Corruption in Urban Land Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Pentapartite Comparative Approach

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Abstract

This research focuses on corruption in urban land governance in Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Namibia, whereby the data collected are secondary data from different sources, including Transparency International and literature review. The research utilizes the document review method in a qualitative research approach to analyze secondary data extracted from reliable websites and literature from Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science. The study also further focuses on areas of high corruption risk in urban land management and the roles of political, economic, and historical imperatives in land management for the analysis of the corruption perceptions index for 2023. Hence, the corruption indices vary radically depending on the country in question and the lowest of those indices prove that corruption constitutes massive challenges. Political actors, economic interests, and each country's historical context shape these patterns. This evil has been termed broadly to slow down urban development, increase the cost of housing, and promote inequality. Any mechanisms of combating corruption should be based on the specific features of the political and socio-economic environment of the countries. As a result, the research has highlighted the importance of enhanced legal reforms, openness, and accountability towards the fight against corruption with particular reference to the Sub-Saharan Africa region in relation to fair and prudent land management.

Keywords: Urban land governance, Corruption perceptions index, Urban land administration, Land regulation, Land fraud

■1.0 INTRODUCTION

Just like a conductor leads an orchestra, urban land governance brings together processes, policies, and organizations to create a harmonious and thriving city. According to Fraol et al. (2021), it is essential for ensuring fair access to land and fostering sustainable development. Global guidelines play a key role in boosting land management, upholding people's rights, and steering growth plans. These guidelines support fair land use, lasting progress, and the recognition of human rights (Klaus & Jibril, 2006). Good leadership relies on solid choices and action, with government bodies watching over land assets to help and shield the public. Transparency, accountability, and the fair distribution of land rights are keys to effective land governance. However, challenges such as homelessness, political interference, and corruption, particularly with urban growth, create significant issues for urban land administration and governance. Since land governance affects not only physical spaces but also the social, economic, and environmental aspects of cities, addressing these challenges is crucial for sustainable urban development.

Corruption in urban land governance has emerged as a critical challenge that affects various sectors, including housing, environmental sustainability, development, public health, and social equity. The term land corruption refers to the misuse of official authority in the pursuit of personal benefit. Land corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) poses major issues that affect the region in various ways. Transparency International (2013) reports that the land sector has one of the highest bribery rates among public services, which impacts one in five people worldwide. This corruption hurts the poorest and most left-out groups the most, taking away their rights and harming how they make a living. Land corruption in SSA presents its set of problems. People often have to pay bribes when dealing with land matters, which keeps corrupt practices going (Chiweshe, 2021). Also, Wily (2021) states that some traditional laws do not give women their land rights, making things even less fair. In rural areas, land corruption holds back people's drive to start businesses and limits job options, pushing them to move to crowded cities.

Land corruption has a wide-ranging impact, including messing up how land is used and affecting affordable housing and agriculture. Consequently, people may not have adequate shelter and enough to eat. Discrepancies over land can turn into bigger conflicts, long-term litigation, and breach of public trust. Peace and stability are, therefore, at risk. Precarious practices also erode cultural traditions about who

owns the land and threaten social ties. Land corruption also weakens economic development and slows progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. The problem has become more severe due to SSA cities' rapid growth. This issue has a significant impact on land management and city planning, leaving many SSA urban areas unaccounted for.

Therefore, this study explores corruption in urban land governance with a focus on its nature, rights, legal remedies, political economy, power relations, urbanization, and the efficacy of anti-corruption strategies within Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Namibia. Land governance challenges in Kenyan urban centers, with a special interest in Nairobi, are well documented due to prevailing political vices in the management and allocation of public land and property rights, which make it relevant to this study. In Zimbabwe's context, political and land reform programs arising from its post-colonial political background create an appreciated setting for appreciable work on historical bias and other elements of contemporary governance issues paramount to this study. Nigeria is a populous country with many urban areas, and therefore it deserves particular attention due to its nature and challenging issues in its governance systems. Also, Namibia's socio-political setting and governance structure are dissimilar to other countries and consequently provide a valuable ethnographic context upon which to understand land corruption since corruption has varying effects on different communities depending on the nature of governance and how corruption impacts them, making it a good setting for this study.

The variety of these countries, together with the vast information that they provide when it comes to contrasting urban land governance corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa, makes it an ideal place to draw comparisons. In this respect, with reference to the comparative features and dissimilarities that are discovered in the course of this study, tailored policy implications that may assist in combating corruption and advancing fairness and sustainability of land management in the region will be provided. The following sections of the paper will consist of the literature review of the prior research, the description of research methodology, analysis and conclusions about the findings as well as the practical recommendations concerning the fight against land corruption and the enhancement of sustainable urban development in SSA countries.

