

Metropolitanization of the Greater Lomé Area: Between Urban Expansion and New Governance Challenges

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ABSTRACT

In the context of rapid urbanization that reshapes territorial configurations in Sub-Saharan Africa, the metropolitan area of Greater Lomé, the capital of Togo, epitomizes the ongoing deep territorial transformations. From an initial population of 8,000 inhabitants in 1914, the city experienced a sharp increase to more than 2.19 million in 2022, reflecting an average annual growth rate of over 2.7%. Greater Lomé now concentrates 27% of the national population in less than 1% of its territory, a hyper-concentration that overshadows the country's secondary growth poles. This rapid growth has been characterized by unplanned urban sprawl, driven by an informal land market in which 75% of the transactions are customary land sales. Consequently, up to 26% of agricultural land is converted into urban areas annually. This research investigates the dynamics of metropolization and its implications for governance and urban services. Using a mixed-method approach, we triangulated qualitative document analysis, quantitative GIS mapping, and fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews. Findings reveal a stark territorial divide. The historic core is concentrated with critical infrastructure, including public lighting (99.7 percent) and paved roads (81.6 percent). This leaves peripheral households severely underserved, with only 10 percent having reliable access to drinking water and 70% relying on motorcycles for their daily commutes. The study highlights a drastic disconnect between the conceived city (official plans), the perceived city (daily practices), and the lived city (experiences of inequality). It calls for an urgent, integrated metropolitan governance framework to steer this urbanization towards sustainable and inclusive development.

KEYWORDS

Urban sprawl, urban governance, population growth rate, Togo

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of metropolization, characterized by the intense concentration of populations and strategic functions, has been profoundly reshaping sub-Saharan African territories for decades. Cities such as Lagos, Kinshasa, and Nairobi exemplify this dynamic, where rapid, often uncontrolled growth defines the urban landscape (Biakouye, 2023). Togo is fully embedded in this dynamic, with its capital, Lomé, standing out as a primate city that absorbs the majority of the country's urban growth (Nyassogbo, 1984). In 2022, the Greater Lomé agglomeration was home to nearly 2.19 million inhabitants, representing approximately 27% of the nation's total population and nearly two-thirds of its urban population (INSEED, 2022). This dominance, however, is not new: in 1958-1960, Lomé was already 5.5 times larger than Sokodé (and 7 times larger than Kpalimé, the third-largest city). By 1970, this gap had widened to 6.5 times the size of Sokodé and 9.5 times that of Kpalimé. Macrocephaly, an acute

imbalance between the primary city and its secondary counterparts, has therefore markedly worsened over the decades (Marguerat, 1994). Demographic preponderance has been matched by a dramatic spatial expansion: the city's urbanized area has grown from a mere 0.55 km² in 1914 to an estimated 425 km² in 2020, illustrating a rapid and continuous expansion (INSEED Togo, 2022).

The city's growth is unbridled. The ocean constrains it to the south and the Ghanaian border to the west. Consequently, urban expansion is primarily directed northward and eastward. This dynamic drives a process of urban sprawl, leading to diffuse and largely unregulated peri-urban development. Each year, this process results in the conversion of a significant share of peripheral agricultural land into built-up areas (Somadjago et al., 2020), with this rate reaching 26% in the city's immediate vicinity (République Togolaise, 2025). This sprawl leads to a fragmented urban fabric, fosters the emergence of new informal settlements (Biakouye, 2023), and creates deep socio-spatial divides.

Indeed, access to basic infrastructure is becoming increasingly inequitable, reflecting national-level disparities. According to a 2024 government report, national electricity access stands at 48.4%, with rates in some rural prefectures falling below 10 percent (MPDC, 2024). While Grand Lomé is better serviced on average, this concentration of resources attracts migration that overwhelms its capacity, creating severe service deficits in its expanding peripheries (Gbekley et al., 2023). For example, the authors' field surveys reveal that there are 3,458 km of roads developed in the city center, compared to 782 km on the outskirts, and 28,318 streetlights in the city center, compared to 78 on the outskirts. This rapid, unequal expansion exacerbates pressure on transportation networks (Suka and Dziwonou, 2021). It fuels a vibrant yet largely informal land market, characterized by increasing monetization and insufficient state regulation (Bawa, 2017; UN-Habitat, 2008).

Several powerful forces are reconfiguring the urban space: demographic pressure, volatile land dynamics, socio-economic precarity, and a weak institutional framework for urban governance. Although Grand Lomé reports the nation's lowest multidimensional poverty, this regional statistic masks the growing precarity in its under-serviced informal settlements (MPDC, 2024). As the city engulfs rural lands, it triggers land-use conflicts and institutional fragmentation (Bawa, 2017; Ouro, 2022).

As its built-up area encroaches on former rural lands, it engulfs neighboring communities, triggering imbalances, land-use conflicts, and institutional fragmentation, as noted by Bawa (2017) and Ouro (2022). Furthermore, the dream of individual homeownership, fueled by strong social aspirations, is overriding the collective need for planned, formal housing, thereby amplifying the pressure on peri-urban land (Guézéré, 2011). While the city center densifies, its peripheries are undergoing chaotic morphological expansion, marked by spontaneous settlements, pockets of urban poverty, and severe deficits in basic urban services.

In response to these major challenges, Togolese authorities have integrated these concerns into their strategic documents, such as the "Togo 2025 Government Roadmap," which aims to modernize the country through an inclusive approach (Kakpo, 2018). In terms of planning, initiatives such as the National Land Use and Development Plan (SNAT) aim to structure this development better and address existing imbalances. The most significant institutional response has been the creation of the Autonomous District of Greater Lomé (DAGL), a territorial entity designed better to coordinate development across the agglomeration's 13 municipalities. However, despite these planning efforts, formalized in documents like the Master Plan for Development and Urbanism (AGETUR-Togo, 2015), the metropolitan area remains a landscape of sharp contrasts, with fragmented governance. The core challenge, therefore, is whether this new governance structure can effectively manage an urban reality that often seems to outpace it.

Furthermore, Lomé's strategic importance within the national urban system underscores the urgency of addressing its challenges through the lens of sustainable development. Consequently, Greater Lomé plays a dual role: it is both a driver of national development and a space of acute urban vulnerabilities.

The central research questions can be stated as follows: What are the defining characteristics of Greater Lomé's metropolization? To what extent do effective governance and planning support this evolution? The paper aims, therefore, to analyze the dynamics of Greater Lomé's metropolization by examining the interplay between demographic growth, spatial expansion, and institutional responses. The objective is to prove that first, Lomé's expansion results from a combination of complex dynamics that produce socio-spatial inequalities; and second, current urban policies, particularly the framework of the DAGL, are adequate to meet the challenges at hand.

