






Community land conflicts and pro-poor urban land access in Enugu, Nigeria: Church involvement for social inclusion



Authors:

Christopher M. Anierobi¹ 
 Cletus O. Obasi² 
 Emeka E. Obioha³ 
 Chukwuemeka D. Onyegbue⁴ 
 Benjamin O. Ajah^{5,6} 

Affiliations:

¹Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Environmental Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

²Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, Faculty of the Social Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

³Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Law, Humanities and Social Sciences, Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, South Africa

⁴Department of Political Science, Faculty of the Social Science, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

⁵Department of Sociology and Social Work, Faculty of the Social Sciences, National University of Lesotho, Roma, Lesotho

⁶Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria

Corresponding author:

Chukwuemeka Onyegbue,
 onyegbudominic@gmail.com

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Pro-poor land access for physical development is hindered by communal land conflicts in most developing countries like Nigeria, thereby inducing homelessness. As the capital city of the then Eastern Region of Nigeria, Enugu has witnessed communal land conflicts and associated challenges in urban expansion, infrastructure development and land-use planning. This study examines the dynamics of communal land conflicts, land access challenges and their socio-economic implications in Enugu, Nigeria. It highlights the role of the Church in promoting social inclusion and advocating for pro-poor initiatives. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining primary data from 40 respondents through structured interviews and observations, alongside secondary data from government reports, academic literature and church records. The study revealed systemic inefficiencies in land administration, driven by dual frameworks combining formal laws and informal practices. Key issues included the exploitation of compulsory acquisition laws, the marginalisation of vulnerable groups and the proliferation of informal settlements. The Church emerged as a significant actor, contributing to peacebuilding and community development through its socio-economic initiatives, advocacy for justice and grassroots engagement. The study concludes that integrating the Church into land governance frameworks presents a unique opportunity to resolve communal land conflicts, address systemic exclusions and promote sustainable urban development.

Contribution: The study, among others, recommends harmonising formal and informal land systems, empowering marginalised groups, upgrading informal settlements and leveraging the Church's moral authority and resources to foster equitable land access and social inclusion.

Keywords: physical development; pro-poor land access; communal land conflicts; the church; urban-peripheral communities.

Introduction

Gaining access to urban land is essential for attaining sustainable physical growth, especially in fast-urbanising areas like Enugu, Nigeria. The urbanisation of Enugu has led to heightened demand for land to facilitate infrastructure projects, residential needs and business operations. Nonetheless, urbanisation has consistently been plagued by land disputes that obstruct fair access to land resources and worsen socio-economic disparities (Aguilar, Flores & Lara 2022). These conflicts frequently arise from entrenched problems, such as historical disagreements, unclear land ownership systems, rival claims between traditional leaders and state authority, and the absence of a unified regulatory structure (Brandful & Nsomah 2017). The impact is especially harsh on urban poor populations, as they depend on stable and low-cost land access to fulfil their housing and livelihood requirements. While communal land conflicts are also prevalent in rural areas, this research specifically examines their impact on urban development, informal settlements and land tenure security for the urban poor in Enugu.

Conflicts over communal land pose challenges to physical development and also serve as a major source of social exclusion. As noted by Anierobi et al. (2024), low-income workers, women and migrants frequently face exclusion from urban land access because of systemic obstacles like discriminatory practices, corruption in land distribution and insufficient representation in decision-making. Corruption in land distribution is a major problem that maintains inequality in access to urban land. In numerous instances, Nuhu and Mpambije (2017) observe that land

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dealings are affected by corruption, partiality and a deficiency of openness in the distribution procedure. For example, Bhanye et al. (2024) contend that the lack of transparent land tenure systems and regulatory structures facilitates the growth of corrupt practices, eroding local communities' trust in formal land markets. For individuals with low incomes, women and migrants who lack the means or political influence to manoeuvre through these corrupt systems, obtaining land turns into an unmanageable challenge.

Alongside these challenges, insufficient representation in decision-making processes exacerbates the marginalisation of vulnerable groups. In numerous cases, decisions regarding urban land management are taken without sufficient dialogue with the individuals most impacted by these policies, especially those from marginalised communities (Davis et al. 2021; Haque & Sharifi 2024). For instance, women frequently do not possess the legal rights and cultural backing needed to obtain land in their names, even though they play essential roles in the economic stability of their families (Gonçalves, Ponchio & Basílio 2021; Supraptiningsih et al. 2023). Likewise, migrants, often marginalised from official land markets because of their status, end up confined in informal settlements with minimal legal safeguards (Agyabeng et al. 2022). The absence of representation in decision-making processes results in the neglect of these groups' concerns and needs, perpetuating the cycle of exclusion and restricting their chances for economic progress.

The Catholic Church, as a long-established institution with deep roots in Nigerian society, has traditionally played a crucial role in addressing social issues in Nigeria (Ogara 2024). While various Christian denominations contribute to social development, this study focusses specifically on the Catholic Church's role in land conflict resolution and social inclusion in Enugu. By leveraging its moral influence, community ties and support for the disadvantaged and marginalised, the church possesses a distinctive ability to aid in addressing community land disputes and promoting equitable land access. Religious groups have played a crucial role in fostering peacebuilding, resolving conflicts and advancing social welfare in various settings (Mrutu 2023), yet their ability to impact urban land governance is still mostly unexplored. Utilising its role as a respected intermediary, the church could promote discussions between opposing parties, champion pro-poor policies and back community-led initiatives to guarantee fair land distribution.

This research aims to examine the overlap between communal land disputes and equitable urban land access for physical development in Enugu, Nigeria, highlighting the possible contribution of the church in tackling these issues. By incorporating the church into the wider conversation about urban governance and fair development, this research aims to promote creative solutions to a significant challenge in urban land management in Nigeria. The results aim to add to scholarly conversations about sustainable urban development, offering actionable suggestions for policymakers, community leaders and faith-based organisations. Furthermore, the study

emphasises the significance of inclusive strategies in land governance that focus on the needs of marginalised groups and promote a fairer and more equitable urban future.

