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Article

"The roller coaster": Accepting to climb corrupt practices or never making a formal title on property in southern cities. The case of the secondary towns of Bohicon (Benin) and Sokodé (Togo)

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Abstract: The issue of urban land management in the world in general and in Africa in particular has been exacerbated by the liberalization of land practices and the commodification of land, which has led to an increase in corrupt practices within land institutions in all cities. A mixed methodology was employed, combining a comparative case study of secondary towns with a quantitative survey of 559 landowners in the towns of Bohicon and Sokodé. In-depth interviews were conducted with 31 informants, who were surveyed on the land acquisition process, the individual determinants influencing corrupt practices, and the institutions most involved in these practices. The findings revealed that the acquisition of a formal title conferring property rights in both cities necessitates the completion of several steps. Corrupt practices are present at almost every stage of the transaction. The application of logistic regression models to the independent variables indicates that age and profession are highly significant in the sociodemographic characteristics of those most susceptible to engaging in these practices. Formal land administration institutions are the most involved in these types of everyday corruption. These practices are ultimately linked to people's life paths and cannot therefore be combated without psychosociological education and the promotion of ethical behavior among all stakeholders, particularly among those who demand services.

Keywords: corrupt practices; moral economy; land title; Bohicon; Sokodé

1. Introduction

The issue of urban land management is assuming greater significance in media and scientific debates at the global level, and particularly in Africa, in the context of the challenges posed by rapid urbanization. This is connected to the numerous issues pertaining to land privatization in general and land conflicts in urban areas in particular. In the literature, the urban environment is the object of covetousness on the part of leaders and citizens alike. According to geostatistical data, over 55% of the African population currently resides in urban areas (Africapolis, 2023; Yapi-Diahou, 2015). One more generation and this population will be close to 70%. Nearly 2/3 of this population will live in agglomerations of fewer than one million inhabitants (SWAC/OECD, 2020). According to Marais et al. (2019), most of the planet's inhabitants live in a small or medium-sized city. This relative urban dynamic of so-called secondary cities is characterized in West Africa by the expansion of small towns in the interior and by the formation of agglomerations through coalescence at different scales (Moriconi-Ebrard et al., 2016). Unlike investment in real estate in most Western

cities, land remains highly visible in intensely urbanized African countries (Aveline-Dubach et al., 2010). It is inevitably at the heart of most urban transformations.

The liberalization of land tenure practices that began in colonial times has been accentuated by the promotion of neoliberalism. This practice, whereby rulers ensure rapid prosperity for their citizens by freeing up markets, initiated a land transition toward hypermarchandization actively pursued by various actors as a means of generating economic gains for themselves (Carmody and Owusu, 2016; Lin and Zhang, 2014; Ofosu-Kusi and Danso-Wiredu, 2014; Pieterse, 2008). The implementation of structural adjustment programs (SAPs) from the 1980s onward thwarted all policies for social housing and urban renewal by public authorities in major cities (Biehler et al., 2015). Currently, the urban explosion has taken off unstoppably in all cities, even secondary cities, where little or nothing is planned to house and provide services for the population (Davis, 2006). It goes without saying, then, that the conditions of residence are created by the inhabitants themselves through the acquisition of a plot of land on which to build their home. However, at first glance, none of the official, traditional or local channels for acquiring a plot of land are properly regulated; they are fraught with pitfalls and disappointments; and they give rise to baroque assemblages and hideous alliances (Piermay, 2003). In light of the intense attachment that urban residents have to their homes, even at the expense of significant personal costs, all regulatory actors engage in subterfuge to derive maximum benefit from this journey (Guézéré, 2011). This impetus facilitates the establishment of corrupt practices in land systems, whether local or public, state owned or managed by local authorities.

In a situation where customary and legal land tenure systems coexist, as is the case in most African countries, varying forms of ownership are considered under law and social norms. However, the state tends to impose legal law as the only means of acquiring land rights (Chung, 2024). In the public arena, only documents produced by the government serve as reliable land data that can legitimize ownership. However, administrative services (land registry office, surveyors' and notaries' offices, land bank, etc.) face several difficulties in their operations, with the result that few official documents, in this case land titles, manage to be produced (de Vries, 2004). Wallace and Williamson (2006) estimate that 2%–5% of formal titles are produced in Africa. While the reliability of these titles is guaranteed by the articles of the land and property laws, they can be contested[1]. Worse still, given that users are already well informed by their relatives about the complexity, fraud, favoritism and abuses that govern the process, they avoid taking the plunge or going through the whole process until they feel totally insecure.

Understanding land corruption in African cities, especially on a small scale, means first and foremost grasping all the dimensions of the moral economy. According to Olivier de Sardan (1996), these rules fit into a broad configuration of daily market and nonmarket negotiations, in which it is not simply a question of negotiating through brokers, the rules of the game being stable and accepted by all parties but also of negotiating through bribes, gifts, symbolic charges, mutual aid, etc.; the rules themselves. Pierce (2016), in his study of the moral economy of corruption, believes that it reveals the relationship between the citizen and the state and is a sign of an ongoing action where official practices linked to the ideological processes of the state

are "legitimately" diverted to unofficial, personal ends. Corruption is considered both improper by the state and permitted within its sphere of action. The economy of a moral good such as land is therefore subject to a sprawling bureaucracy that underlines the involvement of several institutions, several economic practices and several normative moral meanings. The latter empower social agents in their quest to harvest where they have never harvested before (Doberson and Kohl, 2023).

