

Navigating Formal Land Acquisition Channels for Construction Projects in Lagos: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract

Construction projects, like other activities, take place on land, thereby making land acquisition a crucial factor in construction ventures. This is because land acquisition is one of the important decisions that make or mar a construction venture, as other activities depend on getting a suitable site for the project. This paper examined the process of land acquisition from the various formal land delivery channels of Lagos, Nigeria. Primary and secondary data were employed for the study. Secondary data on the procedure of land allocation in the various channels of land delivery collected from Government Offices Providing Land Administration Services (GOPLAS) were analysed in addition to interviews with 19 senior officials of the GOPLDS. The result revealed that there were five different formal land delivery channels in the study area, which include Site and Service Scheme, Private Sector Developers' Programme, and Excision. Others included Regularisation and Joint Venture. The land delivery process in all the channels is a multi-stage procedure that takes between two and 14 months to complete. Also, challenges such as a lack of necessary infrastructure in some of the schemes, clientelistic practices, and the encroachment of land by indigenous landholding families and other bureaucratic challenges associated with GOPLAS make acquiring land through the formal land delivery channels problematic. The inefficiencies and delays in the formal land delivery process can deter investment and slow down urban development.

Keywords: land governance, land accessibility, project management, construction projects, Land acquisition

1. Introduction

Land is the platform of human existence. It is the foundation of the production of the three necessities of life – food, housing and clothing. Irrespective of the importance of land in meeting society's needs, it is limited in supply. The increasing population and urbanisation in many African cities are progressively reducing the supply of accessible land. In Lagos, Nigeria, rapid urbanisation and economic growth have created an unprecedented demand for land, especially for construction projects. As one of Africa's most populous cities, Lagos faces unique challenges in land acquisition, which are crucial for the success of construction ventures.

The land acquisition channels, also referred to as land delivery channels, are routes through which land is made available for development and could be categorised as formal and informal channels (Olapade & Aluko, 2022). While the informal/customary land delivery channels supply the majority of land for development in many African cities (Rakodi & Leduka, 2004), accessing land from this delivery system has been bedevilled with increasing tenure insecurity, land disputes, undocumented titles, environmental degradation, landlessness, unsustainable development, poor layout plans and a general lack of infrastructure facilities (Ige & Gbadegesin, 2022; Olapade & Aluko, 2023).

The lack of a formal title and other challenges associated with acquiring land from the informal land delivery system have led many people to turn to the formal land delivery channels. Meanwhile, the formal land delivery channels face their challenges. For instance, the formal land delivery system is usually not able to supply adequate plots of land for development (Rakodi & Leduka, 2004); the procedure of land allocation is cumbersome and costly (Olapade & Aluko, 2021); and land delivered is associated with clientelistic practices (Durand-Lasserve et. al., 2015). To address some of the challenges associated with the formal land delivery system and encourage its use, different channels of formal land delivery have been developed in many cities.

Despite the existence of different formal mechanisms designed to streamline land acquisition, developers often grapple with bureaucratic red tape, legal ambiguities, and other challenges. These challenges not only delay project timelines but also inflate costs, thereby impacting the overall feasibility and sustainability of construction projects (Husain, 2024; Olapade & Aluko, 2025). Against the foregoing, this paper examines formal land acquisition channels for construction projects in Lagos, Nigeria. This is to provide information that could enhance accessibility to land for construction projects. This study delves into the formal channels of accessing land for construction projects in Lagos, highlighting the procedural intricacies and the multifaceted challenges encountered by stakeholders.

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2. Literature Review

Acquisition of land by individuals or corporate bodies can either be from the government, which is often referred to as formal channels, or through the purchase of land through informal channels (Aluko et. al., 2004). The formal channels for land acquisition, however, differ from one country to another, and so are the processes relating to such acquisition. While many studies (Ige & Gbadegesin, 2022; Musyoka, 2005; Rakodi, 2005; Rakodi & Leduka, 2004; Nkuruziza, 2008, among others) have focused on the informal land delivery channels, few studies focus on formal land delivery channels. The few studies on formal land delivery channels are either not in the same institutional environment or are not comprehensive. For instance, Musyoka (2005) examines the formal land delivery processes in Eldoret, Kenya, focusing on a single channel of land delivery. The study discovered that acquiring land from the formal land delivery involves about fifteen stages, which take several months to complete. The processes were also discovered to be slow, expensive and inefficient. Similarly, Durand-Lasserve et al. (2015) examined the formal land delivery system in Mali. They discovered that there are various channels for accessing land for development, and each channel has its unique processes. The study also discovered that the formal land delivery system is associated with clientelistic practices and bureaucracy, which affect efficiency.

