



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Governance Issues in the Construction of Metropolitan Spaces: Reflections on Greater Lomé.

Aidam Koudjo<sup>1\*</sup>, Djénaissem Namarde Thierry<sup>2</sup>, Anoumou Kouassi Rodolphe<sup>3</sup>, Gbekley E. Holaly<sup>4</sup>, Aholou Coffi<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Regional Center of Excellence on Sustainable Cities in Africa (CERViDA-DOUNEDON), University of Lomé, Lomé 01 BP 1515, Togo

<sup>2</sup>Educational, Societal, and Development Policy Expertise Clinic (CEESPOD), IASBASE, Lomé, Togo

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## ABSTRACT

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### \*Corresponding Author:

genenino31@gmail.com|

The metropolitan region of Greater Lomé, characterized by continuous growth in both population and territorial extent, faces profound territorial, institutional, and functional transformations. This expansion manifests as booming demographics, excessive concentration of urban activities, and often unplanned peripheral urbanization. All these factors undermine administrative unity and hinder coherent integration of public policies. This study aims to analyze the challenges and limitations of the new institutional framework established with the creation of the Autonomous District of Greater Lomé (DAGL), instituted in 2022 to coordinate urban interventions across the 13 municipalities of the conurbation. The methodology combines document analysis, field observation, and 36 semi-structured interviews with elected officials, technical officers, and decentralized state actors conducted between January and April 2025. Results reveal three major governance bottlenecks: persistent overlap of responsibilities among municipalities, the District, and State services, especially in urban planning, sanitation, and environmental management; absence of effective inter-institutional dialogue mechanisms; and structural financial dependence, with over 85% of budgetary resources still covered by state allocations. Moreover, over 70% of new subdivisions occur outside formal channels, promoting urban sprawl and occupation of agricultural lands. The study recommends clarifying competencies across governance levels, introducing a metropolitan fiscal regime, and establishing citizen participatory mechanisms at the DAGL level. These findings contribute to broader reflections on urban governance models in West Africa and open debate on conditions for a metropolitan area that is effective, inclusive, and sustainable.

## INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of civilisation, the city has been one of the most powerful condensers of human history: it articulates ways of life, shapes social hierarchies and crystallises the dynamics of power. As the spatial order of nations is reconstituted, the figure of the metropolis emerges, like a moving klepsydra, absorbing flows and ruptures, revealing the tensions between territorial permanence and functional discontinuity. From sunrise to sunset, many cities have experienced the powerful waves of contemporary urbanisation; but it is in sub-Saharan Africa (Jaglin et al, 2018), in this stronghold of a world in motion, that the phenomenon reaches its highest inflections. And it is here, in this South-Atlantic theatre, that Greater Lomé is making rapid strides into the tumult of metropolisation.

It has now been established that urban growth on the African continent is part of an unprecedented dynamic: by 2050, almost two-thirds of its inhabitants will live in cities, often outside formal planning and governance frameworks (OECD et al, 2025). Under the combined effect of demographic change, internal mobility and the attraction of coastal basins, the West African urban system is becoming denser, both through its emerging centralities and the proliferation of its peripheries

(Chabi, 2013). The processes of metropolisation and peri-urbanisation overlap, like the double face of Janus, combining the concentration of power and the dislocation of the margins (Diop, 2008 ; Abbas et al., 2025).

Togo's capital, Lomé, is a case in point: a port city, administrative centre and economic hub, it accounts for more than half of the country's urban population (Inseed, 2022), inexorably extending its reach beyond the original boundaries that once defined its territory. This is nothing new: in 1958-1960, Lomé was already 5.5 times larger than Sokodé (and Kpalimé, the third largest city, 7 times); by 1970, the gap had widened to 6.5 times Sokodé and 9.5 times Kpalimé. Togo's "macrocephaly", the imbalance between the largest city and the next largest, has clearly worsened over the decades (Margueret, 1994).

Its demography, meanwhile, has leapt from 1.5 million in 2010 to more than 2.3 million in 2022, according to the 5<sup>e</sup> Recensement Général de la Population et de l'Habitat (RGPH-5). While its built-up area overflows onto former rural land, engulfing neighbouring countryside and causing imbalances, land conflicts and institutional fragmentation as noted by Bawa (2017) and Ouro (2022). Finally, the dream of individual housing, nurtured by strong social representations, supplants the collective need for regular housing, thereby increasing the pressure on peri-urban land (Guézéré, 2011 Moghavvemi & Jam et al., 2025 ).

Greater Lomé continues to grow relentlessly: as it expands, the capital is swallowing up agricultural land to replace it with land for construction. This territorial expansion brings with it a host of urban phenomena linked to spatial and demographic growth, the persistence of rurality within urbanity, supply difficulties, mobility, insecurity, and urban governance and management (Sorshy et al. 2023). There are many concrete examples of this expansion on the ground, such as the canton of Adétikopé, a rural locality twenty kilometres north of Lomé that is now caught up in the urbanisation front (Follygan et al. 2017). There, the commercial, industrial and residential dynamics, driven by the proximity of the capital, are shaping a hybrid space, neither entirely rural nor fully urban, often described as a 'blurred space' in search of an identity (Dauvergne 2011), emblematic of the African metropolitan margins.