The investigation aims to shed light on the territorial, institutional, and social constraints shaping Greater Lomé's transition into a fully-fledged metropolis. It also provides strategic reflections to guide future policies in spatial planning, urban governance, and sustainable development. The ultimate goal is to support a more balanced, inclusive, and resilient metropolitan future for the Togolese capital.

1.1. Description of the Study Area

The study area, Greater Lomé, is a metropolitan area undergoing significant transformation. It is composed of 13 municipalities (Baguida, Togblekopé, Légbassito, Sanguera, Vakpossito, Aflao-Sagbado, Aflao-Gakli, Amoutiévé, Bè Ouest, Bè Centre, Bè-Est, Agoè-Nyivé, and Adetikopé), which fall within the Golfe and Agoè Nyivé prefectures. Also, it includes localities from the neighboring Zio and Avé prefectures (Djagblé, Aveta, and Aképe).

The Atlantic Ocean borders the area to the south, the international border with Ghana (Aflao) and the Avé prefecture to the west, the Zio prefecture to the north, and the Lacs prefecture to the east (see Figure 1). An uneven distribution characterizes the urban fabric of the population, with densities ranging from 357 to 1,307 inhabitants/km².

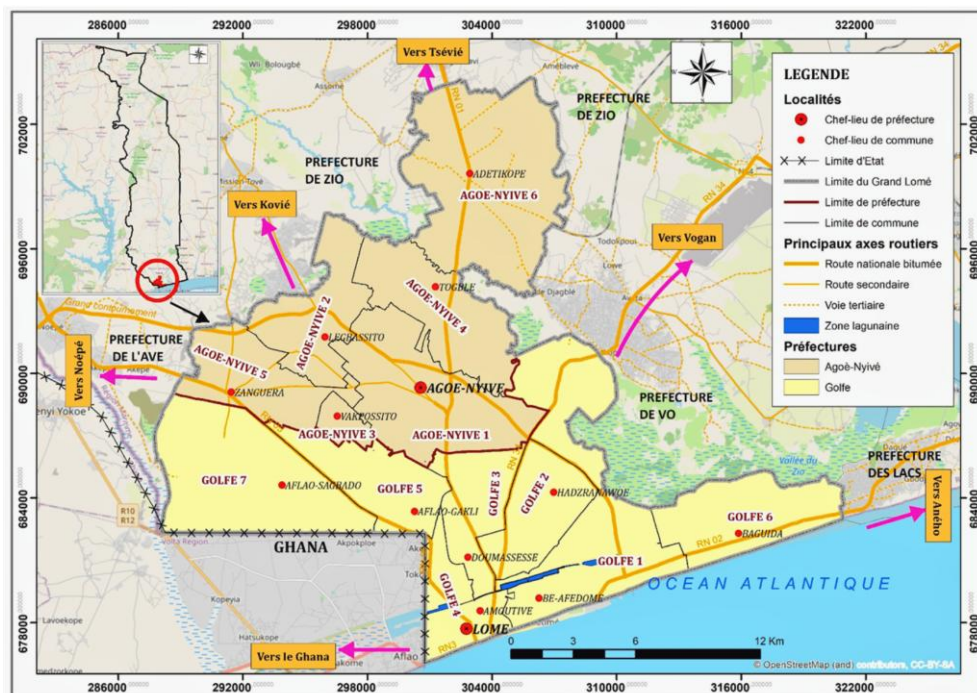


Figure 1: Map showing the Autonomous District of Greater Lomé

Source: Author's compilation based on data from DGCN and OpenStreet Map, 2025

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1. Overall Approach

To investigate the complex and multifactorial dynamics of metropolization in Greater Lomé, the inquiry employs a mixed-methods research design (qualitative and quantitative). The objective is to combine various sources and types of data to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The approach is grounded in two key forms of triangulation. Firstly, we employed Methodological Triangulation by combining qualitative methods (documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews) with quantitative ones (statistical analysis, Geographic Information Systems), thus allowing for a cross-validation of results and providing a more comprehensive picture. Secondly, the researchers employed data triangulation by systematically cross-referencing information from diverse sources, including official reports, satellite imagery, and field surveys conducted with multiple stakeholders (residents, local elected officials, and government technicians). This multi-source strategy strengthens the validity of our findings by reducing potential bias. The investigation thus adopts a multi-scalar and multi-stakeholder framework.

2.2. Materials

The researchers utilized digital tools, including tablets running the KoboToolbox application for survey data collection. They also used GIS software for mapping and spatial analysis.

2.3. Documentary and Statistical Analysis

The research began with the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative component consisted of a documentary review of academic publications, institutional reports, and legal texts to establish the study's theoretical and contextual framework. For the quantitative component, statistical data on demographic trends, growth rates, and population density were gathered. The primary source for these socio-economic indicators was the National Institute of Statistics and Economic and Demographic Studies (INSEED), Togo's official statistical agency.

2.4. Spatial and Cartographic Analysis (GIS)

GIS analysis to map and measure urban sprawl, the authors performed a diachronic spatial analysis (in GIS using software such as QGIS and ArcGIS). The analysis illustrates the evolution of Greater Lomé's urban footprint from 1914 to 2022. This approach facilitated the quantitative assessment of geographic spread and its relationship with demographic characteristics, thus corroborating anecdotal evidence.

2.5. Field Surveys

Fieldwork was conducted from January to April 2025 to verify secondary information against actual on-the-ground conditions. The specific aim of this fieldwork was to obtain quantitative measures for various aspects of peri-urban life, including the availability of services (drinking water, electricity, sanitation), transportation patterns, land ownership, sense of security, and residents' perceptions of local problems. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, which consisted mostly of closed-ended (single and multiple response) questions, complemented by a small number of open-ended questions.

Households were sampled using a stratified purposive sampling strategy. Strata were geographically based on the 13 urban municipalities in the Greater Lomé area included in the study (e.g., Agoè-Nyivé, Adétikopé). We used stratification to guarantee the representation of heterogeneous peri-urban contexts. A random walk was applied to select households in each selected neighbourhood, whereby field personnel followed a specified route, selecting

households at predefined intervals (e.g., every fifth household) along the path to reduce selection bias. Overall, 290 households in the study area were surveyed.

To collect in-depth qualitative data, we conducted semi-structured interviews with fifty key stakeholders (N=50). Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure a diversity of perspectives relevant to our study. These were Mayors, deputy mayors and traditional chiefs (to appreciate local governance problems, planning, services, land regulation) and also senior staff from the Ministry of Urbanism (MUHRF) and the Autonomous District of Greater Lomé (DAGL) to study institutional strategies and technical constraints. Interviews were audiotaped with the participant's permission and transcribed verbatim.

