

# SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF THE MONETARISATION OF LAND IN THE COMMUNE OF BANTE, REPUBLIC OF BENIN

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**Abstract:** This study aims to analyse the socio-economic effects of the monetarisation of land in the Commune of Bantè. The data for this research was collected notably from interviews and surveys supported by participating field observations. The analysis of the information collected made it possible to identify several forms of enjoyment of land rights in Bantè Commune. These are donation, barter, inheritance which is less and less abandoned, but above all, sale which is in vogue. Merchants and civil servants, especially of non-native origin, account for 68.1% of the acquisition of plots of land in urban areas. Nevertheless, land colonisation manifests itself in the monopolisation of large areas of land by locals and well-off foreigners either to set up agro-pastoral farms or to be hoarded for the future. This craze for land has led to heavy speculation and the rise in land prices. In the study sector, the market value of the plots, whose surface area does not exceed 500 square meter, which used to be between 20,000 F CFA and 50,000 F CFA, is currently around 200,000 F CFA and 1,500,000 F CFA. Thus, several cases of conflict have arisen due to multiple transactions on the same plot of land, non-respect of the boundaries of the estates, and the search for power over land.

**Keywords:** Commune of Bantè (Benin), land tenure, socio-economic effects, monetarisation.

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## EFFETS SOCIO-ECONOMIQUES DE LA MONETARISATION DU FONCIER DANS LA COMMUNE DE BANTE, REPUBLIQUE DU BENIN

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**Résumé :** La présente étude se propose d'analyser les effets socio-économiques de la monétarisation du foncier dans la Commune de Bantè. Les données entrant dans le cadre de cette recherche ont été recueillies notamment à partir des entretiens et enquêtes appuyés par les observations participantes sur le terrain. L'analyse des informations collectées ont permis d'identifier plusieurs formes de jouissance de droits sur le foncier dans la Commune Bantè. Il s'agit de la donation, de troc, de l'héritage de moins en moins abandonnés, mais surtout, de la vente qui est en vogue. Les commerçants et les fonctionnaires, surtout d'origine allochtone, sont prépondérants à près de 68, 1 % dans l'acquisition des parcelles en milieu urbain. Néanmoins, la colonisation foncière se manifeste par un accaparement de grandes superficies de terres par les locaux et les étrangers nantis soit pour installer des fermes agropastorales ou pour être thésaurisées pour le futur. Cet engouement à la terre a entraîné une forte spéculation et le renchérissement de celle-ci. Dans le secteur d'étude, la valeur marchande des parcelles, dont la superficie ne dépasse pas 500 m<sup>2</sup> qui était de 20 000 F CFA à 50 000 F CFA s'établit actuellement autour de 200 000 F CFA et 1 500 000 F CFA. Ainsi, plusieurs cas de conflits sont nés du fait des transactions multiples sur une même parcelle, du non-respect des limites des domaines, de la recherche de pouvoir sur des terrains.

**Mots clés :** Commune de Bantè (Bénin), foncier, effets socio-économiques, monétarisation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The earth has always been of primary concern to mankind during its evolution. As the first and main source of production, it provides all beings with the essential of its substance. As a result, it is the object of worship and veneration in African societies (B. Aliou and I. Wega, 2017, p.11). Access to water and other resources, but also to essential services such as sanitation and electricity, is often conditioned by access to land rights (C.N. Ahmadou, 2005, p.23). The rules of access to land depend on traditional societies (socio-political organization, family structures, modes of control over land and labour power), their social and political history. These rules generally encompass different types of land relations, which combine, to varying degrees depending on the spaces in question, individual prerogatives and collective regulations (P. L. Delville *et al.*, 2001, p.5).

With the introduction of the market economy, land took on a market value that became established in European societies and then gradually in African countries, first through trafficking and then through colonisation. From this point of view, the allocation of land, its use, sale, purchase or taxation became an important issue (Y. A. Degbessi, 2014, p.1). Thus, one of the most commonly advocated approaches to overcoming rural poverty in emerging market economies is to improve access to land (H. P. Binswanger *et al.*, 1995, p. 4).