The way in which the institutions in charge of land issues operate means that even the preconditions—such as the signing of agreements between buyers and purchasers, signatures by traditional authorities and local authorities, the initialling of witnesses, the request for a notary's service for the notarial deed, the performance of various tasks by private and accredited surveyors, and the filing of files with the offices in charge of the file control and verification processes—are all infested with corrupt practices and encourage the circulation of illegal documents. The fact that everyone thinks they have to protect themselves from public service malfunctions through corruption leads everyone to practice it. As a result, corrupt practices become more widespread and commonplace and increase dysfunction and uncertainty as to the outcome of administrative procedures. This could mean that corruption is linked to the entire land transaction process and therefore to the production of reliable data in urban operations. According to Transparency International Zimbabwe (2013), corruption linked to land registration or transfer services is one of the sectors with the highest prevalence and is not conducive to the availability of reliable land data. Reliability presupposes that transaction data are available, up to date and updated on a permanent basis so that they can serve as information for all potential purchasers of land and promote sustainable land management.

A number of studies and reports have examined corrupt practices in the land governance sector in sub-Saharan Africa. These include, but are not limited to, the work of Chiweshe (2020), Ghebrehiwet (2017), Nuhu and Mbambije (2017), Transparency International (2019, 2023) and Wren-Lewis (2013). The majority of these studies have focused on rural land grabbing and access to urban land in peripheral areas. This has entailed investigating the specific forms of corruption, the underlying causes, the links between different forms of corruption, the consequences of corruption and recommendations for combating corruption in the areas of land administration and planning, leasing and transfer of property rights, access to land and expropriation. However, few studies have examined not only secondary cities but also the processes underlying everyday corrupt practices, their individual determinants and the institutions involved. This study, which compares the case of two West African secondary towns, Bohicon (Benin) and Sokodé (Togo), aims to answer the following questions.

- What are the land acquisition processes in the secondary towns of Bohicon and Sokodé?
- What are the individual determinants of corrupt practices in the secondary towns of Bohicon and Sokodé?
- Which institutions are perceived as the most corrupt in the land acquisition process in Bohicon and Sokodé?

Following the introductory section, the subsequent section presents the overarching context of corruption in the land sector at the national level in the two countries under study. This is followed by an examination of everyday corrupt practices through the lens of the adaptive life-course theory. The methodology, results and discussion and conclusion sections then follow.

2. Land corruption in Benin and Togo

Togo and Benin are neighbouring countries that share a common geographical border and a close cultural and sociological relationship (Ades and Chua, 1997; Dietz, 2002; Jeanpierre, 2010; Le Gallo, 2000). In Africa, countries that border one another tend to have a shared historical legacy, shaped by a complex history of migration and colonialism. Some authors posit that this proximity can manifest as a comparable degree of corruption across all socioeconomic dimensions and interactions (Goel and Nelson, 2007; Goel and Saunoris, 2022).

Tracking corruption perceptions over the past two decades, Benin and Togo have generally scored below average (5/10 or 50/100) in all Transparency International rankings since 2004. This reveals an endemic level of corruption in these countries. In the land sector, nearly 4 out of 5 people consider corruption to be a serious problem, manifesting itself through poor documentation and a lack of registration in a land registry in countries with a dual land governance system (Transparency International, 2024). This duality, inherited from colonial times, is exploited by the state in its approach to allocating individual property. However, the heterogeneity of stakeholders in positions of power and de jure or de facto control of land resources means that a range of acts, allocation decisions, registration of rights, transfer of ownership and arbitration of competing interests are carried out on the bangs of the law, encouraging corruption (Chigbu et al., 2024; Lavigne Delville et al., 2023).

In Benin and Togo, all state structures, land operators, courts, local government officials, representatives of authorities, extralegal organisations, traditional bodies, various informal agents, and so forth, are regarded as potentially corrupt. This perception is shaped by a combination of factors, including porous legislation, inefficient administration, a dearth of public involvement in governance, a clientelist political system, and a multitude of norms and regulations established at disparate institutional levels and levels of authority, which contribute to a complex web of land corruption. Petty corruption is then embedded in all land acquisition and registration procedures, forming a chain of corruption (Guinin Asso, 2022; Kakai, 2012; Ntampaka, 2008).

In both countries, the arrangements for registering landed property follow almost the same principles as those used in public services. (i) Formulation of the requisition and deposit of the provision, (ii) acceptance of the requisition by the registrar or land registrar, (iii) publicity of the request, (iv) contradictory demarcation, (v) registration of the property in the Register, (vi) posting, (vii) entry in the register of deposits, and (viii) establishment of the title lexicon. The whole procedure is riddled with clientelist networks, and corruption is fostered by actors at all levels. Even though in both countries, the State is attempting to put an end to abuses by introducing a schedule of

fees for issuing land deeds and setting probable deadlines[2], the results fall short of expectations (Magnon, 2010; Nouwadjro, 2023).

These observations collectively indicate the presence of a contagion effect, which has been perpetuated by all individuals belonging to a socioeconomic group whose competing interests are nurtured through various recognition processes in social environments. Therefore, an adaptation of life-course theory can be used to analyse the intertwined determinants of corrupt practices.