2.6. Data Analysis and Processing

Statistical data (from the national census, INSEED) and data from the questionnaires were processed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS, Excel). This analysis produced trend graphs (Figure 2 and Figure 3) to illustrate the overarching dynamics of metropolization.

The final phase of the study was dedicated to the systematic triangulation of our data to ensure the validity and reliability of our conclusions. We corroborated quantitative evidence with qualitative insights. For example, statistical data revealing stark inequalities in infrastructure, such as low access rates to water, public lighting, and paved roads in peripheral areas (INSEED, 2022, 2025), was cross-validated with residents' lived experiences and their accounts of daily challenges. Similarly, we contextualized the official discourse on inter-municipal coordination from DAGL stakeholders by examining it alongside the legal framework of decentralization and our direct field observations of fragmented service delivery.

This cross-examination produced a robust analysis, identifying discrepancies between discourse, policy, and practice, and offering a nuanced and validated understanding of metropolization in Greater Lomé.

2.7. Ethical Considerations

The inquiry was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards. Permissions were requested and obtained from the customary chiefs and municipal authorities before any field research took place. At the individual level, all those interviewed or participating in the surveys provided their free and informed consent after being informed of the study's objective. The anonymity and privacy of the respondents were ensured, and their personal information was kept confidential throughout the data analysis and report publication.

3. FINDINGS

The investigation of the collected data provides an extended view of the mechanisms at work in the urbanization of the city of Greater Lomé. The results show a multilayered equation where three forces are interconnected: unprecedented demographic/spatial expansion, intense land use transformation at the urban periphery and infrastructure problems of great magnitude. These related themes are then discussed in succession.

3.1. Exponential population growth as a driver for space expansion

Among the most significant results, however, is the evidence of incredibly fast population growth, which appears to be the prime driver behind Greater Lomé's urban dynamics. The figures 2 reveal significant demographic growth: from approximately 80,000 inhabitants in 1960, the Lomé metropolis increased to nearly 1.48 million people in 2010 and surpassed 2.19 million in 2022 (INSEED, 2022).

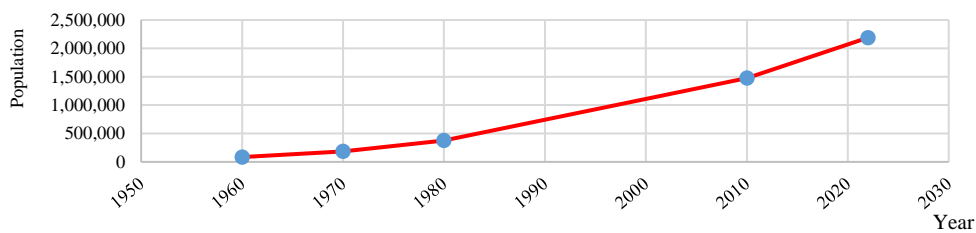


Figure 2: Population Growth of the Lomé Metropolitan Area (1960–2030)

Source: Figures for 1960 and 1981 are retrospective estimates; data for 2010 and 2022 are drawn from RGPH-4 and RGPH-5, respectively.

An analysis of this growth curve reveals a particularly sharp acceleration since the beginning of the 21st century. This trend is driven by a combination of two phenomena: a high rate of natural increase, typical of many cities in the Global South, and massive, sustained rural-to-urban migration to the capital, which concentrates Togo's economic, administrative, and educational opportunities.

This demographic pressure inevitably results in a dramatic spatial expansion. Lomé's urban fringe is continuously expanding, absorbing surrounding villages and farmland. As Bawa, (2017) pointed out, the city's physical footprint has more than doubled in just a few decades. Between 1970 and 2010, the number of peripheral localities with over 1,000 inhabitants grew from 80 to 168, a clear indicator of the constant emergence of new neighborhoods. The fact that approximately 15 new urban areas emerge yearly on the city's edges, coupled with this data, suggests that peri-urbanization is rapid and largely unchecked.

However, our spatial analysis indicates an average density of 71 inhabitants per hectare across the metropolitan area, which is consistent with the World Bank's 2018 estimate of 69 inhabitants per hectare. A phenomenon of territorial fragmentation, or *mitage*, explains this paradox of a city that sprawls without densifying. Anticipating future appreciation in land value, property owners are subdividing plots often informally far ahead of the existing built-up front. The result is a discontinuous, fragmented metropolitan landscape where vast undeveloped parcels are interspersed between built-up zones, creating an extremely diffuse urban fabric (Gonzalez-Calle, 2024).

To illustrate, Lomé's urbanized area expanded from 55 hectares serving 8,000 inhabitants in 1914 to approximately 42,560 hectares (425.6 km²) supporting 2.19 million inhabitants in 2022 (Figure 3)

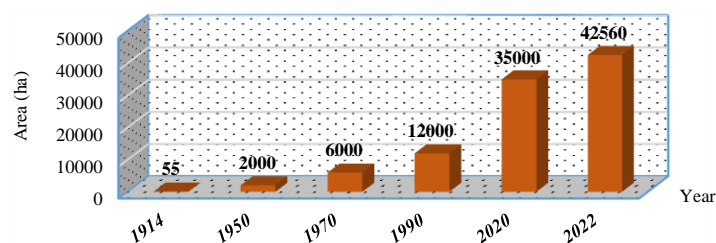


Figure 3: Spatial Expansion of Lomé Over Time (Core Lomé, Greater Lomé, Autonomous District of Greater Lomé)

Source: AIDAM Koudjo (2025), adapted from DZIWANU (2010).

3.2. Land Market Transformations and the Rise of Planned Informal Urbanization

The second pillar of our findings concerns the land tenure mechanisms that underpin this urban sprawl. The urbanization of Greater Lomé is driven by a massive and rapid conversion of rural land into developable plots, a process orchestrated by a swiftly transforming land market. The periphery, which was once primarily agricultural, is now an arena for intense speculation and frenzied land transactions (Takili et al., 2022). A major shift has occurred: whereas land was traditionally transferred through customary channels (such as donations, inheritances, and loans), three-quarters of all land transfers are now monetized.

However, this monetization has not been accompanied by formalization. The market remains largely informal and poorly regulated. The majority of new parcels originate from what are effectively unauthorized subdivisions, carried out by customary landowners or small-scale private developers entirely outside of any state planning framework. These operations proceed without preliminary infrastructure, servicing, or the reservation of space for public facilities and essential services. Bawa (2017) revealed that 66 percent of land acquired on the periphery is for speculative or construction purposes (housing, future subdivisions), rather than agriculture. It also shows that during the 2000s, up to 26 percent of agricultural land in peri-urban municipalities was being converted into building plots annually.

