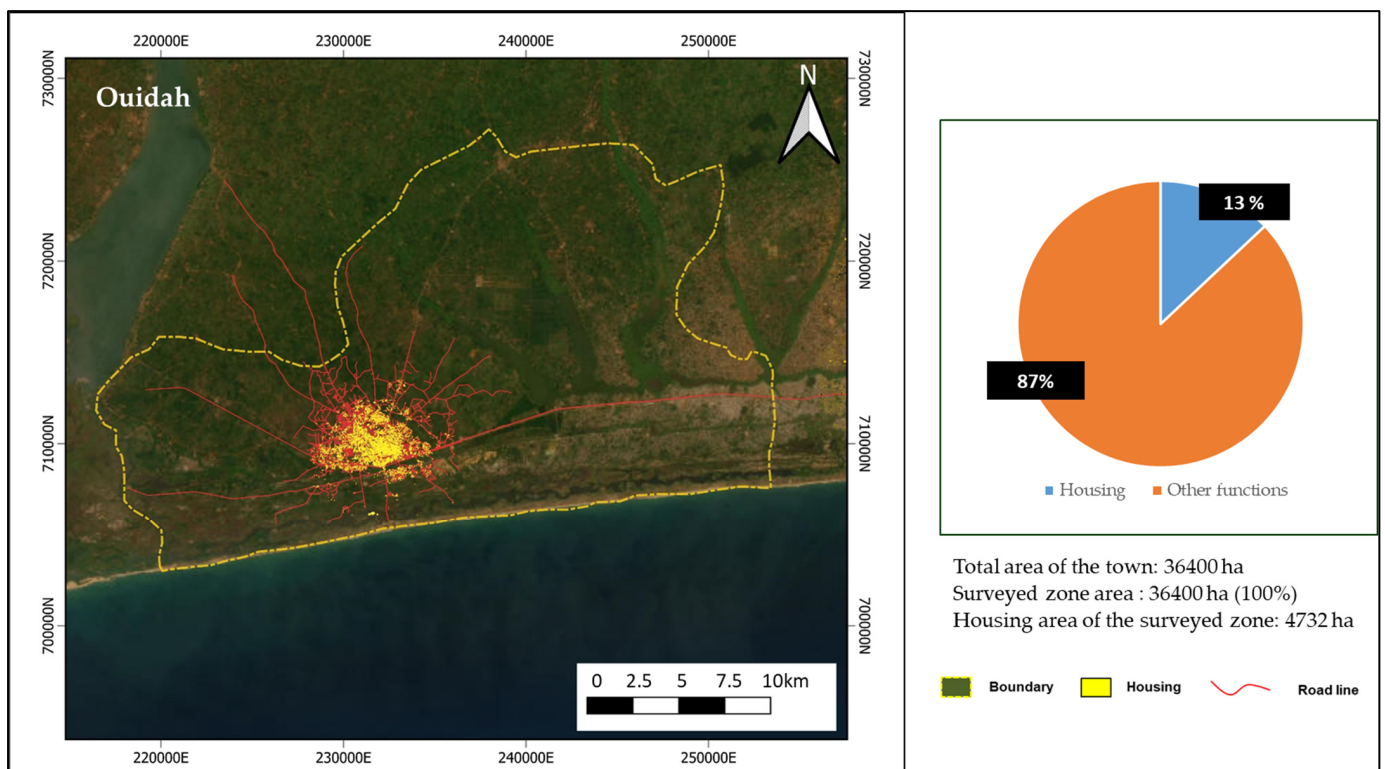


(a)

