

Improving Land Administration in Southwest Nigeria

Challenges, Evidence, and Policy Pathways





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Executive Summary

Southwest Nigeria is the most economically vibrant region in the country. Yet, land administration across the six states that make up the region remains deeply inefficient, marked by insecure tenure, multiple claims on parcels, widespread litigation, and cumbersome bureaucratic processes.

These challenges stem from a complex history of communal landholding, colonial disruption, and the centralised provisions of the Land Use Act of 1978, which vests land control in state governors. Despite the strategic importance of land for housing, agriculture, and infrastructure development, over 80% of land in Nigeria remains undocumented, making up to an estimated \$900 billion in “dead capital” locked in untitled or underutilized land assets.

To address this persistent challenge, Ominira Initiative for Economic Advancement launched the Driving Prosperity through Property Rights (DPPR) project in 2023. Through workshops with stakeholders across five Southwestern states, the initiative identified both gaps and opportunities in the region’s land governance systems. Findings revealed that while 70% of respondents expressed satisfaction with current administrative processes, 30% noted inefficiencies. Nearly all respondents supported digital reforms, including e-registration, cost and time reductions, and greater training in land-related technology. However, divergent perceptions emerged across states, with Ondo showing higher satisfaction and Ekiti exhibiting more skepticism about readiness for digital adoption. Resistance to public-private partnerships was also concentrated in Ondo, indicating the need for localized engagement strategies.

Based on this evidence, the report recommends a comprehensive, multi-pronged reform agenda: revising outdated legal frameworks such as the Land Use Act; integrating customary tenure into statutory systems; digitising land records through e-registration and blockchain; deploying GIS for land use planning; and leveraging public-private partnerships for registry services and affordable housing. Additional priorities include building capacity in land agencies, introducing online dispute resolution platforms, and conducting robust public awareness campaigns.

The potential benefits of reform are profound. Improved land governance will enhance tenure security, unlock land as collateral for credit and investment, facilitate better urban and agricultural planning, and increase internally generated revenue through property taxation. For Southwest Nigeria, land administration reform is not merely a bureaucratic exercise, it is a critical step toward inclusive development, economic transformation, and prosperity.

Address: 6th Floor, Cocoa House, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria +23470859958567 © 2025

Authors: Lanre-Peter Elufisan¹, Bayonle Fesobi², Doyinsola Olagunju³ and Abayomi Odewale⁴

Research Contributors: Doyinsola Olagunju and Abayomi Odewale

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¹Executive Director, Ominira Initiative for Economic Advancement

²Research and Policy Analyst, Ominira Initiative for Economic Advancement

^{3,4}Research Contributors

Introduction

Land administration refers to the processes through which land tenure rights are defined, recorded, and managed within a society. In Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation with over 200 million people, effective land administration is fundamental for development, particularly in the Southwest region which includes Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti states. Land administration in South-West Nigeria has long been a contentious issue, shaped by a complex interplay of historical, legal, and socio-political factors.

As Nigeria's most economically vibrant region, the demand for land for residential, agricultural, and commercial purposes has continued to increase. However, challenges such as insecure land tenure, conflicts over ownership, inefficient land registration systems, and the bureaucratic constraints imposed by the Land Use Act of 1978 persist. These issues not only hinder investment and economic growth but also contribute to social tensions and legal disputes.

Key concepts explored in this report include **land tenure**, the bundle of rights and responsibilities under which land is held and used. **Land governance**, the policies, rules, and institutions that determine how people access and control land, **land rights**, legal or customary claims to own, use, or transact land, and **land administration systems**, the processes and technologies for recording land information and enforcing land rights. In essence, land administration connects the legal, technical, and institutional frameworks that underpin secure tenure and transparent land transactions.

Background

Historically, land tenure systems in Southwest Nigeria were predominantly communal and lineage-based, with land ownership vested in extended families and traditional rulers. Although the system ensured equitable access to land within communities, it also had limitations like ambiguities regarding ownership, boundary disputes, and led to opportunities for exploitation by local elites. The British colonial administration, in its bid to regulate land transactions and facilitate economic development, introduced formal land laws, but these laws often clashed with indigenous customs.

Post-independence, Southwest Nigeria experienced an increase in land speculation, corruption in land allocation, and elite capture of valuable urban lands, all of which culminated in the declaration of the Land Use Act in 1978. Though the Act aimed to standardise land administration by vesting land ownership in state governors, the reality is that its implementation has created more problems than it has solved.



The **Land Use Act of 1978** was meant to bring **order**; it bred **complexity**.

The current situation raises critical questions:

1. How can land administration in Southwest Nigeria be reformed to improve tenure security, reduce conflicts, and facilitate economic development?
2. What lessons can be drawn from other jurisdictions that have successfully improved land administration?
3. Can digitalization and technology play a role in making land registration more efficient and transparent?

This report seeks to explore these questions by examining the history of land administration challenges in Southwest Nigeria, identifying key policy failures, and proposing practical solutions that align with best practices and the unique socio-political context of the region.