In response to this tension, recent reforms have led to the creation of the Greater Lomé Autonomous District (DAGL), an unprecedented attempt at integrated governance and control of metropolitan dynamics (DAGL, 2022). Where previously responsibilities were fragmented between prefectures, communes, decentralised departments and ministries, the DAGL is intended to be the coordinating body, responsible for orchestrating public policies at conurbation level. However, this institutional architecture itself raises other uncertainties: overlapping powers, little financial autonomy, a lack of inter-municipal coordination, and embryonic citizen participation (Tchenkeu, 2021).

This uncertainty is not unique to Togo. From Buenos Aires and Paris to Bogotá and Lagos, many authors have stressed the difficulty of devising 'good governance' in metropolitan areas, given the specific nature of urban trajectories and the fragmentation of stakeholder configurations (Stren and White 1993). In West Africa, in particular, a corridor of towns intertwined between the lagoon and the savannah, the challenges of contemporary urban planning are coupled with major democratic and fiscal issues.

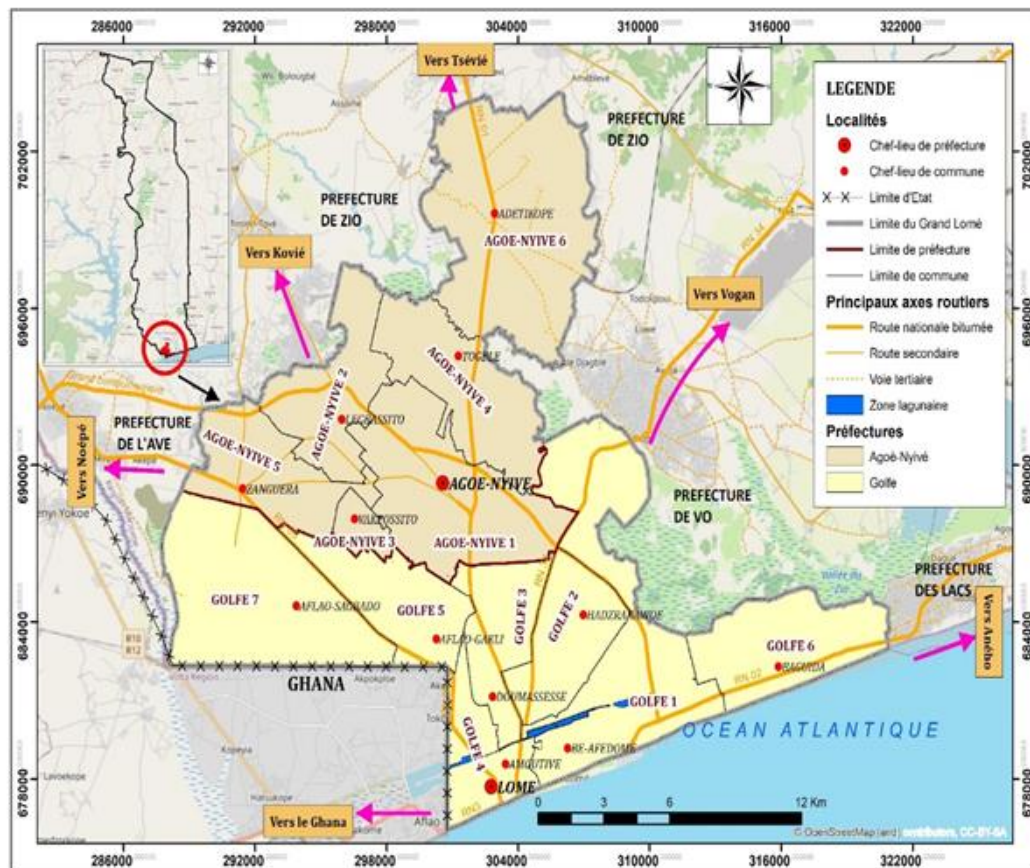
The aim of this paper, which focuses on Greater Lomé, is therefore to examine the issues of governance in the construction of metropolitan areas. Using a methodological triangulation based on documentary analysis, semi-structured interviews and field observation, the study addresses two issues: what are the main institutional, political and financial challenges of metropolitan governance in Lomé? And to what extent can the DAGL system respond effectively?

The study focuses on three main areas: clarification of competences within a partially completed decentralisation system; coordination between territorial levels and sectoral players; and the conditions for more inclusive, coherent and operational local governance. In this way, Greater Lomé is revealed not just as a growing capital, but as an African laboratory for urban experimentation, where the metropolis of tomorrow is still being invented or sketched out.

# 1. MATERIALS AND METHODS

## 1.1 Study area

This research is being conducted in the Greater Lomé metropolitan area, Togo's main urban centre in terms of both population and economic importance. This conurbation covers an area of 425.6 km<sup>2</sup> and comprises 13 communes, divided between the two urban prefectures of Golfe and Agoè-Nyivé. Located in the south of the country, the Greater Lomé urban area is bordered to the south by the Atlantic Ocean, to the west by the Ghanaian border (Aflao), to the north by the Zio prefecture and to the east by the Lakes prefecture.



**Figure 1: Presentation Map of the Study Area**

It enjoys a favourable geostrategic position, both on the coast and on the border. It is criss-crossed by a lagoon-based hydrographic complex, the presence of which has a significant influence on the dynamics of urbanisation, particularly in low-lying or flood-prone areas. In 2022, Greater Lomé had a population of 2,188,376 (INSEED, 2022), compared with 1,571,508 in 2010 (I. TOGO, 2022), confirming constant demographic pressure and a rapid urbanisation process, particularly towards the rural outskirts

## 1.2 Data Collection Instruments

For the purposes of this study, the following tools were used: a digital audio recorder, a semi-directive interview guide, and a digital tablet equipped with the Kobotoolbox application for real time data entry.