■2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Urban Land Governance and Corruption

The role of corruption in urban land governance has been widely proven from several perspectives by different scholars. Van der Molen and Tuladhar (2007) established that corruption in land administration includes bribery, fraud, and nepotism in areas of property rights registration, change in title, and usage of land. However, the study suggests that nepotism and clientele escalated corruption in the land market. Chiweshe (2017) further examined the issue of Eastern Zimbabwe on the subject of corruption in the aspect of land and equally as well claimed that this is a political influence and not a matter of corruption. This work mostly focused on the communal areas, land reform programs, and urban land to understand the obstacles in eradicating corruption. In its research, Ouna (2017) looked at Nairobi, Kenya, and found there was no proper identification of public land; probably why corruption and disputes over the occupancy were high. The study pointed out some of the incidences of the infringement of the right to public land, which include the construction of houses in reserved areas. Beza (2019) discussed Ethiopian urban land governance in relation to anti-corruption measures by linking factors such as population growth rates and spatial expansion to corruption. The study has shown that numerous and highly significant factors, such as extensive and intricate legal systems as well as a lack of proper documentation, essentially feed corruption.

The Anticorruption and Integrity Sector Programme (2020) considered the corrupt behaviors in the urban city, focusing on Harare in Zimbabwe, where unethical urban developers encountered loss due to increasing land market demand. It also highlighted important global topics that include money laundering in Dubai as well as the housing market, which fosters speculative practices that lead to forcing the urban poor out of São Paulo. Zinnbauer (2020) analyzed the correlation between urban growth, both formal and informal, and corruption; the work encouraged the avoidance of a blind focus on formal aspects. Chiweshe (2021) found the interconnection between politics and economics in the land markets important for a more profound understanding of urban land governance and corruption in Africa. The study depicted how urbanization and migration family pressures increase the demand for land and the corrupt practices emanating from political power and financial interest. According to Shipley (2021), corruption has a negative impact on land administration by providing unfair and nontransparent services and hence engaging in extortion and providing services to the favored individuals. The study noted that colonial policies and fraud perpetuate current land titling and customary systems of land.

Adamu et al. (2022) surveyed the effect of land corruption in Nigeria and Namibia and showed that conflict emerged due to low public understanding of land decrees and the misuse of legal procedures by leaders. Stevens (2023) revealed that land services in Kenya, Uganda, and Burundi are among some of the most corrupt; the same was established in Mexico and Bangladesh, whose land administration is characterized by bribery. Political corruption, in addition to bribery and patronage, is a major concern that persists in the land administration. Chavunduka and Tsikira (2024) focused on the factors affecting the management of public land and corruption in Zimbabwe through a case study approach to establish tainted practices that would favor specific entities. The study pointed out the violation of power relations in public land management. However, a gap has been left unfilled in the existing literature concerning corruption in urban land administration and management, especially in influencing regional factors in sub-Saharan Africa. This gap needs to be filled to assist in the anti-corruption strategies as well as advance the area of land governance in urban environments.

2.2 Drivers and Dynamics of Corruption in Urban Land Governance

Corruption in the governance of urban land is multifaceted due to the various cessations that shape it. This means that fragmentation of the land administration policies contributes to corrupt practices since when policy instruments are not harmonized adequately, it creates governance deficits that are unable to deal with corruption appropriately, as postulated by Lambin et al. (2014) as well as Briassoulis (2019). According to Asongu and Odhiambo (2019), socio-political governance instruments that were supposed to tackle corruption distort

corruption and negatively impact inclusive human development and ecological standards. This connotes the affinity that exists between the quality of governance and socioeconomic performance, especially in the land governance domain, which is central to urban society. According to Collignon et al. (2015), poor governance and corruption are considered major causes of socio-economic challenges such as public health. The link between governance failure and corruption means that lack of supervision could increase corruption in the use of land, making negative impacts on urban settings. Finally, poverty and inequality as socioeconomic factors are important determinants of the level of corruption in managing urban land. In parts of cultures and groups where people are not given any chance and voice, vices may become mechanisms of survival in unfavorable systems (Moudon, 2022). This relationship suggests that a healthy economy could be used to fight the vice of corruption.