Literature review

The topic of urban communal land disputes and their effects on access to land for the poor has received significant focus in urban development literature. Land disputes in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Nigeria, frequently stem from intertwined land tenure systems, conflicting interests and ineffective governance frameworks (Adekola, Krigsholm & Riekkinen 2023). Researchers have emphasised that communal land ownership, although it offers a sense of identity and safety for traditional communities, frequently turns into a point of conflict as urbanisation elevates the demand for land (Ntumva 2022; Nuhu 2021). In cities like Enugu, these conflicts are exacerbated by the absence of efficient dispute resolution mechanisms and the inclination of government officials to prioritise elite interests instead of addressing the needs of marginalised communities (Uzuegbunam & Nwofia 2014).

Research has consistently indicated that restricted access to urban land worsens socio-economic disparities, especially for the urban poor who encounter numerous systemic obstacles that impede their capacity to obtain land for housing, jobs and other income-generating activities (Adedeji 2023; Lawanson 2020). A major obstacle is the increasing expense of land in cities, which creates greater challenges for low-income families to obtain stable land rights. In numerous cities, such as Enugu, land prices have soared because of swift urbanisation, speculation and a growing demand for land, making it unaffordable for lower-income groups (Ankeli 2023). Alongside the high costs of land, the lack of transparency in land markets also makes access more difficult. The absence of clear land records, ambiguous property rights and bureaucratic delays foster conditions where informal transactions flourish, complicating the process for the poor to understand the system and obtain legal ownership (Rodima-Taylor 2021).

Discriminatory behaviours, whether official or unofficial, significantly contribute to the exclusion of vulnerable groups from accessing land. Such practices frequently appear as favouritism for affluent individuals or groups, along with systemic discrimination against marginalised communities, such as ethnic minorities, migrants and women (Haque & Sharifi 2024). The outcome is a skewed allocation of land that favours individuals with social, political or economic influence while placing the urban poor, who depend on affordable and secure land for their survival, at a disadvantage. These dynamics result in a harmful cycle, as the impoverished lack access to land, thereby restricting their capacity to accumulate wealth, invest in their families' prospects, or engage in the broader urban economy (Rigon 2022). In Nigeria, the gender aspects of land access are especially evident. Women, frequently a crucial support of informal urban economies, encounter particular difficulties in obtaining

land because of cultural practices and legal obstacles. For example, Nchor (2022) note that in various regions of Nigeria, land is conventionally inherited via patriarchal systems, with women's rights to own or inherit land greatly restricted by both formal legal frameworks and customary traditions. These difficulties are intensified by the absence of legal structures that clearly safeguard women's land rights and by cultural norms that restrict women's participation in land markets and property deals (Ahmed 2024).

Research methods and design

Study design and study area

The study adopted a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively explore communal land conflicts and pro-poor urban land access for physical development in Enugu, Nigeria. The research was conducted across identified urban peripheral communities of Enugu, namely Ngwo (Ngwo, Ngwo Abuo, Ngwo Ato, Ngwo Ano, Ngwo Ise, Ngwo Isii and Ngwo Asaa), Nike (Ogui Nike, Onu-Ato, Umunnevo, Umuchigbo Iji Nike, Ako Nike, Akpogazi Nike and Ibeagwa Nike), Ugwuaji (Obeagu Ugwuaji and Amechi Ugwuaji), Akwuke, Obinagu, Obeagu and Amaechi Awkunanaw Autonomous Communities. Enugu is located in southeastern Nigeria and serves as the capital of Enugu State. It is an Igbo-dominated area with a mix of urban and rural communities experiencing rapid physical development. Data collection was conducted between January and March 2024, with a focus on understanding the intersection of land access, urban development and social inclusion (Figure 1).

Both primary and secondary data were utilised for this study. Secondary data were collected from journals, books, articles, government gazettes and reports of relevant institutions, including the National Population Commission (NPC 1991), the Enugu State Ministry of Lands and Urban Development, the Housing Authority and the Catholic Diocese of Enugu (2018). Key variables included communal land conflicts, government land acquisitions, land administration practices, urban population trends and physical development projects. These data provided a contextual background and informed the design of the primary data collection instruments.

Primary data were generated through structured interviews and direct personal observations. A total of 40 respondents were randomly selected using a stratified sampling technique to ensure representation of various stakeholder groups, including household heads, clergy and urban managers from the identified communities. Respondents provided insights on land access challenges, communal land conflicts and the role of the Catholic Church in promoting social inclusion. The study primarily draws from the Catholic Church's interventions, including its socio-economic initiatives, mediation efforts and advocacy for land justice. While other Christian denominations play roles in land governance, the empirical focus remains on Catholic institutions and programmes in Enugu. Observations were conducted to identify and document physical developments in the city, such as schools, health facilities, water schemes and housing

projects, as well as areas affected by communal land conflicts. These observations provided direct visual evidence of the study issues.

A multistage sampling technique was employed to select participants from the various autonomous communities within the study area. The procedure began with stratification to ensure representation across different social groups and roles within the urban development landscape. Key strata included household heads, community members, clergy and urban managers actively involved in or affected by urban development and communal land conflicts. Within each stratum, snowball sampling was used to select respondents, ensuring fairness and eliminating bias. A sample size of 40 participants was obtained, matching the need for representativeness with the practical constraints of the study. This sample size was adequate to capture diverse perspectives while maintaining feasibility in data collection and analysis.

Data analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. We did this by reading and rereading the transcripts, noting any similarities and discrepancies between and within the accounts of the participants. A qualitative computer package (Nvivo 11, QSR) was used to organise and assist in the task of first-level analysis. Responses were further categorised within relevant themes. The content and format of transcripts were also described during the data analysis process.