The profile of buyers confirms this trend: 93 percent already reside within the Lomé metropolitan area. They are predominantly civil servants and middle-class employees who, faced with the prohibitive cost of land in central districts, invest in the periphery to secure an asset or plan for future construction.

This informal real estate boom generates two major, albeit ambivalent, consequences: On the one hand, it facilitates relatively broad access to land ownership. Relying on customary land, which is less expensive and more accessible than formal, titled land, allows middle and lower-income classes to become property owners. Notably, this system also benefits groups traditionally excluded from the land market, such as women, who are increasingly acquiring property in peri-urban zones.

On the other hand, it produces unplanned and precarious urbanization. Neighborhoods emerge *ex nihilo*, without paved roads, stormwater drainage systems, and with only partial or non-existent connections to water and electricity grids.

It is crucial to note a specific characteristic of Lomé highlighted by the World Bank. Unlike in other African metropolises, these neighborhoods do not take the form of classic "shantytowns" (*bidonvilles*), in the sense of illegal squats on public or private land. In Lomé, the dominant pattern is one of unauthorized subdivisions that are nonetheless legitimized through customary land transactions. The plots are sold, but their legal status remains precarious due to a lack of official registration in the land cadaster. This unique feature, directly linked to the resilience and adaptation of the customary land tenure system, shapes an urban physiognomy of a "sprawling city without classic slums," where precariousness stems from a lack of infrastructure rather than illegality.

3.3. The Structural Deficit in Urban Infrastructure and Services

The direct and logical consequence of the growth dynamics and informal sprawl described above is a glaring lack of basic urban infrastructure and services, particularly in the vast, recently developed extension zones. This third finding constitutes the most tangible challenge of Lomé's metropolitan development.

The speed and dispersion of spatial growth have far outpaced the planning and investment capacity of public authorities. The low-density urban sprawl model makes the provision of networked infrastructure (water, electricity, sanitation, roads) extremely costly and technically complex. Servicing a fragmented and sparsely populated territory requires significantly greater

network lengths per inhabitant than in a compact city, which strains public budgets and considerably slows the deployment of services.

The following figure 4 quantifies this deep territorial divide by presenting the distribution of key infrastructure and services between the city center (Golfe Prefecture) and the periphery (Agoè-Nyivé Prefecture).

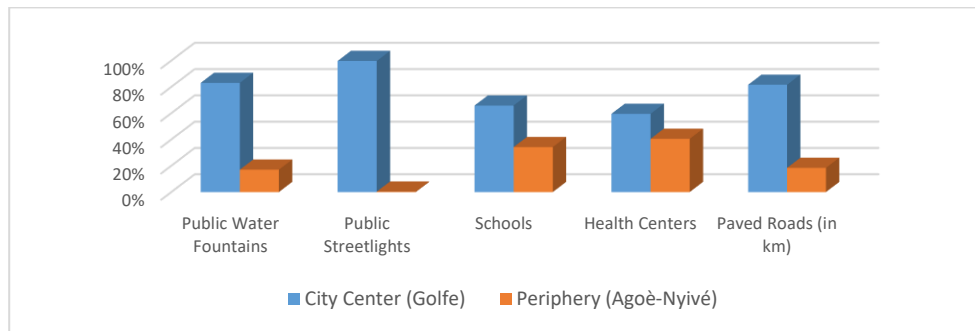


Figure 4: Distribution of Services and Infrastructures in Greater Lomé

Source: Household Survey, 2025.

The data in this table provides a stark, quantitative illustration of a "two-speed" metropolis. The disparity is most extreme in public lighting, where the city center benefits from a virtual monopoly (99.7 percent), leaving the periphery almost entirely in the dark. Similarly, critical infrastructure, such as paved roads (81.6 percent) and public water fountains (83 percent), is overwhelmingly concentrated in the historic core. While the gap is less pronounced for social services like schools and health centers, the center remains significantly better equipped. This evidence confirms that infrastructure development has failed to keep pace with urban expansion, creating a profound structural deficit in the peripheral areas.

The result is a deep territorial divide in Greater Lomé. While central and inner-ring neighborhoods benefit from a relatively adequate level of services, vast portions of the periphery remain chronically underserved. The new residents of these areas face daily hardships: unpaved roads that become impassable during the rainy season, a lack of drainage systems leading to recurrent flooding, limited access to safe drinking water and a reliable electricity grid, and a near-total absence of local public services such as health centers, public schools, or a structured public transit network. This chronic infrastructural deficit not only degrades the quality of life for residents but also hinders the economic development of these territories and reinforcing their dependency on the city center.

3.3.1. Access to Drinking Water: A Structural Inequality Exacerbated by Urban Sprawl

Access to safe drinking water is one of the most telling indicators of the socio-spatial divide created by the unmanaged metropolitan growth of Greater Lomé. In newly urbanized peripheral neighborhoods, particularly in the northern municipalities (such as Zanguéra, Agoè-Nyivé 6, and Adétikopé), coverage by the public network of the Togolese Water Company (TdE) remains extremely low: with less than 10% of households connected to running water. Most of the population is therefore forced to rely on precarious alternatives such as private wells, informal boreholes, or purchasing water from street vendors using jerrycans.

This distributional inequality is primarily due to the mismatch between the pace of urbanization and the rate of infrastructure expansion. The authorities themselves acknowledge that supplying water to new peripheral districts has become "increasingly problematic," largely due to a lack of initiative-taking and structural investment in these rapidly urbanizing areas.

Faced with this deficit, households develop coping strategies, notably by building private wells or community water towers, sometimes connected to motorized pumps. However, these solutions do not guarantee either the microbiological quality of the water or equitable access, especially for the poorest households. The use of often-unregulated water from wells and boreholes exposes the population to significant health risks, including waterborne diseases, fecal contamination, and chemical poisoning from polluted groundwater.

Thus, the deficit in drinking water infrastructure is not only a matter of territorial inequality, but it is also a public health threat, worsened by poorly managed population densification.

3.3.2. Sanitation and Waste Management: A Latent Environmental Crisis

The sanitation system in Greater Lomé, especially in its peripheries, is characterized by a structural failure of public services in waste collection and wastewater management. Officially, municipalities have established pre-collection systems, which are delegated to private or community-based operators. However, no effective systemic organization exists in the periphery, as Biakouye (2023) had highlighted. The efforts that are made remain sporadic and poorly coordinated.

In most peri-urban neighborhoods, waste disposal relies on makeshift solutions: half of the surveyed households report turning to informal community initiatives, such as local savings groups (tontines) or youth associations, to organize occasional collections. The other half resorts to harmful practices, including the open-air burning of waste and illegal dumping in public spaces, on roadsides, or in ravines. These practices are particularly visible in municipalities like Agoè-Nyivé 5, Aflao-Gakli, and Baguida, where our field observations revealed piles of garbage accumulating in the interstitial spaces of the urban fabric.