State of Land Administration in Southwest Nigeria ▼

State of Land Administration in Southwest Nigeria

The problems of land administration in Southwest Nigeria are deeply rooted in history. Before colonial rule, the Yoruba communities in this region practiced a communal land tenure system where land was collectively owned by families and managed by traditional leaders. Back then, land allocation was based on need, and ownership was passed down through generations. While the system worked for small-scale farming communities, it became problematic with urbanisation and commercial land use.

These customary systems were generally equitable and flexible in providing access to land for community members. Colonial rule, however, introduced English notions of private property and formal titling. In Lagos, for instance, British authorities in the 19th and 20th centuries established deeds registries and encouraged individual ownership, fundamentally altering indigenous tenure practices. This policy was resisted in the South, unlike in Northern Nigeria, where the Land and Native Rights Ordinance of 1910 vested land ownership in the government. Instead, land in the South remained largely under the control of families and communities, leading to the rise of land speculators, fraudulent multiple sales, and frequent land-related litigations.

By the 1960s and 1970s, Nigeria's urban centers, particularly Lagos and Ibadan, experienced rapid population growth, increasing the demand for land. Speculators and corrupt traditional rulers exploited the loopholes in the communal system to sell land to multiple buyers, leading to protracted legal battles and violent clashes. In response, the military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo promulgated the Land Use Decree a.k.a the Land Use Act of 1978, which sought to standardise land administration by vesting all land in a state to the governor.

State of Land Administration in Southwest Nigeria

While the Land Use Act of 1978 aimed to address land speculation and ensure equitable access, it instead created new challenges. The centralisation of land control in the hands of state governors has led to abuses of power, delays in processing land documents, and a complex, inefficient system. Over the years, governors have exploited their authority to revoke occupancy rights under the guise of "overriding public interest", often reallocating land to political allies or private developers.

This made the process of obtaining a Certificate of Occupancy (C of O) notoriously slow and expensive, leading many landowners to operate in the informal sector, where land transactions are not properly documented. Thereby contributing to an estimated 80% of land in Nigeria being held informally, where landowners have no legal proof of ownership, and cannot make use of land as collateral for loans or investment.



Over 80% of land in Nigeria is held informally with no legal proof of ownership.

By 2028, the Land Use Act will be 50 years in existence if nothing changes. Despite initiating land registration as early as 1883, less than 10% of land in Nigeria is formally documented, according to the Chairman, Presidential Technical Committee on Lands Reforms and former Vice Chancellor, Federal University of Technology, Akure, Prof. Peter Adeniyi. This calls into question why, over 140 years later, significant progress has not been made.



Only 10% of land in Nigeria is formally registered 140 years after land registration began in 1883.

According to the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, about 65% of civil cases in Nigeria are land-related disputes. Today, Southwest Nigeria remains one of the regions with the highest number of land-related conflicts and litigation cases.

For instance, in Lagos State as of February 2024, the Lagos State Special Taskforce on Land grabbers received 582 petitions in a year, with 35 land grabbing cases in court during the same period. More recently, in February 2025, the Lagos State Ministry of Justice reported receiving 7,500 land grabbing petitions, with 4,283 disputes resolved, 205 land grabbers arrested, and 60 cases being prosecuted in various courts.

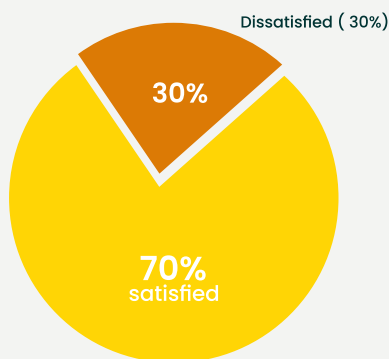


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Findings from Driving Prosperity through Property Rights (DPPR) Survey 2024



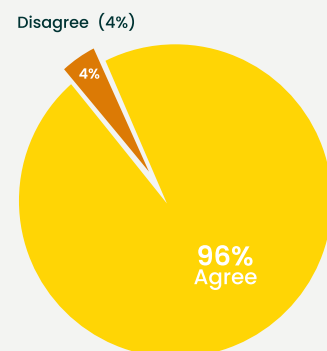
Satisfaction with land administration



Support for Digital registration



Digitalization Improves Efficiency



At Ominira Initiative for Economic Advancement, we embarked on a project Driving Prosperity through Property Rights (DPPR) aimed at interrogating the underlying issues that have impeded an improved land administration in Southwest Nigeria. This project made us conduct DPPR Workshops for stakeholders in the five state ministries of lands and housing across the region except in Lagos state in 2024.

Below are the findings we gathered at the workshops:

While 70% of respondents (75 out of 107) expressed satisfaction with the efficiency and effectiveness of land administration in their states, 30% (32 respondents) were dissatisfied. This implies that, although the majority perceive the system as functional, a significant portion still identifies room for improvement. Addressing inefficiencies and standardizing processes could help improve overall satisfaction.

All the respondents unanimously supported investing in new technology to improve land administration processes. Showing a widespread consensus that adopting technology can lead to more efficient and transparent land administration. This provides a strong justification for digital transformation initiatives.

All respondents agreed that e-registration, along with cost and time reductions, would benefit all stakeholders. There is an urgent need to implement digital land registration systems, as stakeholders recognize the advantages of speed, reduced costs, and efficiency.