Ethical considerations

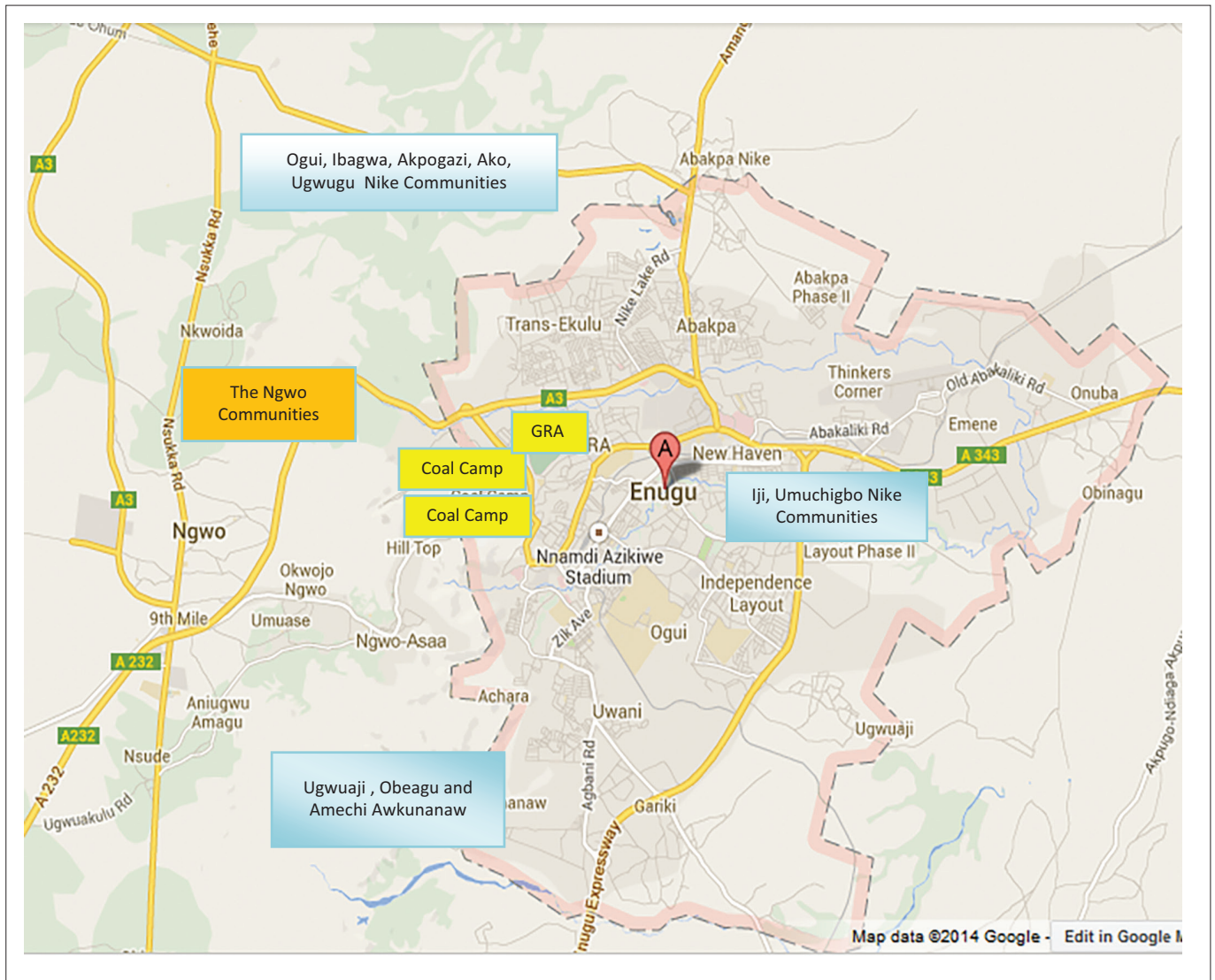
The ethical approval was obtained from the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC/08/09/20099-FWA00002221-1RB03004798). Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, ensuring that they were fully briefed on the study's objectives, risks and benefits. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study. Permission to conduct the research was also sought and obtained from relevant community and institutional authorities.

Results

The results of this study highlight the complexities surrounding land administration, communal land conflicts and socio-economic exclusion in Enugu. These findings demonstrate systemic inefficiencies in land governance, the socio-economic implications of unplanned urban growth and the significant role of the Church in fostering peace and advocating for pro-poor initiatives. The results are presented in this section.

Land administration, tenure system and access for physical development in Enugu

The study revealed that Enugu's land administration operates under a dual framework: the *Land Use Act* (1978) and the *Town and Country Planning Law* (1946). Despite these formal mechanisms, the system is quasi-informal,



Source: Uchegbu, S.N. & Anierobi, C.M., 2014, 'Urban land use planning and administration in Nigeria: A case for land accessibility for poor communities in Enugu, Nigeria', *Journal of the Nigerian Institute of Town Planners* 1–13

FIGURE 1: Map of Enugu Metropolis showing the urban peripheral communities: Ngwo, Nike, Ogui Nike, Ibeagwa Nike and Amaechi Awkunanaw among other communities and the city neighbourhood layouts.

combining formal regulations with informal practices. The Enugu State Ministry of Lands and Urban Development, alongside Local Government Authorities, oversees land administration but their efforts are often undermined by informal community practices. Issues such as outdated frameworks, including the unapproved 1979 master plan, were highlighted. This master plan, while used piecemeal, lacks formal adoption or relevance to current urban needs (Table 1).

Meanwhile, the absence of an updated regional or master plan has marginalised vulnerable groups, particularly the urban poor. Findings showed that a majority of the participants affirmed challenges such as poor record-keeping, inflated land prices and abuse of eminent domain powers. A respondent noted:

'We often hear about public interest when lands are seized by the government or other powerful entities, but the outcomes rarely benefit us, the locals. Instead, these lands are often allocated for projects that serve the elite or outsiders, leaving our communities

TABLE 1: Informal or communal system of land access for physical development.

S/n	Communal system of land access	Prevalent nature of physical development
1	Inheritance (e.g. Parents)	Residential and private buildings and developments for livelihood activities
2	Family allotment (e.g. Family head)	Residential and private buildings and developments for livelihood activities
3	Village or community allotment (e.g. village or community head).	Residential and private buildings and developments for livelihood activities
4	Age grade (Head of the age grade)	Public utilities such as schools, health centres, markets, civic centres, public halls, recreation and playgrounds, post offices, security posts, power stations, etc.