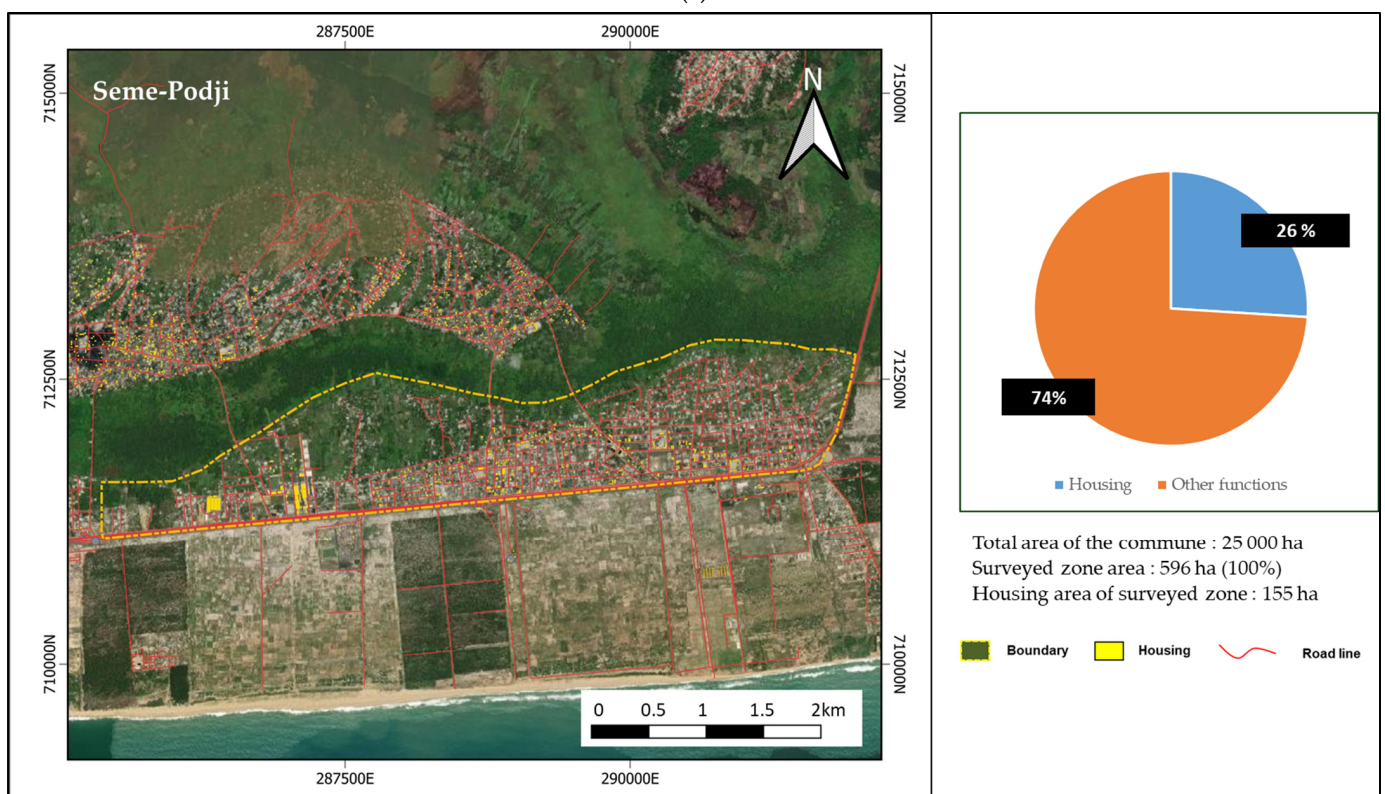


(b)

Figure 3. Cont.

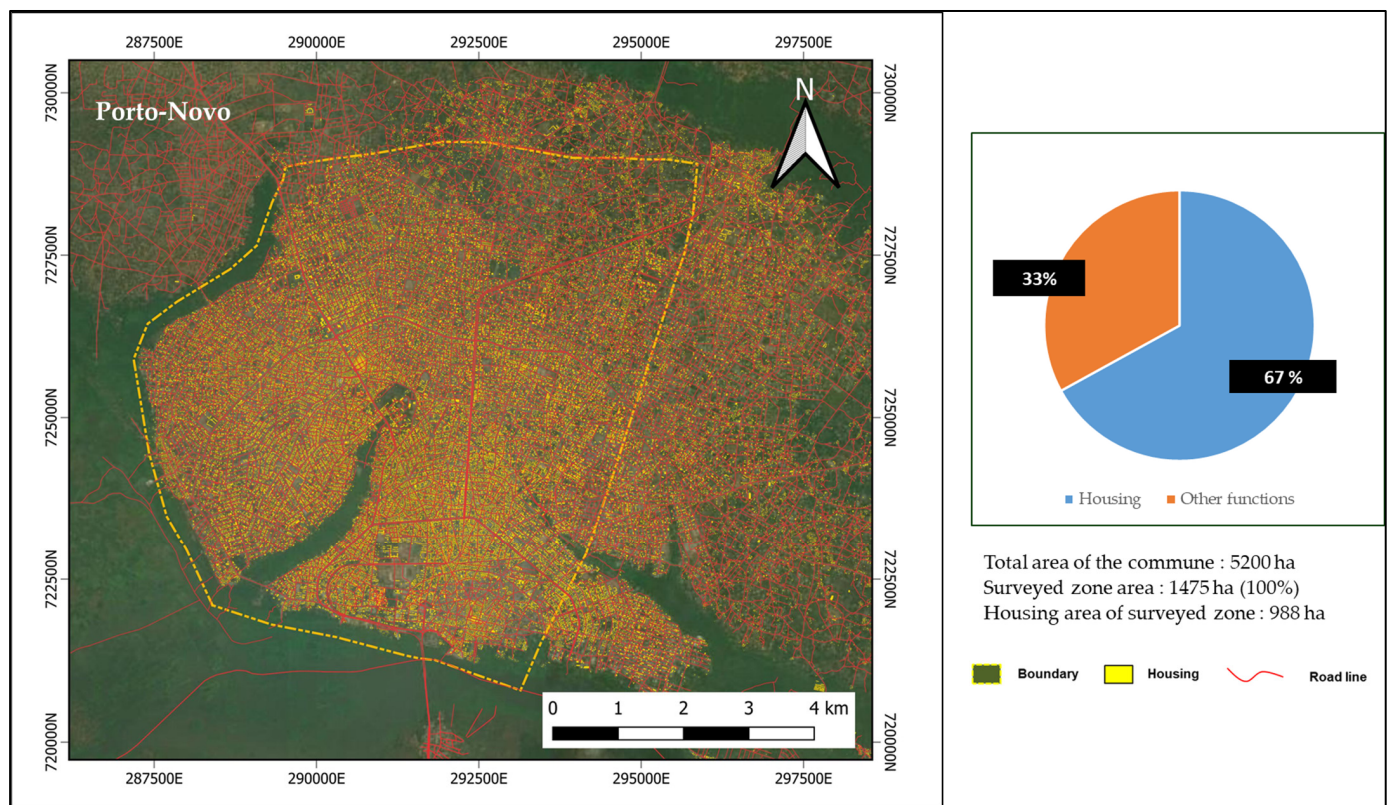


(c)



(d)

Figure 3. Cont.



(e)

Figure 3. (a) Residential housing ratio of the city of Cotonou (adapted map from the Google Earth website). (b) Residential housing ratio of the commune of Abomey-Calavi (adapted map from the Google Earth website). (c) Residential housing ratio of the commune of Ouidah (adapted map from the Google Earth website). (d) Residential housing ratio of the commune of Seme-Podji (adapted map from the Google Earth website). (e) Residential housing ratio of the commune of Porto-Novo (adapted map from the Google Earth website).