This lack of effective waste management has a series of severe consequences: pollution of the immediate environment, clogging of drainage channels (which are often non-existent or poorly maintained), seasonal flooding, and a pervasive sense of neglect among residents. The nuisances associated with these dumpsites (odors, proliferation of mosquitoes and rats, soil contamination) fuel a sense of territorial exclusion and reinforce the marginalization of these areas, which have been urbanized too quickly and have been forgotten by public services.

3.3.3. Access to Electricity and Public Lighting: Clear Progress, but Notable Shortcomings

Compared to water and sanitation, electricity coverage in Greater Lomé shows a relatively more positive trajectory, driven by the gradual extension of medium and low-voltage lines, particularly along major roads. However, this improvement masks persistent inequalities within the peripheral urban fabric. In several neighborhoods, such as Zanguéra and Adétikopé, many households remain formally disconnected from the national grid of the CEET (Compagnie Énergie Électrique du Togo).

In response, residents develop various alternatives: informal or shared connections, locally known as "areigné", or the use of solar or rechargeable lamps, especially for nighttime lighting. While the state has initiated targeted rural electrification programs, including the installation of solar streetlights in some peripheral municipalities, these initiatives remain sporadic, unsustainable, and cover only a minority of the areas in need.

Consequently, the lack of widespread public lighting contributes to growing insecurity in the peripheries, a problem compounded by the limited presence of security forces in these areas. This duality between visible progress along major arteries and chronic deficiencies in the periphery reflects the challenges of multi-polar planning in a rapidly expanding metropolitan area.

3.3.4. The Road Network: A Major Deficit in Structuring Urban Mobility

The quality and connectivity of the road network are another critical issue, revealing the infrastructure lag in Greater Lomé. While some major arteries, such as the Boulevard de la Kozah and sections of national highways, have been paved and improved (notably within the Agoè-Nyivé 1 municipality), the rest of the road grid remains extremely deficient. In municipalities such as Baguida, Aflao-Sagbado, Légbassito, and Sanguéra, the majority of secondary and tertiary roads are unpaved dirt tracks in very poor condition.

During the rainy season, these tracks become impassable due, in part, to mud, potholes, and chronic flooding, which not only hinder traffic but also impede access for public services (such as ambulances, firefighters, and waste collection) and disrupt daily mobility. These difficulties temporarily isolate certain neighborhoods from the rest of the city, accentuating the precarity of local populations. Lacking adequate roads also hinders the effective implementation of maintenance and management strategies for water and electrical infrastructure, rendering technical interventions difficult and costly.

The broader failure to implement a reliable road development plan, therefore, reinforces the hybrid nature of the Lomé metropolis: a city expanding rapidly, shaped by its demographic flows but not by a rational road grid. This imbalance creates an urban divide expressed not only through spatial distance but also through functional isolation.

3.3.5. A Metropolis in the Making: The Disconnect Between Urbanization and Planning

All these findings illustrate a growing dissociation between the de facto city and the planned city. The rapid development of urban fabric, largely driven by private initiative and customary land tenure practices, clashes with the slow and inadequate pace of public intervention. This structural disconnect is at the heart of the urban crises affecting Greater Lomé today, from the shortage of basic services to the marginalization of entire neighborhoods.

This dynamic mirrors a pattern observed in other sub-Saharan African metropolises facing explosive population growth (such as Abidjan, Kinshasa, and Ouagadougou). In Lomé's case, however, the phenomenon is accentuated by the institutional weakness of urban planning mechanisms, the absence of an integrated digital cadaster, and limited inter-municipal coordination.

The summary map of infrastructure and services (Figure 5) reveals these coverage failures, highlighting the geographic overlap between newly urbanized districts and chronically under-equipped zones, confirming the urgent need to rethink the scales of public action, improve metropolitan governance, and develop innovative planning tools adapted to local realities.

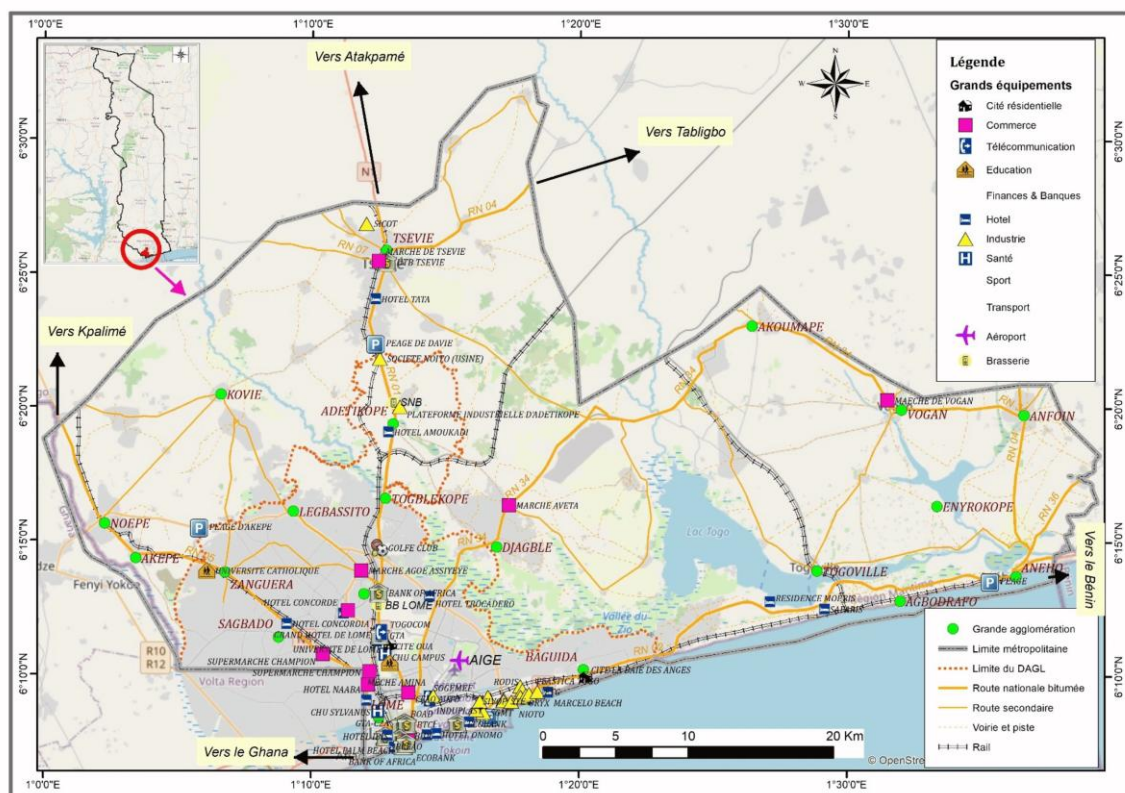


Figure 5: Synthesis Map of Infrastructure and Services
Source: DGCN, OSM. Map designed by AIDAM Koudjo, 2025

3.4. Urban Mobility: The Hegemony of the Motorcycle and its Externalities

The metropolitan expansion of Greater Lomé has profoundly reshaped the travel patterns of its inhabitants, giving rise to a mobility system with highly distinct characteristics. Faced with an underdeveloped public transportation network and ever-increasing commute distances, residents of Lomé have overwhelmingly adopted individual transportation solutions. The motorcycle, in particular, has established itself as the dominant mode of transport. The findings from mobility surveys are unequivocal: 72 percent of daily trips are made by motorcycle, leaving private cars (16 percent) and walking (10 percent) far behind (Table 1).