3. Adapting life-course theory to corrupt practices

To address the issue of corruption analytically here, we need to differentiate between the act of corruption and the nature of the associated actors (Babena, 2018). The fact of "giving oneself to corruption", i.e., voluntarily or involuntarily accepting favors in the performance of a task, is different from "corrupt person", an expression that can make people believe that corruption is in nature. However, taking Koenig (2016) as a starting point, for whom "corruption is life", we understand that the path is the multiple trajectories of individuals who have conceptual implications between nature and action in each area of cognitive activity, leading individuals to make life choices that depend on the opportunities and constraints of social structure and culture. That said, corruption is not a phenomenon limited to specific acts and decisions. It's a process involving the accumulation of attitudes, deliberate planning, historical antecedents, social mobility, group affiliation and other sociological factors (Alatas, 1980; Dimant, 2013).

These factors highlight the influence of society on the path taken by individuals in institutional circles, with lexicological codifications shared by all. Thus, it is common knowledge to hear expressions such as "the goat only grazes where it is tied", "to massage the hump, you need an ointment", "you cannot have a massage without oil", "the one who feeds the child must wash his hands", "you must put a stone on your back or the wind will blow it away", etc., used by all to justify corrupt acts. For some authors, these are deviant behaviors, deviations in behavior, a dysfunctional manifestation of institutions, whether social or professional, resulting from several principles (Philip, 1997; Rose-Ackermann, 1997).

In this respect, Gherghel and Saint Jacques (2013) identify five principles derived from life-course theory. These findings lead us to characterize the phenomenon of corruption. Thus, (i) the development principle sees corruptive acts as a psychological and social phenomenon that pushes an individual to practice them throughout his or her existence, (ii) the temporality principle raises the point that events that take place at specific times can encourage corruptive practices, (iii) the interdependence principle shows that each individual is linked by different systems and therefore corruptive practices are determined by the influence of the entourage, (iv) the principle of time and space explains that the corruptive path of individuals is shaped by the time and place in which their lives take place, and (v) the principle of subjectivity by which each person qualifies and measures corruption according to its form, its severity, its identified consequences, the type of person, and the time spent waiting for a document, for example. Through these principles, the sociodemographic variables of all towns in

general, particularly small- and medium-sized towns, such as Bohicon or Sokodé, can explain the various influences that lead actors to indulge in corruption.

4. Materials and methods

4.1. Studies area

The urban development of Bohicon and Sokodé began in colonial times. Indeed, Bohicon, a town in the interior, began its urban structuring in 1906 with the construction of certain urban infrastructures (railway stations, markets, etc.) by the French colonial administration. These facilities served as the starting point for urbanization and the commercialization of land. The population began to grow (from less than 10,000 to nearly 172,000 today) and, owing to cross-border trade, has maintained an unprecedented urban dynamic. It is located less than 130 km from the capital city and is linked by the country's main roads (Route Nationale Inter Etat (RNIE 2&4)).

Sokodé, a central city, is also one of the country's dynamic inland towns in terms of economy, space and population. Like Bohicon, its urbanization is linked to colonial administration (German_1896–1914 and later French_1920–1958). Until recently[3], it was second only to the capital Lomé. Its population is close to 178,000, according to the results of the 5ème general census of the country in 2023. It is located in Tchaoudjo Prefecture and is the capital of 4 communes (Tchaoudjo 1, 2, 3, 4) as well as the capital of the central region, which comprises several prefectures **(Figure 1).**

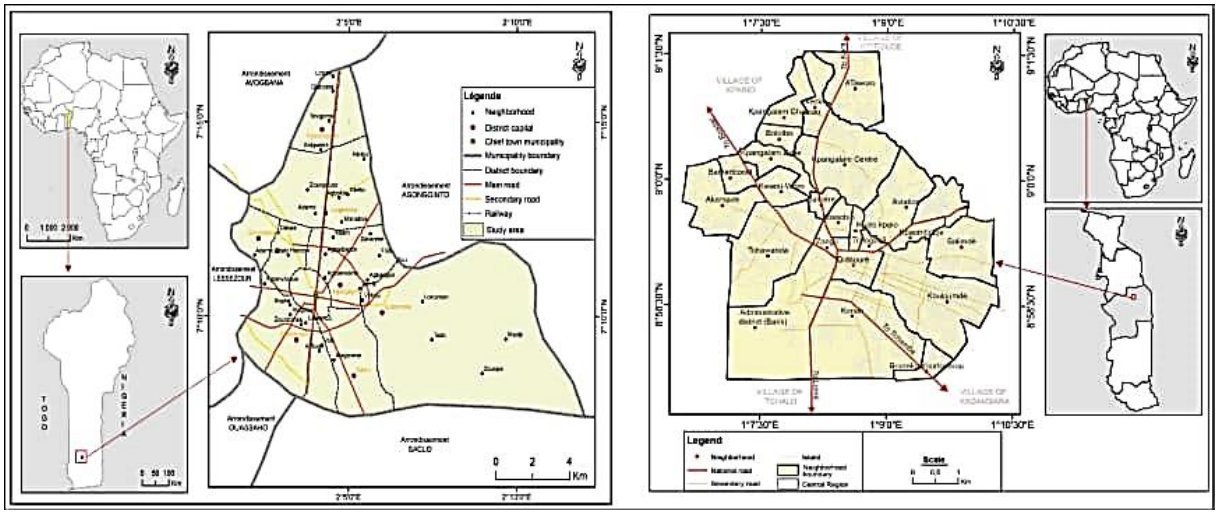

Figure 1. Geographical location of the study area.

Source: Benin—Ministry of Decentralization and Local Governance, Togo—Map from the Sokodé master plan revision study, 2014, Subnational Administrative Boundaries, 2022, updated by the authors, 2024.

Figure 1 shows the urban dynamics of the two communities studied in their respective countries through the presence of urban infrastructures and superstructures.