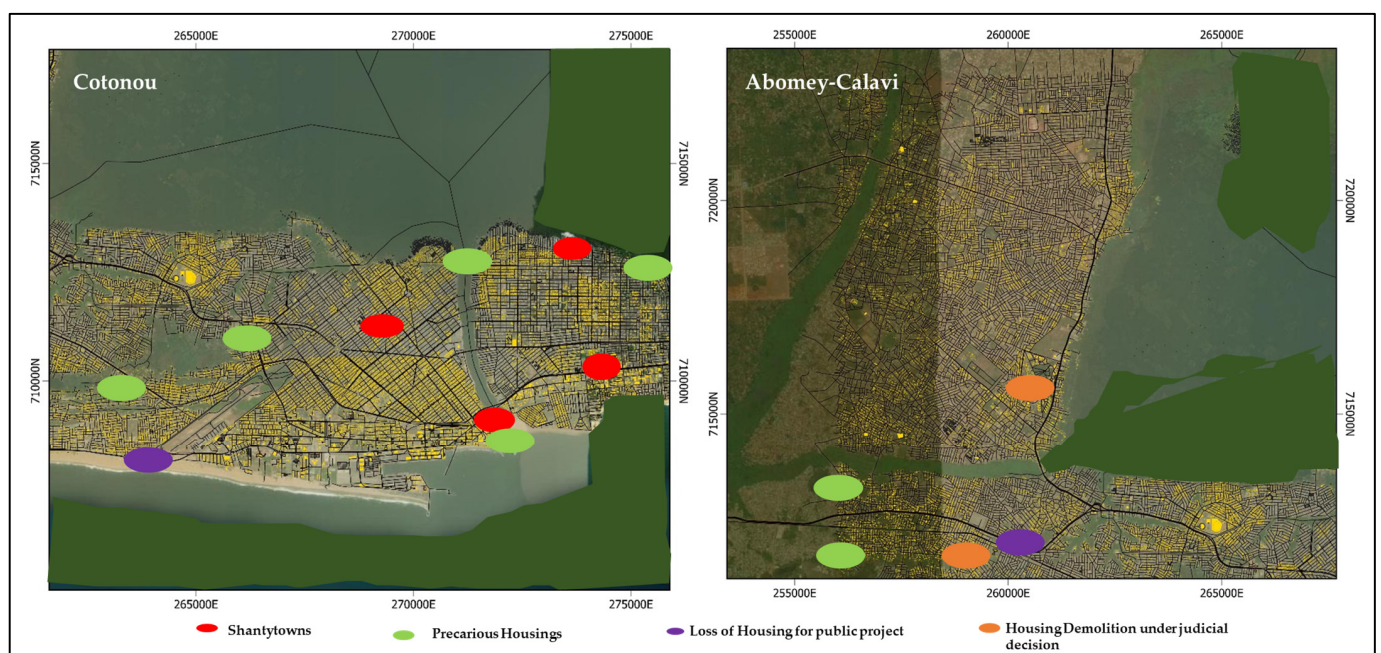


Figure 4. Observed housing issues in Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi.



Figure 5. Shantytown in Akpakpa Dodome district, 2021.



Figure 6. Shantytown in Ladji district, 2021.



Figure 7. Precarious housing in Vossa district, 2021.



Figure 8. Precarious housing in Fifadji district, 2021.



Figure 9. Loss of housing in Fidjrosse district, 2018.



Figure 10. Redevelopment project in Fidjrosse district, 2021.

4.2.1. Development of Shantytowns

During the field survey, we identified numerous settlements in precarious conditions, with a critical lack of provision of basic needs. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the chaotic situation of two shantytowns among the four cases observed, the most critical of which were in the Akpakpa Dodome and Ladji districts in Cotonou (housing issue (1)). The observation allowed us to develop the hypothesis that the vulnerability of these settlements is not only

reflected by the weakness of housing materials but also by land occupancy across several years without appropriate ownership rights (factors (i) and (iii) of insecure land tenure).

4.2.2. Multiplicity of Precarious Housing

Figures 7 and 8 reveal Cotonou as mainly characterized by inappropriate land occupation (houses erected in water outlets), and wetland occupation by settlements of populations across years (indeed, five cases were observed throughout the city). This situation leads to the multiplicity of precarious housing over time (housing issue (2)) that our hypothesis states to be linked to factors (i) and (iii) of insecure land tenure.

4.2.3. Loss of Housing Due to Public Project Development

Elsewhere, entire homes were removed to make way for new roads (Figures 9 and 10). Parts of houses were demolished when the new road was built through the increasingly popular Fidjrosse neighborhood, which is immediately beside the beach. The declaration of a householder: “Although we protested against it, there has been no compensation so far” prompted us to formulate the hypothesis that the related housing issue might be linked with the insecure land tenure factor (ii).

4.2.4. Exposure to House Demolition under Judicial Decision

The fact that a parcel of land can be sold to several individuals, which creates a legal dispute that is frequently unfavorable to the party with the lowest income, is evidence of the land insecurity evident at the time of the study. Such a situation is deemed more frequent with customary lands than modern lands in which authenticating property titles by the land administration is easier. While talking with a victim of house demolition and other householders feeling concerned by the situation, we noticed that in the event of litigation, the first purchaser to register an estate in the tax and estate departments of the Ministry of Economy and Finance is the only state-recognized owner (insecure land tenure factor (i)). Any other purchaser is evicted due to a judicial decision with neither compensation nor re-settlement measures (insecure land tenure factor (ii)). The judicial corruption in relation to the issue of land and the illiteracy of the population worsens the already delicate situation. Economically weak families who generally cannot afford to pay the bribes demanded by corrupt officials may lose their domains (housing issue (4); Figures 11 and 12).



Figure 11. House demolition in Aitchedji district, 2018.