All respondents agreed that more training on technology-related aspects would benefit their roles. There is a clear demand for further education on technology-driven land administration. Structured training programs should be designed to bridge knowledge gaps.

Data Box

100% of stakeholders agreed that e-registration would benefit all users.

All respondents supported investment in new technology for land governance.

Stakeholders are ready, 77% say their states are prepared to adopt tech reforms.

78% of stakeholders believe bureaucratic bottlenecks hinder best land practices.

96% of respondents support digital land administration to improve efficiency.

78% of respondents believe that complex administrative procedures hinder best practices, with the majority of dissenting views coming from Ondo State. Bureaucratic bottlenecks are a challenge in most states, but the perception in Ondo State is different. Investigating Ondo's relatively positive outlook may provide insights for simplifying procedures in other states.

81% of respondents stated that long processes discourage land registration, while 21 respondents (19%) disagreed, with most dissenters from Ondo State. Simplifying and fast-tracking land registration processes can significantly increase compliance. Ondo State's alternative experience could provide a model for improving efficiency in other states.

The response was nearly split, with 55% supporting private sector involvement and 45% opposing it. The majority of opponents were from Ondo State. This established the need for more advocacy and awareness on the benefits of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in land administration. Resistance in Ondo State suggests a lack of trust or awareness of the benefits.



Ondo State stakeholders report fewer complaints, what can we learn from them?



96% of respondents believe that digital land administration processes would improve efficiency. The near-universal agreement highlights a strong demand for digital tools. Policymakers should prioritize digitalization to enhance the efficiency of land administration.

While 77% respondents were optimistic that their states were ready to adopt technology, 25 of them (23%) disagreed, with most dissenters from Ekiti State. Although there is broad readiness for digital transformation, Ekiti State may require additional stakeholder engagement and infrastructure development to overcome skepticism.



By 2028, the Land Use Act will be 50 years, yet land governance remains inefficient and centralized.

Overall, the data indicate strong support for digital transformation, process efficiency, and further training in land administration across the Southwestern states. Highlighting the need to implement digital land administration systems, suggesting that e-registration and digital processes should be prioritized.

Given that all respondents found the workshops useful, more training programs should be developed to ensure stakeholders fully understand and leverage new technologies. And with a majority citing bureaucratic hurdles, states should work on policy reforms to simplify and streamline land administration and land-related transactions.

Long registration processes deter landowners, automation and process optimisation should be introduced to address bottlenecks and speed up land registration. However, it is worth noting that respondents from Ekiti State expressed the most resistance to digital transformation. This shows that targeted interventions such as pilot programs and stakeholder engagement can facilitate a smoother transition in the state. In summary, the survey results indicate a strong yearning for improved land administration processes in Southwest Nigeria.

Effective Land Administration and Economic Development

According to Hernando de Soto, an economist known for his work on property rights in developing countries, if land markets are properly regulated and ownership secured, land could be leveraged for mortgage financing, infrastructure development, and agricultural modernization.

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) report on “Bringing Dead Capital to Life: What Nigeria Should Do,” state that Nigeria holds at least \$300 billion and as much as \$900 billion in dead capital, primarily in residential real estate and agricultural land



An estimated \$900 billion worth of land in Nigeria is ‘dead capital’ land that can’t be used for investment.

The current land tenure system hinders accessibility, sustainability, and opportunities. The land registration process is longer and inefficient. This inefficiency is one of the major reasons why Nigeria ranks poorly in the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business report for property registration. It takes an average of 12 procedures,¹ compared to Ghana’s 5 procedures.

A secure land governance system has a far-reaching impact on development outcomes. Efficient land administration is a foundation for **infrastructure development** because governments need accurate spatial data and clear rights to build roads, lay water pipelines, plan electricity grids, and establish public facilities.

In the absence of reliable cadastral information and secure titles, infrastructure projects face delays or extra costs, for example, unclear ownership leads to protracted negotiations or disputes when acquiring land for highways or rail lines. The World Bank underscores that “authorities need accurate spatial information to plan roads, public services, and infrastructure, while creating jobs.”²

In Southwest Nigeria, which hosts the nation’s busiest ports and commercial hubs, infrastructure expansion is crucial. Lagos State’s experience shows that better land administration like updating records and enforcing planning can improve urban governance, as evidenced by past successes in transportation and waste management when land data was leveraged for planning.



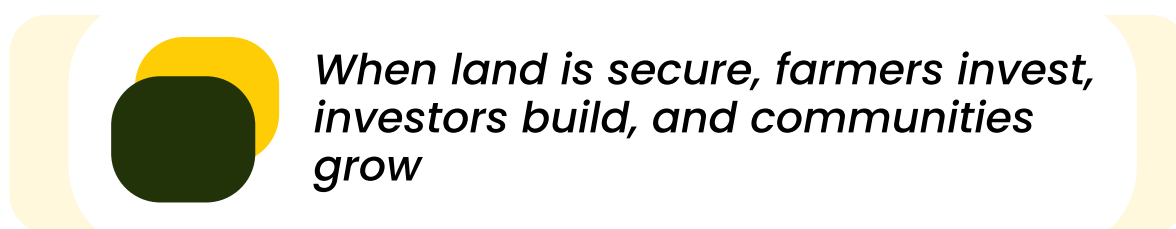
You cannot modernise agriculture with medieval land systems.