4.2. Data collection

This study opted for a mixed comparative case study approach. The aim was to gain an in-depth prior understanding of all the stages involved in land acquisition,

particularly land titling in the cities studied, and to understand the corruption that is grafted on to the stages of land formalization so decried by the population. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data in the field.

The in-depth qualitative method was based on a literature review and discussion of the land acquisition process. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject, it is essential to consider a number of key concepts, including corruption, land acquisition, land transactions, land securitization, land formalization and moral economy. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of experts and professional networks. These included the heads of cadastral services, council officials, tax officers, technical structures, land defence associations, surveyors, traditional authorities and notaries, as shown in the table (Appendix A).

The interviews allowed us to examine the various stages of the land transaction in greater detail and to gain insight into the potential manifestations of the phenomenon. Furthermore, the interviews enabled the identification of variables for the construction of the landowner questionnaire, including sociodemographic variables, land practices, the land market, documentary procedures, property rights and security of tenure, the production of land data and property valuation.

To this end, data from the most recent general population censuses in both countries and their various projections were used to establish various samples. In Benin, data from the 4th general population and housing census (RGPH 4) of 2013 and projections for 2016 revealed that 171,781 people for 38,270 households are distributed in the urban centers of the 10 arrondissements of the commune of Bohicon.

The 5th general population and housing census of 2023 in Togo revealed that 177,706 individuals, comprising 44,426 households, reside in the 5 cantons of the commune of Sokodé. To determine the study population, a general sampling formula was employed to ascertain the number of households to be included, and a cluster allocation to arrondissements and cantons was used to determine the number of households to be surveyed per territory (see Appendix B)

As a result, 311 respondents from 10 arrondissements in Bohicon and 248 people from 5 cantons in Sokodé were selected. Data collection was carried out at random across 28 districts (16 in Bohicon and 12 in Sokodé), with a margin of error of 5%. We took into account the heads of household or, where possible, tried to contact the main owner or the person in charge in the case of rentals. In several cases where we were confronted with difficulties in finding a contact, we chose another contact instead of the one designated according to the steps selected and covered all the samples selected.

4.3. Data processing

Qualitative data collected via audio recordings were transcribed via the Speechnotes application and by manual transcription after consent and assurance of anonymity had been obtained from all study participants. The data were then grouped by expertise, role and theme, and a content analysis was carried out.

The quantitative data were imported into the *R* software for processing, visualization and statistical testing.

A binary logit logistic regression model was employed to ascertain the individual determinants of corrupt practices among the respondents. The objective was to identify the socio-demographic characteristics that were significant in the context of corruption. To ensure the robustness of the analysis, the model was adjusted for a number of control variables, including the mode of transaction, the nature of the plot of land acquired, the social relationship, the importance of the position of the plot of land, and the perception of the value and layout of documents on the property. All with a 95% confidence interval and a significance test. To enhance the explanatory model's quality, we employed a stepwise top-down selection approach. The Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) was utilized as the criterion in this study. Widely regarded as a leading criterion for improving models, the AIC is based on the principle that a lower AIC value indicates a superior model. Furthermore, the chi-squared test was utilized to assess the significance of the various relationships identified between the cities.

5. Results

The results presented here are based on several points that are essentially linked to the research objectives, namely, processes, individual determinants and the institutions of greatest concern.

5.1. Land acquisition at Bohicon and Sokodé

In the towns studied (Bohicon and Sokodé), the acquisition process is generally governed by positive national law, which stipulates that acquired land (particularly new land) must be registered in cadastral databases and that a land title deed must be issued to acquirers, giving them exclusive rights of use, state recognition of ownership, inclusion in the taxpayer base and favorable mortgage and loan conditions for economic development. To obtain this document, most acquirers follow several steps, as shown in the **Figures 2 and 3** below.

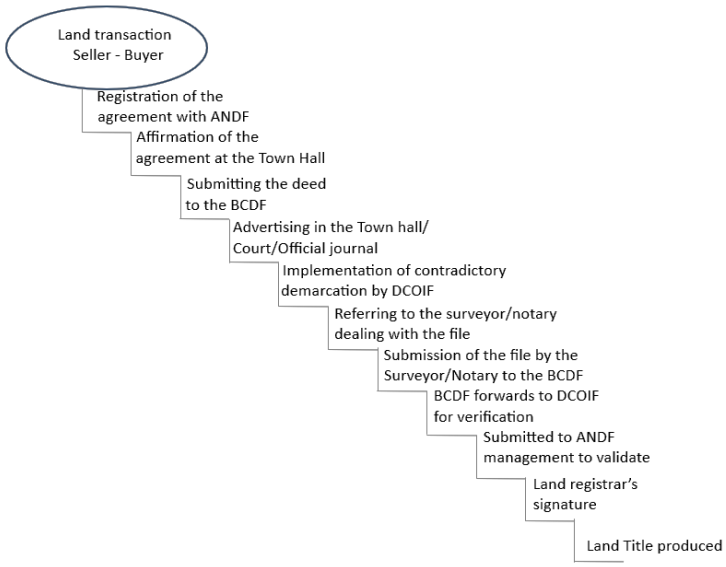

Figure 2. Land acquisition process in Benin.

Source: Direction du Cadastre et des Opérations d'Information Foncière-Bénin, updated by the authors, 2024.