The dynamics of land transactions (questioning of land donations, open-ended loans, emergence of new modes of access to land: rentals, fixed-term loans) underline power relations and conflicts of interest (S. Sanou and B. Thallet, 2009). These transactions give rise to disputes over property rights, the calling into question of old land agreements, disputes arising from different interpretations of certain transactions, attempts to 'misappropriate' inheritance, boundary disputes and conflicts over the extraction of natural resources (H.M.G. Ouédraogo, 2005, p.17).

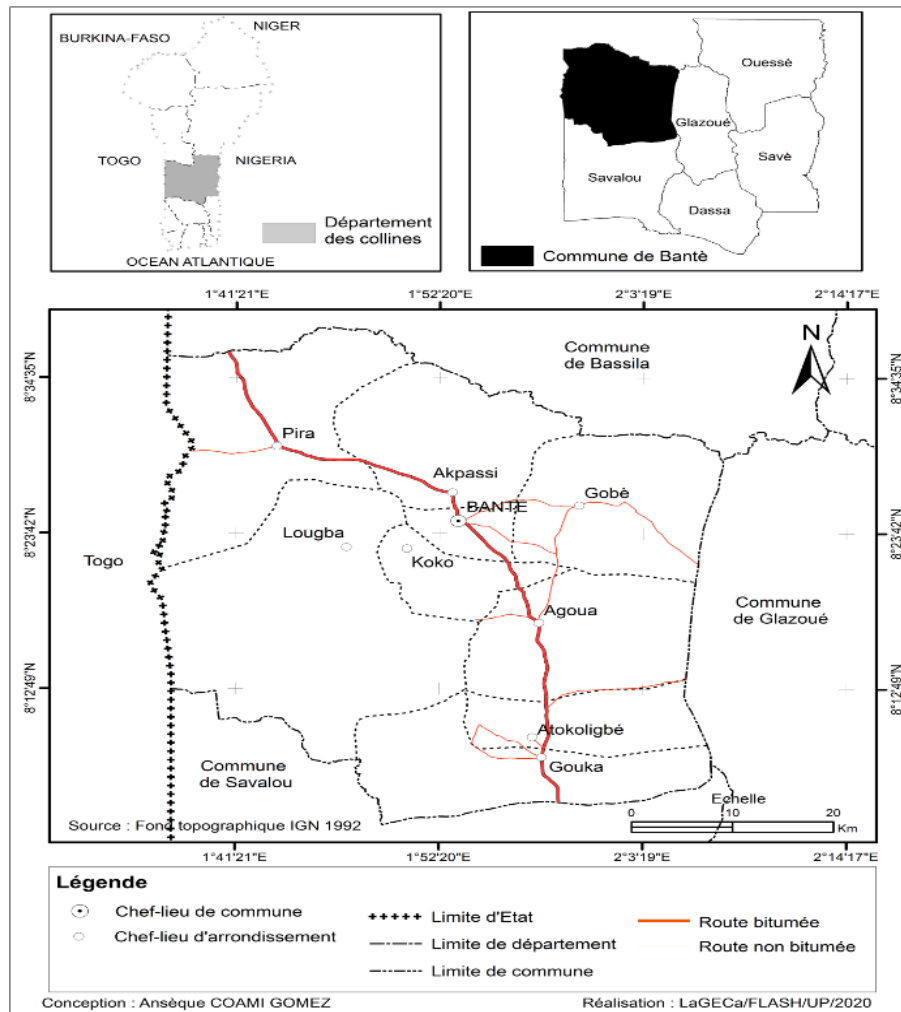
These observations are recurrent in Benin's major cities, especially in Cotonou, Porto-Novo and Abomey-Calavi, where scenes beyond comprehension are frequently seen. Often, the same plot of land can be sold to several buyers, either by the rightful owners or by persons with no authority over it. Indeed, according to the information gathered at the Abomey-Calavi Court of First Instance, lawsuits relating to land disputes occupy a prominent place. Like an epidemic, land transactions today do not spare any locality in Benin. The scale and frequency of land transactions are the basis of this research, which looks at the socio-economic effects of the monetarisation of land in the town of Bantè.