In Nigeria, Fabiyi (1984) examined the procedures for land allocation in the formal land delivery system in Ogun, Ondo and Oyo states of Nigeria. The study employed secondary data from the government offices providing land delivery services and interviews with government officials. The study discovered that the process of land allocation for the three states was similar. The procedures involve a four-stage process that takes several months to complete. Again, Aluko et. al. (2004) examined the formal and informal land delivery processes in Lagos State. The data for the study were obtained from the Lagos State Lands Bureau and interviews with some key informants. The study reported that the procedure for the allocation of a plot in a formal site and service scheme requires meeting stringent requirements and is subject to the approval of the State Government, and the process might take up to two years. The study did not provide information on other channels of accessing land in a formal land delivery system.

In another study, Butler (2009) assessed the procedures for the supply of business / commercial land in the cities of Kano and Lagos in Nigeria using desktop analysis and interviews of key informants. The study identified three different types of markets for land delivery with different procedures. The identified market includes the primary state market where direct state grants are allocated; the organised secondary market, which

trades in Statutory Rights / Certificate of Occupancy; and the informal secondary market, which transacts in pre-1978 land rights or customary rights. The study also reported a high inefficiency in the allocation of direct state grants, which represents one of the formal channels of land delivery. Again, Yakubu (2014) examined the process of acquiring a direct grant of Statutory Right of Occupancy in Kaduna, Nigeria. The study discovered that while the stipulated time for the processing of a grant of Statutory Rights of Occupancy was 50 days, it takes about 400 days in practice.

Olapade and Aluko (2021) categorised channels of land delivery in Lagos into three, namely formal, semi-formal and informal channels. The study further categorised the six modes of acquiring land in the city under the three land delivery channels. For instance, the study categorised land allocation through the site and service scheme and allocation through the private developer scheme as formal. In contrast, land allocation through regularisation and excision was categorised as semi-formal and allocation of land through customary landholding authority, whether for members or non-members, as an informal channel. The study, however, does not cover the procedure of land allocation through the channel and the challenges associated with each of the channels.

On challenges confronting the formal land delivery channels, many studies have criticised them for bureaucracy and inefficiency (Rakodi & Leduka, 2004; Musyoka, 2007; Nkuruziza, 2008). Especially for the long duration it takes for the allocation of land through the formal channels. For instance, it involves fifteen stages and takes several months to complete in Kenya (Musyoka, 2007). Omirin (2003) observed similar challenges in Lagos, Nigeria. Bello et. al. (2014) focusing on site and service schemes in Nigeria criticised the land delivery channel for lack of available facilities and inefficiency in land allocation.

Most of the extant studies that have examined formal land delivery have either focused on a single channel of land delivery or were carried out in different institutional environments with distinct land governance. There is, therefore, a gap in the assessment of land allocation procedures in the land delivery channels of cities in developing countries such as Lagos. Earlier studies on the Formal Land delivery system are either dated (Fabiyi, 1984; Aluko, et. al., 2004) or were carried out in different institutional environments (Musyoka, 2005). Apart from these, earlier studies were limited to a channel within the formal land delivery system (Yakubu, 2014; Bello et al., 2014) and did not document challenges associated with each of the channels. There is therefore a need to holistically assess the different channels for land acquisition in Lagos, Nigeria, hence this study.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design employing both primary and secondary data. Using a qualitative approach, secondary data on the procedure of land allocation in the various channels of land

some quotations were presented. The selected quotes are representative of the patterns observed in the data. Specifically, quotations from interviews with IGOPLAS 1, 2, 5, 10, 18 were presented. The background information of the IGOPLAS is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Background Information of Informants from IGOPLAS

Respondents	Gender	Highest Academic qualification	Year of experience	Position/ Rank
IGOPLAS 1	Male	Second Degree	22	Assistant Director
IGOPLAS 2	Female	Second degree	17	Chief Land Officer
IGOPLAS 5	Male	First degree	18	Chief land officer
IGOPLAS 10	Male	First degree	15	Assistant Town Planner
IGOPLAS 18	Male	First degree	30	Assistant Director

delivery were collected from Government Offices Providing Land Administration Services (GOPLAS). This includes schematic diagrams of procedures for each land delivery channel and their associated requirements. The information collected was corroborated by the Key Informants Interview (KII) of officials from the GOPLDS. There were a total of nine GOPLAS operating in Lagos State; seven were under the control of the State Government, while two were under the control of the Federal Government. The GOPLDS under the control of the Lagos State Government include the Lands Bureau, Ministries of Physical Planning and Urban Development, Justice, Agriculture and Cooperative; and Waterfront Infrastructure Development; other Lagos State GOPLAS include the Lagos State Property Development Corporation; New Towns Development Authority (NTDA), and the Office of the Surveyor General. The GOPLDS under the control of the Federal Government in Lagos State include the Lands Division of the Federal Ministry of Works and Housing and the Federal Housing Authority (FHA).