Source: Adapted from Eze, J., 2021, 'Urbanization in Nigeria, Enugu (the coal city) as an urban town: A historical review', *Cities* 113, 1–10, 103096

S/n, serial number.

displaced, marginalized, and deprived of the resources we rely on for survival.' (P9, Male, 49 years old)

Meanwhile, the participants were unanimous in saying that some native communities collaborate with corrupt officials to exploit the *Land Use Act's* compulsory acquisition clause, resulting in land usurpation. For instance, one participant shared:

'Selling off our paternal lands seems to be the only way to avoid losing them entirely to government agents who disguise themselves as land grabbers. These individuals take advantage of their authority and the compulsory acquisition provision in the Land Use Act to take our ancestral lands under the pretext of public interest. They assert that the purchases are intended for development or governmental initiatives, but in truth, the properties frequently transition into private ownership for individual gain. This situation leaves us, the legitimate proprietors, with no choice but to sell the land ourselves, wishing to maintain some control or advantage before everything is seized from us without adequate compensation or remedy.' (P21, Male, 55 years old)

This narrative indicates a deliberate and disguised form of land grabbing. The indigenes responded to this by selling off their landed property which they felt would be in danger of compulsory acquisition. Similarly, land deprivation, denial of access and land price inflation were noted as key exclusionary factors. Women and the poor are disproportionately affected, with participants affirming these challenges. A community member explained that:

'[E]ven when we try to fight back, the system favours the rich and connected individuals. We as ordinary people have no voice.' (P33, Female, 46 years old)

The narrative reflects a cycle of systemic injustices where institutional frameworks and practices consistently disadvantage the less privileged and reinforce their exclusion over time, as well as perpetuate broader socio-economic disparities and limit opportunities for equitable development.

The study further revealed that ancestral lands in peripheral communities have become sites of unplanned and poorly coordinated development. This phenomenon has resulted in the rapid emergence of informal settlements and squatter developments, often characterised by inadequate infrastructure and substandard living conditions. Participants unanimously linked these issues to the absence of proper land-use planning and oversight, as well as the unchecked encroachment of land speculators. Participants explained that these informal developments arise because of the high demand for affordable housing in urban and peri-urban areas, combined with weak enforcement of zoning regulations. One participant lamented:

'[W]hen developers come, they don't care about planning. They just build anywhere, and before you know it, the whole area becomes congested, with no roads, no drainage, nothing.' (P5, Male, 61 years old)

The lack of infrastructure in these areas exacerbates the challenges faced by residents, including poor access to clean water, sanitation and electricity. The study further highlighted that informal settlements and slum formation often lead to social and economic challenges, including increased crime rates, environmental degradation and public health risks. Another participant described the deteriorating conditions:

'Living here is a struggle. Floods come when it rains because there are no proper drains. Diseases spread quickly because there is no clean water or sanitation. It seems like we are forgotten.' (P2, Female, 39 years old)

The findings emphasise the urgent need for proper urban planning, community consultation and infrastructural development to address the issues associated with haphazard development and slum formation. Without strategic intervention, these trends could further marginalise already vulnerable communities, worsening their socio-economic conditions and limiting opportunities for growth and development (Table 2).

Communal land conflicts and land access for physical development in Enugu

The findings of this study revealed that government land acquisitions significantly contribute to communal land conflicts in Enugu. Corrupt government officials and politicians were often identified to collaborate with certain natives to exploit compulsory acquisition powers under land laws to unjustly appropriate neighbouring lands. This abuse of state power frequently triggers resistance from rightful landowners who fight to protect their ancestral lands which hold profound significance as sources of identity and livelihood. The study highlighted that communal land conflicts have persisted in urban peripheral communities for over six decades, particularly in cases where government interventions have been inadequate or biased. Notable examples include: Ogui Nike-Iji Nike vs. Amechi-Ugwuaji Awkunanaw Boundary Conflict: Ongoing since 1942, this conflict has seen several government acquisitions for residential developments, such as the Independence Layout and Premier Layout, yet remains unresolved despite attempts at intervention in 1941, 1944, 1948 and 1954. The core of this dispute lies in competing historical land claims between the indigenous Nike and Awkunanaw communities and is exacerbated by government expropriations under colonial and post-colonial administrations. Despite successive mediation efforts, including court rulings and boundary demarcations, tensions persist because of overlapping customary land tenure systems and allegations of unfair compensation for seized lands.

Additionally, there is the Obeagu Onuayo Akagbe (now Obeagu Awkunanaw) vs. Umu-Edenwoko Akpugo Boundary Dispute: This conflict, dating back to 1941, persists

TABLE 2: The informal and formal process of urban land administration in Enugu.

S/n	Informal land administration	Formal land administration
1	Negotiation with native family owners	Application fee
2	Payment of the agreed amount for the land	Acceptance fee
3	Traditional covenant for land security (ihu-okuko)	Survey plan fee
4	Feasting ceremony over the demised land (Nri-ana)	Land registration for certificate of occupancy (C of O)
5	Youth development levy (Ogbo na eche-agu)	Development levy
6	Community development levy (Utu-Obodo)	Plan approval fees
7	Annual rent (Nru – ana)	Annual ground rent to state govt.
8	-	Annual ground rent to local government area (L.G.A)

Source: Adapted from Eze, J., 2021, 'Urbanization in Nigeria, Enugu (the coal city) as an urban town: A historical review', *Cities* 113, 1–10, 103096 and Uchegbu, S.N. & Anierobi, C.M., 2014, 'Urban land use planning and administration in Nigeria: A case for land accessibility for poor communities in Enugu, Nigeria', *Journal of the Nigerian Institute of Town Planners* 1–13

to this day despite multiple court judgments and government actions. The dispute is deeply rooted in historical grievances over territorial boundaries, which have been exacerbated by shifting administrative decisions and inconsistent land policies. The introduction of formal land administration structures under the *Land Use Act of 1978* did little to resolve the issue, as local communities continued to rely on customary tenure systems that often contradict statutory regulations. Furthermore, contested land acquisitions for infrastructure projects and real estate developments have fuelled further disputes, with affected communities resisting displacement and demanding greater transparency in government-led land allocations.