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## 2. DATA AND METHODS

### 2.1 Framework of the study

The Commune of Bantè is located in the North-West of the Department of Collines, 296 km from Cotonou. It is located between 8°0' and 8°40' north latitude and 1°30' and 2°17' east longitude. It shares its borders with the communes of Savalou in the South, Bassila in the North, Ouéssè and Glazoué (via the Agbado River) in the East and the Republic of Togo in the West. Covering an area of 2,695 km<sup>2</sup>, it occupies about 19.44% of the territory of Les Collines and 2.49% of the national territory. It comes in second place, after the Commune of Ouéssè (3,200 km<sup>2</sup>) in terms of the size of the area within the Department of the Hills. Figure 1 shows the geographical location of the Commune of Bantè.



**Figure 1: Geographical location of the Commune of Bantè**

Source : Topographic background, IGN, 1992

The Commune of Bantè has experienced spectacular natural growth in recent decades. In fact, the municipality recorded a population of 82,129 inhabitants in the 2002 population and housing census (INSAE, 2004) and in the ten (10) year intercensal period, it has 107,181 inhabitants (INSAE, 2015) and represents 14.93% of the total population of the Department of the Hills. The average household size is 5.9 members, with 18,215 households in the municipality as a whole (INSAE, 2015). Its population is very young, which presents great challenges for the future in terms of housing. In the municipality, the districts of Bantè, Gouka, Pira, Akpassi and Atokoligbé have a high human concentration and an embryonic urban structure. Table I shows the distribution of the municipality's population by district in 2013.

**Table I : Population of the Commune of Bantè by district in 2013**

Boroughs	Men	Women	Total population
Agoua	3 984	4 094	8 078
Akpassi	6 407	6 560	12 967
Atokoligbé	6 306	6 557	12 863
Bantè	8 588	9 094	17 682
Bobé	3 791	3 703	7 494
Gouka	8 565	9 108	17 673
Koko	3 579	3 680	7 259
Lougba	4 090	4 290	8 380
Pira	7 206	7 579	14 785
<b>Total</b>	<b>52 516</b>	<b>54 665</b>	<b>107 181</b>

Source : INSAE, 2015

This population growth requires the need for fertile farmland and additional housing, which would lead to great pressure and, in turn, to a multiplicity of land transactions.

The most significant of these are the Chabè and Idasha, the Mahi, the Fon, the Djerma, the Ibo, the Adja, the Holli, the Fulani, the Lokpa and the Kotokoli. All these allochthonous socio-cultural groups cohabit peacefully with the natives who do not compromise the prosperity of their business and their interests.

The presence of these different socio-cultural groups induces a dynamic in the occupation of land and the exploitation of natural resources. Each of these groups is specialised in a specific sector of activity. The Holli, Lokpa and Kotokoli are involved in rural activities with the need to have large areas of cultivable land due to the abundance of fertile land. On the other hand, the other socio-cultural groups, particularly the Ibo from Nigeria and the Adja from South Benin, are major traders and live in the city centres. The desire for a definitive settlement transforms the basis for the transfer of land in the different areas of the commune. This evolution has led to the emergence of the market value of the land.

## **2.2. Methods**

The methodology adopted during this study is of a descriptive and analytical type based on socio-economic surveys. The study was carried out in three phases. The first led to the documentary research, the second to the field investigation and finally the processing of the collected data and the analysis of the results.

The documentary research made it possible to make a synthesis of the documents available on the subject through the analysis of some specific works after having studied them and to finally have a source of information.

Two techniques are used for successful data collection: questionnaire surveys and interviews. They are oriented towards target groups and resource persons deemed necessary to obtain quality information. The survey sheets drawn up were used to gather all the information. The data collection tools mobilised essentially consist of a questionnaire and an interview guide to gather information. The materials used are: a topographical map that includes the Commune Bantè for knowledge of the study area, a digital camera for taking pictures in the field and a computer equipped with Word and Excel functions for processing the information collected and writing the report.

In order to gather reliable information, survey sheets were drawn up and submitted to the target populations. The technique of reasoned choice made it possible to define the sampling. The populations in the following districts were sampled: Agoua, Akpassi, Bantè, Gouka and Pira. This sample is defined taking into account the demography and the importance of land speculation in each district. In addition, the selected localities are all crossed by the inter-state road No. 2 and are those that are home to many more allochthonous populations. A total of 110 households were surveyed.