Figure 12. House demolition in Tokan district, 2021.

The above-observed disparities allow stating that the situation is still redeemable and managing access to housing through land access becomes imperative to improve the level of development in the conurbation of Grand Nokoue. According to some householders encountered during our field observation, the reason behind the disparities observed in their housing conditions is the lack of secure land tenure that exposes settlements to eviction at any time by a strong government from a place informally occupied over decades. Therefore, it is worth investigating the actual ways of access to land in the conurbation of Grand Nokoue in order to suggest improvements that may positively influence the development of sustainable urban housing.

4.3. Outcome of the Interview Survey

The following sections present a summary of the responses given by the interviewees for each issue revealed by the literature background. All relevant answers (outcome of the interview) were selected among the respondents' comments. The most common and similar answers were summarized and combined into one. We summarized the answers and carefully examined, analyzed, and discussed them to find their correlation with one or more of the insecure land tenure factors in the discussion.

4.3.1. Development of Shantytowns

Table 3 below addresses the outcome of the interview survey and field observation that revealed the predominance of informal settlements (1-E-1) in the investigated districts. These are characterized by the crucial lack of basic infrastructure and access to services (1-O-2, 1-E-2). In these districts, a common observation is that houses are built using precarious materials and are overcrowded by the number of people living in small backyards. The situation led to the emergence of shanty housing, which escaped the attention of administration control and management over the years. The table summarizes the most common responses from informants on the issue of the development of shantytowns. The officers and experts explained the high density of shanty houses in the cities of Cotonou, Abomey-Calavi, and Seme-Podji as caused by the lack of recognition of land rights by land authorities (i). However, according to householders, the lack of community-based rights (iii) is the major cause of the increased development of shanty houses. The trend differs in Ouidah and Porto-Novo, where community-based rights emerged as the major concern. Among the major subjects addressed by the respondents' comments on shantytowns, the secure tenure perception of communities (1-H-1, 2, 3, 4, and 5), community customs-based life (1-E-4), and the provision of basic services (1-O-2, 1-E-2) are major concerns. Even though land dualism (1-O-4, 1-E-3, and 1-E-5) and land ownership (1-H-6) are not included,

they are only slightly addressed as elements that give communities a feeling of security and the illusion of having some kind of property rights based either on long-term land occupancy or land inheritance.

Table 3. Comments of interviewees on “Development of shantytowns”.

Category and Number of Officers					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Officers	Associated Insecure Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
0	0	2	0	0	1-O-1: Economic power of occupants The majority of the occupants of shantytowns are low-income people	Not directly associated
2	2	2	0	0	1-O-2: Basic services provision The lack of provision of basic service access reduces communities' incentive to invest an important amount of money in properties	(i) Lack of recognition by authorities
2	0	0	2	1	1-O-3: Community customs-based life Under some kind of customary rights, kin groups settled over the years are not likely to relocate despite a crucial lack of basic services and infrastructure in their living area	(iii) Informal community-based rights
0	2	0	2	1	1-O-4: Land dualism The coexistence of customary and modern systems gave communities a feeling of security and the illusion of having some kind of property right based on long-term land occupancy	
Category and number of Experts					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Experts	Associated Insecure Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
2	1	0	0	0	1-E-1: Informal settlements Many of the shantytown occupants are delocalized populations due to judicial decisions or in the name of development projects	(i) Lack of recognition by authorities
2	0	1	0	0	1-E-2: Basic services provision Poor land zoning and development do not encourage populations to invest in housing	
0	1	1	0	0	1-E-3: Land dualism The multiplicity of planning tools complicates the regulation of modern and customary property rights	
0	0	0	1	1	1-E-4: Community customs-based life Under some kind of customary rights, kin groups settled over the years are not likely to relocate despite a crucial lack of basic services and infrastructure in their living area	(iii) Informal community-based rights
0	0	0	1	1	1-E-5: Land dualism The coexistence of customary and modern systems gave communities a feeling of security and the illusion of having some kind of property right based on long-term land occupancy	

Table 3. Cont.

Category and Number of Householders					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Householders	Associated Insecure Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
2	0	0	0	0	1-H-1: Secure tenure perception Populations have the feeling of security as they have been living in place for years, and developed their living environment without any support from the authorities	(iii) Informal community-based rights
0	1	1	1	2	1-H-2: Secure tenure perception Populations have the feeling of security when they are the first occupants of lands	
2	1	0	0	1	1-H-3: Secure tenure perception Communities settled over the years cannot feel at home anywhere else	
0	0	1	0	0	1-H-4: Secure tenure perception Governments have allowed years to pass without any eviction decision	
2	2	1	2	0	1-H-5: Secure tenure perception Self-survival even in inappropriate zones, gives occupants a feeling of ownership	
0	2	1	1	1	1-H-6: Land ownership Lands even without official property rights give a feeling of secure ownership when they are acquired by inheritance	(i) Lack of recognition by authorities

4.3.2. Multiplicity of Precarious Housing

Table 4 below addresses investment incentives (2-E-2, 3, and 4; 2-H-1 and 2), secure tenure perception (2-O-4, 2-O-6, and 2-H-4), and the economic power of occupants (2-O-3 and 2-E-1) as major concerns regarding the multiplicity of precarious housing. They reveal various reasons that may explain the multiplicity of precarious housing, such as the weakness of land property rights that leads to the lack of recognition by authorities (i) and the establishment of informal community-based rights (iii). According to the interviewees, there is a perceptible trend of low incentives for investing in informal lands (2-E-2) or lands without basic service provision (2-E-3) because such tenure exposes residents to the risk of sudden eviction by the real landowner or by the government which owns the land. The uncontrolled house rental also exposes residents to similar threats (2-H-4). Therefore, and given that the house rental sector remains unregulated, occupants will feel unsafe and prefer to live in a precarious house which is their property rather than be exposed to eviction by a householder due to late rental payments. In addition, by investing the minimum amount of money in land that does not belong to them, occupants have a certain degree of control over their level of loss in the case that the government decides to recover its property in the future. Notably, the officers and experts fully agreed on the lack of recognition by authorities (i) as the major cause of the multiplicity of precarious housing, while the householders blamed the lack of community-based rights (iii).

