



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Effectiveness of Urban Planning Documents Tested by Institutional Obstacles: The Case of Greater Lomé (TOGO)

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## ABSTRACT

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Urban growth across Africa has triggered the adoption of a wide range of strategic planning tools aimed at guiding spatial development. In Greater Lomé, instruments such as the Urban Development Master Plan (UDMP), the City Development Strategy (CDS), and the National Housing and Urban Development Policy (NPHUD) have been introduced to support more structured urban growth. However, a persistent gap remains between the theoretical ambitions of these frameworks and their practical implementation on the ground. This study seeks to identify the systemic barriers that limit the effective operationalization of planning documents in the Togolese capital. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research draws on document analysis, local case studies, and 184 semi-structured interviews with institutional, technical, and civil society stakeholders. The results reveal three interdependent constraints: normative instability due to overlapping and unstandardized terminologies; fragmented governance marked by weak coordination and limited capacity; and misalignment between planning goals and actual land management practices. These factors collectively hinder the transition from spatial planning to effective urban transformation. The study concludes that bridging this gap will require a stronger legal foundation, improved metropolitan-level coordination, and enhanced local capacity and ownership to realize the objectives of planned urban development in Greater Lomé.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the early 2000s, the Greater Lomé region has experienced rapid urban growth, both demographically and spatially. Its population increased from 1.57 million in 2010 to over 2.3 million in 2020, now accounting for nearly 24% of the national population (INSEED, 2022). This dynamic, still only partially controlled, has resulted in disorderly urban sprawl, placing significant strain on planning capacities, infrastructure, and the urban environment (Assogba, 2021). Within the broader context of West Africa's urban explosion, sustainable urban planning emerges as a critical response to the challenges of managing rapidly changing urban territories.

To address this situation, Togolese authorities have equipped the Greater Lomé agglomeration with a suite of strategic planning instruments: the Master Plan for Development and Urbanism (UDMP), the City Development Strategy (CDS), and the National Policy for Housing and Urban Development (NPHUD) (Mahamat et al., 2024). These tools aim to guide urban growth and foster a more structured, inclusive, and environmentally sound development model. The CDS, for instance, envisions a "modern, healthy, and attractive urban community," while the UDMP seeks to regulate land use and plan long-term infrastructure (Deneux, 1981). However, the mere existence of these documents does not guarantee their effective implementation, and Greater Lomé remains characterized by informal urbanization, a weak connection to local realities, and deficient infrastructure (Guezéré, 2011; Ouro, 2023).

Field assessments in several municipalities reveal significant disparities in the development and implementation of planning documents. These differences are observable between local authorities, between urban and rural areas, and even between consulting firms, reflecting a high degree of methodological heterogeneity (Nyagssogba, 1984). In some cases, urban development projects are carried out without a solid legal basis or reliable cartographic documentation (Hounsounou, 2019), thereby increasing the vulnerability of cities to spontaneous urbanization. This fragmentation is largely due to the absence of a unified normative framework and the leeway given to territorial actors, who often interpret national guidelines according to their own logics (Koutoua, 2019). Compounding this issue are a structural deficit of technical skills and a lack of effective urban management tools (GIS, updated maps, databases), which limit the operational capacity of local governments, particularly in rural areas.

At the metropolitan scale, these obstacles are exacerbated by weak institutional coordination. Since the 2019 administrative reform, Lomé has been divided into thirteen municipalities under the auspices of the Autonomous District of Greater Lomé (DAGL), a restructuring intended to promote local governance. However, this new framework raises coordination challenges for issues that transcend municipal boundaries, such as mobility, flood risk, and environmental management (Suka & Dziwonou, 2021; Marie-H, 2010). Furthermore, the implementation of urban policies is constrained by a chronic lack of local funding, inefficient tax collection, and a heavy reliance on external aid (Ouro, 2023; Mawedeou, 2022). Land tenure also presents significant hurdles: the lack of secured land reserves, jurisdictional conflicts, and the persistence of customary practices despite the 2018 land reform (Deckon & Tchini, 2018; Narath, 2008) all slow the execution of planned projects.