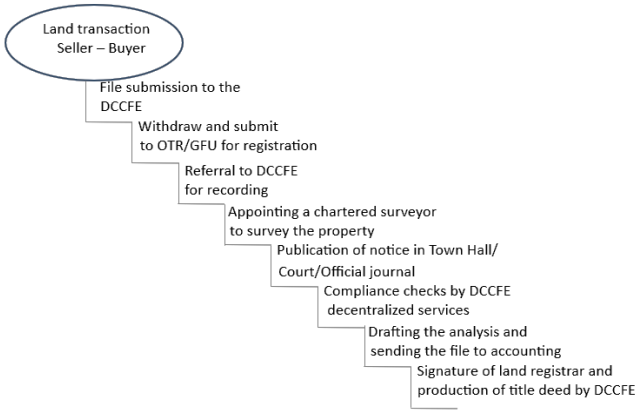

Figure 3. Land acquisition process in Togo.
Source: OTR_ Direction du Cadastre, de la Conservation Foncière et de l'Enregistrement, 2023.

In both cases, these are the general stages in the land titling process. In Benin, after the transaction, the applicant registers his or her request with the Bureau Communal du Domaine et du Foncier (BCDF_ a decentralized service of the Agence Nationale du Domaine et du Foncier) of the territory in which the parcel is located; then, the deeds are affirmed at town hall and returned to the BCDF for publicity before being forwarded to the Direction Technique du Cadastre et des Opérations d'Informations Foncières (DCOIF) for the contradictory demarcation process. After demarcation, the files are forwarded to ANDF's Régie principale for the preparation of all the internal documents required for title production. This process is almost identical to that in Togo, where the applicant submits the application files to the deconcentrated services of the Direction du Cadastre, de la Conservation Foncière et de l'Enregistrement (DCCFE), but without necessarily going through the town hall. He then submits the file to the Guichet Foncier Unique services at the Office Togolais des Recettes (OTR) for all the payments and verifications involved in registering the deed. He then submits the requisition file for registration to the DCCFE, which proceeds with the publicity and contradictory demarcation before the internal process of producing the title itself.

In addition to these general legal steps, several submodalities further complicate the process for acquirers in these two countries. This complexity is a breeding ground for corrupt practices.

5.1.1. Evidence of corrupt practices in the securitization process

On the basis of the sample of landowners drawn from the two towns, the informants were asked about their experience of corrupt practices at any level of the acquisition process and the steps involved in producing the various land deeds (Forget and Paillé, 2012). **Table 1** reveals that this phenomenon is evident in both environments.

Table shows the respondents' experiences with corrupt practices. In Bohicon, 77% (66% of men and 11% of women) said they had paid bribes, indulged in favoritism or played on relationships in land acquisition procedures.

Table 1. Experience of corrupt practices.

Cities	Experience				No experience				Total	
	Men		Women		Men		Women			
Bohicon	205	66%	34	11%	59	19%	13	4%	311	100%
Sokodé	83	34%	12	5%	142	57%	11	4%	248	100%

Source: Field data, authors, 2024.

In Sokodé, 39% (34% men and 5% women) say that they have experienced corrupt practices. The difference in percentages between the two towns is striking but can be explained by the fact that the higher the level of documentation (as is the case in Bohicon), the more likely people are to give in to corrupt practices. **Figure 4** below shows the evolution of landowners in document production.

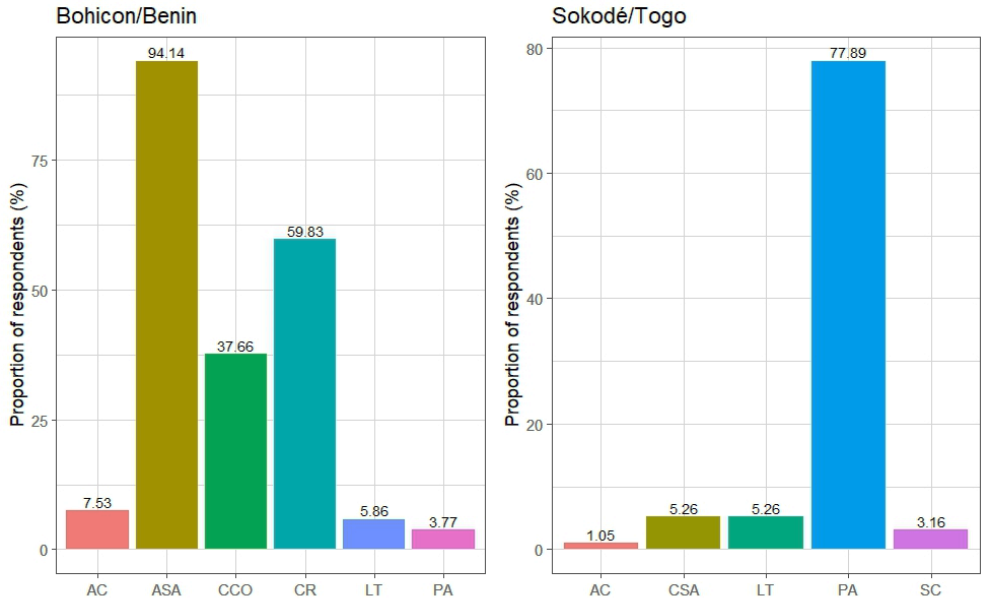

Figure 4. Trends in the production of land documents.

Source: Authors, 2024.