Participants repeatedly identified government actions, particularly compulsory land acquisitions and interference, as a significant source of communal land conflicts. These acquisitions often disregard the historical and cultural significance of the land to the communities, as well as the established rights and dynamics within those communities. Respondents highlighted how the government's approach, driven by urbanisation or infrastructural projects, fails to adequately consider the socio-economic implications for the affected populations. One community leader elaborated on this issue:

'The government says they need the land for development, but what about us? They don't think about the families who depend on this land for farming, for identity, for survival. They just come with their machines and destroy everything, leaving us with nothing.' (P7, Male, 58 years old)

The study found that such interference often leads to disputes between communities as they contest boundaries or resist what they perceive as unjust expropriations. In many cases, the lack of transparency in land acquisition processes fosters suspicion and conflict among community members. A participant who was a farmer recounted:

'When they (the government officials) take our land, they don't even consult us properly. They just work with a few people who claim to represent the community, but those people are only concerned about themselves. This causes fights among us because everyone feels cheated.' (P16, Female, 50 years old)

Furthermore, the use of the *Land Use Act's* compulsory acquisition clause was criticised by participants, who viewed it as a tool for exploitation. One participant keenly expressed:

'The Land Use Act is supposed to protect us, but instead, it is used against us. They manipulate the law to take what they want, and the rest of us are left to fight for scraps. This is why we see conflicts everywhere.' (P39, Female, 38 years old)

The findings suggest that government-induced interference not only disrupts the delicate balance within communities but also undermines trust in public institutions. This lack of trust fuels resistance and prolonged disputes, as affected populations struggle to assert their rights. Participants called for more inclusive and transparent approaches to land acquisition, while at the same time emphasising the importance of respecting community dynamics and ensuring fair compensation for displaced families.

Table 3 of the study provides detailed insights into these dynamics, illustrating how land conflicts perpetuate inequality and undermine inclusive physical development in Enugu. This evidence underscores the urgent need for transparent, equitable and community-centred land administration reforms to mitigate these challenges and ensure sustainable development.

Social inclusion and the church's collaboration in land access for physical development in Enugu

The study identified the Church as a key growth factor in Enugu, a sentiment affirmed by the majority of the

TABLE 3: Communal land conflicts and land access for physical development in Enugu.

S/n	Communal land conflicts in the urban periphery of Enugu	Conflict areas	Nature and outcome	Status
1	Ngwo Communities across Enugu North, Enugu South and in Udi L.G.As. Versus Ogui Nike or Government and Amechi Awkunanaw across Enugu North and Enugu South L.G.As	Inter Community Land Boundary Conflict -1942–1954.	Boundary dispute persisted despite the Government acquisition for Satellite Layout (Jamboree Layout land now an urban slum; Ologo-Camp); Ishi Aria Land; old Coliary/Old government reserved area and the land leased to Coal Corporation/Royalty in 1909. Conflict in 1942; reoccurred in 1954, 1999 and 2007 to date	Boundary dispute persisted despite the Government acquisition for Satellite Layout (Jamboree Layout land now an urban slum; Ologo-Camp); Ishi Aria Land; old Coliary/Old GRA and the land leased to Coal Corporation/ Royalty in 1909. Conflict in 1942; reoccurred in 1954, 1999 and 2007 till date with a twist of the Ngwo community rising against the Government to recover lands
2	Nike Communities Versus Amechi Awkunanaw Communities in Enugu North L.G.A; Enugu South L.G.A and Enugu South L.G.A.	Ogui Nike-Iji Nike versus Amechi-Ugwuaji Awkunanaw in Inter Community Land Boundary-1942	Boundary disputes persisted despite Government land acquisitions for residential areas called the Independence Layout & Premier Layout; conflict has reoccurred up till 2002 till date. Obeagu Ugwuaji and Amechi Ugwuaji autonomous communities were created and boundary demarcated in 2015. The Enugu State University of Technology permanent site land was acquired in 1982 and was converted to a private estate called Centenary City; HELIU estate land was also acquired in 2016 on the conflict lands	Boundary disputes persisted despite Government land acquisitions for Independence layout and Premier Layout etc.; conflict has reoccurred from 2002 to the present. Obeagu Ugwuaji and Amechi Ugwuaji Autonomous communities were created and their boundaries demarcated in 2015. The HELIU estate was established in 2016 on conflict land, which remains unresolved.
3	Amechi Awkunanaw Enugu South L.G.A. Versus Akpugo Nkanu west L.G.A.	Obeagu Onuayo Akagbe (now Obeagu Awkunanaw) in Enugu South L.G.A. versus Umu-Edenwoko Akpugo of Nkanu west L.G.A. Inter Community Land Boundary-1941, 1944, 1948, 1954	Boundary dispute since 1941. The matter went up to the Supreme Court and persisted despite various court judgments. The conflict reoccurred until 2003 and has continued from 2017 to the present. The demarcation process was not completed despite the land acquisition of Madonna University, Akpugo	Boundary dispute since 1941. The matter went up to the Supreme Court and persisted despite various court judgments. The conflict reoccurred until 2003 and has continued from 2017 to the present. The demarcation process was not completed despite the land acquisition of Madonna University, Akpugo

Source: Anierobi, C.M. & Obasi, C.O., 2021, 'Urbanization and rural-urban migration: Toward involving the church in addressing pro-poor urban housing challenges in Enugu, Nigeria', *SAGE Open* 11(3), 21582440211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211040123> and Eze, J., 2021, 'Urbanization in Nigeria, Enugu (the coal city) as an urban town: A historical review', *Cities* 113, 1–10, 103096 S/n, serial number.

participants, including sampled communities and government officials. Respondents highlighted the Church's pivotal role in transforming the Enugu Ngwo coal mining settlement into a thriving city through the establishment of schools, health facilities, water schemes, roads, cemeteries, housing projects and industries that promoted the welfare of the populace. A community leader noted: 'The Church was more than a place of worship; it became the backbone of our society by building schools and hospitals where the government had failed' (P25, Male, 52 years old). The Church's contributions to society can be classified into three dimensions: (1) political dimension, (2) socio-economic dimensions and (3) ecclesiological dimensions. These collaborative roles were also found to be traditionally and institutionally structured and enshrined in the canonical laws of the Church. These roles are further examined accordingly in this research.