A gradual erosion of citizen participation in the planning process accompanies these institutional and technical limitations. Despite an initial commitment to consultation during the CDS development phase, implementation has shifted towards top-down, technocratic approaches (Oladokoun, 2013), disconnecting urban projects from lived needs. A major conceptual issue adds to this: the lack of standardized tools. Although a methodological guide for developing urban planning documents has been validated, it has yet to be officially adopted. In its absence, each stakeholder applies their own methods, sometimes conflicting with principles of territorial coherence and sustainability. This methodological atomization degrades the legibility of plans and undermines their implementation across Greater Lomé.

These observations lead to the hypothesis that the mismatch between normative frameworks, local planning practices, and institutional fragmentation constitutes a structural lock-in that prevents any coherent implementation of urban policies. A second, underlying hypothesis is that this situation is partly inherited from a chaotic genealogy of planning tools in Togo, characterized by persistent conceptual instability.

Therefore, this study's central research question is as follows: what are the main barriers to the effective operationalization of urban planning documents in Greater Lomé, and how can the gap between the strategic choices outlined in these plans and the informal dynamics observed on the ground be explained?

The main objective of this article is to demonstrate that failures in implementing planning documents are the consequence of both historical structural factors and contemporary institutional limitations. The proposed analysis is based on a mixed-methods approach, combining documentary review, case studies, and semi-structured interviews. This article is organized into three parts: first, it traces the genealogy of planning tools in Togo; second, it analyzes the dysfunctions observed in local implementation based on fieldwork in several municipalities of Greater Lomé; and finally, it formulates reform proposals to strengthen the effectiveness of territorial governance.

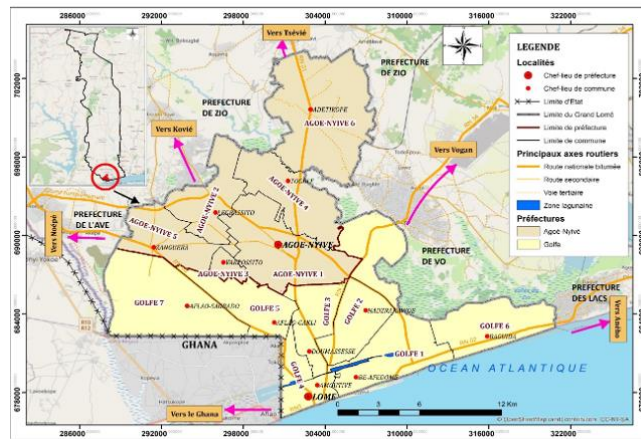
The expected results will highlight concrete levers for improving institutional coordination and the quality of planning documents, with the aim of achieving a more effective alignment between strategic vision and the lived realities of city dwellers.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

### 2.1. Study Area Description

Greater Lomé comprises 13 municipalities: Baguida, Togblekopé, Légbassito, Sanguera, Vakpossito, Aflao-Sagbado, Aflao-Gakli, Amoutiévé, Bè Ouest, Bè Centre, Bè Est, Agoè-Nyivé, and Adétikopé. It encompasses the prefectures of Golfe and Agoè-Nyivé, as well as some peripheral localities from the Zio and Avé prefectures, including Djaqlé, Aveta, and Aképé. This extensive territory forms an evolving metropolitan area undergoing significant spatial and demographic transformations.

The Atlantic Ocean to the south; the Aflao-Ghana border and Avé prefecture to the west; Zio prefecture to the north; and the Lakes (Lacs) prefecture to the east (see Figure 2) define the geographical boundaries of Greater Lomé. The urban fabric is unevenly distributed across the territory, with population densities ranging between 1,307 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> and 357 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>.



**Figure 1. Map of the Greater Lomé Autonomous District**

Source: DGCN, OSM, prepared by AIDAM Koudjo, 2025

### 2.2. Materials Used

Data collection and analysis relied on a combination of technical tools and methodological instruments designed to ensure reliability, traceability, and reproducibility of the findings. The main equipment and sources utilized include:

- a digital voice recorder, used to capture semi-structured interviews conducted with key territorial stakeholders;
- a semi-open questionnaire, developed in advance, which served as the backbone for household surveys and structured field observations;
- a tablet computer equipped with the Kobo Toolbox application, enabling real-time data entry and spatially referenced data processing;
- a set of technical and administrative documents, including urban plans, cadastral records, decrees, and legal texts, accessed through municipal services, land management offices, and relevant judicial institutions.