Agricultural productivity also hinges on land administration. The Southwest includes fertile zones (cocoa in Ondo, food crops in Oyo and Ogun) where farming is largely smallholder-based. Farmers with secure land rights are more likely to invest in their land planting perennial crops, applying soil improvements, or adopting new technologies because they trust they will reap the benefits. Conversely, if tenure is insecure or land claims are contested, farmers tend to limit investments due to fear of losing the land. Studies globally have shown that when land tenure is clarified and secured, agricultural output often increases as a result of greater on-farm investment and sustainable land

In Nigeria's case, tenure insecurity, partly a legacy of the Land Use Act's disruptions, has been identified as one factor behind underperforming agriculture and rural poverty. Effective land administration through clear rights and accessible registration can unlock credit for farmers too. Titled land can serve as collateral for loans to purchase equipment or inputs, thereby boosting productivity.

Urban planning and real estate development are similarly affected. Southwest Nigeria is experiencing rapid urbanisation, not only in Lagos but also Ibadan, Abeokuta, Akure, and other cities. Proper land administration enables orderly urban growth. When land ownership is well-documented and governance is strong, city authorities can zone land, enforce building standards, and expand housing in a planned manner.

Without it, cities expand informally, leading to slums, inadequate services, and conflicts. Lagos's challenges with slum clearance and regularisation reflects this dynamic, as the city's land struggles stem in part from historical neglect of formal land rights for the poor. A secure land tenure framework, with fair rules for recognising existing occupants, would allow for upgrading informal settlements rather than wholesale eviction, aligning with inclusive urban development goals.



In "Land Administration for Sustainable Development", authors Ian Williamson, Stig Enemark, Jude Wallace and Abbas Rajabifard, confirmed that the relationship between land administration and land markets is the "central economic driver for most countries" since it impacts health, transportation, environment, immigration, taxation and defence services.

A robust land administration system fuels **real estate markets and investment flows**. Real estate is a major component of the regional economy in Southwest Nigeria, from commercial property in metropolitan Lagos to residential developments across the region. Investors, whether domestic or foreign, are more inclined to put capital into land and housing when they can confidently acquire and trade titles without fear of legal disputes. High transaction costs and uncertainty, on the other hand, act as a tax on investment. It currently takes an average of 92 days and costs about 11% of a property's value to register land in Nigeria, this is an enormous drag on property market efficiency. Simplifying and speeding up this process would lower the cost of doing business.



It currently takes 92 days and up to 11% of a property's value to register land in Nigeria.

This suggests that Nigeria's overall economic potential, often touted given its resources and population, is curtailed by governance issues in the land sector. By modernizing land administration, the region can unlock land value for development projects, increase government revenue through property taxation. Lagos already exemplifies this by significantly boosting its internally generated revenue via property tax reforms. We also need to foster an environment where every parcel of land is used optimally and fairly. In summary, efficient land administration in Southwest Nigeria is not a side concern it is a catalyst for infrastructure, agricultural modernization, better cities, thriving real estate markets, and overall economic prosperity in the region.³



Land governance reform is one of Nigeria's most urgent untapped opportunities.

Nigeria must as a matter of necessity synergise its land administration systems through well thought-out initiatives that are requisite and up to speed. A relevant initiative geared towards improving land access in Nigeria is the ongoing State Action on Business Enabling Reform (SABER) program ⁴ jointly funded with \$750 million by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the World

SABER's focus on land will, ⁵ “cover the gamut of instruments that impact land administration in the 36 states of the federation with a result-area focus on improved land administration and land-based investment processes.”

According to PwC, Nigeria holds ⁶ as much as \$900 billion worth of “dead” capital locked up in residential real estate and abandoned land, including the total value of abandoned properties by the Federal Government, estimated at over N230 billion. Estate surveyors, Ubosi Eleh + Co. confirm ⁷ that a 25 percent rise in titled GDP will grossly improve Nigeria's agricultural productivity and economic efficiency.

Certainly, the urgency for stakeholders to supercharge Nigeria's land reforms is crucial. But improving land administration in the Southwest for economic transformation is an opportunity that must be taken now.



***A 25% increase in titled land could significantly boost Nigeria's GDP.”
(PwC finding)***



How to Improve Land Administration in Southwest Nigeria



PHOTO REPORT



PHOTO SPOTLIGHT

PHOTO REPORT



Photo report of workshops across states in Southwest Nigeria

Improving land administration requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy that addresses legal frameworks, institutions, technology, and sociocultural realities. Below is a set of critical, evidence-based recommendations, drawing on both local context and best practices from Africa.

1. Legal and Institutional Reform

The foundation of improvement lies in updating and harmonising the legal framework governing land. Stakeholders widely agree that the Land Use Act of 1978 needs revision. Reforms should clarify the status of customary tenure and possibly devolve more land management powers to local levels. One option is to establish state-level land administration agencies with clear mandates, streamlining the multiple steps currently needed for approvals.