## 1.3. Methodological Approach

In geography, to address environmental, societal, and economic issues, it is essential to first identify and analyze them using all available means and the most suitable methods (Assako 2020).

### **1.3.1. The Circular Heuristic Gradient Methodology or the Research Shuttle**

This method involves starting with an exploration of the subject, followed by a literature review, which is then complemented by an exploratory field investigation. After operationalizing the research (by designing the research framework, selecting the data, and choosing the data processing tools), the data is processed, and the results are validated.

The data collected for a research project comprises 'all the information, measurements, and raw observations gathered by the researcher prior to any processing or interpretation that will ultimately provide answers to the initial research questions' (Omar 1987). This study adopts a qualitative approach with a comprehensive focus, which is well-suited to exploring the governance dynamics at play in African metropolitan contexts. This type of approach makes it possible to grasp the complexity of the interactions between formal institutional structures (local authorities, the State, decentralised services) and the informal practices that play a part in the urban fabric (social players, community networks, customary land tenure systems).

### **1.4. Documentary Corpus**

The first phase consisted of an in-depth documentary analysis, based on: legislative and regulatory texts relating to decentralisation (Law no. 2019-006 amended in 2022), urban planning and regional development; urban planning documents (Master Urban Plans, Master Urban Development Schemes); technical reports from the Greater Lomé Autonomous District (DAGL); and scientific and academic publications on urban policies in West Africa. This documentation made it possible to define the institutional contours of the area under study, identify the governance issues, and formulate the working hypotheses.

### **1.5. Field survey**

The second phase was based on a series of 36 semi-structured interviews conducted between January and April 2025 with a diverse panel of stakeholders, selected using a reasoned, non-probabilistic method. The interviewees included mayors and technical officers from the 13 urban communes of Greater Lomé, executives from the Autonomous District (DAGL), ministry officials (urban planning, environment, security), customary actors (traditional chiefs), and representatives of civil society and the private sector involved in urban development processes.

Field observations, carried out in representative neighbourhoods (port areas, densely populated suburbs, informal neighbourhoods, changing suburbs), supplemented the interviews by comparing what the players had to say with the reality of the area observed.

### **1.6. Analysis Method**

The data from the interviews and observations were cross-referenced with a view to triangulation, and analysed according to a thematic grid structured around four major areas of governance: inter-institutional coordination (relations between municipalities, Districts and State structures), the distribution of powers in a context of unfinished reform, the funding of public policies (fiscal autonomy, allocations, FACT), and citizen participation in planning and decision-making mechanisms. This treatment has made it possible to identify the main systemic tensions and institutional dysfunctions, as well as emerging innovations in metropolitan governance in Greater Lomé.

## **2. RESULTS**

## 2.1. Institutional Coordination in the Process of Reshaping

### 2.1.1. A hybrid metropolitan architecture that can still be perfected

The institutional establishment of the Greater Lomé Autonomous District (DAGL) by law no. 2022-008 represents a structuring innovation in the landscape of urban governance in Togo. This entity, described as a special territorial entity with legal personality and financial autonomy, covers the whole of the Lomé conurbation, including the two urban prefectures of Golfe and Agoè-Nyivé, i.e. thirteen communes (Figure 1).

The DAGL is now at a crossroads: it is taking the place of the former regional level (Maritime region) in the urban field, while working on coordination between local authorities and the State. Its District Council, the central deliberative body, has 53 members: 26 appointed by the municipal councils (2 per municipality), 26 appointed by presidential decree, and a governor appointed by the State who chairs the Council.

This system embodies a hybrid model of governance, combining local representative logic and centralised control. It reflects the legislator's desire to give Lomé, a growing megalopolis, a metropolitan government, without turning it into an ordinary regional authority. Nevertheless, this architecture, although unprecedented, is still under construction and raises questions of legitimacy, functional clarity and horizontal and vertical coordination.

**Table 1: Membership of the Greater Lomé Autonomous District Council**

Composition of the Council	Number of members	Method of appointment
Representatives of the communes	26	Appointed by vote of the municipal councils
State representatives	26	Appointed by presidential decree
District Governor	1	Appointed by presidential decree
Total	<b>53</b>	-

Source: AIDAM Koudjo, fieldwork 2025

### 2.1.2. Persistent Overlapping of Powers

Although the establishment of the Greater Lomé Autonomous District (DAGL) and the accompanying legislation seem to outline an ambitious structure for metropolitan governance, the institutional reality observed on the ground is characterised by a series of overlapping powers and interferences between different levels of actors. This superimposition of levels between the municipalities, the District, the administrative prefectures and the decentralised services of the ministries reflects a fragmentation of local public action. The result is a climate of uncertainty in the distribution of responsibilities, which are often not clarified in their implementation, hampering the coordination of policies and hampering the effectiveness of decisions.