The political dimension

The study revealed that the Church maintains a critical but non-partisan political role. According to one government official:

'The Church doesn't meddle in politics, but it provides a moral compass and services that the government often struggles to offer.' (P1, Male, 60 years old)

Participants emphasised the Church's alignment with its social teachings, such as those in *Rerum Novarum* and *Gaudium et Spes*, which encourage governance that upholds social justice. These teachings provide a framework for engaging with the political system while remaining apolitical. As one respondent put it:

'[T]he Church acts as the voice of the voiceless, representing the poor in ways that the political system often overlooks.' (P20, Female, 35 years old)

The socio-economic dimension

The study identified that the Church has always associated itself with the socio-economic well-being of the society in accordance with the social teachings as stipulated in the encyclicals of the Popes, especially in *Rerum Novarum*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican 11 and in the encyclical *Mater et Magistra*. Some participants repeatedly referenced the Church's role in fostering socio-economic welfare. A clergyman who works in the Ministry of Health stated that:

'[T]he hospitals run by the Church are the only places where the poor can receive care without being turned away for lack of funds.' (P23, Male, 44 years old)

The Church's initiatives are perceived to be guided by its social teachings which advocate for economic justice and equitable resource distribution. A respondent from the education sector observed that 'the Church's schools have not only provided education but also instilled discipline and hope in many families struggling to escape poverty'. The capability of the Church to provide the

basic needs and welfare, schools, hospitals and social centres among other institutions, is seen as a strong indication of its intention and ability to help the poor. Some of the institutions established by the Church in Enugu for the welfare of the society are shown in Table 4 to Table 7.

The ecclesiological dimension

The ecclesiological dimension reflects the Church's commitment to social ministry, which integrates faith with practical engagement in societal challenges. One participant remarked that:

'[T]he mission of the church is not only to preach the gospel but to live it by ensuring justice, inclusion, and care for the vulnerable.' (P10, Female, 46 years old)

The social teachings of the Church, as documented in *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*, form the foundation for this ministry. A participant from the clergy explained that:

'[T]he Church's social ministry shapes its institutions and ensures they address the most pressing needs of the people, particularly in underserved communities.' (P2, Male, 52 years old)

This section highlights the significant implications of the Church's collaborative efforts in promoting social inclusion and facilitating land access for physical

TABLE 4: Secondary schools of the catholic diocese.

S/n	Name	Location
1	St. Paul de Apostle Sec. Sch.	Awkunanaw
2	St. Joseph Secondary School	Emene
3	Sacred Heart College	Uwani
4	St. Patrick's College	Ogbete
5	Godfrey Okoye University Secondary School	Thinkers Corner
6	Federal Housing St. Leo de Great	Federal Housing Abakpa Nike
7	St. Monica College Holy Ghost	Ogui Enugu
8	College of Immaculate Conception	Enugu
9	Holy Rosary College,	Uwani
10	St. Joseph College	Emene
11	St. Patrick College	Emene
12	St. Anne's College	Abakpa
13	St. Monica Comprehensive College	Ogui
14	Holy Angels Comprehensive Secondary School	Amaechi
15	DDL Juniorate	Abakpa Nike, Enugu
16	Immaculate Heart Model Secondary School, Ogui	Ogui, Enugu
17	Our Saviour Community Secondary School	Ogui Rd, Enugu
18	OSISATECH Boys' Secondary School	Amorji-Nike, Enugu
19	OSISATECH Girls' Secondary School	Ind. Layout, Enugu
20	Claret Academy, Garriki	Garriki, Awkunanaw
21	Divine Love Secondary School, Trans Ekulu	Trans-Ekulu, Enugu
22	Knigen des Friedens College	Achara Layout
23	Nazareth Vocational Skill Centre	Agbani Road, Coal Camp, Enugu
24	Olu Aka Di Mma Vocational Industrial Technical Training Centre	Coal Camp (Ogbete, Enugu)

Source: Adapted from Catholic Diocese of Enugu, 2018, *Diocesan directory and liturgical calendar*, ed. A.C. Agu (ed.), The Diocesan Catholic Secretariat, Enugu; Anierobi, C.M. & Obasi, C.O., 2021, 'Urbanization and rural-urban migration: Toward involving the church in addressing pro-poor urban housing challenges in Enugu, Nigeria', *SAGE Open* 11(3), 21582440211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211040123> and Eze, J., 2021, 'Urbanization in Nigeria, Enugu (the coal city) as an urban town: A historical review', *Cities* 113, 1–10, 103096

S/n, serial number.

TABLE 5: Identified socio-economic projects of the church.