Table 1 Modal Split of Trips in Greater Lomé

Mode	Household Survey Share (%)
Motorcycle	72
Car	16
Walking	10
Other	2

Source: Household Survey, 2025

This near-total predominance of motorcycles, whether private vehicles or the ubiquitous motorcycle taxis (zemidjan), is not a simple choice but a rational and spontaneous adaptation to the constraints of urban sprawl. Their flexibility, relatively low acquisition cost, and ability to navigate through traffic jams and on unpaved roads make them the most effective solution for a large segment of the population. While cars remain a marker of social status and their

ownership is on the rise among affluent households, their use is constrained by cost and growing congestion. In total, 86 percent of households in Lomé own at least one motorized vehicle, illustrating a rapid motorization that is predominantly driven by two-wheelers.

This mobility structure both reveals and reinforces socio-spatial dynamics. Work-related travel accounts for 77 percent of daily trips, indicating a high degree of functional segregation between residential areas, which are mostly peripheral, and the employment hubs concentrated in the city center and business districts. Mobility also has a strong gender dimension: men are "89% more mobile" than women. This disparity is explained by differentiated social roles, with women often confined to activities within the domestic sphere or the immediate vicinity, and by more limited access to motorized transport due to economic and cultural reasons.

However, this reliance on motorcycles generates serious negative externalities that weigh on the metropolis's sustainability. Environmentally, air and noise pollution have reached critical levels. The vehicle fleet is aging and poorly maintained, with 90 percent of motorized vehicles being over 10 years old, resulting in pollutant and greenhouse gas emissions that far exceed established standards.

In terms of health and safety, road traffic insecurity is a major scourge. The proliferation of two-wheelers, combined with risky behaviors (speeding, non-compliance with traffic laws), makes Lomé one of the cities with the highest accident rates. In over 70 percent of accidents, the human factor is the primary cause (Assogba, 2022). While the motorcycle was the individual response to urban sprawl, it has become a major collective problem. Mobility is therefore a central challenge for Greater Lomé, calling for a systemic overhaul to promote more sustainable, safe, and inclusive transport options (rehabilitating public transit, developing cycling lanes, and creating a metropolitan traffic plan). This primacy of motorcycles, including both private bikes and zemidjan taxis, has been characteristic of Lomé since the 2000s and reflects a spontaneous adaptation to urban sprawl. Private cars remain a minority, largely due to acquisition and maintenance costs, but their numbers are increasing among wealthier households.

3.5. New Urban Poles and the Polycentric Structuring of the Metropolitan Area

The sprawl of Greater Lomé is not occurring uniformly, but rather crystallizing around emerging secondary poles that are beginning to redraw the functional map of the metropolis. This dynamic marks a gradual transition from a strictly monocentric model, organized around the historic center, toward a polycentric structure in its formative stages.

The case of Adétikopé, north of the agglomeration, is emblematic of this transformation. Formerly a peri-urban village, Adétikopé has become a full-fledged city, established as a municipality (Agoè-Nyivé 6) during the decentralization reform. Its demographic growth is spectacular, with an average annual rate of 13 percent (INSEED, 2022), fueled almost entirely (99 percent) by migratory inflow from households moving from inner-city Lomé in search of more accessible land and a perceived better quality of life. This shift is visible in the landscape: approximately 90 percent of its buildings are of a "modern" type (concrete blocks, sheet metal, or concrete), signaling a rapid, formal urbanization that is supplanting traditional housing. Strategic investments further enhance Adétikopé's attractiveness, with the Adétikopé Industrial Platform (PIA) being a key example, launched in 2021. This large-scale project, combining an industrial zone, a logistics park, and a dry port, sustainably anchors a major economic function in the northern periphery, creating a new hub for jobs and activities. Other peripheral localities, such as Baguida to the east (focused on tourism and residential development) and Sanguéra to the west, are experiencing similar, albeit less intense, dynamics.

Nonetheless, this emerging polycentricity is ambivalent. On the one hand, it can help decongest the historic center and bring jobs and services closer to residential areas. On the other hand, without coordinated metropolitan-scale planning, it risks producing a fragmented city, akin to an urban archipelago. The main challenges are the poor connectivity of networks (especially transport, with saturation on the arteries linking these poles to each other and to the center), the risk of deepening socio-spatial inequalities between the different poles, and the difficulty of providing public services (water, electricity, sanitation) coherently across such a vast and discontinuous territory.