In practice, certain responsibilities that are supposed to fall within the remit of the metropolitan or municipal level are still exercised or regulated by decentralised State structures or by national technical institutions, sometimes without consultation with local authorities. Several areas illustrate this situation of functional duplication and operational ambiguity. Coastal management, for example, is a highly sensitive field, heavily dominated by the maritime prefecture and sectoral ministries, particularly those responsible for the maritime economy, coastal safety and planning. This vertical predominance leaves very little room for the coastal municipalities which, although directly concerned by these issues, are rarely consulted or involved in decisions relating to the use, protection or enhancement of the coastline.

Another significant example is urban planning. Although there are guidelines at national level, such as the Schéma National d'Aménagement du Territoire (SNAT) or the Plan Directeur du Grand Lomé (Greater Lomé Master Plan), these strategic documents are not very closely linked to local dynamics. Communal development plans or development schemes specific to each commune are rarely integrated into the priorities and guidelines defined by higher levels, which creates gaps between

the State's overall vision and the concrete needs identified by local elected representatives or municipal technicians. The result is that the planning tools are not operationally anchored in the areas concerned, and are therefore poorly taken on board by local players. Sanitation and waste management also illustrate this dilution of responsibilities. While the collection of household waste is theoretically a responsibility shared between the municipalities and the District, the reality reveals a fragmentation of initiatives, with little pooling, little sharing of equipment, and a lack of truly metropolitan management. Some municipalities are responsible for their own waste collection and pre-treatment, while others still rely on improvised services or services provided by contractors directly contracted by the State, without any coordination with the DAGL. This dispersal of activities, uncoordinated at the urban level, is preventing the emergence of integrated, sustainable solutions to one of Lomé's most pressing environmental problems. One of the main reasons for this overlap is the lack of binding inter-institutional coordination mechanisms. Apart from the sessions of the District Council, no permanent technical or strategic platform has been officially set up to bring together the main players. As a result, each entity seems to operate in silos, sometimes producing redundant, competing or contradictory policies, which several stakeholders describe as governance in drawers.

### **2.1.3. Relations between Players: Between Informal Collaboration and Political Rivalries**

The introduction of the Greater Lomé Autonomous District (DAGL), although an institutional innovation, has not been enough to establish a fully consolidated culture of collaboration between the various territorial players involved in metropolitan governance. Although the creation of the District Council has enabled new forums for dialogue to emerge between mayors, municipal councillors and State representatives, the functional relationships between these political and administrative figures remain strongly marked by competitive dynamics, legitimacy divisions and a latent politicisation of metropolitan issues. Togo's historically centralised political context continues to influence local decision-making, accentuating the asymmetries between local elected representatives and centrally-appointed authorities.

The main source of tension lies in the implicit but constant opposition between the mayors, elected by universal local suffrage and vested with direct popular legitimacy since the 2019 municipal elections, and the District Governor, appointed by presidential decree and perceived as the extension of central authority into the local system. This duality creates friction in the management of shared public policies, as municipal councillors sometimes see the administrative hierarchy as an obstacle to their decision-making autonomy. This institutional coexistence, with no clear hierarchical status, gives rise to ambiguous situations where each party acts according to its own interpretation of its powers and responsibilities, with few mechanisms for arbitration.

One of the most illustrative examples of this silent rivalry can be seen in the case of the clearing of urban beaches in 2021. On this occasion, decisions were taken by the Préfecture Maritime, in conjunction with the relevant ministries, without consulting the town councils directly affected by these operations (in particular those of Golfe 1, Golfe 4 and Golfe 6). The silence observed on the part of the District, which could have played the role of mediator or coordinator, was interpreted by several local councillors as a form of institutional disengagement, reinforcing the feeling that local councillors were excluded from the definition of metropolitan policies that directly affected them. This situation has crystallised a latent conflict of legitimacy surrounding the management of the capital's coastal areas, which have traditionally been administered from the top down, but are now also a matter of local planning, participative governance and the right to territory.

In the same logic of inter-institutional friction, the relationship between the governor of the Autonomous District and the prefects of the prefectures of Golfe and Agoè-Nyivé remains subject to confusion. In principle, under the new system of territorial governance, the governor should exercise regional coordinating authority over the entire metropolitan territory included in the District. However, in practice, the prefects continue to exercise their functions according to a hierarchical logic directly attached to the Ministry of Territorial Administration, without clear recognition of a functional link with the District Governor. This overlapping of levels of authority produces what some of the institutional players interviewed describe as "stacking without articulation", i.e. a

juxtaposition of administrative figures acting in the same urban area without systematic coordination, each pursuing its own priorities, often influenced by political balances outside the territory.

However, despite these clearly identified structural tensions, some signs of openness to cooperation are emerging. In 2025, at the initiative of the governor of Greater Lomé, a joint survey of urban infrastructure was carried out in all the communes of the conurbation, with the active participation of the two departmental prefects. Although only partial, this shared territorial diagnostic exercise demonstrated the capacity of the institutions to produce concerted actions as soon as strong leadership and a desire for coordination are asserted. It also shows that the consolidation of inter-institutional governance does not depend solely on the formal architecture established by the texts, but is also deeply dependent on the quality of interpersonal relations, the level of mutual trust between leaders, and the degree of maturity of local political practices.