There are no restrictions on the use of primary data for this study; all materials are available from the authors upon request. No new software code or complex algorithms were developed. Data processing was carried out using open-access tools (KoboToolbox, spreadsheets, and thematic matrices). At the time of writing, datasets have not yet been deposited into a public repository, but anonymized source files (interviews, questionnaires) are archived and may be shared through institutional platforms upon request.

This research did not involve human or animal subjects in the biomedical sense. However, all interview participants gave verbal informed consent, in line with ethical standards commonly applied in qualitative research within the social sciences. Formal ethics committee approval was not required. Nevertheless, the study adhered strictly to fundamental research ethics principles regarding anonymity, confidentiality, and neutrality.

No generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) was employed in the design, analysis, or interpretation of the data. Its use was limited solely to superficial linguistic improvements (grammar, formatting), with no bearing on the scientific content of this paper.

### 2.3. Methodological Approach

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, drawing on documentary analysis, empirical fieldwork, historical contextualisation, and a participatory reading of urban land governance systems.

The first phase involved a thorough literature and archival review, conducted across libraries, municipal repositories, and urban institutional archives. This stage helped map the historical evolution of land governance frameworks and planning tools in Greater Lomé, spanning the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial periods. This historical analysis was complemented by a review of key strategic documents currently guiding urban development: UDMP, CDS, local development plans (PDC), land laws, and major investment programs.

The second phase consisted of fieldwork conducted between January and April 2025, structured around three main data collection methods:

- a survey of 184 residential compounds, sampled from three main types of neighbourhoods historic areas, transitional zones, and expansion fronts was carried out to gather information on land access, tenure status, living conditions, and household socio-economic profiles;
- a series of semi-structured interviews with institutional and community actors including traditional land chiefs, neighborhood leaders, municipal technicians, legal officers, and representatives from local Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs). These interviews explored the interface between customary and statutory land rights, patterns of land disputes, and local perceptions of land value;
- a targeted review of documented land disputes, analysed through legal and administrative files retrieved from court archives and land management offices.

All data collected were subjected to a cross-thematic analysis, using an analytical framework based on four key dimensions: governance, norms and standards, legal security of land tenure, and territorial efficacy. A triangulated analysis combining primary sources (interviews and surveys), secondary materials (grey literature, laws, plans), and spatial representations (maps, GIS) provided an integrated diagnosis of land-related vulnerabilities and institutional constraints impeding urban planning implementation in the Lomé metropolitan area.

## 3. RESULTS

### 3.1. A Fragmented Genealogy of Urban Planning Documents: Chronic Conceptual Ambiguity in Togo

The evolution of urban planning in Togo reveals a series of conceptual disconnects, characterized by overlapping terminologies, shifting labels, and institutional innovations frequently introduced without clear legal foundations or methodological coherence. From the colonial era to the present day, at least six different terms have been used to refer to urban planning instruments intended to serve the same essential function: managing the spatial organisation of cities. Rather than a linear or standardized development, the trajectory resembles a disjointed genealogy. Although often driven by technical ambition, it remains plagued by repeated failures to harmonise the legal and procedural frameworks for urban planning. Unpacking this genealogy exposes the cumulative yet unstable nature of the documentary landscape that underpins (or undermines) urban planning in Togo.

#### 3.1.1. Phase 1: The Colonial Era, Early Experiments in Urban Forecasting (1930–1946)

**1930:** Early signs of urban intervention appear with Order No. 511, issued on 17 September 1930, which established subdivision regulations in four urban centres. However, these documents lacked any overarching urban vision or long-term foresight.

**1946:** The emergence of three planning instruments is noted, including the first appearance of the term *projet directeur* (master project), which was intended to guide urban expansion in a more coordinated fashion. Yet none of these projects were ever operationalized, remaining conceptual and unimplemented.

### 3.1.2. Phase 2: The Post-Independence Period – Institutionalizing Uncertainty (1967–1977)

**1967:** A significant legal effort introduces the Urban Master Plan (UMP) by decree, with Article 45 mandating its adoption in Lomé, marking the first formal attempt at postcolonial planning.

**1969:** Just two years later, another decree approves a planning document for Lomé yet this time under a different name: the Urban Master Plan (UMP). Although largely overlapping with the PUD in content, the new term introduces a conceptual ambiguity with no clarification provided.