Based on Merry et al. (2015), governance indices can measure corruption as well as the rule of law but are generally blunt, thus complicating the measurement of corruption in land governance as well as the identification of useful interventions. The lack of strong institutional governance instrumental in the protection of property rights makes corruption in urban land even more rampant. Most nations in the developing world fail to implement effective institutions that will curb corruption or they lack political will (Zhang, 2018). This is made worse by personalities who carry out corrupt practices, like in Kenya (Naher et al., 2020). There are no checks and balances and no transparency, all of which provide a fertile ground for corruption. According to Bartley (2018), both the absence of effective rights protection and the emergent dominance of privatized authority harm land resources: one can identify corruption as a process allowing elites effectively to grab land in Cambodia and thereby subvert the principles of equitable access to land. Naher et al. (2020) further postulate that corruption also undermines the delivery of basic public services, meaning that land governance challenges are part of a complex problem matrix. The intermediation that takes place between public officials, private developers, and other players in urban land management translates to corporate fraud and embezzlement of public resources (Zhang, 2018). This means that the roles of the public and private sectors intertwine with aspects of governance and raise the issue of corruption (Naher et al., 2020).

Corruption in the urban land is also attributed to newcomer systemic factors that are out of reach of bureaucratic capacity. Most of the countries have very poor or, at best, ambiguous land laws that the legal authorities find very hard to fight corruption. For example, Beza (2019) asserts that Ethiopia's legal structures are cumbersome and fraught with soft spots within which corrupt actors can navigate for self-aggrandizement in land transactions. Further, inadequate institutional capacity, particularly in land administration, such as inadequate financial resources and weak accountability systems, are some of the implemented land policy challenges. Ouna (2017) argues that weak identification of public land, particularly in Nairobi, has led to corruption in Kenya's land sector. This paper found that socio-political factors deeply influence the perpetration of corruption in urban land governance. Many a time, politics is the cause of biases and favoritism within the framework of the political leadership at the given point in time, and allocation of land will often follow the inept and unprofessional trend of hiring people that have some political ties, nepotism, and corporate indulgence. For instance, corruption in the distribution of land in Zimbabwe is connected to bare politics, with politicians 'keen on hanging on to power (Chiweshe, 2021). Corruption is encouraged in cultures and is sustained by elites who use it to gain political control of the land. As it is with Nigeria and their so-called customary land practices, more often than not powerful people participate in corrupt activities (Adamu et al., 2022).

Other issues include the demand for urban land, the economic stability, and the nature of the country's level of economic inequality, all of which influence corruption. Ethiopia has not been an exception for having issues of land grabbing and other illegal plot allocations caused by the increased land demand due to fast urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa (Beza, 2019). Economically generated factors also worsen the situation since a poor person or society will be compelled to compromise. For example, the high cost of land and housing has resulted in corruption in the form of illicit selling of the land and bribery in Kenya (Ouna, 2017). Based on these findings, therefore, studies that make cross-sectional comparisons between the experiences of different sub-Saharan countries could be useful for pursuing a cohesive approach to addressing corruption in urban land management. Thus, the realization of multiple factors that foster corruption can provide an additional perspective for the elaboration of more adequate measures to tackle the problems concerning urban land management all across the region.

2.3 Consequences of Corruption in Urban Land Governance

Corruption in the management and allocation of urban land has social impacts that affect different aspects of society. It replaces other traditional land management processes, which results in allocations that are not in harmony with the set plans. This contributes to the socially inefficient growth of urban areas characterized by squatter communities that lack the basic needs, hence worsening poverty and social unevenness. For instance, some individuals engaged in corrupt practices have escalated non-housing options for households in Nairobi, claiming that corruption in dispensing land has led to high levels of people living in slum areas and other informal structures, as noted by Transparency International (2013). Moreover, corruption slows down the delivery of fundamental needs such as roads and providing necessities like water and sanitation, which are necessities for sustainable growth of towns and cities (Shipley, 2021).