The head of each of the GOPLAS was contacted to serve as a key informant for the research. The heads or representatives of each of the GOPLAS were interviewed and acted as key informants. Meanwhile, in some GOPLAS, more than one officials were interviewed based on the structure of the Office, which required information from different departments. A form of purposive sampling was therefore adopted for the study. In all, interviews were conducted with 19 officials from GOPLAS, who served as key informants for the research. All the key informants are government officials with years of experience ranging from 14 to 30 years. Five of them were female, and all of them had at least a first degree qualification. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interviews, supplemented with secondary data, were analysed using thematic analysis. The themes generated from the quotations extracted from the interviews and desktop research were organised into a narrative to answer the research questions. To better illustrate the themes and provide evidence for interpretations and readability,

4. Findings and Discussion

This section provides the results of the field study and the discussion based on them.

4.1. Formal Land Delivery Channels (FLDCs) for Land acquisition and their Challenges

From the review of secondary data collected and interviews conducted with key informants from GOPLAS, it was discovered that there were available in the study area. This includes Site and Service Scheme, Private Sector Developers' Programme (PSDP), Acquisition from Excised land, Regularisation and Joint Venture. Table 2 provides a list of formal land delivery channels, descriptions of each channel, procedures for land acquisition in each of the channels and their challenges.

As shown in Table 2, one of the FLDCs was the site and service schemes, which are purposely designed estates by the government that are provided with infrastructure such as roads, water, and electricity, and are laid out in plots of different sizes based on density. The site and service The scheme channel is usually employed to allocate land to individuals.

Table 2: Procedures of land allocation in the formal land delivery channels and their challenges

Land Delivery Channels	Description of channel	Procedure of land allocation	Challenges
Site and Service Scheme	purposely designed estates that are provided with infrastructure	A 15-stage process of land allocation, which could take several months to complete	Poorly conceived Schemes that lack the necessary infrastructure. Inefficient allocation of plots in prime locations. Land encroachment by a third party.
Private Sector Developers' Programme	The state government is allocating undeveloped/service land en bloc to prospective developers who, thereafter, provide it with infrastructure.	The allocation process involves 11 stages culminating in the issuance of a Certificate of Occupancy to the applicant.	Delay inland allocation as a result of lengthy procedures. It also requires meeting stringent conditions before land can be allocated.
Acquisition from Excised Land	The channel is a medium used by the government to return a particular portion of land to the indigenous landholding families from which it was initially acquired, and the family can sell it to interested members of the public.	After the land has been excised, the developer can approach the family that now owns the land allocated to the developer. The three stages involved in the land acquisition can be completed within a few days (2 to 3 days)	Double allocation and other problems associated with land delivery involving indigenous landholding families
Regularisation	Granting of title to people who erroneously purchased uncommitted government land.	The regularisation process involves 11 stages with a minimum duration of 33 days.	False claims by the applicant and other administrative issues.
Joint Venture	Partnership between the government and a private organisation in the land delivery system.	The government allocate land to the private organisation free of charge, which will provide the necessary infrastructure.	Bureaucratic nature of GOPLDS which delay granting approval for JV. Change in government.

[...]Site and Services Scheme that is they (government) will lay out land, put infrastructure like road, light (electricity) and all that, they allocate to individual [...] (IGOPLAS 18)

The analysis of information from key informants shows that acquiring land through this channel involves an 8-stage process, which could take several months to complete. This result supports earlier studies such as Omirin (2003) and Musyoka (2005) that land allocation through the site and service scheme involves multiple stages and takes considerable time. Apart from the long duration for acquiring land using the channel, the channel is bedevilled with other challenges, such as poorly conceived and managed schemes, which lack the necessary infrastructure. Others include inefficiency in land allocation, clientelistic practices similar to the findings in Durand-Lasserve et. al. (2015), and encroachment of allocated land by customary landholding families. Some of the comments of the key informants regarding the challenges of the site and scheme channel of land delivery include:

[...] we sometimes have issues with the cost of providing the infrastructure, maybe because of some people's negligence, that they did not give the government the right estimate [...]. (IGOPLAS 1)

[...] Only those who are close to people in power get land from formal LDIs. Cost is also high and not affordable [...]. (IGOPLAS 1)

The corollary of the foregoing is that the process of land allocation through the Site and Service Scheme in the study area was not effective. The designs of the Schemes were not usually effective, and the process took a long time to complete; also, the cost of allocation was high. This result supports the finding in Bello et al. (2014) that the Site and Service Scheme in Nigeria was not effectively designed and managed.