**1970:** The term Urban Development Master Plan enters the lexicon following the approval of master plans for five secondary cities. This new label appears despite lacking any prior legal or definitional basis.

**1977:** A new shift occurs with the enactment of a decree establishing the Directorate for Urbanism and Housing (DGUIH), alongside the terms Urban Development Master Plan (UDMP) and Land Use Plan (LUP), both introduced without clearly defined scopes or methodologies.

### 3.1.3. Phase 3: The 1980s – Continued Semantic Drift (1981–1983)

1978–1983: Under contract with the consulting firm Technosynthesis, urban master plans (initially called PDUs) were developed and then formally approved under an entirely different label: Urban Development Master Plan. The content remained largely the same, but the administrative labelling changed. This substitution absent any conceptual or methodological transformation further cemented the pattern of terminological inconsistency. The rebranding of identical instruments under diverse terms, with little justification, amplified confusion in both institutional understanding and policy execution.

### 3.1.4. Phase 4: The Contemporary Shift – Imported Models and Regulatory Complexity (Since 2019)

2019: Law No. 2019-020 introduced two new planning instruments directly inspired by the French planning system: the Local Urban Plan (PLU) and the Schéma de Cohérence Territoriale (SCOT). While these documents aim to strengthen the link between strategic planning and local implementation, they have been added to an already saturated and ambiguous nomenclature. No efforts were undertaken to clarify the distinctions between these imported tools and previous instruments like the UMP, UDMP, PLU, or LUP.

This accumulation of acronyms and planning terms *projet directeur*, UMP, PDU, UDMP, SCOT/PLU has led to a fragmented institutional memory and operational confusion. The resulting inconsistencies have significantly undermined the effectiveness of the urban planning system in Togo. The absence of a unified and recognized reference framework has made it difficult to evaluate or monitor planning instruments, compare methodologies across cities, or align legal, technical, and operational languages in a coherent way.

**Table 1. The Genealogy of Urban Planning Frameworks in Togo**

Period	Introduced Terminology	Legal Basis?	Main Characteristic
1946	Master Plan (Projet Directeur)	Unclear	Intended as a forward-looking document, but never implemented
1967	Urban Development Master Plan (PUD)	Decree	Referenced in law but never directly applied
1969	Urban Master Plan (PDU)	Approved by decree	First formal document, yet conceptually ambiguous
1970	Urban Development Framework (Schéma Directeur d'Urbanisme)	Not referenced	Similar to the PDU, but lacking legal and conceptual clarity
1977	UDMP – POS (Urban Planning Scheme / Land Use Plan)	Decree establishing the Directorate of Urbanism and Housing (DGUIH)	New generation of tools, but not technically defined
1983	Urban Development Framework (Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement Urbain)	Approval decree	Substitute term for PDU used in official decrees
2019	PLU – SCOT (Local Urban Plan / Territorial Coherence Scheme)	Law No. 2019-020	Terminologies imported from the French urban planning model

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

### 3.2. Preliminary Inventory of Urban Planning Documents in Togo

The current status of urban planning documents developed or under development in Togo since independence can be described as follows:

**Table 2. Chronology of Urban Planning Document Implementation in Togo (1970–2024)**

Year	Description
1970 – 2019	49 UDMPs developed for 49 localities, of which 25 have been effectively implemented.
2020 – 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Implementation of UDMPs in 8 commune capitals;</li> <li>– Execution of Detailed Urban Plans (PUD) in 10 commune capitals;</li> <li>– Two pilot Local Urban Plans (PLU) in Avé 2 and Zio 2.</li> </ul>
2022 – 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Four (4) PLU currently under development for four communes in the Lacs region;</li> <li>– Two (2) UDMP in progress for Asrama and Wahala;</li> <li>– Six (6) additional UDMPs developed under the UIDP project for six communes.</li> </ul>
2023 – 2024	– Three (3) PLUs in progress for three communes in the Kéran region.
2024	– Thirteen (13) PLUs under development for 13 localities, funded by the State's internal budget.