In addition, corruption aggravates socio-economic differences and environmental difficulties. Sturiale and Scuderi (2019) also note that corrupt land governance makes the planning of green infrastructure more challenging, and therefore, climate change adaptation and urban resilience. Lack of integration of environmental dimensions in land governance results in increased urban heat islands and, even more so, loss of biodiversity (Leal Filho et al., 2017). Thirdly, corruption undermines the citizen's confidence in governance institutions. In their article, Cheeseman, Lynch, and Willis (2018) posit that corruption interferes with democracy and causes erosion of electoral democracy, hence the lack of faith in governance systems and hence continuous production of corruption. Finally, economic corruption reduces the efficiency of the land markets and investors due to legal risks and property rights complications, which investors are likely to associate with a corrupt system. This means that corruption may result in the grabbing of land and forests and hence more unsustainable land use that causes environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity (Zinnbauer, 2020). Politically, corruption leads to exclusion, impacting the worst off in society, such as the poor and women who experience hindrances to land acquisition. Wily (2021) observes that in Sub-Saharan Africa, due to legalized and traditionalized sexism, women are often discriminated against in land transactions. Also, political corruption in land management has led in recent years to forced eviction of the urban poor by other individuals of a high and upper class, as in the case of

Zimbabwe (Chiweshe, 2021). However, there is a lack of cross-national comparative research on urban land governance corruption not only in Sub-Saharan Africa but also in other parts of the world.

2.4 Strategies for Combating Corruption in Urban Land Governance

Reducing corruption in the management of urban land requires an inter-sectoral legal, institutional, and community strategy. Improving the tenacity of rules and regulations together with increasing transparency is critically important for eliminating corrupt practices. According to the research of Driessen et al. (2016), effective governance should enhance responsibility in managing citizens' decision-making processes. Meyfroidt et al. (2020) suggested that the study of land-use governance needs to be done with a reference to a tele-coupled system whereby local dynamics have external consequences. Telecoupling means a system through which it is possible to track the interconnectedness of activities in a certain locality and their ability to affect change in another region socially, economically, or environmentally. This view departs from the collaborative governance approach, where a comprehensive approach that is adopted involves state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the community. It is very important to minimize legal uncertainties, and to do this, the laws regarding land use have to be overhauled. For example, the recent reforms in Ethiopia on land tenure have had a positive activity that seeks to promote stability of ownership rights as well as the simplification of how one could register on the land. The use of technology in the affairs of governing a country increases efficiency while at the same time minimizing chances of embezzlement. Cheeseman et al. (2018) observe that over time technology enhances efficiency and delivers quality information, which puts pressure on authorities. Much attention is needed on the socio-political dynamics of the country to foster the right implementation of the concepts of urban land governance. It is also necessary to enhance the capability of the staff in the agencies involved in land administration together with affording them adequate equipment and today's technology to encourage transparency and accountability. An example includes the recent adoption of digital land registries in Kenya, which has reduced the level of corruption in the regional markets since it has been revealed that the registries have reduced the levels of corruption (Ouna, 2017).

Citizen involvement in the formulation and implementation of land policies is also another strategy of land policy reform. Smallholding should involve residents in the decision-making so that they manage to receive a fair share while avoiding corruption. Promoting civil society organizations that demand accountability is equally relevant; for instance, in Zimbabwe, such organizations have stood up for demanding bias-free and corrupt-free land deals and recommending their necessary changes (Chiweshe, 2021). Corruption is rife in the land sector, and therefore accountability is important in the fight against corruption. Lack of inflow of accurate information is likely to dissuade malpractice. Hence, there is the enhancement of checks and balances, improving the independence of, for instance, anti-corruption commissions. There is also a strong need for international cooperation and assistance on the contingencies in governance structures. Namibia has benefited from foreign support for improving its land management sector. Scholarly articles and new concepts for the efficient, effective, equitable, and sustainable utilization of this important resource in Africa's emerging cities demand further studies.

■3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research employs the document review technique, which is a part of the qualitative research design system for analyzing secondary data. The materials employed in this work were obtained from websites like the World Bank and Transparency International as well as from academic articles that were published in Scopus and Web of Science electronic databases. To keep up with current concepts and theoretical frameworks and to match the data to the objectives of the study, only the sources published in the last ten years were included. The documents were selected as they relate to urban land management, governance, and corruption in the SSA region, with specific concern for issues of corruption perceptions, legal frameworks, and political interference. The list of documents has been chosen by certain considerations. First, they had to focus on corruption and governance problems in land management in urban areas. Secondly, its reliability in terms of authorship, the institution where the work was published, and its use in other works was analyzed. Finally, the documents needed to provide relevant data on at least one of the five cities included in the study (Nairobi, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Namibia). Such countries were chosen because their histories, economics, and politics are different, which facilitates comparisons.