Another channel of acquiring land in the study area was through the Private Sector Developers' Programme. This channel, which is specifically designed for private developers, is a corporate initiative where the government give virgin land to intending developers. The developers were expected to provide the necessary infrastructure, parcel the land into plots and sell the parcelled land to members of the public. The smallest size of land allocated by the government under this scheme is one hectare.

[...] Private developers scheme is a process where corporate organisations that need land for their business request land from the government; we give nothing less than 1 hectare and above... it is from 1 hectare to 5 hectares [...] (IGOPLAS 2)

The channel is most suitable for construction ventures as it is designed for property developers who want to embark on large-scale development. Interviews with informants and secondary data collected reveal that the procedure for land allocation under the channel involves a 12-stage process that could take up to 12 months. The delay is usually associated with lengthy procedures and the time it takes for the governor of the State to endorse the Certificate of Occupancy (C of O). It also requires meeting stringent conditions before land can be allocated. For instance, one of the officials commented on the process of land allocation under the channel as follows:

[...] Some criteria they must meet, particularly their bank statement that shows that they have the funds, they must show the project they are about to embark on, they must show their track records of what they have done before [...] (IGOPLAS 2).

Apart from the issue of time duration to complete the process, other challenges associated with the process, as expressed by the informants, include land conflict with Indigenous land owners referred to as *omo onile*, who usually claim that they were not adequately compensated by the government when their land was compulsorily acquired. The *omo onile* usually prevents the applicants from taking possession until they make another round of payment to the *omo onile*. Some of the respondents commented as follows:

[...] we have challenges of the *omo onile*, it is something we have been battling with [...]. (IGOPLAS 10)

Another channel for acquiring land for construction ventures is through the excision channel. This channel, which Olapade and Aluko (2021) referred to as a semi-formal channel of land acquisition, involves acquiring excised land from the Indigenous customary landholding families. Sometimes the State Government embarks on massive land acquisitions of semi-urban / rural, undeveloped lands. This is to make land available to the State for future use. Excised lands are land previously acquired by the government and have now been returned to the original Indigenous customary landholding family. Unlike land acquired through informal channels, an excised land has a registered title, thereby categorised as a formal land delivery channel. One of the government officials commented as follows:

[...] It is under the Land Use Act to do an excision for the existing landholding family in that area, which is a form of compensation, and also not to extinguish their existence in their locality [...] (IGOPLAS 2)

When the land is excised and a formal title obtained, interested members of the public who need land for development can approach the family. The process of

acquiring land through the channel is a simple three-stage process, which commences when the prospective purchaser obtains information on the availability of the plot. This stage is followed by an inspection of the available plot by the prospective purchaser to examine the physical condition of the site. The next stage is for the purchaser to investigate and confirm the authenticity of the ownership claims. The stage of price negotiation and payment would follow this. The acquisition of land through this channel is high-speed. The stages can be completed within a few days (2 to 3 days) compared to the process in the other formal channels, which will take several months. The challenges associated with land acquisition from excised land are similar to those of acquiring land through informal channels. This includes double allocation, tenure insecurity, and land conflict associated with land in the informal channel, as discovered in Olapade & Aluko (2023).

Another channel of land acquisition revealed in Table 2 is the regularisation channel. This channel provides formal title to land for those who have erroneously purchased uncommitted Government land (LASG, 2009). Regularisation is among the channels described by Olapade and Aluko (2021) as a semi-formal channel of land delivery. Land allocation in locations subjected to the regularisation policy is usually assigned by landholding families from whom the government acquired the land. The family will issue a deed of assignment, which is part of the requirement needed to obtain the formal registered title of a Certificate of Occupancy.

[...] when you encroach on government land and the land is not committed, instead of destroying your property, the government can say you should come and regularise, that is what we call regularisation [...]. (IGOPLAS 18)

The process of land acquisition through regularisation after purchasing land from the customary landholding families involves a 10-stage process, which could be completed within 33 days (Lagos State Government, 2019). This is, however, contestable as delays in any of the stages can increase the duration of the period. Similarly, the process involves numerous inter-agency activities, which further escalates the complexity of the process.

From the analysis, the duration for regularisation is fast when compared with other channels of formal land delivery in the study area. This could be a result of the creation of a specific directorate that handles all issues relating to regularisation, thereby establishing a one-stop shop for the processing of regularisation. This therefore reduces the bureaucracy in the process. Despite the short processing time for regularisation, some challenges were identified with the regularisation process from the interview with the officials of

GOPLDS, including false claims by the applicants, such as submitting a survey plan that does not correspond with the actual location of their land and false ownership claims.