**Source: Field Surveys and Official Urban Planning Reports, 2025**

This table 2 provides an overview of Togolese localities equipped with urban planning documents, namely the Strategic Development and Urbanism Master Plans (UDMP) and Local Urban Plans (PLU). In total, 57 municipalities, including the 13 in Greater Lomé, have urban planning documents. The master plans for the regional capitals, now obsolete, are currently being revised by the UIDP project. To date, 28 of these urban planning documents have led to the implementation of road networks, key infrastructure, or detailed plans derived from the SDAUs.

### 3.3. Knowledge of Urban Planning Documents: A Limited Ownership

One of the primary findings is the low level of knowledge regarding urban planning documents among local stakeholders. On average, out of ten individuals interviewed per municipality, only two to three actors reported having even limited knowledge of the Strategic Development and Urbanism Master Plan (UDMP).

Other documents, such as Local Urban Plans (PLU), Detailed Urban Plans (PUD), or Sector Development Plans (PAS), remain largely unknown. However, a few exceptions were noted in certain municipalities where PLU development or implementation projects are underway, often linked to local initiatives or external support.

### 3.4. Level of Involvement: Motivated Stakeholders Facing Structural Constraints

The interview results show a generally high level of involvement from local stakeholders in the development of certain urban planning documents, particularly the UDMPs. In the majority of municipalities, eight to nine out of ten actors stated they had been involved in consultation and monitoring processes.

However, a significant limitation lies in the time lag between the development of these documents and the establishment of new municipal teams. Most of these documents are over five years old and were designed before the decentralization reforms. Consequently, the new elected officials and municipal technicians did not always participate in their creation, which undermines their current ownership. In contrast, ongoing projects more systematically involve local actors, indicating progress in participatory governance.

Local governance is also affected by a deficit in participation and transparency during the plan monitoring phase. According to a representative from a community-based NGO in Lomé, "After the plan was developed, residents were not sufficiently involved in its implementation. Many citizens are

unaware of the status of the proposed projects, which undermines citizen oversight and the pressure to get them done." This lack of post-design involvement can lead to lower project ownership by the population and thus to difficulties in bringing them to fruition, especially when actions require the contribution or cooperation of residents (e.g., for land acquisition or resettlement).

### **3.5. Frequency and Effectiveness of Use: Often Inadequate or Obsolete Documents**

Another major finding is the infrequent use of urban planning documents in the daily execution of municipal duties. Several municipalities face difficulties in utilizing these tools, primarily due to their inadequacy in reflecting the on-the-ground reality, their obsolescence, or the disconnect between current urban dynamics and the provided cartographic and regulatory data.

In some localities, the delay between the development and effective implementation of these documents exceeds ten years, rendering the content of the plans outdated and difficult to apply.

### **3.6. Opinions and Recommendations from Local Stakeholders: A Call for a Useful, Simple, and Locally-Rooted Reform**

The interviewed stakeholders unanimously welcomed the initiative to create a guide for the development and implementation of urban planning documents. Several key recommendations were formulated:

The guide should be written in accessible French and, if possible, translated into the main national languages (Ewe, Kabyè, Tem, Moba, etc.) to facilitate understanding by all.

It should be practical, operational, and adapted to local realities, avoiding overly technical or legalistic content that is difficult to apply.

It is strongly recommended that the guide mandates the creation of municipal steering committees responsible for monitoring and supporting consultants during planning projects.

The guide could also include typological prescriptions for desired housing forms by sector, to ensure better architectural and functional coherence.

Finally, once developed, the documents must be implemented without delay and simultaneously handed over to the municipalities to ensure their immediate and effective use.

### **3.7. Partial Implementation of Planned Actions**

An examination of on-the-ground achievements reveals that only a segment of the measures outlined in the strategic documents has been realized. On one hand, some progress is notable: for instance, infrastructure projects have been successfully carried out under the Priority Action Plan derived from the CDS, such as the rehabilitation of several main arteries in Lomé, the extension of the drinking water supply network in peripheral neighborhoods, and the construction of local markets and community centers in certain municipalities. These accomplishments reflect the commitment of authorities and partners to equip Greater Lomé with facilities consistent with the plans' orientations.

On the other hand, many planned projects have either not been initiated or remain unfinished. For example, most projects aimed at reinforcing secondary roads and drainage systems in flood-prone areas, despite being identified as priorities in the UDMP, are experiencing delays. Several interviewees highlighted persistent deficiencies in basic services: "In our municipality, many neighborhoods still lack paved roads and functional drains, despite the plans. Every rainy season, we face the same floods," shared a mayor from a peri-urban municipality, illustrating the ineffectiveness of certain planned provisions.