Availability of data also formed other elements of consideration that led to the selection of such countries out of the several countries in the region. That is why the information regarding the analyzed documents was combined and compared to reveal similarities and differences related to the selected cities. This thematic analysis revolved around the corruption indices of urban land management, governors, and the political economy of urban land management. Cross-case analysis was then used to bring out similarities and differences exhibited in the respective cities after comparing the scenarios in each one of them. This meant that it was possible to locate governance difficulties within broader historical, economic, and political contexts and at the same time generate a critical framework within which policy advice could be developed. In this study, basic exploratory and qualitative techniques like interviews and focus group discussions were not applied. The use of secondary data made it possible to conduct a comprehensive analysis and use materials from different and various sources because their information is checked and reliable.

■4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section assesses the corruption perceptions and its effect on Sub-Saharan Africa's urban land administration, specifically in Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Namibia.

Table 1 SSA Corruption Perceptions Index for 2023

Country/Territory	Region	CPI score 2023
Somalia	SSA	11
South Sudan	SSA	13
Equatorial Guinea	SSA	17
Burundi	SSA	20
Chad	SSA	20
Comoros	SSA	20
Democratic Republic of the Congo	SSA	20
Sudan	SSA	20
Eritrea	SSA	21
Congo	SSA	22
Guinea-Bissau	SSA	22
Central African Republic	SSA	24
Zimbabwe	SSA	24
Liberia	SSA	25
Madagascar	SSA	25
Mozambique	SSA	25
Nigeria	SSA	25
Guinea	SSA	26
Uganda	SSA	26
Cameroon	SSA	27
Gabon	SSA	28
Mali	SSA	28
Djibouti	SSA	30
Eswatini	SSA	30
Mauritania	SSA	30
Kenya	SSA	31
Togo	SSA	31
Niger	SSA	32
Angola	SSA	33
Malawi	SSA	34
Sierra Leone	SSA	35
Ethiopia	SSA	37
Gambia	SSA	37
Zambia	SSA	37
Lesotho	SSA	39
Côte d'Ivoire	SSA	40
Tanzania	SSA	40
Burkina Faso	SSA	41
South Africa	SSA	41
Benin	SSA	43
Ghana	SSA	43
Senegal	SSA	43
São Tomé and Príncipe	SSA	45
Namibia	SSA	49
Mauritius	SSA	51
Rwanda	SSA	53
Botswana	SSA	59
Cabo Verde	SSA	64
Seychelles	SSA	71

(Source: Transparency International, 2024)

This paper adopted Transparency International's 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) on public sector corruption across several countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This means that the lower the value on the index, the higher the levels of corruption and the index varies from 0 to 100. This is evident from the table indicating a difference in corruption perception indices within the SSA regions with regard to the differences within the region. Somalia and South Sudan represent the lowest value, which corresponds to the very high perception of corruption. These nations, and some others in Africa and the Middle East, are plagued with governance issues that are unaccountable and opaque. Other countries that reported moderate to high levels of corruption include Equatorial Guinea, Burundi, Chad, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Sudan. The rating results also show that the level of corruption in Eritrea and the Republic of Congo is critical. Other countries that have poor scores, inclusive of between 22 and 25, are Guinea-Bissau, the Central African Republic, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Liberia, and Madagascar, among others, which reveal the ability to improve governance as well as the fight against corruption. The middle bracket is comprised of Uganda, Cameroon, Gabon, Mali, Djibouti, Eswatini, and Kenya, and its programs present a middle-of-the-road picture in the fight against corruption. It is, however, important to note that despite the above findings on democracy and

human rights, there is still a lot of corruption. Angola, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, the Gambia, Zambia, Lesotho, Côte d'Ivoire, Tanzania, Burkina Faso, South Africa, Benin, Ghana, Senegal, and other countries have reasonable levels of improvement in their governance. But still, there is some room for improvement to attain a higher degree of transparency and accountability. In the first tier, some countries are São Tomé and Príncipe, Namibia, Mauritius, Rwanda, Botswana, Cabo Verde, and Seychelles, which fully comply with the indicators of anti-corruption and good governance. These countries are an illustration that where there is good governance and sound institutional transformations, it is likely to record positive results.