At the end of the surveys, a manual analysis of the survey forms was carried out and the questionnaires were grouped by category of actors. Thus, the questionnaires for the population (target groups) were grouped together by neighbourhood, while those for the local authorities were grouped together in order to be able to compare statistical parameters such as averages. The data were examined, described and transcribed into a table. The analysis of the different results to the various questions helped to understand the different relationships between the different actors. The SWOT analysis model based on mainly descriptive methods was used.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of the research are presented in several points, namely: the modes of access to land, their evolution, the reasons for the monetarisation of land and their socio-economic effects as well as the problems raised by access to land, while presenting the actors of the land transaction.

### **3.1. Modes of access to land in the Commune of Bantè**

Field investigations have made it possible to identify several modes of access to land in the Commune of Bantè. These are: primitive occupation, inheritance, donation and purchase.

#### **3.1.1. Primitive occupation of the land in the Commune of Bantè**

Originally, and according to information gathered in the field, the land belongs to the original occupants. Their occupation corresponds to the areas of cultural influence of their ancestors. The epic evokes that it is indeed the hunter-farmers who, in search of game, discovered land considered rich for agricultural production and settled there first. In addition, there are the migrants who move from region to region in search of fertile land. They mark their presence by building hamlets near

their fields. As a result, the first inhabitants of Bantè were interested in the land for production and housing. At that time, the land belonged to no one. To mark the anteriority of their occupation, the natives delimited the space using natural means such as hills, roads and rivers.

During this period, the most fertile land was sought and the rapidly impoverishing, i.e. poor land, was abandoned. This practice was due to the high availability of land resources and the small population. At that time, settlement on a cultivable or even habitable area was not subject to any particular formality. In the course of time, this form gave way to other modes of access, although the allocation or definitive transfer of land is always the will of those called landowners, or even, the rightful owners.

### ***3.1.2. Heritage***

Inheritance, according to the interviewees, is the first form of transfer in this society. It was carried out exclusively for the benefit of the descendants of the first occupants or to a member of the same lineage. It is based on the conception that land is passed from father to son or from brother to brother. Inheritance is established between relatives with privileged attribution of direct descendants of the first occupants or of the deceased. Generally, property is divided according to age unless instructions to the contrary have been given by the relative during his or her lifetime, and this applies only to the purposes already exploited. In other words, the heirs jointly exploit the same estate attached to the family patrimony. In most cases, it is noted that only men have access to the inheritance. As for women, they do not have access because they are called upon to leave the family. Although the current land code grants the same right to men and women, the exclusion of women persists. This leads women who feel capable of managing a space to buy it.

### ***3.1.3. Donation***

Unlike death, which is linked to inheritance, the gift of land appeals to the indigenous people, the majority of whom are young people who, newly married, are now obliged to leave home and assume their autonomy. This form concerns both men and women. In the first place, it involves the redistribution of land among the descendants of the primary community members in order to ensure optimal development. Any holder of land is free to allocate it free of charge to anyone in need with the assurance that the latter is able to use it wisely. The first migrants in the study area also had the chance to benefit from the same advantages granted to the direct relatives of landowners. This sign of solidarity has contributed enough to share the land with the non-natives who express the need. Over time, the donation of plots of land to foreigners has become an exception. It is often provided with certain clauses such as the establishment of a "dowry" imposed in proportion to the harvest and a ban on planting trees or growing perennial crops. In this register, we can cite the hamlets currently set up as administrative villages such as Adja-Pira in the district of Pira, Golé and Katchonmon with the Holli in the district of Lougba, Edahoué with the Adja in the district of Attokolibé, Okouta-Djaba with the Lokpa in the district of Bantè. However, it is important to mention that the allocation of land to an external third party, to a family is still subject to a substantial gift of drink to request authorisation to accept the act made to them.

### ***3.1.4. Purchase***

In the Commune of Bantè, the land transaction had existed in a particular form that did not involve money. Several cases were cited that resulted in the transfer of rights to land. For example, some communities now hold land as a replacement for crimes committed against individuals resulting in deaths in their clans. The land is therefore permanently transferred to the clan that has suffered the loss of life.