## 2.2 Clarification of Competences in a System of Incomplete Decentralisation

### 2.2.1. Distribution of Powers: Between Text and Reality

The creation of the Greater Lomé Autonomous District (DAGL), enacted by law no. 2022-008, represents an attempt to reorganise urban governance in the urban area of the Togolese capital. This reorganisation is based on a functional division of powers between several levels of authority: the District, which is now the orchestrator of cross-cutting metropolitan policies; the communes, which are responsible for local public services and the day-to-day lives of the population; and the devolved State, which remains the guarantor of regalian functions and inter-sectoral coordination at national level. As set out in the legislation, the DAGL's remit extends to sanitation, public health, protection of the urban environment, land-use planning and development for Greater Lomé, as well as the management of major infrastructure projects such as metropolitan markets, urban landfill sites and school and port facilities that go beyond the boundaries of a single commune. The urban communes, on the other hand, retain more localised prerogatives, particularly in the areas of local roads, the issuing of building permits, the management of neighbourhood markets, communal civil status, basic education and primary health.

However, despite this formal institutional division, the results (table 2) show a persistent gap between the planned functions and their practical application. Many responsibilities appear to be unclear, shared or even conflicting, resulting in duplication of effort, administrative delays and inter-institutional rivalry. For example, sanitation and urban planning projects often suffer from a lack of operational consistency in their management, exacerbated by the absence of clear rules for coordination between institutional players. Consequently, the clarification of responsibilities cannot stop at simply stating them in legal terms: it requires active support, prioritising operational responsibilities and ensuring that actions are consistent.

In this context, it is useful to compare the theoretical distribution of functions with the actual responsibilities taken on, as identified during the field surveys. The table below provides a representative summary.

**Table 2. Planned Division of Responsibilities between DAGL, Municipalities and Central Government**

Area of responsibility	Commune	DAGL (District)	Central government (Ministries)
Local roads	✓	△ Shared case	△ Shared case
Waste (collection and treatment)	✓	✓	△ Shared case
Major sanitation (pluvial, coastal)	△	✓	✓ (via the relevant ministries)
Urban planning (documents, planning)	✓	△ Coordination	✓



Environment (wetlands, landfill sites, etc.)	✗	✓	✓
Local markets	✓	✗	✗
Major markets (metropolitan interest)	✗	✓	✓
School infrastructure (secondary schools)	✗	✓	✓

Legend: ✓= clear allocation    |△= overlap

Source: AIDAM Koudjo, fieldwork 2025

### 2.2.2. Spatial Planning: A Belated Revival in a Changing City

Since the first planning initiatives were taken after Togolese independence, policies relating to the organisation of the national space have long suffered from a lack of continuity, coordination and prioritisation. Between 1966 and 1980, the country's first two five-year plans were mainly devoted to the rural sector, relegating urban development to second place. During this period, the investments deemed to be "urban facilities" generally included areas as diverse as the supply of drinking water, electrification, village water supply and the construction of basic schools, with no specific strategy for urban development.

It was not until the third five-year plan, between 1976 and 1980, that a change of direction was observed, with partial recognition of the challenges of Lomé's uncontrolled growth. This new direction was reflected in the development of an initial housing policy that included the regulation of housing estates, the development of community facilities and the need for social housing. However, the structures set up to implement this policy (such as the Office National de l'Habitat) were rapidly weakened and then dismantled under the Structural Adjustment Programmes of the 1980s and 1990s, leading to a total discontinuity in spatial planning.

This gradual disengagement of the State from controlled urbanisation led to fragmented urban production, dominated by customary land tenure systems and a virtual absence of rationalisation of urban expansion. Over this long period, until the end of the 2000s, Lomé underwent extensive urbanisation without any real planning instruments, despite the rapid growth of its population and its spatial sprawl.

Since the 2010s, attempts to revive the city have been made through more structured initiatives. The Schéma Directeur d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme du Grand Lomé (SDAU-GL), launched in 2013 and finalised in 2018 with donor funding, introduced a twenty-year vision. However, this strategic document remains poorly implemented, due to a lack of operational details, recurrent funding and ownership by local authorities.

It is against this backdrop that the Schéma National d'Aménagement du Territoire (SNAT, 2020) is a recent and promising milestone. The SNAT establishes a spatial planning framework for the national territory and is intended to be an instrument for coordination between local authorities and the State, in a spirit of committed decentralisation. It aims to structure the territory around regional growth centres, organise economic corridors and regulate the expansion of conurbations.

However, despite these advances at institutional level, the practical implementation of planning instruments remains embryonic at Greater Lomé level. Surveys carried out in the thirteen communes of the conurbation reveal that in 68% of the development projects undertaken since 2020, the communes have not been consulted upstream or involved in drawing up the specifications. The lack of consultation between the District, the central administration and local elected representatives is a major weakness in the urban planning process.

What's more, although the Greater Lomé Autonomous District has a clear planning mandate, it does not yet have all the tools it needs: sectoral urban development plans, zoning, modern subdivision guides and environmental standards are sorely lacking. Pending the generalisation of these tools, urban development is largely driven by land speculation, the actions of private developers and the occasional intervention of international landlords in certain pilot districts.





**Figure 2: Greater Lomé SDAU**

**Source: G2 Conception International / Agence ECAUH, 2018.**

Although the reforms of the last decade have introduced a renewed ambition and planning culture, the development of Greater Lomé remains an unfinished project, suffering from a lack of strategic management, weak institutional resources and a lack of horizontal and vertical coordination between players. Table 3 below provides a chronological overview of the major reforms that have taken place between 1970 and 2025, distinguishing between the strategic instruments, legal texts and institutional arrangements that have structured (or attempted to structure) public action in the field of urban planning and territorial development.

