

## **Appraisal of Land Grabbing and the Challenge on Agroeconomic Activities of Plateau State Polytechnic Students From Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi LGAs**

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**ABSTRACT:** For quite a while, land grabbing has consistently been expanding across the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. In Plateau State, several communities have been displaced and their ancestral lands, which were hitherto their primary means of sustenance, have been taken over since 1999. This has affected several activities, including the agroecconomy sector, that thrive within Plateau State. Unfortunately, the challenge of land grabbing on agroeconomic activities among Plateau State Polytechnic students has not been investigated. Through a case study of three Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi, this paper examined land grabbing in central and northern parts of Plateau State. Initially, the paper investigated the nature and dynamics of land grabbing and subsequently examined its challenge on agroeconomic activities on students in the selected LGAs. Primary data for the study were gathered from 180 students that were selected from the LGAs and from the field visits to some affected communities in the LGAs while the secondary data were drawn from existing literature and from verified social media handles. Adopting the descriptive approach, the data were subsequently analyzed based on the Principles of Land Acquisition (PLA) in Nigeria. It has been established in the study that land dispossession in the LGAs by non state actors

is a calculated form of terrorist-driven land grabbing that has been proven to constitute a serious threat on agroecology which is the source of livelihood and income of the students and land owners in the LGAs. To sustain and enhance agroecological activities in the LGAs, it has been suggested in this paper that government should implore deliberate measures to rebuild and return all grabbed lands to their ancestral owners.

**Keywords:** *land grabbing, terrorist-driven land grabbing, agroecological development*

## INTRODUCTION

As far back as 1960, communities in Plateau State have been experiencing diverse forms of intense pressure, on both their land and land resources, from local and international capitalists, agencies and governments (Datok, 2018). The idea behind such repeated pressures has been noted to be primarily, for the advancement of agriculture, mineral exploitation and tourism (Kachika, 2010) that have resulted to substantial land investment around several communities in the state (Mwadkon, 2008). For instance, the Pandam game reserves, Mado tourist village/Wild life park, Kurra falls, etc., are large-scale agricultural, mineral and tourism investments that are respectively, domiciled in the ancestral lands of the parenthetical communities of Pan, Mado and Kurak, in Qua'an Pan, Jos North and Barkin ladi LGAs (Mwadkwon, 2008). While previous land dispossession in the state seemed essentially to prosper and advance the economy of the host communities, the recent pressure on the lands, however, appears to be destructive to the economy of the host communities.

Plateau State is composed of 17 LGAs that have separately experienced diverse forms of pressure on their lands from state and non-state actors, since 1999 (Marcus & Umar, 2022). Due to their agro economic viability, Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi LGAs are purposefully, chosen to underscore the perennial land grabbing in several communities and to situate the perspective of the land grabbing in the state.



**Figure 1:** Map of Plateau State Showing Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi LGAs

The contribution of Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi LGAs on the agro-economic development of Plateau State is quite significant. The LGAs have been noted as the primary destinations for large agricultural activities within Plateau State (Dickson, Danjuma & Tanimu, 2019). For instance, they are known to account for over 80% of the cereal (such as corn, millet), root crops (such as potatoes) and vegetables (such as carrots, tomatoes, onions, pepper, cucumber) that are produced in substantial quantity in the state. (Dickson et al. 2019). Covering a total area of about 165,300 hectares (Mangu), 95,000 (Bokkos) and 150,700 hectares (Barkin Ladi), the LGAs are correspondingly located in the central and northern parts of Plateau State.

The continuous dispossession of ancestral lands in the LGAs has continued to engender an unprecedented rise in the figures and extent of hectares of land that have been dispossessed in the communities. Considering the devastating activities of non-state actors in Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi LGAs, this paper investigates how Plateau State Polytechnic students in several communities in the LGAs have been dispossessed of their ancestral lands which were hitherto their principal means of sustenance. The paper also examines the strategy adopted by state and non state actors to acquire land in the selected communities in the LGAs.

## Methodology

The current study was conducted among the potentially affected communities of Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi LGAs of Plateau State. Three communities were

selected from each LGA as follows: Mangu LGA - Panyam, Mangu, and Sabon Gari; Bokkos - x, y and z; Barkin Ladi - x, y, and z.

Data for this study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. The secondary source consists of information gathered from existing literature and verified social media platforms. Primary data were sourced from interactions with Plateau State Polytechnic students from the selected communities in Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi LGAs. In all, 150 respondents [50 from each LGA] participated in the interaction. The respondents comprised students who engage in agro-economic activities in the selected communities. All respondents were purposefully drawn to give their exhaustive experience of land grabbing in their community and how it has affected the agro-economic activities and development of their community. All the information for this research were collected within a period of 7 months: from June to December 2024 and were analyzed using the land acquisition principle.

### **Land Acquisition Principle and Land Grabbing in View**

The issue of land acquisition and grabbing in Nigeria, which has reverberated in several studies (cf. Bazán, 2020; Odoemene, 2015; Emenyonu, Nwosu, Eririogu & Osuji, 2017; Marcus & Umar, 2022 ), has been a persistent challenge that seemed to have eluded all solutions since 1999. Principally, land acquisition involves investors acquiring or hiring farmlands from the government or community for the purpose of growing commodity crops or excavating available land resources (Emenyonu, et al, 2017). The concept of land acquisition is basically, to enable state actors (both government and private) improve food security and rural development in their host communities. Thus, land acquisition is designed to be a legitimate process of leasing or renting land by investors with the total involvement of the host communities.