Table 4. Comments of interviewees on the “Multiplicity of precarious housing”.

Category and Number of Officers					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Officers	Associated Insecure Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
1	0	0	0	0	2-O-1: Informal settlements Most precarious houses (mainly bamboo-made) are settled without permission along rivers or seaside;	(i) Lack of recognition by authorities
1	0	0	0	0	2-O-2: Community customs-based life Most precarious settlements along the seaside are those involved in fisheries activities for decades	(i) Lack of recognition by authorities
0	1	2	0	2	2-O-3: Economic power of occupants Most of the populations living in precarious houses have low income; they settle on vacant without an official owner	Not directly associated
1	1	0	0	0	2-O-4: Secure tenure perception The longtime living in precarious conditions without eviction by the authorities has led to the extension of precarious houses	(iii) Informal community-based rights
0	0	0	2	0	2-O-6: Cultural perception of secure tenure Due to the historical characteristics of the city, many people think houses have to keep their authentic cultural features	(i) Lack of recognition by authorities
Category and Number of EXPERTS					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Experts	Associated Insecure Land Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
0	1	1	0	0	2-E-1: Economic power of occupants Economic issues are the main reasons for settlement on unregistered lands	Not directly associated (i) Lack of recognition by authorities
1	1	0	1	0	2-E-2: Low incentive for investment in informal lands Communities settled on unregistered or informal lands do not invest too much in properties as they can be subject to land claimed by the authorities	
1	0	1	1	0	2-E-3: Low incentive for investment in lands without basic services The lack of basic infrastructure reduces the land value which does not promote investment in housing	
0	0	0	0	1	2-E-4: Incentive for investment in lands formally registered Modern constructions in the past 10 years have been erected on lands registered under the enacted new law	

Table 4. Cont.

Category and Number of Householders					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Householders	Associated Insecure Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
2	1	1	0	0	2-H-1: Incentive for more investment in secured land The amount of money invested in house construction depends on the strength of the property right over the land	(i) Lack of recognition by authorities
1	2	0	1	2	2-H-2: Incentive for more investment in secured land If one feels to be on safe land, it is easy to invest in a high-standard building	
2	1	2	2	0	2-H-3: Community customs-based life People prefer to live as a community precariously rather than feel lonely in a modern apartment	(iii) Informal community-based rights
1	2	1	1	2	2-H-4: Secure tenure perception With the risk of sudden eviction from a decent rental house, it is safer to buy even poor land and erect a precarious house of one's own	

4.3.3. Loss of Housing for Public Project Development

Table 5 relates the perception of the informants on the possible reasons for the loss of housing due to public projects. The outcome stipulates the lack of protection from eviction or exclusion (ii) as a major influential factor. As a common rule, development projects, such as road and public infrastructures, give rights to land compensation and/or resettlements when authorities allow land occupancy. However, in many cases, the compensation amount may not meet the expectations of the beneficiaries. Throughout the interviews, we observed that even presumed community-based rights lacked power against development goals. This notion is sustained in the Fidjrosse district of Cotonou where a householder declared, “Although we protested against it, there has been no compensation so far.” The interviews regarding the management of public projects also reveal that informal settlements (3-O-1, 3-O-3, 3-O-4, and 3-E-3) expose occupants to housing loss with various consequences; these are addressed in Table 5, showing that informal settlements are a major concern. The respondents’ opinions on the compensation provision and resettlement measures show the extent to which an inclusive participatory approach to development projects (3-O-5, 3-E-2, 3-E-4, 3-H-1, 2, 3, and 4) might create a positive cycle. This will provide an enabling environment that generates local fiscal systems, develops innovative instruments to capture gains in land value, and recovers public and private investments.

Table 5. Comments of interviewees on “Public project development”.

Category and Number of Officers					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Officers	Associated Insecure Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
0	1	0	0	1	3-O-1: Informal settlements It is easier for houses to be lost in the name of development projects when they are erected on lands that are not recognized by authorities	(ii) The lack of protection from eviction or exclusion
1	1	1	0	0	3-O-2: Formal or authorized settlements Development projects like roads and public infrastructures give rights to land compensation when the land occupancy is recognized or allowed by authorities	
1	0	1	0	0	3-O-3: Informal settlements Inappropriate land occupancy such as in wetland and flood-prone areas is a major cause of housing loss when governments decide on zone redevelopment	
1	0	0	0	1	3-O-4: Informal settlements Constructions in zones declared inappropriate by authorities expose occupants to a permanent risk of losing their property when the time comes for development	
2	2	2	2	2	3-O-5: Inclusive participatory approach to development projects When populations are involved in a new project at its important stages, starting from the design stage, they feel more concerned and cooperate more in their resettlement procedures	Not directly associated
Category and Number of Experts					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Experts	Associated Insecure Land Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
0	1	0	1	0	3-E-1: The strength of the state’s power In many countries, public project development has priority over existing housing	(ii) The lack of protection from eviction or exclusion
2	2	1	2	1	3-E-2: Inclusive participatory approach to development projects When the time comes for development, it is recommended that governments involve populations in decision-making such as eviction, resettlement, compensation, etc.	
1	0	1	0	1	3-E-3: Informal settlements Wetlands and riversides are not appropriate for housing in principle; housing there exposes occupants to sudden eviction sooner or later	
2	2	2	2	2	3-E-4: Inclusive participatory approach to development projects An inclusive approach to project development may mitigate the impact of housing loss at the community level	Not directly associated

Table 5. Cont.