### **3.8. Institutional Constraints and Metropolitan Governance**

The results show that the institutional fragmentation of Greater Lomé complicates the coherent implementation of urban policies. Although the Autonomous District of Greater Lomé (DAGL) was created to ensure coordination at the metropolitan scale, in practice, collaboration between the 13 municipalities and the DAGL remains uneven. According to a municipal technical manager, "It is not always easy to align our municipal development plan with the Greater Lomé SDAU; we lack support, and everyone tends to work in silos." This testimony reveals that inter-municipal consultation bodies and coordination mechanisms between the state and local authorities still require improvement.

Consequently, cross-municipal structural projects, such as planned road bypasses or retention basins, suffer from fragmented management and delays.

### 3.9. Financial and Technical Limitations

Financially, the results confirm that insufficient resources are a major bottleneck. The municipal budgets of Greater Lomé, even when supplemented by state allocations, cover only a fraction of the necessary investments. Many projects that exist on paper are awaiting effective funding. A mayor from a peripheral area summarized the situation: "Our financial means are very limited; without help from the state or partners, we cannot build the planned infrastructure." This finding aligns with the analysis that mobilizing additional resources (loans, grants, public-private partnerships) is essential to realize the plans' objectives.

From a technical standpoint, operational capacities vary from one municipality to another but remain modest overall. Municipal technical services face a shortage of qualified personnel and equipment (e.g., mapping software, digitized land databases) to effectively monitor and manage urban projects. This results in a dependency on the Ministry of Urbanism or external consultants to study and execute complex projects, which can delay their completion. An official from the Urban and Municipal Development Agency confirmed that "most municipalities do not yet have the technical skills or tools to handle certain aspects of the UDMP themselves, such as detailed neighborhood planning or real estate development control." This situation underscores the importance of local capacity building to accelerate operationalization.

### 3.10. Land Tenure and Regulatory Challenges

Finally, obstacles related to land tenure emerge clearly from the case studies. In peripheral municipalities, the availability of land for new public facilities (roads, schools, etc.) is often jeopardized by unplanned settlements or land transactions carried out without regard to the designated zoning. A Ministry of Urban Planning, Housing and Land Reform (MUHRF) official explained that "expropriation and land regularization procedures are very lengthy. A road project can be blocked for years because we couldn't compensate the affected owners in time." Although the new Land Code aims to speed up these procedures, its adoption on the ground remains uneven. Furthermore, construction control is lacking: in areas theoretically designated as non-buildable or reserved by the UDMP (e.g., for green spaces or future rights-of-way), the emergence of spontaneous subdivisions is common due to a lack of surveillance and strict enforcement of urban planning rules. This phenomenon ultimately complicates the implementation of the master plan, which becomes obsolete in certain areas taken over by informal urbanization.

In summary, the results highlight a persistent gap between the ambitions set forth in the planning documents and the on-the-ground reality in Greater Lomé. While some progress has been made, a series of interdependent constraints institutional, financial, technical, and land-related hinder the full execution of the plans. These findings call for a thorough reflection on how to overcome these obstacles and improve the effectiveness of public action in urban planning.

### 3.11. Metropolitan Governance and Decentralization

Finally, a major finding of this study relates to the institutional evolution accompanying (and seeking to manage) metropolization. The creation of the Autonomous District of Greater Lomé (DAGL) in 2019 introduced an unprecedented level of governance to coordinate the 13 municipalities that form the metropolitan area. The DAGL, led by a state-appointed governor, was tasked with a number of strategic responsibilities at the agglomeration scale. These include sanitation, urban transport, metropolitan land-use planning, the management of major markets and shared-interest facilities, and the coordination of municipal actions with an inter-municipal dimension. In 2022, the Parliament expanded the DAGL's competencies (Law No. 2022-012) to explicitly include public sanitation throughout the capital, street addressing, and support for harmonizing development among the municipalities. This legal recognition reflects the state's desire to strengthen metropolitan governance to meet the challenges posed by the city's size.