S/n	Name	Location
1	Catholic Institute for Development, Justice and Peace	Uwani, Enugu
2	Justice and Peace Farms	Ugwuomu Nike
3	Diocesan Bulletin Office	Holy Ghost Cathedral
4	Diocesan Social Communication	Holy Ghost Cathedral
5	Diocesan Printing Press	Holy Ghost Cathedral
6	Mirindu Water Programme	Catholic Secretariat, Ogbete, Ogui, Enugu
7	Nwannedinamba Low Cost Social Scheme	P.O. Box 302, Enugu
8	Small and Medium Entrepreneurs Promotion and Training Association	Holy Ghost Cathedral, Ogbete, Ogui, Enugu.
9	Trinitas Bureau De Change	Uwani, Enugu
10	Trinitas Oil Ltd.	Aguabor Layout, Enugu-Onitsha Express Road
11	Trinity Water Factory	Independence Layout
12	Umuchinemere Pro-Credit Micro Finance Bank	Uwani, Enugu

Source: Adapted from Catholic Diocese of Enugu, 2018, *Diocesan directory and liturgical calendar*, ed. A.C. Agu (ed.), The Diocesan Catholic Secretariat, Enugu; Anierobi, C.M. & Obasi, C.O., 2021, 'Urbanization and rural-urban migration: Toward involving the church in addressing pro-poor urban housing challenges in Enugu, Nigeria', *SAGE Open* 11(3), 21582440211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211040123>

S/n, serial number.

development in Enugu. The Church's multi-dimensional contributions to Enugu's development demonstrate how faith-based organisations can fill governance gaps, reduce inequalities and foster inclusive growth. Through the integration of political, socio-economic and ecclesiological dimensions, the Church has not only transformed communities but also established a sustainable framework for development that prioritises justice, equity and human dignity.

Discussion

The findings indicate that Enugu functions with a dual land administration system, merging formal regulations such as the *Land Use Act of 1978* and informal practices based on community traditions. This duality leads to inefficiencies and encourages corruption, reflecting earlier research (e.g. Hendrickse 2024; Uyi & Tifwa 2024) that emphasises the difficulties of hybrid governance in urban African contexts. The presence of these systems hinders planning and leads to disjointed urban growth, especially in peri-urban regions. Policy changes should focus on aligning these frameworks, clarifying responsibilities and minimising chances for misconduct. The research also shows that Enugu's urban development is hindered by an obsolete master plan (1979) and insufficient documentation. These results agree with Rigon et al. (2018) who claim that numerous African cities do not have the ability for contemporary urban planning. The consequences involve disordered land use practices and the exclusion of at-risk populations, especially women and the impoverished in urban areas. Tackling these problems necessitates funding for the digitalisation of land records and the revision of master plans to align with present conditions.

Furthermore, the findings reveal systemic land grabbing facilitated by compulsory acquisition laws, often benefiting government entities and native elites. This exacerbates landlessness among the urban poor, a phenomenon widely

TABLE 6: Pastoral institutions and responsibilities.

S/n	Name	Location
1	Divine love retreat and conference centre (DRACC)	P.O. Box 50, Emene Enugu
2	Enugu diocesan catechetical and pastoral centre	Ugwu Di Nso, Eke, P.O. Box 1513, Enugu
3	Enugu diocesan individual, marriage, family and group counselling centre	1-3 Ikwaato St. Uwani, Enugu
4	Upper room ministries	Emmanuel Town Ugwuomu Nike, P.O. Box 302 Enugu
5	Adoration ministry	Adoration Centre, Emene

Source: Adapted from Catholic Diocese of Enugu, 2018, *Diocesan directory and liturgical calendar*, ed. A.C. Agu (ed.), The Diocesan Catholic Secretariat, Enugu; Anierobi, C.M. & Obasi, C.O., 2021, 'Urbanization and rural-urban migration: Toward involving the church in addressing pro-poor urban housing challenges in Enugu, Nigeria', *SAGE Open* 11(3), 21582440211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211040123> and Eze, J., 2021, 'Urbanization in Nigeria, Enugu (the coal city) as an urban town: A historical review', *Cities* 113, 1–10, 103096

S/n, serial number.

TABLE 7: Care homes.

S/n	Name	Location
1	Little sisters of the poor mother of perpetual help home for the elderly	St. Paul Awkunanaw, Enugu
2	Motherless babies home	Holy Ghost Cathedral Ogui, Enugu
3	Guardian angels motherless babies home (GAMB)	Nwanne di-na-Mba Estate, Enugu
4	Daughters of divine love (DDL) charity home	Amorji Nike, P.O. Box 546, Enugu
5	Daughters of divine love (DDL) pro-life centre	23 Aria Road, Enugu

Source: Adapted from Catholic Diocese of Enugu, 2018, *Diocesan directory and liturgical calendar*, ed. A.C. Agu (ed.), The Diocesan Catholic Secretariat, Enugu; Anierobi, C.M. & Obasi, C.O., 2021, 'Urbanization and rural-urban migration: Toward involving the church in addressing pro-poor urban housing challenges in Enugu, Nigeria', *SAGE Open* 11(3), 21582440211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211040123> and Eze, J., 2021, 'Urbanization in Nigeria, Enugu (the coal city) as an urban town: A historical review', *Cities* 113, 1–10, 103096

S/n, serial number.

documented in African urban studies (e.g. Notess et al. 2021). Such practices not only displace communities but also erode trust in public institutions. Advocacy for more transparent land acquisition processes, fair compensation mechanisms and participatory governance is crucial. In the same way, it was found that weak enforcement of planning regulations has led to the proliferation of informal settlements characterised by inadequate infrastructure and services. These findings resonate with UN-Habitat (2023) reports on the growth of slums in sub-Saharan Africa. Informal settlements pose significant challenges, including poor sanitation, health risks and social exclusion. Addressing this requires a multi-pronged approach that combines upgrading existing settlements with proactive measures to prevent future slum formation.

Additionally, the research reveals persistent local land disputes like the Ogui Nike and Amechi-Ugwuaji border conflicts. These conflicts are frequently intensified by government purchases and unclear procedures. This discovery corresponds with research by Koroso, Zevenbergen and Lengoiboni (2019), which associates land conflicts with inadequate institutional structures. Addressing these conflicts requires enhancing dispute resolution systems and encouraging transparency in land dealings. Simultaneously, the results indicate the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups caused by rising land costs, inadequate compensation methods and preferential treatment in land distribution. This reflects patterns seen in various African cities (Anas & Musah 2023), where unequal land access exacerbates socio-economic

inequalities. Policy actions must focus on fair land allocation and specific assistance for disadvantaged communities.