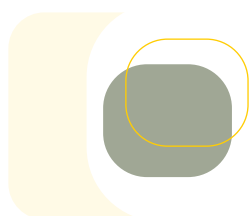
For example, creating a “one-stop-shop” Land Services Office in each state (as Ghana did with its Client Service Access Units) can consolidate the functions of survey, deeds registry, and consent approval under one roof, reducing bureaucratic hurdles. Policy reforms should also institute statutory recognition of customary landholding groups. This could mean legally empowering community land trusts or family ownership entities that can hold land titles on behalf of customary owners, thereby bridging the gap between unwritten traditions and formal law.

In doing so, legislators can draw inspiration from **Botswana’s Tribal Land Act (1968)**, which set up autonomous Land Boards to manage tribal (customary) lands.⁸ Botswana transferred land allocation duties from chiefs to these Land Boards, integrating customary tenure into a statutory system while maintaining local representation. The result was that about **70% of Botswana’s land remains tribal land managed by Land Boards** with the rest being state or freehold land, allowing customary practices to operate under a regulated framework. Southwest Nigeria could pilot a similar model: establish Local Land Boards or Committees including traditional rulers, community leaders, and government officials to jointly administer land, adjudicate disputes, and record rights at the community level. This would resonate culturally and improve the legitimacy of land decisions.

2. Digital and Technological Innovation

One of the most effective strategies for improving land administration in Nigeria is the adoption of a digital land registration system. Many countries, such as Rwanda and Kenya, have successfully digitized their land records, which has led to increased transparency, reduced corruption, and improved efficiency. Experts⁹ who have called for this noted a digital system would involve scanning and uploading all land records into a centralized database.

The system would allow for easy retrieval of information, reducing the need for middlemen, and limiting opportunities for bribery. Additionally, blockchain technology could be employed to further enhance transparency and security, ensuring that land records cannot be altered without leaving a traceable audit trail. Digital land registration will undoubtedly improve the accessibility of land records, reduce administrative delays, and enhance transparency. It would also facilitate better land use planning and taxation by providing accurate records.



A digital land registry isn't a luxury, it's a development imperative.

Although a fully digital system may face resistance in rural areas where digital literacy and internet access are limited. It is a fact that existing land records are often incomplete or fraudulent, so the initial phase of digitizing these records may face significant challenges in terms of data accuracy. However, those who benefit from the current system such as corrupt officials and middlemen are likely to resist this reform. There may also be opposition from traditional rulers who fear losing control over customary land rights. That said, some technological possibilities in this sector includes:

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for Land Use Planning: GIS technology can revolutionize land use planning by providing accurate maps, demographic data, and environmental assessments that can

inform better decision-making. GIS can also be integrated with land registration systems, allowing for a more holistic approach to land management. While GIS technology is powerful, its effectiveness will be limited by the availability of accurate and up-to-date data.

Mobile and Online Platforms for Land Dispute Resolution: Land disputes¹⁰ are a significant challenge in Nigeria, often dragging on for years in courts. Technology can streamline dispute resolution by providing online and mobile platforms where grievances can be submitted and tracked. Such platforms could use artificial intelligence to provide preliminary assessments of cases, potentially resolving disputes before they escalate into full-fledged legal battles. In areas with limited internet access, these platforms may not be practical. Another reality is that deeply entrenched disputes involving powerful interests may be resistant to resolution through automated systems.

Online dispute resolution platforms will reduce the time and cost involved in resolving land conflicts. By automating parts of the process, these platforms can alleviate the burden on Nigeria's overwhelmed judicial system. This approach can face great opposition from lawyers and court officials who benefit from the prolonged nature of land disputes. Traditional rulers who prefer resolving disputes through customary channels may also resist the move to online platforms.



3. Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs)

One of the ways to improve efficiency in land administration is through PPPs that outsource land information management and registry services to private firms. These firms, in partnership with the government, can digitise land records, maintain land databases, and streamline land registration processes. Private firms bring expertise, efficiency, and technological resources that government agencies may lack. Reports¹¹ have shown that outsourcing land services has been successfully implemented in countries like the Philippines, where PPPs improved the efficiency and transparency of land administration. The involvement of private firms would therefore require increased accountability and data privacy mechanisms. Because, if not carefully regulated, the cost of land services could increase, making land registration unaffordable for poorer citizens.

This strategy will help address Nigeria's housing deficit, particularly in urban areas, where demand for affordable housing is high. By leveraging private sector efficiency, affordable housing can be built more quickly and at lower costs. Adequate regulation must be in place to ensure that private developers do not prioritize profit over affordability, leading to housing projects that are out of reach for the majority of citizens. There is also the risk of corruption in the allocation of land for these projects.

4. Customary System Integration

Land administration in Nigeria is often bedevilled by the coexistence of customary and statutory land tenure systems. Customary systems, while deeply rooted in local traditions, often conflict with statutory law and are susceptible to abuse by traditional rulers. Policy innovation that formalises customary land rights through legal frameworks would reduce conflicts between customary and statutory systems. Rwanda has successfully formalised customary land rights, allowing landholders to obtain legal titles while preserving traditional practices.

This may be met with resistance from traditional rulers who view it as an erosion of their authority. Furthermore, given the diversity of Nigeria's ethnic groups, a one-size-fits-all approach to customary land reform may not work and it is likely that traditional authorities and local elites who benefit from the current system will kick against it. Also, rural communities may also resist if they perceive the reforms as an imposition of government control over their ancestral lands.