Figure 4 shows that 94.14% of landowners have affirmed their agreement of sale (ASA) at the communal level, and 59.83% have a document indicating that they have been resettled (CR) after public subdivision work in the city. Even if few (5.86%) have gone as far as the land title (LT), the data show that landowners in Bohicon tend to experience corrupt practices more in the public sector, particularly at the level of communal services. Unlike in Sokodé, where private contracts (PAs), limited to the signature of traditional chiefs, account for the bulk of deeds acquired (77.8%), few have proceeded to the confirmation of sale (CSA) at the town hall (5.26%) or to the acquisition of the LT (5.26%). All of these findings show that as much as corruption is experienced in the production of formal documents, it manifests in the informal sector. The chi2 test shows that the proportions between the two cities are significantly different, with a *p*-value of 0.0836.

These points help us understand that corruption evolves according to the level reached in the documentation. However, several variables may be conducive to corrupt

practices. The case of independent variables, notably sociodemographic characteristics, is highlighted here to understand the internal effects or inherent logic of these practices in the everyday lives of actors.

5.1.2. Sociodemographic variables and corrupt practices

In Bohicon, as in Sokodé, respondents were asked about sociodemographic variables likely to influence those who had given themselves over to corruption or accepted it as a fait accompli when requesting a service. **Figures 5 and 6** below shows the significance of these variables for landowners in the titling process.

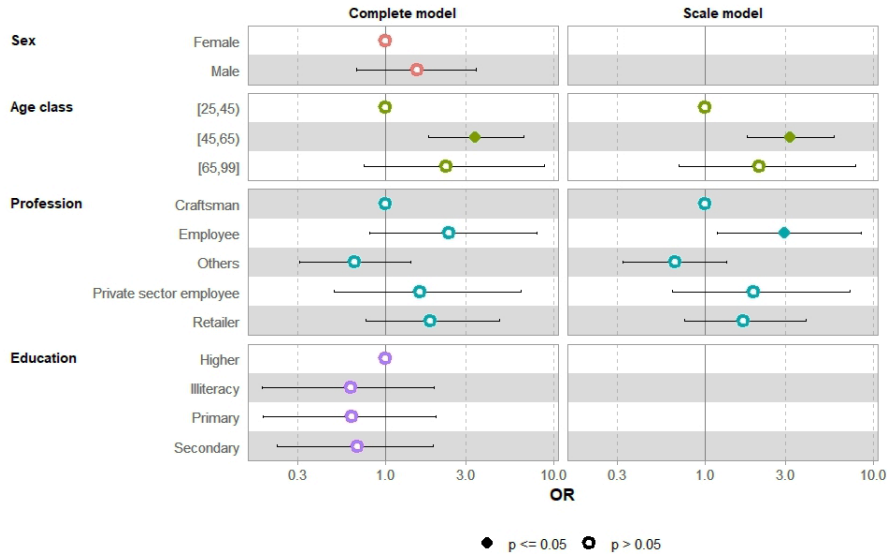

Figure 5. Sociodemographic variables and corrupt practices in Bohicon.

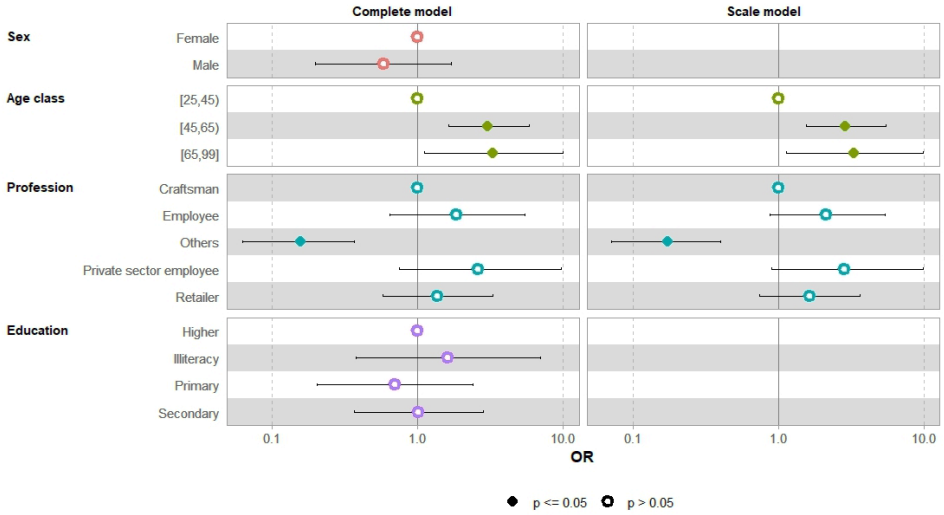

Figure 6. Sociodemographic variables and corrupt practices in Sokodé.

Source: Authors, 2024

The two figures illustrate the results of a logistic regression highlighting the effects of sociodemographic factors such as gender, age, education and profession in both localities. The model was developed by including these four variables (full model), and its quality was assessed via the AIC (reduced model). In Bohicon, the results of the full model show that the age classes [45,65] and [65,99], as well as civil

servants, private sector employees and shopkeepers, have odds ratios greater than 1. This suggests that these classes are more exposed to corrupt practices. *P*-values of less than 0.05 for the age groups [45,65] and [65,99] (0.001 and 0.02, respectively) indicate that the differences in odds are highly significant in relation to the age group [25,45]. On the other hand, the significance of the differences is also observed in the other professions (self-employed, transport operator, businessman, etc.), although the odds ratios are less than 1. The AIC increased from 288.95 to 284.08 in the reduced model, which shows that statistically, age class and profession are the most significant variables, whereas gender and level of education have only minor effects. This means that regardless of the gender and educational level of the landowners, they are subject to corruption. The finding is similar in Sokodé, almost at the level of each driven variable.