[...] Some of the challenges we encounter in regularisation are the issue of incorrect survey plans. On many occasions, the applicants present a survey plan that corresponds with the actual location of their land. There is also the problem of false claim of ownership by the applicant, which, when a counterclaim is presented, will disrupt the regularisation exercise [...] (IGOPLAS 5)

One of the respondents, however, criticised the regularisation process on the claim that the process encourages people to encroach on government land and also results in the creation of slum settlements and suggested a general regularisation and upgrading of the area.

[...] What we are doing is not the best; we are directly or indirectly encouraging people to keep encroaching on government land. In my own opinion, I think what we should do is regularisation and upgrading. So when you get to slum areas, do infrastructure there, some plot will automatically go... You have regularised them by giving them the title, you have upgraded, some people will sell their land and move out if that place [...] (IGOPLAS 1)

The last channel of land delivery presented in Table 2 is the Joint Venture channel. This is an arrangement where the government partners with a private body to deliver land. It is similar to the Private Sector Developers' Programme (PSDP), only that instead of the developer making an outright payment for the land, the land is allocated free of charge, but the proceeds of the development are shared between the government and the developer. Some of the respondents provided insights into what a Joint Venture Arrangement entails as follows:

[...] People seeing our (government) acquired land as underutilised or unused can apply to us to partner with us so that they can build some housing units.... So at the end of the day, it is a public-private partnership [...]. (IGOPLAS 18)

The process of land allocation through the joint venture arrangement entails the developer approaching the appropriate GOPLDS for the allocation of their unused land. Interviews with some officials of GOPLDS provided insights into what the Joint Venture Arrangement entails as follows:

[...] the Government gives them the land as equity, then the developer uses his resources to build. So he parts with some units to the Government [...] (I GOPLDS 18)

The joint venture provides a public-private arrangement which makes developable land available, thereby increasing the supply of serviced plots. The main challenge with that land supplied under this arrangement is that it is usually expensive and outside the reach of the poor. The challenge with the approach is the bureaucratic nature of government offices, which delays the approval of JV. Also, a change in government might disrupt any arrangement made with the previous government when a new government take over the reins of affairs.

The synthesis of the findings of this study reveals that the formal land delivery process in Lagos is characterised by multiple channels, each with its own set of procedures and challenges. Each of the five identified channels involves a multi-stage process that can be lengthy and complex. The findings also reveal that it takes considerable time to acquire land through the formal land delivery channels, except for acquisition from excised land, which is usually fast but very risky. This result is in tandem with the results from Musyoka (2005) and Durand-Lereserve et al. (2015) that the formal land allocation process is slow, expensive and inefficient. Some of the challenges plaguing the land delivery process include poorly conceived schemes, which lack the necessary infrastructure, limited allocation of plots in prime locations to government officials and their associates, and the encroachment of land by omo-onile. Others include the allottee not developing the land after obtaining the C of O, a highly politicised process, and other administrative issues. All these challenges connote a weak governance of the formal land delivery channels. This is a problem that needs to be addressed to make land accessible for construction projects. There is therefore a need for improvement in land governance to curb these challenges and improve access to formal land delivery.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the formal land acquisition channels for construction projects in Lagos, Nigeria, and identified the challenges associated with each channel. The findings reveal that the formal land delivery process is complex, involving multiple stages and significant delays. Key challenges include poorly conceived schemes, high costs, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and conflicts with indigenous landowners. All these challenges connote a weak governance of the formal land delivery channels. While the availability of multiple formal land delivery channels creates different routes to access formal land for the public, the challenges associated with acquiring land through the formal channels will prevent their use. The implications of these findings are significant for policymakers, developers, and project managers. For instance, the inefficiencies and delays in the formal

land delivery process can deter investment and slow down urban development.

To address these issues, a holistic restructuring of the GOPLDS is recommended to reduce bureaucracy and improve efficiency. Implementing an Integrated Land Administration Automation System could streamline processes, enhance transparency, and reduce delays. Improving land governance is crucial to making formal land delivery channels more attractive and accessible. This will not only facilitate timely access to land for construction projects but also reduce the reliance on informal land acquisition methods, promoting sustainable urban development in Lagos.

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- In summary, this paper contributes to knowledge by identifying and categorising formal land delivery channels in Lagos, providing a detailed analysis of their procedures and challenges, and offering practical recommendations for improving land governance and accessibility.
- ## 6. Acknowledgement
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