In practice, the DAGL has enabled the launch of some coordinated initiatives (e.g., in solid waste management or transport planning, with the support of international partners). However, it is still too early to fully assess its impact on controlling urbanization. Interviews with local actors suggest



that the effective establishment of integrated governance remains a work in progress, with overlapping jurisdictions between the DAGL and the municipalities of Greater Lomé, as well as financial resource constraints. Nevertheless, many observers view the very existence of the DAGL positively as an institutional step towards a more coherent metropolization. Greater Lomé thus has a "metropolitan local government" which, if it succeeds in scaling up, could mitigate some of the negative externalities of urban sprawl and better plan the future of the metropolis.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The preceding results underscore that the difficulties encountered in operationalizing urban plans in Greater Lomé are situated within a broader context of structural challenges for urban governance in West Africa. As noted in various studies (Takou et al.; Ouro, 2023; Somadjago et al., 2020), weak institutional capacities, a historical centralization of power, and a lack of accountability to citizens have long hindered the effectiveness of public urban action (Alain, 2004). Over the past decade, the Togolese state has initiated reforms to address these weaknesses, notably by promoting decentralization and participatory strategic planning. The adoption of Law No. 2019-006, amending the decentralization law, grants municipalities clear competencies in land-use management, including the issuance of building permits, local development plans, and the management of urban services. Similarly, the creation of the Autonomous District of Greater Lomé (DAGL) aims to establish a level of metropolitan governance that integrates the 13 municipalities. These institutional developments are promising, but our observations show that they have not yet produced their full-intended effects on plan implementation. A gap remains between the established legal framework and operational reality, which is understandable only a few years after the installation of the new municipalities, as highlighted by Takili et al. (2022).

The DAGL offers an unprecedented framework for regional-scale planning, the development of a metropolitan Urban Development Master Plan (UDMP), and the pooling of certain infrastructures. However, its success will depend on the ability to foster close cooperation between the state, the DAGL governorate, and the municipalities. Resistance may arise, for example, if mayors perceive the DAGL as a supervisory body that diminishes their prerogatives. The financial question is also crucial: the operation of the DAGL and metropolitan investments require significant resources. In this regard, state allocations, local taxation (such as the management of major markets transferred to the DAGL), and support from development partners will be decisive.

A key point of discussion concerns participatory and inclusive planning in this metropolitan context. Decentralization, in principle, aims to bring governance closer to citizens; it would be opportune for Greater Lomé to leverage its new governance structure to involve civil society more deeply in urban planning decisions (e.g., public consultations on local urban plans, participatory budgeting at the municipal level).

One avenue for progress lies in strengthening multi-level coordination. Follygan et al. (2019) emphasize the necessity of better articulating the interventions of the state, the DAGL, and the municipalities. The effective establishment of consultation platforms, such as the CCGU (Urban Coordination and Management Committee, composed of the mayors of Greater Lomé, the Governor of the DAGL, and state representatives), would ensure integrated monitoring of plans. Furthermore, the ongoing development of the National Land-Use Planning Scheme (SNAT) and the prospect of regional schemes offer an opportunity to create a hierarchical and coherent planning system, as noted by Biakouye (2023). It will be crucial to readjust the Greater Lomé UDMP to align it with the SNAT and integrate municipal development plans, thereby avoiding inconsistencies and overlaps.

On the financial front, an innovative and diversified approach is necessary to bridge the gap between ambitions and available resources. The Togolese government has identified the development of infrastructure and basic services as a priority in its 2020-2025 roadmap, implicitly acknowledging the need for increased means. In concrete terms, this could involve increasing state budget transfers to the municipalities of Greater Lomé, as well as strengthening the mobilization of local revenues. Awareness and enforcement initiatives could be implemented to reduce tax evasion and broaden the urban tax base (for example, by modernizing taxpayer censuses and digitizing tax collection). In parallel, the use of public-private partnerships (PPPs) should be explored to finance certain facilities planned in the UDMP (waste treatment plants, parking facilities, social housing, etc.). The role of the

private sector was identified as critical from the outset of the CDS design, and its effective involvement remains an open challenge.