Category and Number of Householders					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Householders	Associated Insecure Land Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
2	1	2	0	2	3-H-1: Inclusive participatory approach to development projects The compensation provided in the name of a development project is often insufficient for appropriate relocation	Not directly associated
2	1	0	0	0	3-H-2: Inclusive participatory approach to development projects In many cases, eviction is accompanied by no compensation or resettlement measures	
2	1	2	0	2	3-H-3: Inclusive participatory approach to development projects Even when a decision is taken on the compensation, it is very hard to receive it	
0	3	0	0	0	3-H-4: Inclusive participatory approach to development projects There is huge corruption regarding compensation provision. If you are lucky, you may receive it	

4.3.4. Exposure to House Demolition under Judicial Decision

In Table 6, the informants mentioned two factors of insecure land tenure that exert an influence on housing due to the many land conflicts that occurred in the city during the previous decades. These are the lack of recognition by authorities (i) and the lack of protection from eviction or exclusion (ii), which may expose various ranges of the population to loss of housing. The table summarizes the above-described conditions by targeting land transaction control (4-O-1 and 4-H-4) and land administration (4-E-1 and 4-H-2) as necessary facts to address in order to cope with the issue of housing demolition under judicial decision. According to these, the study suggests that the government should take full responsibility for land pricing and exert real control over land transactions, and vulgarize land administration procedures into enough languages to make them accessible to the population (4-O-2). The judicial corruption (4-H-1) that occurred in the city in the past 10 years exacerbated the risk of unsafe land purchase. A head of household from Abomey-Calavi declared that “In Benin, justice is corrupt, the rich are crushing the poor, and legal practitioners would have no morals”. Another interviewee from Cotonou mentioned the following: “In general, when land is purchased in respect with laws, the risk of contestation is very low.” According to the owner of several plots of land in the Fidjrosse district in Cotonou, the majority of high-standard housing in the city is erected on land recognized by authorities or the so-called secure land.

Table 6. Comments of interviewees on “House demolition under judicial decision”.

Category and Number of Officers					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Officers	Associated Insecure Land Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
0	2	1	0	0	4-O-1: Land transactions’ control In recent decades, a parcel of land could be sold to several individuals, creating a legal dispute that is often unfavorable to the party with the lowest income	(ii) The lack of protection from eviction or exclusion
1	2	1	1	2	4-O-2: High illiteracy level The high illiteracy level of the population is the cause of misunderstanding of land acquisition procedures	(ii) The lack of protection from eviction or exclusion
1	0	0	1	0	4-O-3: Land administration Unclear registration procedures are sometimes the cause of many unregistered lands	(ii) The lack of protection from eviction or exclusion
Category and Number of Experts					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Experts	Associated Insecure Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
1	1	2	0	1	4-E-1: Land administration The limited extent of the land law may explain its misuse by land officers and its misunderstanding by populations	(ii) The lack of protection from eviction or exclusion
1	1	0	2	1	4-E-2: Land dualism Land dualism opens the door to a multiplicity of planning tools that complicate the regulations on land property rights	(ii) The lack of protection from eviction or exclusion
Category and Number of Householders					Summary of Responses from the Informants: Householders	Associated Insecure Land Tenure Factors
Cotonou	Abomey-Calavi	Seme-Podji	Ouidah	Porto-Novo		
0	1	0	1	0	4-H-1: Judicial corruption Judicial corruption is a cause of social injustice	(ii) The lack of protection from eviction or exclusion
2	1	2	1	2	4-H-2: Land administration Poor land administration contributes to land wars	
2	2	0	1	2	4-H-3: Land transaction control The government did not take responsibility for land plot prices; each seller fixes a price, and this creates confusion	
2	2	2	1	0	4-H-4: Land transaction control If land prices are categorized properly and vulgarized among the population, buyers will feel safer and there will be less conflict over land	

5. Discussion

5.1. Summary of Results

The observation revealed that access to basic services and the provision of infrastructure are important determinants of perceptions of tenure security toward sustainable development. This finding supported the conclusion of [34] who pointed out the need to improve the delivery of urban services to unlock the potential of an increasingly urbanized world. However, the authors did not mention the necessary conditions for delivery. The findings of this study highlighted that the delivery of urban services and infrastructure projects should accompany inclusive tenure security to attain sustainable development. They suggest that tenure security, which includes conditions for the delocalization and resettlement of populations, could create a positive cycle and enable an environment that generates local fiscal systems, develops innovative instruments for capturing gains in land value, and recovers public and private investments.

Taking the different regions into consideration, the observation also showed that there are disparities in the levels of development and the related proportion. Indeed, the conurbation of Grand Nokoue is also rich in high-standard housing erected in city centers where basic service access and road infrastructures are available. The observation acknowledged modern housing in commercial zones in Cotonou city center. Nevertheless, some residential boroughs such as the Airport Zone in Cotonou and Zopah District in Abomey-Calavi also contain middle- and high-standard housing. The above allows stating that the situation is still redeemable and managing access to housing through land access becomes imperative to improve the level of development in the conurbation of Grand Nokoue. According to some interviewees, the reason behind the disparities observed in their housing conditions is the lack of secure land tenure that exposes settlements to eviction at any time by a strong government from a place informally occupied over decades.

The interviews enhanced the current understanding that, as governments have not invested in services for unrecognized lands, people are less motivated to invest in their properties. The situation induced the development of shantytowns and precarious housing. Therefore, the provision of basic services and official recognition of land by governments to promote better investment among occupants in housing appears to be a necessary condition to enhance their security, and prevent the threats of eviction and land grabbing. Moreover, the abovementioned situation may expose occupants to critical health and social consequences.