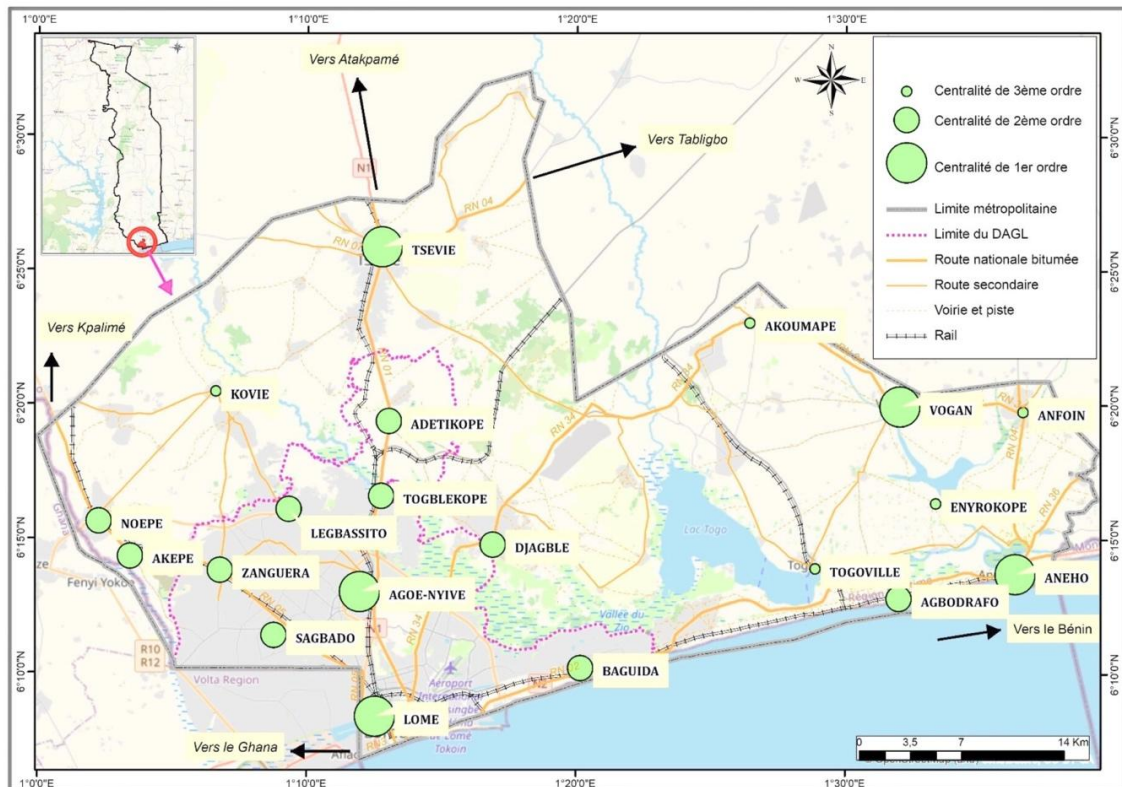


Figure 6: Centralities within the Greater Lomé Metropolitan Area.

Source: DGCN, OSM. Map design by AIDAM Koudjo, 2025

3.6 Metropolitan Governance and Decentralization

Finally, a major finding of this study pertains to the institutional evolution that has accompanied and sought to manage the process of 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 constitute the metropolitan area. The DAGL, headed by a state-appointed governor, was mandated to oversee a few strategic responsibilities at the metropolitan scale. These notably include sanitation, urban transport, metropolitan land-use planning, the management of major markets and shared public facilities, and the coordination of municipal actions that have an inter-municipal dimension.

Furthermore, in 2022, Parliament expanded the DAGL's mandate (Law No. 2022-012) to explicitly include public sanitation throughout the capital, street addressing systems, and support for harmonizing development across municipalities. This legal recognition reflects the state's intent to strengthen metropolitan governance in addressing the challenges posed by the city's scale.

In practice, DAGL has launched some coordinated initiatives (for example, in solid waste management and transport planning, with support from international partners). However, it is still too early to fully assess its impact on managing urbanization. Interviews with local stakeholders suggest that the effective implementation of integrated governance remains a work in progress, with challenges such as jurisdictional overlaps between the DAGL and the municipalities of Greater Lomé, as well as financial resource constraints.

Nevertheless, the very existence of the DAGL is viewed positively by many observers as an institutional step toward more coherent metropolization. Greater Lomé thus has a "metropolitan local government" which, if it succeeds in scaling up its operations, could mitigate some of the negative externalities of urban sprawl and better plan for the metropolis's future.

4. DISCUSSION

The preceding results illustrate the complex process of metropolization in Greater Lomé. This phenomenon combines universal dynamics with local specificities. Compared to other sub-Saharan African metropolises, Lomé exhibits striking similarities: a demographic explosion concentrated in the capital, rapid and often uncontrolled urban sprawl, and a significant gap between urban growth and the provision of public infrastructure and services. These traits are reminiscent of cities like Cotonou or Abidjan, which also experience diffuse peri-urban expansion and challenges in metropolitan governance. The "dilution" of Lomé's urbanization into its peri-urban space partly reflects the West African model of urbanization, characterized by land availability and the historical weakness of state-led urban planning.

However, Lomé stands out for its absence of large, visible slums; the city does not have informal settlements on the scale of Kibera in Nairobi or Makoko in Lagos. The nature of the local land market, where customary land subdivisions dominate, is to blame (Oura, 2012). While this situation might suggest that Lomé has avoided the "worst" of informal urbanization, the social cost of sprawl manifests in other ways: through poor access to services, long commute times, and increased vulnerability to hazards, particularly flooding.

From an environmental perspective, the metropolization of Greater Lomé raises questions of sustainability. Urban encroachment on natural and agricultural areas, such as the lagoon mangroves and wetlands, has reduced natural buffer zones and exacerbated stormwater runoff problems. Local scholars have documented a resurgence in flooding in Lomé over the past two decades, now affecting neighborhoods that were previously spared. Climate change could amplify these risks, rendering Greater Lomé a vulnerable territory, as underscored by its low-lying position between the lagoon and the ocean (Takili et al., 2022). Environmental management must therefore become a central component of metropolitan planning, for instance by limiting urbanization in the Zio valley and planning for metropolitan-scale stormwater drainage networks.

From a socio-economic standpoint, metropolization in Lomé is accompanied by a polarization of activities reminiscent of primate city theory: Lomé concentrates most Togo's administrative, financial, port, and industrial functions. While this national primacy makes Greater Lomé the engine of the economy, generating a very significant share of the national GDP, it also raises the issue of territorial imbalances. Indeed, the pull of the metropolis on populations from across the country can drain secondary cities of their vitality and human capital (Moriconi-Ebrard, 1995). In Togo, studies highlight the difficulty of promoting "counter-magnet cities" that can offset Lomé's dominance (Oladokoun, 2013). Kara, for example, struggles to emerge as a second economic pole, and Sokodé remains modest in size.

In this context, Lomé's metropolization is a double-edged sword: it could accentuate regional disparities if no national land-use policy is implemented to support the development

of other urban centers. At the local level, however, this concentration also offers agglomeration economies (better access to markets, labor, and innovation) that Greater Lomé could leverage to finance its development. The presence of regional institutional headquarters such as the West African Development Bank (BOAD) and the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development (EBID), alongside major projects like the deep-water port and the Adétikopé Industrial Park (PIA), reinforces Lomé's role as a regional metropolis that extends beyond its national borders. Therefore, the analysis invites a reconceptualization of Greater Lomé, seeing it not just as the capital of Togo, but as a cross-border urban hub. The immediate proximity of the Ghanaian border (Aflao) effectively integrates Lomé into an emerging conurbation. It fosters daily exchanges, including cross-border trade and other economic activities. The metropolization of Greater Lomé thus transcends administrative boundaries, which could encourage future inter-metropolitan cooperation (for example, between Lomé and Accra) on shared challenges such as regional transport and coastal management.