It is therefore important to gain a perspective of governance reforms with regard to varied corruption levels. The variations in CPI scores depicted in the figure imply that there are stiff and excellent hurdles and performances cutting across most SSA countries. For instance, Somalia and South Sudan, as countries with lower CPI scores, continue presenting appalling governance issues that hamper development. All these countries require serious overhauls aimed at constructing proper democratic institutions. On the other end of the scale, countries with high CPI scores, such as Botswana and Seychelles, show us that good governance translates to better development. These nations have developed very effective anti-corruption mechanisms and institutional changes that other SSA countries should emulate. The CPI scores also have a direct positive relationship with the level of corruption in land administration, particularly in the urban areas. In highly corrupt countries, bribery, fraud, and favoritism in the administration of land are common and are a cause of the inefficiencies and inequitable nature of the distribution of land. Those countries with low CPI scores must step up the process of enhancing the degree of transparency and increasing the quality of the legal environment as well as proper institutions in land management. Thus, the CPI contains significant information on problems of corruption perceptions and requires the enhancement of governing and anti-corruption activities in the SSA countries. Therefore, eradicating high, moderate, and low corruption requires an appraisal of the country's political history, delivery system, and innovativeness. Therefore, SSA nations can indeed learn from some of the successful cadences of the countries with a high score in CPI to effect efficient governance reforms that would enhance sustainable development and more resilient cities.

Table 2 Forms and patterns of corruption in urban land governance in selected sub-Saharan African countries

Country	Types of Corruption	Manifestations	Sector-specific Issues	References
Kenya	Bribery, nepotism, clientelism, fraud	Land transactions, property rights registration, land administration	Public land corruption, illegal land grabbing, urban vs. rural distinctions	Transparency International [Kenya] (2024), Ouna (2017)
Ethiopia	Bribery, fraud, nepotism	Land use planning, property registration, legal framework gaps	Complex legal structures, public land administration, urban expansion issues	Beza (2019), World Bank (2020)
Zimbabwe	Bribery, clientelism, favouritism, nepotism	Land reform programs, communal and urban land issues, and political power influence	Corruption in communal areas, land reform challenges, urban land market manipulation	Chiweshe (2017; 2021)
Nigeria	Bribery, nepotism, fraud	Land adjudication, state land decree conflicts, abuse of the rule of law by elites	Public vs. private land corruption, conflicts between communities and state officials, urban land use planning issues	Transparency International [Nigeria] (2024), Adamu, Mabakeng, & Youngu (2022)
Namibia	Bribery, favouritism, abuse of power	Land allocation, land registration, property rights	Public land administration, unequal access to land, influence of political elites	African Development Bank (2020), Transparency International (2024)

Table 2 shows corruption patterns in urban land governance systems in Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Namibia, influenced by socio-political, economic, and institutional factors, highlighting the complexity of Sub-Saharan Africa's urban land governance. Kenya and Ethiopia are both grappling with corruption, particularly in land transactions, property rights registration, and administration. The issue is exacerbated by illegal land grabbing and distinctions between urban and rural land use. This compromise in land governance leads to inequitable land distribution, erodes public trust, and perpetuates socio-economic inequalities. Zimbabwe and Nigeria are both grappling with corruption in land governance. Zimbabwe's political power dynamics have led to favoritism, clientelism, and nepotism in land allocations, resulting in ineffective reform and unequal access to land. Nigeria's urban land governance is deeply institutionalized, causing systemic inequalities and social unrest. Without comprehensive reforms, sustainable urban development and social equity in Nigeria will be hindered. Namibia faces corruption in land allocation, registration, and property rights, despite a stable governance structure. Power abuse by political elites leads to unequal land access and inefficient public land administration. Corruption in urban land governance causes socio-economic and political challenges, including inequitable land distribution.

Table 3 Political economy and power dynamics in urban land governance in selected sub-Saharan African countries

Country	Role of Political Actors	Economic Interests	Historical and Socio-Political Context	References
Kenya	Significant influence of politicians and government officials in land allocation	Business elites and land developers heavily involved in land transactions	Colonial legacies of land inequality, post-colonial land reforms, and a dynamic current political climate	Transparency International [Kenya] (2024), Ouna (2017)
Ethiopia	Government officials exert considerable control over land distribution and planning.	Investors and developers capitalize on legal complexities and rapid urban expansion.	Historical centralized control over land, socialist land reforms, and recent rapid urbanization	Beza (2019), World Bank (2020)
Zimbabwe	Politicians and politically connected individuals dominate land markets	Economic interests of elites and large-scale land developers	Colonial history of land dispossession, post-independence land reforms, and ongoing political and economic challenges	Chiweshe (2017; 2021)
Nigeria	Political actors, including elites, influence land allocation and urban planning.	Significant involvement of business elites, investors, and land speculators	Colonial land tenure systems, post-colonial urban growth, and a politically charged environment impacting land governance	Transparency International [Nigeria] (2024), Adamu et al. (2022)
Namibia	Political elites and government officials have a strong influence on land distribution.	Economic interests focus on land for agricultural and tourism development, with private investors playing a significant role.	Colonial legacy of apartheid-era land segregation, independence-era reforms, and contemporary debates over land restitution and redistribution	African Development Bank (2020), UN-Habitat (2019)