The results of the combination of field observation and interviews provide answers to the question of how the factors of land tenure influence housing conditions. This study affirms the findings of [17,20], which stipulated property rights to land as one of the most powerful resources available to people to increase and extend their investments in housing. It reaffirms the unbreakable link between the security of tenure and housing issues and provides an understanding of the correlation between insecure land tenure factors and related housing issues. Figure 12 below highlights the link. The lack of basic services exposes occupants to non-recognition by authorities (i) while exposing them to sudden eviction or exclusion (ii). The consequences of these are the proliferation of shantytowns (1) and precarious housing (2). The long-term existence of shantytowns and precarious housing promotes the development of informal community-based rights (iii), often a source of disputes and conflicts between populations and governments. The informal community-based rights in turn do not shield occupants from a loss of housing to public project development (3) or house demolition under judicial decision (4). The above issues (3) and (4) are induced by a lack of recognition by authorities (i) and a lack of protection from eviction or exclusion (ii). In addition to the above-described insecure land tenure factors, this study highlighted independent factors not directly associated with land tenure such as low economic power (iv), the high illiteracy level of populations (v), and the lack of an inclusive, participatory approach to development projects (vi), that contribute to the housing insecurity and vulnerability. More specifically, the study showed that the low economic power of populations (iv) is a cause of the multiplicity of precarious

housing (2) which in turn switches into the development of shantytowns (1). As a long-term consequence, the situation often leads to the loss of housing either for public project reasons (3) or under judicial decision (4). The high illiteracy level of the population (v), the cause of many unregistered lands, is also revealed as an influential factor in the loss of housing under judicial decision (4), while the lack of an inclusive, participatory approach to development projects (vi) compromises projects' sustainability. Overall, the study reveals chaotic conditions, which create a negative downward spiral that threatens sustainable development. Figure 13 below illustrates the situation.

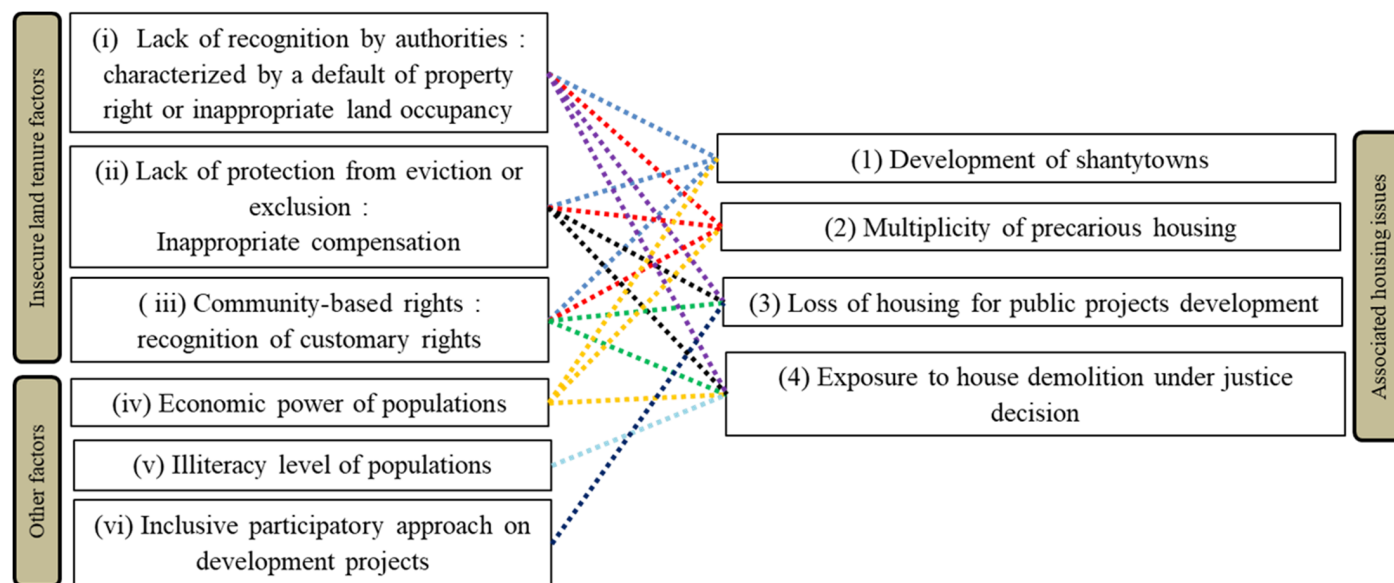


Figure 13. Correlation between housing issues and associated factors.

5.2. Policy Recommendations and Implications

The present study discusses in more detail challenges induced by the insecure land tenure factors and their implication on land governance and practice for sustainability that can be categorized into the need for acknowledging land tenures and addressing land reforms. Based on these, a conceptual framework can be built that links the above-mentioned facts and includes the most important aspects of the challenges to be addressed carefully in order to make cities and communities sustainable. However, coping with the challenges requires not only political decisions but also involves stakeholders at various levels of land administration, central and local governments, and populations. Their interaction either as contributors to the improvement of land strategies or as direct and indirect beneficiaries of these, is critical for sustaining the process of addressing land tenure meanings and understanding, and land reforms. For so doing, this study proposes a six-step interaction of stakeholders in the implementation process. They address respectively:

- The acknowledgment of multiple values and meanings of land tenure;
- The acknowledgment of various perceptions and understandings of land tenure;
- The management of land access modes and land inequalities;
- The acknowledgment of distinct forms of justice towards land occupancy;
- The dissemination of land policies;
- Coping with unclear land tenures.