**Table 3. Comparative Chronology of Urban Planning Reforms in Togo (1970-2025)**

Year	Reform or document adopted	Nature of reform
1966-1975	1st and 2nd Five-Year Economic Orientation Plans	Rural development, no urban component
1976-1980	3rd Five-Year Plan: emergence of urban issues in Lomé	Start of a housing policy
1990	1st Urban Master Plan (PDU) for Lomé	Strategic tool with no normative scope
2001	DPNSU: Declaration of National Urban Development Policy	Programmatic guidance
2014	National Housing and Urban Development Policy (PNH DU)	Articulated sectoral policy
2016	Framework law on regional planning n°2016-002	Structuring legal framework
2018	Preparation of the SDAU GL	technical validation
2020	SNAT: Schéma National d'Aménagement du Territoire (National Spatial Planning Scheme)	National policy
2022-2025	PLU, Plans Communaux de Développement Urbain (PDCU) in the new communes of Lomé	Local participatory tools (in progress)

**Source:** AIDAM Koudjo, 2025 field surveys.

### 2.2.3. Land Tenure: Between Dominant Informality and Delayed Reform

The results of the field surveys highlight a particularly worrying feature of urban production in Greater Lomé, namely the massive domination of informality in land access circuits. Observations and interviews show that more than 70% of newly acquired plots of land, particularly in the outlying areas of the conurbation, are acquired informally (MATDUH, 2025). These acquisitions are generally made by direct purchase from customary chiefs or unauthorised developers, thus escaping any form of public control or organised land planning. This situation gives rise to unregulated and often haphazard urbanisation, which makes it considerably more difficult to draw up coherent urban policies, in addition to undermining the legitimacy of the land rights held by households.

The adoption in 2018 of the Land and Property Code of the Togolese Republic, driven by a desire for structural reform of the land legal framework, could have been a major turning point. In theory, this legislation provides modern tools for securing land tenure, clarifying ownership status, providing a framework for transfer procedures and guaranteeing more transparent management of public and private land assets. However, in practice, this legislation remains largely unimplemented, mainly because its implementing regulations, which are essential for its operationalisation, have still not been promulgated. As a result, the regulatory vacuum created by this wait is fuelling a paradoxical situation where, despite the existence of a renewed legal code, the land tenure landscape remains governed by old and disorganised practices.

The testimonies gathered in the field provide a concrete illustration of the complexity of the abuses observed. In Vakpossito, for example, almost 83% of the allotments identified are not serviced, which means that they have no road, sewerage, water or electricity facilities, exposing the inhabitants to precarious living conditions and increased environmental vulnerability. In Adétikopé, formerly agricultural land is being rapidly and unplanned urbanised in the absence of any detailed development plan. This phenomenon is leading to the gradual disappearance of arable land, with no compensation or anticipatory development strategies in place. In Dékon, another emblematic case, certain plots of land are the subject of profound disputes due to the coexistence of several land titles granted by different competent authorities, or sometimes self-proclaimed. In one documented case, five titles were recorded for the same plot of land, issued in the name of different holders, revealing the overlapping registrations, the porosity between the formal and customary circuits, and the conflicts over legitimacy that plague the entire land tenure system.

Beyond these localised situations, it is the entire land management ecosystem that poses problems. The persistent absence of a centralised, modernised and interoperable cadastral system, coupled with an extremely low rate of land registration, not only prevents the securing of land rights, but also blocks any attempt to mobilise land taxation for local development purposes. In fact, in the vast majority of Greater Lomé's communes, plots of land are neither exhaustively recorded nor properly valued, depriving municipalities of a major source of local revenue, which is nonetheless necessary to finance urban facilities, basic services and community infrastructure.

This imbalance between rapid spatial expansion and an administrative inability to formally regulate and integrate land dynamics creates a form of "city by default", produced by non-institutional players, based on community, customary or private logic, on the fringes of urban planning principles. This uncontrolled growth also generates regular micro-conflicts, encourages the occupation of non-constructible areas (flood zones, road rights-of-way, water drainage corridors, etc.), and makes it very difficult to make any coherent plans for urban development, mobility or sanitation.

Given this situation, detailed mapping remains essential to identify the areas most affected by land informality, overlapping occupancy status, complaints lodged, and areas not covered by town planning documents. An analytical map, combining the dynamics of urban growth, the nature of the land complaints recorded and the absence of regulatory planning, would make it possible to highlight the pockets of spatial vulnerability where the future of Greater Lomé is at stake today.

## **2.3. The Conditions for More Inclusive, Coherent and Operational Local Governance**

### **2.3.1. Local Funding Still Heavily Dependent on the Central Government**

Analysis of the available budgetary data and institutional interviews reveals that Greater Lomé's metropolitan governance model is still heavily dependent on state funding. The Autonomous District of Greater Lomé (DAGL) does not currently have its own tax system, or even a structured mechanism for generating autonomous revenue. Its meagre operating funds come essentially from centralised budget allocations, made by the Treasury via the Ministry of Territorial Administration and allocated on an annual basis, and sometimes on an ad hoc basis. In 2025, around 32 billion CFA francs were earmarked by the State to finance decentralisation at national level, a significant proportion of which, estimated at nearly 7.5 billion, was directed towards Greater Lomé, given its strategic importance.