Another innovative approach¹² is the introduction of land value taxation, where landowners are taxed based on the value of their land rather than the improvements made on it. This would encourage landholders to use land more efficiently and discourage speculative landholding, which is a significant problem in Nigeria. Land value taxation has been successfully implemented in countries like Denmark and Estonia, where it has led to more efficient land use and increased government revenues. In Nigeria, such a tax could incentivise the development of unused land, especially in urban areas.

Rather than seeing customary tenure as an obstacle, reforms should integrate it into the formal system in a pragmatic way. As noted, one method is legal recognition of community land rights. Another is establishing Customary Land Secretariats (CLS), as Ghana did. Under Ghana's Land Administration Project, **50 Customary Land Secretariats were established** to record local land allocations and ownership under the auspices of traditional authorities. These CLS offices, equipped with training and record-keeping tools, provided an interface between customary landowners and the national land commission. They helped document land transactions that would otherwise go unrecorded.

In Southwest Nigeria, empowering local governments or traditional councils to keep registries of customary land linked to the state's digital system could greatly increase documentation. Customary rules like family land ownership or allotment by chiefs can be formally logged, giving such arrangements legal backing. In all cases, ensuring that women's land rights under customary law are protected in the integration process is key, learning from Rwanda where joint spousal land registration was mandated, leading to over 80% of land titles including women's names.¹³

5. Dispute Resolution and Transparency

Corruption in land administration such as officials demanding bribes for files to move, or cartels of “touts” forging documents must be tackled through systemic changes. A key measure is **process transparency**: by publishing all fees, requirements, and service standards openly e.g., on state government websites and at land offices. Some Nigerian states have improved transparency, for instance, making the fee schedule for land transactions public, which was noted as a positive step. Additionally, simplifying procedures as recommended above inherently cuts corruption opportunities.

The fewer the steps and signatures needed, the fewer points at which a bribe can be solicited. Digitisation also helps by allowing applicants to track the status of their applications online, reducing the power of any single official to derail the process unnoticed. **Accountability mechanisms** should also be introduced: regular audits of land office transactions, rotation of staff to prevent collusion, and hotlines for reporting corruption. The use of unique transaction IDs and digital payments can eliminate the handling of cash and fake receipts. Lagos’s e-GIS, for example, has been reported to remove the need for intermediaries and extra unofficial payments by enabling direct online applications.

Finally, legal measures such as stiff penalties for land fraud, and an empowered land ombudsman or anti-corruption task force within each state, can deter corrupt behavior. Botswana’s experience is illustrative here too by having autonomous Land Boards and clear rules, they significantly reduced the discretionary power of any one individual like a chief or politician to allocate land for personal favors.¹⁴ Nigeria’s states could borrow from this by ensuring land allocation committees make collective decisions and proceedings are recorded.

6. Capacity Building for Land Agencies and Local Government Officers.

A reform plan will falter if the people implementing it lack the requisite skills and motivation. Therefore, sustained investment in **training and equipping land administration personnel** is necessary. Many land registry offices in the Southwest are understaffed, or staffed by officials not updated on modern practices. Training programs possibly in partnership with universities or international agencies should cover surveying techniques including digital surveying and GIS operation, records management, customer service, and alternative dispute resolution.

For instance, under Ghana's Land Administration Project (LAP), over 1,900 stakeholders including surveyors, land officers, judges, and traditional leaders received training in various aspects of land administration. This broad-based capacity building improved service delivery and helped speed up land case resolution in Ghana.

Southwest Nigeria can aim for similar numbers training local government land officers, urban planners, and cadastral surveyors. Logistical capacity is also important, providing needed equipment, computers, GPS devices, vehicles for field surveying, high-speed scanners for archives and proper funding so that offices can operate efficiently. Performance incentives for staff can be introduced, rewarding offices that cut down processing times or clear backlogs. Moreover, capacity building should extend to the judiciary and arbitration bodies handling land disputes; specialised training for judges on land law statutory and customary will help clear the thousands of pending land dispute cases more judiciously. In essence, human and institutional capacity must be bolstered to match the new systems put in place.

7. Public Engagement and Awareness

Even the best land administration system will underperform if the public does not trust or know how to use it. Thus, an improvement strategy must include robust public awareness campaigns. Citizens need to understand the importance of formally registering land and the procedures to do so. Outreach can be conducted via local radio in Yoruba and Pidgin, community town hall meetings, and collaboration with civil society organisations. Rwanda's LTR program succeeded in part because of extensive community sensitisation where village leaders led public information sessions and mobilised residents to participate in the adjudication and titling process.

In Southwest Nigeria, traditional rulers and community heads can play a similar mobilising role, explaining in local terms how secure titles can benefit families for instance, preventing land grabbing or easing inheritance. Special attention should be given to including women and youth in these conversations, so they know their rights under the law. Stakeholder engagement also means involving various groups in the reform process. This includes traditional authorities to gain buy-in for integrating customary practices, professional bodies like the Nigerian Institution of Surveyors or Nigerian Bar Association to incorporate technical and legal expertise, academia for research support and evaluation, and the private sector like banks, real estate developers, who are end-users of land information.

