

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-56683

Title: Customary Land System and Security Modes in the Communes of Nikki and Tchaourou in Northern Benin

Recommendation:

Accept after minor revision.....

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓		
Techn. Quality		✓		
Clarity	✓			
Significance		✓		

Reviewer Name: Faheem Abdul Muneeb

Reviewer's Comment

This manuscript examines the functioning of customary land tenure systems and land security mechanisms in the communes of Nikki and Tchaourou in northern Benin. The study explores how traditional norms of land access—particularly inheritance—interact with evolving socio-economic dynamics such as migration, land scarcity, and increasing pressure on agricultural resources. It also analyzes the tensions between customary practices and formal legal frameworks in shaping land governance and security.

The topic is highly relevant within the fields of development studies, political ecology, land governance, and African rural sociology. By focusing on a region characterized by ethnic diversity and land pressure, the manuscript provides valuable insights into how customary systems adapt to changing socio-economic conditions. The study contributes meaningfully to debates on legal pluralism, land tenure security, and conflict in rural Africa.

The manuscript effectively highlights the complexity of land relations, demonstrating that land is not only an economic resource but also a source of identity, legitimacy, and social power.

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Scientific Contribution and Empirical Strength

The study offers a strong empirical contribution through its combination of qualitative and quantitative data collected from 120 respondents across the two communes. One of its key strengths lies in the detailed analysis of land access patterns. The findings clearly show that inheritance remains the dominant mode of land access (74.3%), as presented in Table 2 (page 7), confirming the persistence of lineage-based systems.

At the same time, the study highlights emerging trends such as land lending (14.1%), gifting (6.3%), and rental/purchase (3.5%), indicating a gradual shift toward more flexible and market-oriented arrangements. The comparison between Nikki and Tchaourou further strengthens the analysis, showing how demographic and migration dynamics influence land access practices.

The manuscript also makes an important contribution by examining generational changes in land access. The figure on page 9 illustrates that younger individuals are increasingly dependent on loans and rental arrangements due to land fragmentation and scarcity, raising concerns about long-term land security.

Another significant strength is the analysis of socio-cultural inequalities. The regression results (page 10) demonstrate that gender and age significantly influence access to land, with women and younger individuals facing structural disadvantages. The inclusion of verbatim interview excerpts effectively supports these findings and adds depth to the analysis.

The discussion of customary land tenure security strategies—such as tree planting, symbolic construction, and oral agreements—is particularly insightful. These practices, while socially recognized, are shown to be fragile in the absence of formal legal recognition, contributing to land disputes and conflicts.

However, while the empirical findings are rich and well presented, the analytical discussion could be further strengthened by more explicitly linking the results to broader theoretical debates on land governance and institutional change.

Methodology and Analytical Approach

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative data (interviews and discourse analysis) with quantitative techniques (descriptive statistics and logistic regression). This methodological design is appropriate for capturing both the structural and experiential dimensions of land tenure systems.

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The use of the ECRIS method for identifying strategic groups and conflicts adds methodological rigor and is well suited to the study of land-related social dynamics. The sampling strategy, which includes diverse stakeholders such as traditional leaders, farmers, herders, and women affected by land disputes, enhances the representativeness of the data.

The statistical analysis, particularly the use of logistic regression (page 10), strengthens the analytical depth by identifying key socio-cultural determinants of land access.

However, the methodology section could benefit from clearer articulation of certain aspects, such as the sampling justification (noting the difference between calculated and actual sample size), data coding procedures, and model specification for regression analysis. Providing more detail would improve transparency and reproducibility.

Structure, Style, and Presentation

The manuscript is well structured, with clearly defined sections including introduction, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion. The inclusion of maps (pages 3–4) effectively situates the study area geographically, while tables and figures enhance the presentation of empirical findings.

Tables such as the distribution of land access methods (page 7) and regression results (page 10) are particularly useful in summarizing key data. The integration of qualitative excerpts throughout the results section strengthens the narrative and provides contextual depth.

The writing is generally clear and academically appropriate, though some sections contain long sentences and minor grammatical inconsistencies that should be revised for improved readability. Additionally, some repetition in the discussion section could be reduced to enhance conciseness.

Final Recommendation

Overall, the manuscript presents a comprehensive and well-grounded analysis of customary land tenure systems and their evolving dynamics in northern Benin. The study provides valuable empirical insights into land access, inequality, and conflict, and contributes meaningfully to discussions on land governance and legal pluralism.

With minor revisions focusing on enhancing theoretical integration, clarifying methodological details, and refining language and presentation, the manuscript is suitable for publication.

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Decision: Accepted with minor revisions.