The role of each stakeholder in the proposed strategy is described below.

The central government includes the state and its employees. The central government owns or uses substantial amounts of land, which makes it a key stakeholder. The government is also a stakeholder as the financier of the reform process. As a major stakeholder, the government acts in the land reform process as the initiator and the steward of the process with a financial obligation. Its implication in the process runs from steps 1 to 6. In Benin,

the stewardship has been delegated to the National Agency for Land Development (ANDF) under the Ministry of Living Environment.

Other government stakeholders include all civil servants involved in the administration of land who are working in the departments of Lands, Physical Planning, Survey and Land Adjudication, and Settlement. They include technical officers, clerical officers, and subordinate staff. These groups of stakeholders' (named local authorities) implication extends through all six steps of the proposed strategy.

Donors are among the non-state actors. Resources from the donor community in terms of monetary donation, particularly to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), could complement the financial obligations of the central government. The donors could also assist in the reform process through technological transfer. In general, external donors sponsor land sector non-state actors, and international institutions dedicated to fighting poverty globally. For example, the Freidrich Ebert Stiftung is known as a major donor in the field of land reforms in many African countries, and in cases of slum-upgrading issues, the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) is a potential sponsor of awareness-creation projects.

The training institutions are also part of non-state stakeholder groups. In Benin, few institutions are concerned with the training of land administration and management staff working in the professions of surveying, planning, and property management. The few existing include the National Geographic Institute in charge of surveying and mapping (IGN). National polytechnics and universities may also support training the extra personnel needed to implement the reforms.

Private users of land include the public, but some users with special interests may form advocacy groups. These include local community organizations, which are generally concerned with the state of residential land use or with establishing a business-friendly environment. Other users of special note include slum residents, squatters, and informal traders. Professional organizations such as the Planners Association too can be active in the land reform process. They are trade associations of professionals who deal with land administration.

Political groups may also play an active role in the land reform process as the most injustices associated with the land delivery system in the past involved political patronage [35]. The ruling and the political class that gained from this patronage may either be keen to shoot down the reforms when the anti-reform politicians will call for the rejection of the constitution on the basis that the land reform clauses entrenched in the law were unacceptable. Nevertheless, the pro-reform politicians will call to initiate the implementation of the land reform proposals.

Landowners are generally private individuals, but there may be also corporate owners with substantial holdings. Even though such practices are not common in Benin at the time of this study, corporate owners including land-buying companies are starting to appear and there are also individuals and families with substantial holdings. Some of them are organized into landowners' associations, but others are not. Their role in the implementation process of land reform is also critical.

5.3. Originality of New Findings

Several studies examine the effects of insecure land tenure to offer a contribution to the field of land use management and adaptation. In the sense of previous research outcomes referred to and cited in this paper, the delineated key challenges provide major opportunities for governing land systems for sustainability by acknowledging multiple values and meanings of land policies, various perceptions, and understanding as well as power differentials in relation to land tenure security. They also give an argument to explicitly address land access modes and land inequalities by acknowledging distinct forms of justice towards land occupancy. However, few studies focused on specific issues such as housing issues that the present study investigates through a participatory approach of stakeholders on the land tenure question. Moreover, none of the above-mentioned

studies emphasized unclear land policies and community-based rights management for sustainability. These aspects are indeed fundamental in order to cope on a fair basis with land issues targeting both cities and communities.

Considering the above, the present study appears as a major contribution to the literature in the field of sustainable cities and balanced communities and their living space as guarantors of sustainable development.

5.4. Research Limitations

This study focused only on a few cities (five making the conurbation of Grand Nokoue in Southern Benin), among which only two cities (Cotonou and Abomey-Calavi) of the five making up Grand Nokoue allowed effective fieldwork and data collection in the urban study area. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic did not allow visiting householders in their living place, and this study used a database of surveys among householders from a previous study conducted by the authors in 2017–2018. Moreover, a few officers and experts from the conurbation of Grand Nokoue were interviewed considering their busy schedules and despite difficulties in contacting them at their offices. Although it is also important to investigate more, the specific features of the investigated cities and the high expertise of the interviewees in the field of land use planning and management make it enough to reach reliable conclusions.

6. Concluding Remarks

The study revealed that the safer the land tenure, the more investment in land, leading to better land exploitation. It suggests that communities tend to invest to a greater degree in improving their living conditions when they are assured that they would not be abusively evicted from their residence place. It asserts the hypothesis that secure access to land and guaranteed property rights are key to improving household livelihoods and supporting poverty alleviation.

The research has documented that land rights recognition by authorities is critical for reducing the proliferation of shantytowns and precarious housing. Moreover, land occupants' protection from sudden eviction and the provision of resettlement measures in case of necessity to move due to development projects, provide a perception of security that may enhance incentive for housing improvement. Customary rights recognition has also been proven to be a sensitive aspect of land tenure factors, the consideration of which will help improve land tenure security. The above-mentioned implications in turn play a role in processes that support the sustainable development of cities and communities.

This paper suggests addressing unclear land tenures and land reforms through an inclusive participatory approach that involves stakeholders at various levels of land administration, central and local governments, socio-political groups, and communities, and gives answers to questions related to housing issues, property rights regimes and the ways of access to land.

It provides a basis for some suggested future research that should be conducted to develop insights on how to cope with many other issues promoted by insecure land tenure in Sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, subjects related to (1) providing adequate shelter for all; (2) improving human settlements management; (3) promoting sustainable land-use planning and management; (4) promoting the integrated provision of environmental infrastructure: water, sanitation, drainage, and solid waste management deserve deeper investigation. More studies on land policy impact assessment are also needed to provide more available data on the land tenure question and fill the gap of accurate information necessary for the progress of science and development.

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