But the sale of land in its evolved form is a recent practice. It is said to have occurred during the revolutionary period around 1975, when the then authorities declared the land to be the exclusive property of the state. All land was expropriated and managed by branches of the central administration. To gain access to it, anyone with the need to use it for building purposes refers to the local authorities for formalities. These local authorities had authority over all purposes. In habitable areas, the fixed price of 2,500 CFA francs was required to have a plot of at least 30 m by 30 m, i.e. 900 m<sup>2</sup> for exclusive residential use. In addition to this, one (1) litre of local drink "Sodabi" was added for the committee that travelled to the delimitation of the domain.

This transaction underwent a reversal after the conference of the nation's driving forces in 1990, when the political ideology changed towards economic liberalism. Occasionally, land was returned to the rightful owners, the former owners who exercised authority over it. Thus, between 1990 and 2000, the land increased in value and selling prices ranged from 20,000 to 50,000 CFA francs.

Nevertheless, the sale of land is still not very active in the study sector and is now known to everyone as an undeniable means of access. The commodification of access to land is increasingly evident in the Commune of Bantè, with the increase in land pressure and the economic value of land, due in particular to demographic pressure and the impoverishment of farmers and the increase in social needs. However, the rise in prices observed in recent years is linked to the new form of land colonisation developed by foreigners who come to conquer the land with large sums of money. This has created a strong demand for land, forcing landowners to align their prices with those in the big cities. Today the sale of land has seen a strong surge and the amounts of a plot of land vary between 200,000 and 1,500,000 CFA francs or even more depending on the locality, accessibility and location in the locality. At the same time the surface area of the plots have decreased and are now 500 m<sup>2</sup> or at best 625 m<sup>2</sup>.

The "appetite" for selling land nowadays leads to even giving up floodable areas. Photo 1 illustrates an already fragmented lowland whose plots are sold and allocated.



Photo 1 : Ditchboard space sold to Bantè

Shooting: Gomez, January 2020

In photo 1, a puddle can still be seen in January, during the dry season. Although it is a place occupied by water during the rainy season, it has been broken up and the plots are being sold. The constructions that appear in the photo are often flooded during the rainy season.

### ***3.2. Actors in the land transaction***

Several players are involved in the land transaction in the Commune of Bantè. These include the sellers, the tenants and the administration.

#### ***3.2.1. Category of transferors***

The categories of actors mobilised in the transfer of land are very diverse. For example, customary authorities, including traditional chiefs, were the only ones able to sell the land that was under their control. They contributed to the transfers to people in need. The heads of families who hold land reserves appear as sellers. The power of sale is conferred on the eldest members of each family holding a presumed title of land ownership. Most families take advantage of cases of death or illness to find a valid reason for the liquidation of land. Sometimes young people who act as intermediaries in the family because of the parents' inability to go to the land abuse certain titles and discreetly give them away. Other people who have acquired plots beforehand put them up for sale if they need money. The peculiarity in the study sector is that there are no structures or private persons set up as traders. It should be noted, however, that around 1995, the authorities of the current Commune sub-prefecture parcelled out and put up for sale an administrative reserve of several hectares of land in Bantè at prices of 50,000 F CFA or 75,000 F CFA, depending on the position of the plot.

#### ***3.2.2. Category of tenants***

The very first tenants are foreigners. Small groups of producers or entrepreneurs or families in a situation of land dependency also take them. Traders and civil servants are generally found as the most represented actors in land acquisition (61.2%), while workers, farmers and those in other sectors of activity occupy 38.8%. The sons of the

commune residing in towns with financial means are the largest purchasers of large rural areas for the purpose of setting up farms. There are also foreigners who acquire several hectares which are hoarded (but always with the complicity of a native resident). This raises the issue of land colonisation, a potential source of conflict.

### ***3.2.3. Role of the municipal administration***

The administration intervenes in the formalisation of land agreements, in this case the issuing of property deeds. These property deeds are most often sales agreements drawn up between the seller and the buyer and approved by the Mayor of the Commune. The new land code has established procedures for the issuance of rights to plots of land, but these are not yet well known to the population.

### ***3.3. Foundations of land monetarisation in the Commune of Bantè***

The land, once within the reach of every individual, has lost its traditional form. Several factors explain this evolution.