The analysis of land governance and corruption in Sub-Saharan Africa in Table 3 reveals that political actors, economic interests, and historical socio-political contexts significantly influence land management practices. In Kenya, politicians and government officials influence land allocation, leading to corruption. Ethiopia's centralized governance system allows for state control, but weak checks and balances create opportunities for corruption. Zimbabwe's political and economic interests dominate land markets, exacerbated by historical land dispossession and post-independence reforms. Nigeria's complex land ownership patterns, post-colonial urban growth, and political interference contribute to corruption. Namibia's history of apartheid-era land segregation and post-independence reforms shape political elites' influence on land distribution. Effective land governance requires robust legal frameworks, institutional capacity, and political will to address historical injustices and ensure equitable land distribution.

Table 4 Political, economic, and historical contexts influence urban land governance in selected sub-Saharan African countries

Country	Role of Political Actors	Economic Interests	Historical and Socio-Political Context	References
Kenya	Significant influence of politicians and government officials in land allocation	Business elites and land developers heavily involved in land transactions	Colonial legacies of land inequality, post-colonial land reforms, and a dynamic current political climate	Ouna (2017), Transparency International [Kenya] (2024), National Land Commission Kenya (2021), Beza (2019), World Bank (2020), Koroso & Zevenbergen (2024)
Ethiopia	Government officials exert considerable control over land distribution and planning.	Investors and developers capitalize on legal complexities and rapid urban expansion.	Historical centralized control over land, socialist land reforms, and recent rapid urbanization	
Zimbabwe	Politicians and politically connected individuals dominate land markets	Economic interests of elites and large-scale land developers	Colonial history of land dispossession, post-independence land reforms, and ongoing political and economic challenges	Chiweshe (2017; 2021), Transparency International Zimbabwe (TIZ) (2024)
Nigeria	Political actors, including elites, influence land allocation and urban planning.	Significant involvement of business elites, investors, and land speculators	Colonial land tenure systems, post-colonial urban growth, and a politically charged environment impacting land governance	Adeniyi (2011), Lamond, Awuah, Lewis, Bloch & Falade (2015), Adamu et al. (2022), Transparency International [Nigeria] (2024)
Namibia	Political elites and government officials have a significant role in land allocation, often influenced by historical land claims and contemporary development pressures.	Economic interests primarily focus on agricultural development, tourism, and real estate.	Legacy of apartheid-era land segregation, post-independence land reforms, and ongoing debates over land restitution and redistribution	Mandy (2020), Namibia Statistics Agency (2018), Adamu, Mabakeng & Youngu (2022)

Table 4 shows the analysis of urban land governance in Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Namibia, revealing several common themes and challenges. In all five countries, political actors, including government officials and elites, have a significant influence on land allocation and urban planning. The involvement of business elites, investors, and land developers further complicates the governance of land resources. In all five countries, the historical context of colonial land inequality and subsequent post-colonial land reforms is a recurring factor. The legacy of colonial policies continues to shape the current political climate and contribute to persistent land management issues. This historical context, coupled with the ongoing involvement of powerful actors, implies that any efforts to reform land governance must address both the entrenched interests of political and economic elites and the lingering effects of colonial policies. The socio-political context of each country also plays a crucial role in land governance. Centralized control over land, as seen in Ethiopia, has deep roots in the country's historical and socio-political history. Similarly, in Zimbabwe and Nigeria, the entrenchment of political power in land governance reflects the complex interaction between political power and economic interests. The ongoing land reform process in Namibia, as well as the historical context of land dispossession during the colonial era, continues to have an impact on land governance. The study underscores the need for comprehensive land reform in these nations, addressing historical injustices, power dynamics, and current political and economic structures to promote effective urban land governance.