The results of the study highlight the important initiatives and socio-economic actions carried out by the church. These initiatives demonstrate the church's longstanding dedication to social welfare, justice and community growth. Regarding pro-poor advocacy, the church has become a prominent supporter of fair resource allocation. Results from this research indicate that the church establishes skill development, economic empowerment and social welfare initiatives aimed at marginalised or disadvantaged populations. These efforts not only decrease poverty but also alleviate resource-driven conflicts. This concurs with Sele and Wanjiku's (2024) claim that churches bear a moral responsibility to confront structural inequities, especially in situations where economic imbalances drive social upheaval.

Theological reflections and the church's role in land conflict resolution

Theological foundations for land justice and social cohesion

Land, seen as a sacred blessing, carries deep theological importance in various religious traditions, especially in Christianity, where it is regarded as a resource given to humans for careful management and fair allocation (Gn 1:28; Lv 25:23). The idea of justice in land management corresponds with Catholic social teachings, especially the principles of the universal destination of goods and a preferential option for the poor (Gaudium et Spes 1965; Rerum Novarum 1891). These principles stress that land and resources ought not to be controlled by the powerful to the detriment of the marginalised and that social systems must guarantee equitable access for everyone, particularly the impoverished and disenfranchised. The Church's engagement in resolving land disputes and fostering social harmony must hence be grounded in theological principles of justice, reconciliation and peacebuilding (Mt 5:9). In addition to its current roles in education, healthcare and advocacy, the Church needs to purposefully incorporate these theological principles into its practical efforts to resolve community land disputes.

Practical strategies for church-government collaboration

To move beyond merely stating the Church's current role, this study proposes specific, actionable strategies through which the Church can enhance its impact on land conflict resolution and social inclusion in partnership with government authorities. These four strategies are enunciated as:

1. Mediation and faith-based conflict resolution
 - The Church can serve as a neutral mediator in communal land disputes, drawing on its moral authority and community trust.
 - It can establish Interfaith Conflict Mediation Centres, where religious leaders facilitate reconciliatory dialogue between disputing parties.

- Drawing from scriptural principles of peace and reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18–19), the Church can implement biblical-based mediation models that emphasise restorative justice.

2. Advocacy for just and inclusive land policies

- The Church should leverage its institutional influence to advocate for transparent land governance and policies that protect the urban poor from unjust displacement.
- Religious leaders can collaborate with policymakers to promote land reforms that integrate informal land access mechanisms into formal governance structures.
- The Catholic Bishops' Conference and other faith-based networks can lobby for fair compensation mechanisms for displaced persons, ensuring their rights are protected under the law.

3. Community education on land rights and ethical stewardship

- The Church should establish land justice education programmes, teaching marginalised communities about their legal rights and ethical land stewardship.
- Church-run schools and institutions can incorporate land ethics and social justice curricula, equipping young people with knowledge about equitable land governance.
- The Church can use sermons, workshops and social media campaigns to educate congregants on land rights from a theological perspective, fostering a justice-oriented mindset.

4. Development of affordable housing and alternative land access

- The Church can partner with the government and Non-governmental organisations to develop low-cost housing schemes for displaced or landless families.
- Church-owned lands could be allocated for community-led housing projects, promoting cooperative land ownership models that ensure sustainable access.
- Faith-based microfinance initiatives can provide financial support for pro-poor land acquisition, reducing barriers to land ownership for marginalised groups.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study has highlighted the complexities and inefficiencies in Enugu's land administration and tenure systems, which operate under a dual framework of formal laws and informal practices. These systems, while designed to support equitable land distribution and urban development, have inadvertently perpetuated systemic exclusions, unplanned growth and socio-economic disparities. Communal land conflicts, driven by government land acquisitions, exploitation of compulsory acquisition laws and marginalisation of vulnerable groups, have further exacerbated these challenges. The findings underscore the critical role of the Church in addressing

these issues. Through its socio-economic initiatives, advocacy for justice and grassroots engagement, the Church has demonstrated its capacity to contribute meaningfully to resolving communal land conflicts and promoting pro-poor policies. Integrating the Church's efforts into formal land governance frameworks presents a unique opportunity to foster social inclusion, mitigate conflicts and ensure equitable development. A multi-stakeholder approach that prioritises transparency, inclusivity and justice is needed to address the issues identified in this study. Through the strengthening of institutional frameworks, bridging formal and informal systems and leveraging the Church's resources and moral authority, Enugu can develop sustainable solutions to its land administration challenges.

This study therefore recommends Government, Community, Church collaboration towards addressing the social exclusion of the poor in land access and physical development as well as the communal land conflict in the city. This collaboration should also foster the integration of the prevailing informal into the formal land administration and be tailored to minimise the cost of land and increase the accessibility of urban land to the poor while eliminating double charging and the inherent bureaucratic bottlenecks. Additionally, policies should be developed to integrate informal land access systems, such as inheritance and community allotments into formal frameworks. This can enhance transparency and reduce conflicts while preserving the social benefits of communal practices. Proper resettlement and just compensation schemes should be packaged and delivered directly to persons affected by displacements or evictions in the area. Updating and adopting the 1979 urban Master plan of Enugu, land Cadastral and proper record keeping would facilitate easy access to land for all and help in present and future land use planning and developments in the city. These will also help address the issue of slums and squatter settlements while engendering inclusive pro-poor land access and physical development. Urban renewal schemes should be carried out in the peripheral communities so as to revitalise and provide infrastructural facilities and amenities in the areas. The Government, Community, Church collaborative measures in land administration will ensure pro-poor social inclusion and sustainable development in communities as the Church is an identified growth factor in the area.

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Authors' contributions

All authors C.M.A., C.O.O., E.E.O., C.D.O. and B.O.A. contributed to proofreading and approving the manuscript. C.M.A. and C.O.O. worked on conceptualising and writing the introduction section, while C.O.O. also contributed to the conclusion. E.E.O. focussed on writing the literature review and introduction sections, and C.D.O. contributed to the methodology, results and conclusion sections. B.O.A. worked on the introduction, literature review and conclusion sections.

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