Through sociodemographic variables, it is clear that the life-course of individuals influences corrupt practices, and these practices take place in several institutions.

5.2. Land institutions and corrupt practices in Bohicon and Sokodé

In line with the data collected from landowners in the towns of Bohicon and Sokodé, the classification of the degree of corruption varies according to the direct or indirect experience of corrupt practices in land institutions. Thus, according to **Figure 7**, several institutions are involved.

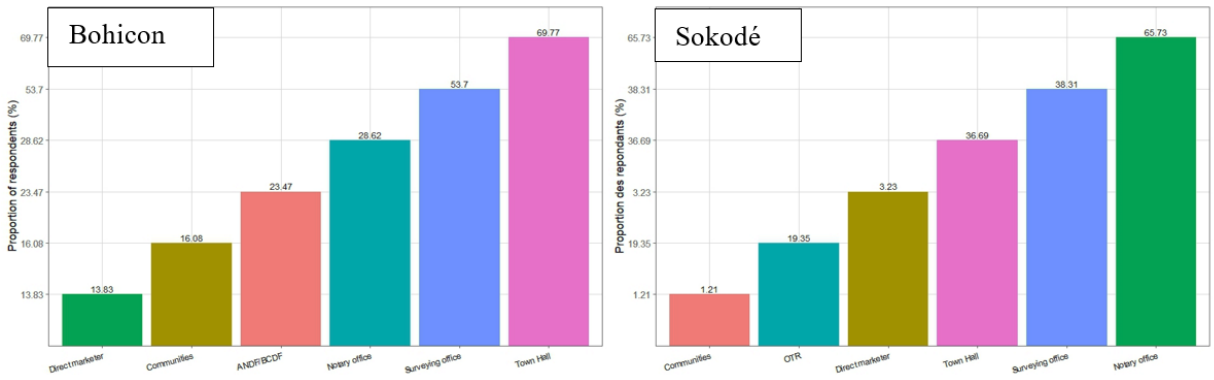

Figure 7. Land tenure institutions and corrupt practices in Bohicon and Sokodé.
Source: Authors, 2024

An analysis of this figure reveals that in Bohicon, 69.77% of the respondents perceive the town hall as the institution most involved in corruption, followed by the surveyor's office (53.7%), the notary's office (26.62%), the Agence Nationale du Domaine et du Foncier (ANDF_23.47%) and the main institutions that can be classified as informal (local authorities, canvassers, etc.). On the other hand, in Sokodé, the notary's office is perceived as the institution most involved in corruption, according to 65.73% of the respondents, whereas the surveyor's office is reported at 38.31%, followed by the town hall (36.69%) and the Office Togolais des Recettes (OTR_19.35%). In general, institutions that can be classified as informal are considered to be slightly corrupt. The difference in proportions between respondents in the two localities is statistically significant, with a *p*-value of less than 0.001.

6. Discussions

The land acquisition and titling discussed in this work are the result of the informal transaction market developed as an alternative to the failure of governments to structure and be the main promoters of land exchange in African cities (Antwi and Adams, 2003; Derso and Gebremichael, 2023; Fekade, 2000; Kombe and Kreibich, 2000). For Kironde (2000), Africa's rapid urbanization is generally accompanied by the inability of public authorities to provide formal goods, and they are forced to deal with the informal sector, which is evolving in parallel with this urbanization. In addition, in a context of legal pluralism, such as that of most countries inherited from colonial-era institutions, land acquisition procedures range from informal social negotiation to documentation sanctioned by a formal title deed (Nkurunziza, 2008). However, the process of obtaining title documents does not depend solely on formal institutions, as might have been expected, but rather on the individual's ability to cope with the cumbersome, time-consuming and costly procedures involved. This situation is a consequence of the ineptitude of the official management structures, and the prevalence of corruption is an indicator of the failure of these institutions (Kadewandana et al., 2024; Rakodi, 2003). This corruption, which can be described as both moral and administrative, is explained by several characteristics, including sociodemographic characteristics such as gender, age, profession, education, income, etc.

This study, carried out in Bohicon and Sokodé, focused on 5 items: gender, age, profession, education and income. However, 4 were ultimately retained, given that income had rendered all the others insignificant. This means that corrupt practices and their robustness are conditional. Additionally, income may be correlated with profession in this case. All the other 4 variables affect corrupt practices. Age and profession are highly significant compared with gender and level of education. For Mangafic and Vesselinovic (2020), age in particular is a significant predictor of corruption. People of adult age between [45,65] are the most likely to give in. This can be explained by the fact that these are periods when every head of household fights hard to acquire a piece of land to build a "home" before possible retirement. Torgler & Valev (2004), in their cross-national studies, also showed that people between the ages of 30 and 65 are more likely to justify bureaucratic corruption than those under 30. In a study of psycho-demographic factors and attitudes toward corruption in Osun State, Nigeria, Adejumo (2010) reported that age had a significant positive relationship with attitudes toward corruption among public service employees. Furthermore, investigating demographic factors affecting corruption perception in Estonia (Eastern Europe), Çiçek, (2018) tested the significance of independent variables such as age, gender, religion, education, professional status and income level and reported that (i) income level is the most significant factor, (ii) the more an individual's age evolves, the less he or she gives in to corruption, (iii) the more people have a stable profession, the more likely they are to commit to corruption, and (iv) gender is the least influential factor, followed by level of education. In any case, sociodemographic variables influence corrupt practices. This influence has led Melgar et al. (2010) to argue that the individual is a rational actor who makes decisions by balancing benefits and costs according to individual characteristics such as values and moral opinions.