The metropolitan governance of Greater Lomé, recently established, is both a culmination and a starting point. It is the culmination of a long-delayed decentralization process. Notably, Togo held its first local elections in over 30 years in 2019, marking the formal establishment of a "Greater Lomé" entity. Nevertheless, it also serves as a starting point, as everything remains to be established in terms of its operational framework, resources, and legitimacy. International experiences suggest that a metropolitan body can greatly improve coordination, as seen in Abidjan with its Autonomous District, or in Dakar with its inter-municipal cooperation projects. For Lomé, the DAGL offers an unprecedented framework for planning at a regional scale, developing a Metropolitan Urban Development Master Plan (SDAUM), and pooling certain infrastructure projects. However, its success will depend on its ability to foster close cooperation between the central state, the DAGL governorate, and the municipalities. Resistance may arise, for instance, if mayors perceive the DAGL as an oversight authority that diminishes their prerogatives. The financial question is also crucial: the functioning of the DAGL and the required metropolitan investments demand significant resources. In this regard, state funding, local taxation (for example, through the management of major markets now transferred to the DAGL), and support from funding partners will be decisive.

A key point for discussion is the role of participatory and inclusive planning in this metropolitan context. In principle, decentralization aims to bring governance closer to the citizens. It would therefore be opportune for Greater Lomé to leverage its new governance structure to more deeply involve civil society in urban planning decisions (e.g., public consultations on local development plans, participatory budgeting at the municipal level). The high proportion of young people in Greater Lomé (over 60% are under 25) means that today's choices will shape the lives of several future urban generations. Approaching metropolization through the lens of social inclusion is therefore critical, including access to housing (how to control land costs and avoid a two-tier city of well-equipped centers and neglected peripheries), access to employment within the metropolis (developing business zones in peripheral municipalities to reduce disparities), and gender equality in urban opportunities (e.g., facilitating women's mobility and access to property).

Finally, the metropolization of Greater Lomé should be discussed in light of the Sustainable Development Goals and international agendas, such as the United Nations' SDG 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities. Progress has been made, particularly through projects supported by international partners to improve urban infrastructure. However, much remains to be done for Lomé to become a truly resilient and sustainable metropolis. The current situation highlights a paradox common in developing countries: metropolization brings economic growth and innovation, but it also generates vulnerability if not guided by a strategic vision. The challenge for Greater Lomé is to transition from an "uncontrolled" metropolization, driven

primarily by demographic and market forces, to a "managed" metropolization, guided by robust public policies in urban planning, transport, environment, and governance.

Faced with rampant urbanization, the stated ambition is to transform Greater Lomé into a multi-polar, resilient, and inclusive metropolis capable of meeting the needs of a growing population while ensuring more balanced and sustainable urban development. The success of this transition will depend on the capacity of public actors to plan, regulate, and invest in infrastructure, while containing urban sprawl and integrating the peripheries into the metropolitan system. Today, the Autonomous District of Greater Lomé constitutes a metropolitan area undergoing a profound transformation, comprising thirteen municipalities.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examines the ongoing metropolization of Greater Lomé, illustrating the city's transformation from a modest capital into a vast urban agglomeration exceeding two million inhabitants. Over just a few decades, demographic expansion and spatial sprawl have absorbed rural peripheries, generating both opportunities and pressing challenges. Lomé's growing metropolitan role enhances its economic weight and promotes urban diversification; however, such rapid growth also highlights dysfunctions associated with largely unplanned urbanization. Among these are infrastructure deficits, unequal access to basic services, inadequate transport, environmental pressures, and socio-spatial fragmentation.

The findings confirm that metropolization extends beyond quantitative growth, involving deep territorial restructuring and significant institutional adjustments. Establishing the Autonomous District of Greater Lomé represents a step toward unified governance; however, its effectiveness depends on strong state support, sufficient financial resources, and effective local stakeholder engagement. A shared metropolitan vision, supported by enforceable planning instruments and sectoral strategies for mobility, sanitation, and land use, will be decisive in shaping inclusive growth.

Priority policy actions include expanding access to essential services in peripheral areas, addressing land tenure through accelerated titling and densification, and building a metropolitan-scale public transport system to reduce dependency on motorcycles. Ultimately, understanding Lomé's metropolitan dynamics is crucial to orienting governance, planning, and future research toward sustainable urban development.

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التحول الحضري المتروبوليتان لمنطقة لومي الكبرى: بين التوسع العمراني وتحديات الحوكمة الجديدة

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الملخص

في سياق التسارع العمراني الذي يعيد تشكيل البنى المكانية في إفريقيا جنوب الصحراء، تُجسّد منطقة لومي الكبرى، عاصمة توغو، التحولات العميقة الجارية على المستوى الترابي. فمن عدد سكان لم يتجاوز 8,000 نسمة سنة 1914، شهدت المدينة قفزة هائلة لتصل إلى أكثر من 2.19 مليون نسمة في عام 2022، وهو ما يعكس معدل نمو سنوي يزيد على 2.7%. وتستأثر لومي الكبرى حالياً بـ 27% من سكان البلاد في مساحة تقل عن 1% من أراضيها، في تركّز مفرط يهيمش مراكز النمو الثانوية. وقد تميّز هذا التوسع السريع بانتشار عمراني غير مُخطّط، تقوده سوق عقارية غير رسمية تعتمد بنسبة 75% على البيع العرفي للأراضي. ونتيجة لذلك، يتحوّل ما يصل إلى 26% من الأراضي الزراعية سنوياً إلى مناطق حضرية. وتتناول هذه الدراسة ديناميات التمدّن وأثارها على الحوكمة والخدمات الحضرية. وباستخدام منهجية مختلطة، جرى الجمع بين التحليل النوعي للوثائق، والتحليل الكمي بالخرائط الجغرافية (GIS)، والعمل الميداني بما في ذلك مقابلات شبه منظمّة. وقد كشفت النتائج عن انقسام ترابي صارخ: إذ يتركّز في النواة التاريخية معظم البنية التحتية الأساسية، بما يشمل إنارة عامة بنسبة 99.7% وطرق معبّدة بنسبة 81.6%. أما الأسر الواقعة في الأطراف فتعاني من ضعف شديد في الخدمات، حيث لا يتمتّع سوى 10% منها بإمداد موثوق لمياه الشرب، فيما يعتمد 70% من السكان على الدراجات النارية في تنقلاتهم اليومية. وتُبرز الدراسة فجوة حادّة بين "المدينة المتصوّرة" (المخططات الرسمية)، و"المدينة المُدرّكة" (الممارسات اليومية)، و"المدينة المعيشة" (تجارب التفاوت وعدم المساواة). وتدعو إلى ضرورة تبني إطار متكامل للحوكمة الميترولوجية، بهدف توجيه مسار العمرنة نحو تنمية شاملة ومستدامة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الزحف العمراني، الحوكمة الحضرية، التخطيط الإقليمي، التوسع العمراني العشوائي، توجو