The example of Ethiopia's land certification is instructive as it was largely a government-driven effort, but it had implicit social acceptance because it delivered obvious benefits, where landholders received certificates enhancing the security of their lands. Studies later showed that Ethiopia's rural certification raised farmers' sense of security and even increased access to credit by 10% for those with the new certificates¹⁵ Communicating such potential benefits in the Nigerian context can galvanise public demand for the reform reinforcing the idea that "If I register my land, no one can take it from me, and I can get a loan or safely lease it without fear".

7. Public Engagement and Awareness

Additionally, as new systems like an e-registry roll out, user education in simple guides, helpdesks, maybe even mobile apps will ensure people actually utilise them, thereby achieving the intended impact of greater formalisation. The above recommendations are not abstract ideals, they are informed by concrete successes achieved in Africa:





Best Practice Case Studies



Rwanda

Rwanda: Achieved systematic land titling in a post-conflict context by combining strong political will, a clear national policy (Land Policy 2004 and Organic Land Law 2005), and an innovative low-cost implementation strategy. By 2013, around 10.3 million parcels were registered and about 8 million land certificates issued, covering virtually the entire country.¹⁶

The program was participatory with local land committees, and community mappings ensured buy-in ensuring gender-sensitive joint husband-wife titles became the norm. Rwanda's case shows that with leadership and citizen participation, it's possible to go from a situation of **80% of court cases being land disputes (circa 2001) to a vastly more secure and efficient system within a decade**. Southwest Nigeria can learn from Rwanda's focus on speed, affordability, and completeness of registration.



Botswana

Often cited as having one of Africa's most effective land administration systems, Botswana integrated customary tenure through Land Boards as mentioned. These Land Boards issue certificates of customary land grants and have created relatively comprehensive records of land rights in rural areas. The country also invested early in mapping and land information systems.

A UN-Habitat report notes that Botswana's record-keeping enables more informed land allocation and dispute resolution. The success factors here include **autonomous institutions, clear legal backing, and gradual improvements**. Botswana continually updated its land policies, most recently with a new land policy in 2015 to address emerging issues. For Southwest Nigeria, Botswana's model illustrates the importance of legally empowering local land administration bodies and maintaining good records to manage communal lands effectively.



Ghana

Through the multi-phase Land Administration Project (LAP, phases I from 2003 and II through mid-2010s), Ghana sought to modernise its land sector. Results have been mixed, but notable achievements by 2016 include **over 61,000 land titles and deeds registered, 30,800 customary land rights documented**, and significant institutional reforms. Ghana established a new Lands Commission and streamlined services.

Best Practice Case Studies



Through the multi-phase Land Administration Project (LAP, phases I from 2003 and II through mid-2010s), Ghana sought to modernise its land sector. Results have been mixed, but notable achievements by 2016 include **over 61,000 land titles and deeds registered, 30,800 customary land rights documented**, and significant institutional reforms. Ghana established a new Lands Commission and streamlined services.



Ethiopia

Despite a different context, Ethiopia's land is largely state-owned with use rights for citizens, its rural land certification program demonstrates the value of incremental security. In the mid-2000s, Ethiopia issued millions of first-level certificates, these are simple, community-witnessed documents to farmers for their plots, which markedly reduced land disputes and improved farmers' confidence.¹

Many farmers, especially women who benefitted from joint certification, felt more secure, leading to increases in soil conservation investments and the ability to rent out land without fear. Now Ethiopia is upgrading to second-level certificates with maps.



Comparative lessons
from **African Land
Reforms.**

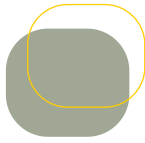


Comparative lessons from African Land Reforms.

| Country | Reform Type | Key Features | Outcome | Lessons for Nigeria |
|----------|---------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Rwanda | Systematic Titling | Community participation, gender | 80% disputes resolved | Speed, affordability |
| Ghana | LAP I & II | Digital records, CLS | Partial success | Need sustained funding |
| Botswana | Tribal Land Boards | Legal autonomy, transparency | Efficient rural land use | Clear legal mandates |
| Ethiopia | Rural Certification | Community-endorsed certificates | Increased credit access | Start small; scale up |

For Southwest Nigeria, this suggests that even interim measures like local certificates of occupancy or recognition of customary claims, short of a full title can provide a boost in security while the comprehensive reforms are underway. Such interim documents could be later upgraded to full titles in the digital registry. However, these strategies will face opposition from entrenched interests, particularly those who benefit from the current system's opacity. Therefore, any reform efforts must be accompanied by stakeholder engagement, public awareness campaigns, and strong political will to overcome resistance.

Implementing these recommendations will require coordination across federal, state, and local governments, as well as persistence to overcome vested interests that benefit from the chaotic status quo. However, the case studies show that successful reforms in land administration have transformed national trajectories elsewhere, and Southwest Nigeria has both the need and the capability to do the same.



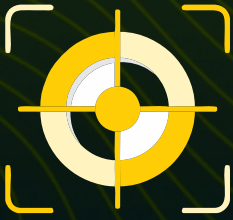
Reforming land governance is not just a legal issue, it's a growth strategy.