Strengthening human and technical capacities is another key component. Our case studies corroborate the findings of Bawa (2017), who suggests that delegating more resources to municipalities (engineers, geographers, land law experts) would facilitate the local operationalization of plans. Targeted training programs (through international cooperation, urban development agencies, universities, or the association of Togolese municipalities) could be implemented to raise the level of technical competence in urban planning in each municipality. Moreover, improving urban information systems (computerized cadastre, municipal GIS) is essential for monitoring land use and anticipating land conflicts. Some pilot initiatives are underway, such as the geolocation study of socio-economic infrastructure launched by the DAGL in 2022, which aims to provide decision-makers with better data for planning.

Finally, the involvement of non-governmental actors and citizens must be sustained throughout the entire life cycle of the plans. While the CDS emphasized participation in its development phase, this commitment should be replicated during the implementation phase. Local monitoring committees (integrating civil society, local chiefs, and youth) could be established in each municipality to oversee project progress, report on-the-ground concerns, and ensure transparent communication about progress or delays. This participatory co-management would encourage greater mutual accountability: authorities would be held accountable, while residents would feel like stakeholders in the urban transformations.

The effective operationalization of urban plans in Greater Lomé requires systemic improvements. Recommended measures include better-integrated metropolitan governance, increased and innovative financing, a substantial strengthening of local capacities, a fully implemented land reform, and sustained citizen participation. These orientations align with those advocated in the literature on resilient and inclusive African cities and should ultimately help to reduce the gap between planning and urban reality in Lomé.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The assessment of the operationalization of urban planning documents in Greater Lomé reveals a significant gap between strategic ambitions and actual implementation on the ground. While the Urban Development Master Plan (UDMP), the City Development Strategy (CDS), and the National Housing and Urban Development Policy (PNH DU) have provided essential strategic frameworks to guide the city's growth, their tangible impact has so far been limited by a series of intersecting constraints. Institutional challenges—including coordination among the 13 municipalities and metropolitan-level governance—as well as financial limitations, land tenure issues, technical capacity deficits, and weak participatory governance have all acted as barriers to the full execution of these otherwise relevant plans.

Rather than questioning the usefulness of urban planning, this evaluation underscores the need to strengthen the conditions required for its effective implementation. Greater Lomé stands at a critical juncture: recent reforms in decentralization and spatial planning offer a solid foundation for improving planning outcomes, provided they are supported by decisive actions. Key priorities include reinforcing vertical and horizontal coordination between stakeholders, mobilizing adequate financial resources (both public and private), and enhancing the capacity of local institutions to lead urban development processes.

In summary, fully operationalizing urban planning documents in Greater Lomé is an ambitious yet achievable endeavor. The recommendations presented here ranging from stronger metropolitan coordination to sustained community participation offer concrete pathways to bridge the gap between planning and implementation. Their gradual and regularly assessed application would not only enhance the effectiveness of urban policies in Lomé but also contribute to delivering a living environment in line with the city's development vision. The true challenge lies in transforming planning from a theoretical exercise into a lived urban reality a challenge that, if successfully met, could position Greater Lomé as a leading example of metropolitan planning in West Africa, where strategic urbanism genuinely benefits the population.

## 6. Patents

This section is not mandatory but may be added if there are patents resulting from the work reported in this manuscript.

**Supplementary Materials:** The following supporting information can be downloaded at: <https://www.mdpi.com/article/doi/s1>, Figure S1: Map of the Greater Lomé Autonomous District; Table S1: The Genealogy of Urban Planning Frameworks in Togo; Table S2: Chronology of Urban Planning Document Implementation in Togo (1970–2024)

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**Data Availability Statement:** The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are openly available.

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the Master Plan for Development and Urbanism (SDAU), the City Development Strategy (CDS), and the National Policy for Housing and Urban Development (PNH DU)

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare the absence of any conflict of interest.

## Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

UDMP	Urban Development Master Plan
CDS	City Development Strategy
DAGL	Autonomous District of Greater Lomé
DGUH	Directorate for Urbanism and Housing
GIS	Geographic Information System
LUP	Land Use Plan
MUHRH	Ministry of Urban Planning, Housing and Land Reform
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPHUD	National Policy for Housing and Urban Development
PAS	Sector Development Plans
PLU	Local Urban Plan
PPP	public-private partnerships
PUD	Detailed Urban Plans
SNAT	National Land-Use Planning Scheme
UIDP	Urban Infrastructure and Development Project
UMP	Urban Master Plan

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