At the same time, the thirteen communes that make up Greater Lomé have very unequal financial resources. Some, located at the heart of economic activity (such as Golfe 1, 2 or 4), can rely on revenue from municipal taxes on markets or building permits. Conversely, peri-urban communes such as Agoè nyivé 4;5 6 have extremely limited tax margins, due to the lack of tax-generating activities and the insecurity of land tenure, which prevents taxpayers from registering. The main solidarity mechanism in force remains the Fonds d'Appui aux Collectivités Territoriales (FACT), also financed by the State but very flexible in its distribution. In 2025, this fund distributed nearly ten billion FCFA to communes nationwide.

However, the regularity of this support is questionable, as is its ability to meet the growing demand for infrastructure, road maintenance, sanitation and social services. Budgetary dependence undermines medium-term planning, prevents local authorities from having any strategic autonomy, and makes it very difficult to adopt autonomous funding partnerships on a metropolitan scale.

### 2.3.2. Under-Exploited Local Taxation and Largely Untapped Land Potential

In a context where municipalities could logically rely on their land as their main source of revenue, it is striking to note that very little use is made of land and land-related taxation. For example, the majority of potential taxes - property tax on built-up areas, council tax, tax on occupancy of the public domain, fees for the use of commercial facilities - are either non-existent in practice or not collected. There are many reasons for this: the absence of a functional land register, the multiplicity of land titles and systems (customary, urban, theoretical but not registered), poor indexation of properties on the tax roll, and finally, weak local administrative capacity for census-taking, evaluation and collection.

Added to this is the lack of systematic integration of digital tools, such as geographic information systems (GIS), which would nevertheless enable rapid modernisation of the local tax system. Some advanced municipalities have tried to experiment with geolocation mechanisms for their tax units, but these initiatives remain isolated, unconsolidated and without sufficient institutional support. Yet the fiscal potential of property taxation remains immense in an expanding capital like Lomé, where more than 50,000 new buildings have been registered in the last ten years, often in accessible areas where economic activity is growing.

**Table 4. Sources of Endogenous Funding Identified in the Communes of Greater Lomé (2025)**

<b>Mobilisable resource</b>	<b>Potential use or allocation</b>
CEET fees (public lighting, metering)	Electrification of neighbourhoods, urban road lighting
TdE fees (meter, emptying)	Access to drinking water, drainage, water network maintenance
Public space rights/occupation	Financing of market facilities, car parks and sanitary facilities
Tax on motor vehicles (TVM)	Maintenance and asphaltting of intra-urban roads
Council tax (linked to CEET connections)	Construction of health centres, schools and public facilities

Revenue from market facilities (markets, car parks)	Operation and maintenance of business parks
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Source: AIDAM Koudjo, 2025 field surveys

2.3.3. Urbanisation and Housing Programmes out of Touch with Local Realities

The cost of urban expansion in Greater Lomé is largely based on households building their own homes, outside the public sector. According to the results of the 5th RGPH (2022), 95% of housing is the result of family interiors or informal initiatives, while barely 5% is the result of public or structured programmes. This poses two major challenges: on the one hand, the inadequacy of development plans in the face of the speed of built-up expansion; and on the other, the lack of tax revenue and depreciation on these extensions, since property taxation does not keep pace.

The government's 20,000-unit housing programme, announced for 2020, is currently being implemented and has not yet delivered the planned units. This situation is exacerbating residential insecurity, uncontrolled spatial sprawl and the emergence of a "city by default", produced solely by demand, with no collective supply strategy.

2.3.4. Fragile Planning in A System without Multi-Stakeholder Integration

The lack of coordination between levels of governance, combined with the lack of resources and financial autonomy, is preventing the emergence of coherent operational governance. There is currently no consolidated metropolitan framework for mobilising resources, no tool for pooling projects or harmonising budgets across Greater Lomé. The communes are moving forward at different speeds, in a context of institutional individualism and a lack of local strategic visibility. In this context, even projects supported by international donors, such as the World Bank or the European Union, are being held up for lack of a robust metropolitan entity capable of assuming project management.

3. DISCUSSION

A structural change in urban governance is essential if cities are to achieve optimum management of their resources and preserve their heritage. As Noubouwo (2017) points out, an effective urban policy must be able to satisfy immediate needs while avoiding the destruction of natural resources and enhancing the cultural identity of cities. When urban resources are optimally exploited, there is less need for new construction or excessive exploitation of natural resources. The dynamics at work in Greater Lomé urban population growth, economic crisis, climate change and technological change are redefining local strategic programmes and forcing reforms in planning and governance. Here, the results are in line with those of Casteigts (2005), who show that governance is never uniform: it reflects the dominant social model and the forms of urbanisation it produces. For Greater Lomé, this means that reforms must take into account how these global pressures interact with local realities, from demographic density to the colonial institutional legacy. The Autonomous District of Greater Lomé (DAGL) is a good example of this institutional reform dynamic in a context marked by rapid growth and territorial fragmentation. The results of our study highlight several recurring issues: the proliferation of administrative structures, overlapping powers, a lack of formal inter-institutional coordination and limited citizen involvement. As Lando (2013) points out, this lack of an institutional framework contributes to the anarchic emergence of housing, which multiplies in the absence of a suitable framework. Faced with an inadequate and poorly organised housing supply, demand for building plots is exploding, resulting in huge open housing estates that encourage mass immigration to the outskirts. This situation clearly shows how failures in urban governance exacerbate housing problems and accelerate the spatial disorganisation of the metropolis. The situation of Greater Lomé, fragmented into thirteen communes from two prefectures, is not unlike that of other West African metropolises such as Abidjan, Dakar or Accra, where the unity of the urban fabric clashes with the plurality of local governments. In Abidjan, for example, the establishment of an Autonomous District has initially made it possible to recentralise certain functions via a governor coordinating inter-communal projects (Kouamé 2019). However, the success of these arrangements largely depends on

the balance between centralised governance and local initiatives, a balance that is still lacking in Lomé due to overlapping roles and the gap between theoretical powers and their actual implementation.