Table 5 Impacts of corruption on urban growth, housing markets, and social consequences

Country	Urban Growth and Planning	Housing Market and Land Prices	Social Consequences	References
Kenya	Corruption hampers infrastructure development and effective urban planning	High land prices, housing affordability issues, rampant land speculation	Worsening social equity, limited access to land for the poor, displacement of communities	Transparency International Kenya (2019), Transparency International Kenya (2024)
Ethiopia	Inefficient urban expansion, poor infrastructure development due to corruption	Escalating land prices, housing shortages, displacement due to rapid urbanization	Social inequities, challenges in accessing land for low-income groups, and community livelihoods affected.	Adam (2014), Beza (2019)
Zimbabwe	Corruption-driven urban sprawl, inadequate infrastructure, and poor urban planning	Inflated land prices, housing crisis, speculative land deals	Increased social inequality, reduced access to land, forced evictions of marginalized communities	Chiweshe (2017; 2021), Transparency International Zimbabwe (2024)
Nigeria	Stalled urban growth and infrastructure deficits due to corruption in land governance.	Unaffordable housing, speculative land markets, displacement due to elite capture of land	Deepening social inequity, restricted land access for the poor, adverse impact on community livelihoods	Adamu et al. (2022), World Bank (2017)
Namibia	Corruption impacts urban development, resulting in poor infrastructure and planning.	High land prices, affordability issues, and speculative land transactions	Social inequalities worsen, limited land access for marginalized groups, and increased community displacement	Smit (2011), Anti-Corruption Commission (2021)

Table 5 highlights the significant impact of corruption on urban growth, housing markets, and social outcomes in five countries. Corruption hampers urban planning and infrastructure development, leading to inefficient urban growth and poorly planned cities. This is evident in Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, and Namibia, where corrupt practices result in inadequate infrastructure, haphazard urban expansion, and challenges in urban planning. Corruption also affects the housing market and land prices. Inflated land prices and unaffordable housing are prevalent in all five countries due to speculative land deals and elite land capture. Nigeria and Namibia, in particular, experience high land prices and affordability issues, widening the gap between the wealthy and the poor. The social consequences of corruption in urban land governance are severe, particularly for low-income groups, marginalized communities, and those with limited access to resources. Displacement of communities and reduced land access for the poor in Kenya and Zimbabwe exacerbate social inequalities, leading to heightened tensions and potential conflicts. In Ethiopia and Namibia, inequitable access to land threatens the livelihoods of low-income groups, further deepening socio-economic disparities. These findings emphasize the need for comprehensive anti-corruption strategies and governance reforms in urban land management. Addressing corruption in urban land governance is crucial for achieving equitable urban development, ensuring access to affordable housing, and promoting social justice. Reforms should prioritize transparency, accountability, and public participation in land governance processes. Strengthening institutional frameworks, enforcing land rights, and curbing the influence of elites in land markets are essential steps toward mitigating the negative impacts of corruption. Neglecting these issues will impede urban growth, exacerbate housing crises, and deepen social inequalities, ultimately leading to long-term socio-economic instability. Policymakers should take these findings into account and prioritize measures to combat corruption and promote good governance in urban land management.

◼5.0 CONCLUSION

This study gives a detailed evaluation of corruption in urban land governance in Kenya, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, and Namibia from secondary sources. The study found that corruption in urban land governance is not only persistent but also structural, and this is due to political, economic, and historical forces. In this context, the comparative analysis highlights how corruption patterns are diverse and multifaceted in their differences and similarities depending on each country's governance, political economy, and socio-political circumstances. The cross-national study established various similarities between the countries; political players' intervention in the allocation of land, exploitation of legal grey areas, and the effect of corruption on urban development and housing. They also collectively lead to social injustice and impede economic growth; in addition, they complicate issues of urbanization within the region.

However, the study also acknowledges the fact that there is a need to consider the context the countries are in. Curiously, some countries have legal bases that may act as a deterrent for corruption, but the lack of political will and the means of tracking violators prevent this from happening. Thus, countries with a relatively underdeveloped legal framework experience deeper and more significant problems in fighting corruption, therefore, they need stronger measures. This study concludes that dealing with corruption in the governance of urban land demands a complex strategy. It is quite clear that there is no one-size-fits-all, and anticorruption efforts have to be contextualized by the political economy and history of the country in which they are being implemented. These are improvement of the legal base, increase of transparency and accountability, and creation of political willingness to undertake changes. To this end, it is necessary to pursue more effective anti-corruption measures, including progressive land reforms, which quite often may be viewed as anti-corruption measures as they address socio-economic causes of corruption, help in the achievement of a more balanced distribution of land, and promote sustainable urban developments. Hence, it is evident that the anti-corruption crusade in Sub-Saharan Africa's urban land management is a daunting task that is not impossible. This paper has sought to present the realities of the five above countries and show how they can be used to build more transparent, accountable, and equitable land governance frameworks that can support the region's urbanization and development agenda.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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