In the case of this study, those individuals who engage in corrupt practices do so in the various land institutions that abound in the two localities. The results of the two environments indicate that institutions that can be classified as informal are less represented than those that can be classified as formal. According to Koechlin et al. (2016), in the field of urban land administration and allocation, one of the most common forms of corruption is the bribery of land officials, especially as the various processes involve a variety of formal authorities to facilitate access to information, decisions or favorable outcomes. According to these authors, corrupt practices become commonplace when new powers are granted to local authorities to promote economic and social development. Durand-Lasserve (2019) also made the same point, saying that the decentralization of land management in West Africa in particular has often led to a shift rather than a decline in corruption in land administration. In essence, corruption in the land sector is pervasive and the countries grappling with it must prioritize the reconstruction of land administration institutions, alongside efforts to enhance trust to facilitate secure access to land (Brankov and Tanjević, 2013; Danish et al., 2024).

7. Conclusion

This empirical study of land corruption in two secondary towns (Bohicon/Benin and Sokodé/Togo) concentrated on the analysis of corrupt practices within the land acquisition process. Specifically, the objectives focused on the process of titling land acquisitions, individual determinants of corrupt practices and the land institutions involved, with the goal of elucidating the difficulties that landowners face in securing absolute land rights in most cities in sub-Saharan Africa. The link between these three objectives is interesting insofar as it leads us to understand the complexity of urban land governance in the face of sustainable development challenges. The results indicate that the diversity of actors and institutions means that corruption is evident in the land acquisition process. For acquirers, this evidence is linked to certain sociodemographic characteristics, such as sex, age, profession and level of education. However, we found that age and profession were most significant in Bohicon (Benin) and Sokodé (Togo), according to logistic regression. These corrupt practices are more evident in formal than in informal institutions.

This research has the merit of elucidating the fact that urban land corruption, like other types of everyday corruption, is more closely linked to the moral economy. Consequently, the traditional dichotomy between users as victims and civil servants as villains is no longer tenable. It traps all stakeholders in a vicious circle in which most corrupt actions are not necessarily voluntary and do not depend solely on the individual's particular interest. It is a social phenomenon that is part and parcel of the life-course of individuals, as revealed by the effects of individual determinants. Anti-corruption measures cannot be confined to legislation and international conventions, as is currently the case, but must also include psycho-sociological education to promote ethical behavior among those responsible for services but also, above all, among those seeking services.

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Notes

[1] For example, articles 145 new to 148 new of law no. 2017-15 of August 10, 2017 amending and supplementing law no. 2013-01 of August 14, 2013 on the Land and Property Code in the Republic of Benin, or articles 256 to 259 of law no. 2018-005 of June 14, 2018 on the Land and Property Code in Togo.

[2] Article 18 of law n° 2018-39 of 29 December 2018 on the finance law, for the 2019 management in the republic of Benin. It incorporates and modifies the provisions of Article 20 of Law n°2017-40 of December 29, 2017. In Togo, the 2023 manual of procedures for establishing land title, registering and cancelling mortgages, published by the Office Togolais des Recettes, summarizes the fees.

[3] The latest demographic trends show that the northern city of Kara, now the administrative capital, is experiencing a dynamic that, according to the 5ème general census (RGPH-5), places it in second place.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Summary of the key informants interviewed.

City/Country	Key informants	Number	Roles/functions
Bohicon/Benin	Director, DCOIF (ANDF)	1	Coordinates national cadastral control activities
	BCDF/ANDF agent	1	Monitoring and control of cadastral transactions and operations in the commune
	RFU/Mairie agents	2	In charge of assertion, property taxation
	Private surveyors	3	Carries out demarcation and contradictory demarcation work
	Tax department manager	1	Receipt and registration of the sales agreement
	IGN Division Manager	1	National land data archiving and subdivision monitoring
	Direct marketers	2	Broker in charge of finding land for sale and customers
	SVGF representatives	2	Supports the government and the public in recognizing owners
Subtotal (1)		13	
Sokodé/Togo	Head of DCCFE	1	Coordinates cadastral activities at national level
	Head of Division DCCFE Sokodé and archiving	2	Carry out land conservation activities in communes
	Councillors/Agents at the Town Hall	2	Deal with land confirmation acts and land projects
	Surveyors	4	Boundaries and document production processes
	Direct marketers	3	Brokers in charge of finding land for sale and customers
	Head of canton/village/neighbourhood	5	Validation of land transactions in their locality of jurisdiction
	Notary	1	Legal support for buyers
Subtotal (2)		18	
Total		31	

Source: Authors, 2024.

Appendix B

Table B1. Number of households selected per cluster in the arrondissements and cantons of Bohicon and Sokodé.

Cities	Arrondissements/cantons	Number of households	Study population
Bohicon	Agongointo	2033	19
	Bohicon I	9087	69
	Bohicon II	11668	81
	Lissezoum	1700	15
	Ouassaho	2758	23
	Saclo	1670	15
	Sodohomé	3832	15
	Avogbanna	2238	35
	Passagon	2478	23
	Gnidjazoum	806	8
Total (1)	10	38270	311
Sokodé/Tchaoudjo 1	Kpangalam	9279	61
	Komah	22901	95
	Tchalo	2218	18
	Kadambara	5881	43
	Kparatao	4147	31
Total (2)	5	44426	248

Source: Authors, 2024