Analysis of local public finances also confirms a widely recognised problem in the African context: the financial autonomy of local authorities remains extremely limited (Resnick, 2014). The DAGL, which relies mainly on state allocations, is in a vulnerable position in the medium term. The example of Abidjan, with its specific tax arrangements and targeted levies on economic activities, shows that local management strengthened by own-source revenue promotes the sustainability of investment and communal infrastructure (Boccanfuso et al., 2020). Transposing such measures to Togo, for example by sharing revenues from the port, major markets or the capital's property tax system, could be a promising way forward.

In addition, the modernisation of tax collection systems, in particular through the digitisation of land registers and tax registers - a process already underway as part of ProDeGoL (GIZ, 2023) - would appear to be an essential lever for improving local authorities' budgetary capacities. These technological advances, combined with appropriate training for local staff, should be accompanied by institutional reforms aimed at giving the DAGL an autonomous tax system and shared contractual powers between municipalities.

Finally, citizen inclusion remains an embryonic dimension of metropolitan governance in Lomé. The creation of an additional level, although intended to strengthen coordination, risks distancing citizens from the decision-making process, especially as the governor is appointed rather than elected. This democratic challenge, which has also been taken up in cities such as Cotonou, Abidjan and Dakar (Ahonankpon and Gbaguidi, 2013), calls for innovative participatory democracy mechanisms, participatory budgets, the active presence of citizen representatives in decision-making bodies and the regular publication of activity reports in order to strengthen the accountability and transparency of urban policies.

## CONCLUSION

The study of metropolitan governance in Greater Lomé was carried out with a view to analysing the institutional, political, financial and social dynamics that are currently shaping one of the most strategic urban areas in French-speaking West Africa. In a context of accelerated urban transition, marked by rapid demographic growth, uncontrolled urban sprawl and growing pressure on basic resources and services, the creation of the Greater Lomé Autonomous District (DAGL) appeared to be a strong institutional response to the territorial fragmentation and inefficiency of previous urban governance. The results obtained confirm that this reform, although conceptually promising, still comes up against several structural constraints that limit its real effectiveness. Three main challenges stand out: firstly, a problem of clarification of responsibilities, with the texts being clear but their application remaining confused or partial on the ground, with persistent overlaps between the central State, the District and the municipalities. Secondly, the weakness of inter-institutional coordination mechanisms, which prevents the emergence of concrete synergies around public policies, particularly in the areas of development, urban planning, sanitation and land management. Finally, a lack of financial and fiscal autonomy, which weakens the capacity for action of local authorities, which remain highly dependent on state allocations and struggle to mobilise their own resources in the best possible way.

Over and above these pillars of public action, the research also highlighted the low level of citizen participation in metropolitan governance mechanisms, despite the fact that the social anchoring of public policies is a key factor in their legitimacy and sustainability. This lack of an interface between institutional players and the general public contributes to a feeling of distance from, and even distrust of, the institutions emerging at metropolitan level, particularly the DAGL, whose status is still poorly understood by large sections of the population.

In the light of these observations, a number of strategic recommendations can be made. First of all, it would appear necessary to undertake legal consolidation work through the publication of

operational competence guides, intended for town halls, the District and the prefectures, in order to clarify the areas of intervention, room for manoeuvre and decision-making interfaces. This standard-setting work must be accompanied by a strengthening of coordination bodies, in the form of regular territorial conferences or inter-municipal sectoral working groups. In financial terms, the DAGL would benefit from a dedicated metropolitan tax system, based on the capital's major economic infrastructures, in addition to state support, which should remain transitional in nature. Particular attention must also be paid to modernising the tax resource mobilisation chain, by involving the municipalities in a process of digital reform and asset management (via functional digital cadastres, tax geolocation and the introduction of dematerialised payment systems).

In terms of democratic governance, it is essential to promote greater institutional transparency by publishing activity reports, holding public accountability forums and organising citizen consultations on major urban projects. Opening up the DAGL to civil society and co-constructing metropolitan policies with local populations, particularly young people, women, market traders and neighbourhood residents, must become a priority in order to institutionalise a new legitimacy pact between local institutions and urban society.

Finally, the study calls for a wider scientific debate on possible forms of metropolitan governance in French-speaking Africa, at a time when several cities, such as Niamey, N'Djamena and Conakry, are also making the transition to broader coordination structures. Greater Lomé, by virtue of its institutional specificity, its demographic weight and its strategic functions, could become a reference laboratory for devising a hybrid model, combining unified management, local autonomy and citizen participation. The question that this study leaves open, and which deserves to be explored in greater depth, is how to build a democratic and efficient metropolis in a context where the State remains central, society is fragmented and technical resources are limited. The success of Greater Lomé will ultimately depend on the ability of the players involved to generate trust, build compromises and collectively invent the urban governance of the twenty-first century in Africa.

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