#### ***3.3.1. Factors motivating the sale of land***

Foreigners migrating to the various localities of the commune who find themselves in need of building or agricultural activities access the land by purchasing it. Well-situated plots of land began by attracting many people with some means. Those who have already lasted and feel at ease in the area decide to settle on their personal property by acquiring plots. Given the increasing scarcity of land, those who control access to it are in a position to negotiate more favourable conditions for their particular needs, be it for cash income, ploughing or other services. The sale of large plots of land in the Commune of Bantè is leading speculators to accumulate large tracts of land at prices that are still sustainable. Because this investment is profitable and does not decline, 65% of those surveyed said that the land is considered an excellent store of value.

There are other reasons, but many more on the sellers' side, that encourage the transfer of land. Indeed, to meet their financial and material needs, many people resort to selling part of the land they have. There is also the selling off of land to pay school fees for the children, in case of difficulties with health care. The sale is also used to pay off debts contracted. The sale is sometimes a means of managing the inheritance by getting out of indivision, in the event of a conflict to share the inheritance between the rightful owners.

#### ***3.3.2. Effects induced by land monetisation***

The implications of the monetarisation of land in the Commune of Bantè are multiple and multifaceted. Far from establishing an exhaustive typology, we can mention, in a general way, the disputes, the persistent disputes, the conflicts that result in the calling into question of previously concluded agreements, the disputes between buyers and owners arising from the sale of the same plot of land to several buyers, the conflicts between families, the villages that mainly concern the boundaries of the estates. Several cases of land disputes are now pending before the second-class court of Savalou. Photo 2 shows a disputed plot of land in the Adjantè district of Bantè.



Photo 2 : Disputed plot of land in the Adjantè district in the Bantè Arrondissement

Shooting : Gomez, January 2019

Photo 2 shows a case of a plot of land sold to several people at the same time. The last buyer rushed to erect a building that was suspended because of the complaints of the others. These cases are becoming more and more numerous in the municipality and particularly in the town of Bantè.

On the other hand, the sale of land is still an excellent and easy source of income for some families. However, it must be recognised that this is diminishing over time.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

This study has made it possible to inventory a plurality of modes of access to land in the Commune of Bantè. Among the systems of property transfer, access to land is today dominated by financial transactions, in other words, by purchase. The starting principle, which according to (S. Sanou and B. Tallet, 2010, p. 4), is that land cannot be denied, 'feeder land' to someone who needs it for food is becoming increasingly obsolete and outdated. This calls into question the empirical spirit of the findings of P. L. Delville et al (2001, p.5), for whom, in rural Africa, access to land and the resources it carries remains closely linked to social identities. This observation is also shared by J-P Chauveau et al. (2006), who states that in the African context, the issue of financial markets is generally approached through an analysis of the transformation of customary land tenure systems in the direction of private appropriation. Land then becomes a major source of income for many households, but also an asset, a source of wealth, prestige and power (E. P. Feubi Pamen et al. (2014, p.7).

This preponderance of land sales leads to high speculation not only through higher transfer prices but also becomes a strong propensity for conflict. This corroborates the findings of J-P Colin (2005, p 13), according to whom, conflicts over transactions (and more broadly over transfers to immigrants) are exacerbated in a context of depletion of land reserves and economic crisis, with in particular the return of "urban" natives (unemployed, out-of-school children) to their villages of origin. In the Commune of Bantè, merchants and civil servants with a little more means are taking over plots of land in urban areas. Purchase is currently the dominant mode of access to land for migrants (J-P Chauveau et al., 2006), as it frees them from the traditional prohibitions on land use.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

At the end of this study, it appears that land is a very precious resource in the Commune of Bantè, whose property acquisition has evolved over time. In the primary logic, land was excluded from sale, but over time it has been under the effect of strong demand (population increase) and above all the need to satisfy non-native people who have settled permanently in the area. Instead of a fee being imposed on the beneficiaries of the plots of land, monetarisation has now become the rule. Over a period of time, land prices have risen, which, if it is not controlled and managed, will exclude vulnerable groups without means. It is therefore important for the communal authorities to set up a mechanism for monitoring land transactions in order to reduce the growing tensions that are already being observed in several forms.

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