Conclusion: Policy Roadmap

| Phase | Years | Key Actions | Expected Outcome |
|-------|-----------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| I | 2025–2026 | Stakeholder engagement, legal reviews | Reform buy-in |
| II | 2026–2028 | Digital records, CLS | Improved efficiency, reduced disputes |
| III | 2028–2030 | Legal autonomy, transparency | Revenue gains, secure tenure |



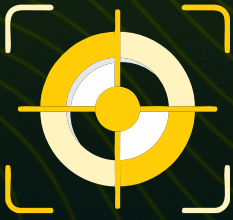
Key Insights

Phase I lays the groundwork for reform by building legitimacy and addressing institutional resistance. **Stakeholder engagement** across government, traditional rulers, and civil society to build consensus; **legal reviews** of the Land Use Act and state-level land policies. **Reform buy-in** from key actors; enhanced understanding of local constraints and legal harmonisation needs.

Phase II focuses on action and learning using targeted pilots to generate momentum while training the workforce and testing PPP models. Launch of **digital pilot projects** in selected states or LGAs to test e-registration and GIS mapping; **training programs** for land officers, surveyors, and judiciary; **PPP rollout** to digitise records and support affordable housing. This is expected to lead to **improved efficiency** in land services and **reduction in land disputes** due to clear and streamlined documentation processes.

Phase III consolidates the reform gains through full-scale system integration, with emphasis on sustainability and inclusion (particularly for rural communities and women). **Full-scale digitisation** of land registries and integration of digital GIS systems; establishment of **Customary Land Secretariats (CLSs)** for local documentation of traditional claims; **taxation reform** to introduce land value taxes and improve revenue collection. **Revenue gains** through better property taxation; secure tenure across both statutory and customary systems, unlocking credit and investment.

This report has examined the imperative of improving land administration in Southwest Nigeria, highlighting the historical context, current challenges, and practical pathways for reform.



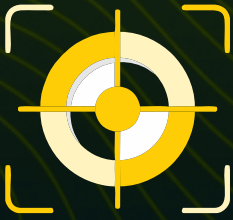
Key Insights:

The key findings are clear: land governance in the region, as in Nigeria at large, has not kept pace with societal needs or best practices. Colonial and post-colonial policies (epitomized by the 1978 Land Use Act) have left a dual system that often undermines tenure security and efficient land use.

Presently, cumbersome bureaucracy, inadequate records, and conflicts between customary and statutory tenure arrangements contribute to insecurity and lost economic opportunities. Yet, evidence from within Nigeria and across Africa demonstrates that **strategic reforms can yield profound benefits**. Modernised land administration characterised by clear legal frameworks, digital cadastral systems, transparent processes, and inclusive recognition of rights is a proven catalyst for development. It enables better infrastructure planning, boosts agricultural and housing investment, and increases government revenue through property taxation and land fees, all of

For Southwest Nigeria, reforming land administration is not only about improving rankings or service delivery; it is about **laying a cornerstone for inclusive and sustainable development**. Secure land rights give ordinary citizens like the market woman in Ibadan, the farmer in Ekiti, or the entrepreneur in Lagos, the confidence to invest in their future.

As Nigeria seeks to diversify its economy beyond oil, the Southwest can lead by unlocking the value of land, a resource often said to be as precious as “crude oil” in its own right. The policy implications are significant: state governments should prioritise land reforms in their development agendas, and the federal government should support these through enabling legislation e.g., amending the Land Use Act or its regulations and funding for technological upgrades.



Key Insights:

In conclusion, improving land administration in Southwest Nigeria is both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in overcoming inertia and resistance to change, as well as in the complexity of mapping and registering millions of parcels in a diverse region. The opportunity, however, is immense. By securing property rights and enhancing land governance, the region can propel economic activities, reduce poverty, and set an example for the rest of Nigeria.

As this report has detailed, a combination of legal reform, institutional strengthening, digitisation, integration of customs, anti-corruption efforts, and education can bring about a land administration system fit for the 21st century. The road to reform may be demanding, but the destination, Southwest Nigeria where land is administered efficiently, fairly, and sustainably is well worth striving for. The time to act is now, to ensure that land, the bedrock of so much economic and social life, is managed in a way that genuinely supports the region's and the nation's development aspirations.

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About Ominira

Committed to promoting a freer and more prosperous African society, **Ominira Initiative for Economic Advancement** was established in 2019 as an independent, non-profit youth-led policy think tank. Guided by a mission to research and advance solutions to Africa's socio-economic issues, the initiative envisions a continent of responsible individuals who uphold individual liberty, human dignity, and property rights.

Our thematic focus includes economic freedom, free trade, entrepreneurship, consumer rights, and governance reform. Through strategic programs such as the Free Trade Fellowship, Enterprise Dialogue Series, and Property Rights Advocacy, we provide platforms for public discourse, policy engagement, and youth inclusion in economic debates through publications, videos, events and use of multimedia.

With a growing media platform via OminiraTV on Youtube and a growing network of researchers and advocates, our work has spanned stakeholder forums, student seminars, and the flagship Freedom in Nigeria Conference (FinCon), all designed to bridge data and real-life experiences, making policy conversations more accessible and impactful.

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