

HOW DO KEY ACTORS AND GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES INTERACT IN LARGE-SCALE LAND ACQUISITION? AN INSTITUTIONAL THEORY PERSPECTIVE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Large-scale land acquisitions (LSLAs) are frequently promoted as catalysts for investment and economic growth in developing countries. However, prevailing research often overlooks how the clash between formal institutions and traditional, customary land interests shapes equity and justice for local communities. Addressing this gap, this study employs institutional theory to analyse the Lekki Free Trade Zone (LFTZ) project in Lagos, Nigeria, examining how the interplay of formal and traditional institutions shapes negotiation power and ultimately, investment outcomes. Through a qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with government representatives, international investors, and host communities, the findings reveal a profound institutional misalignment. The regulative pillar, centred on the Land Use Act of 1978, created coercive framework that systematically undervalued land, fostered bureaucratic corruption, and led to grossly inadequate compensation. The normative pillar's promise of modernisation and jobs was undermined by the absence of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) and the failure to honour resettlement and benefit-sharing agreements, which eroded legitimacy and triggered conflict. Most fundamentally, the cultural-cognitive pillar highlights a clash of logics: where communities view land as ancestral and spiritual heritage. The study concludes that sustainable development requires governance reforms that bridge formal and traditional systems by integrating customary norms, rigorously enforcing FPIC, and ensuring procedural transparency.



KEYWORDS

- Large-scale land acquisitions
- Institutions
- Peri-urban regions
- Land rights
- Land investments
- Customary rights
- Institutional theory

RESEARCH RELEVANCE

- Misalignment of formal laws and customary norms creates power asymmetries.
- Lack of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), and broken promises erode legitimacy and trigger social conflict.
- Reforms are needed to integrate customary norms, enforce FPIC, and ensure transparency.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Amidu, A.-R., Agboola, A. O., & Bolomope, M. (2026). How do key actors and governance structures interact in large-scale land acquisition? An institutional theory perspective. *Land Use Policy*, 164, Article 107963. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2026.107963>

“The research affirms that sustainable and equitable land governance requires institutional complementarity. This entails moving beyond a top-down imposition of formal rules to actively integrate customary norms and values into the legal and procedural framework.”