For any land acquisition deal to be legitimate, three basic conditional and indispensable principles have to be entirely fulfilled, otherwise, the deal is considered a grab. Odoeneme (2015) identifies these principles as: primacy of the host community, valid consent and non-coercion; which must all be consummated for any land deal to be legitimate and are briefly discussed in the ensuing section.

### **Principle of primacy of the host/indigenous community**

This first principle places the host/indigenous community at the centre of every potential land acquisition. The principle underscores the reasoning that the total interests and welfare of the indigenous land owners are prioritized throughout the land acquisition processes. As a response to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2007, the principle of primacy of the host/indigenous community advocates for the protection and strengthening of the cultural heritage, traditions and institutions of the locals. Consequently, the total and effective participation of the host communities in achieving their own visions of economic and social development is given greater importance. This approach is expected to compel institutions with vested interests in lands to think more broadly about the general implications and impacts of such acquisition on the livelihood of the current and future generations of the host communities (Li, 2011).

In applicable situation, giving primacy to the host communities entails that investors (both government and private) have fully consulted with the indigenous people and comprehended the possible consequences of the land acquisition on their economics, sociocultural, political and spiritual survival.

### **Principle of valid consent:**

This principle presupposes that the voluntary approval of the land owner or community has to be exhaustively established before any land acquisition is declared legitimate. Expressly, the principle of valid consent ensures that the permission of land owners is sought and obtained. Accordingly, for any agreement on land acquisition to be valid, the locals must freely express their capacity to voluntarily make informed decisions. This principle mandates government and investors to consult extensively, with the host communities and land owners whenever their land is to be acquired. It is in this light that the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2005, p. 2) affirms that the consultations “shall be undertaken in good faith and in a form appropriate to the circumstances, with the objective of achieving agreement or consent to the proposed measures”.

Expectantly, the principle of valid consent is said to be compliant if the process of consultation is developed to address the concerns of the indigenous land owners. Such consultations must be transparent and devoid of any form of secrecy (Comstock, 2011).

### **Principle of non-coercion:**

The third principle in the process of land acquisition is non-coercion. In international jurisprudence, the concept of coercion, which is closely related to the word “duress”, embraces “any unlawful threat that can be used to induce or compel people to act in a manner that otherwise they would not” (Odoemene, 2015, p. 10). What this principle underscores is that throughout the process of land acquisition, from the point of negotiation to eventual acquisition, all engagements with the host communities/land owners must be devoid of any forms of coercion. In the light of this principle, land owners or host communities must be given sufficient time and space to make decision throughout the process of land acquisition and to the point of their relocation from the acquired land (Byman & Waxman, 2000, p. 9).

### **Presentation of Data and Discussion**

#### ***Land ownership and use of dispossessed land owners***

Data for this study has revealed that land ownership in the selected LGAs is largely by customary mode and the majority of the land owners are farmers whose primary source of their income is farming. Table 1 reveals that more than 91% of the dispossessed land owners in Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi LGAs inherited their lands. This implies that land ownership in the study areas is predominantly by inheritance from ancestral lineage. However, a few of the respondents did not inherit their lands as more than 6% of them purchased their lands. Apparently, more than 96% of the dispossessed land owners in the study areas basically use their lands for farming. This indicates that food crop production is a leading source of livelihood of the land owners in the LGAs and majority of them, to a great extent, rely on it for their survival.

Table 1: Land Ownership and Land Use

LGA	Land ownership		Land use	
Mangu	Inheritance	Purchase/Rent	Farming	Non-farming
	91%	9%	96%	5%
Bokkos	94%	6%	97%	3%
Barkin Ladi	95%	5%	96%	4%

Source: Field Survey 2024

### Land Acquisition Strategy and Purpose by Government

Primarily, the purpose of land acquisition by government in Mangu and Riyom LGAs, is for agricultural development and almost all the lands acquired by government were legitimate. As revealed in Table 2, 97% of the respondents affirmed that the lands acquired by government were put to agricultural production and only 3% of the land were used for non agricultural development. A lot of the respondents identified the Agricultural Services, Training Centre [ASTC; a large commercial high-breed farm that is acquired by the state government in both LGAs] as practical agricultural venture that is of immense benefit to the dispossessed land owners. The implication of this is that, grabbed lands were ultimately used by government to expand agricultural investment thereby advancing food production which is the dominant source of livelihood in the communities. Interestingly, most of the respondents have attested to government's consistency to boost food protection especially in communities that were affected. In this regard, about 900 hectares of land have been cultivated by ASTC in the 13 communities spread across Mangu (Aloghom, Gaude/Kinat, Bwai, Sabon Layi, Mangul- Kantoma Bakin Hanya, Jwakkom/ Lighit-Lubang, Kombun, Daika (Atughun), Dangdai and Gyembwas) and Riyom (Jol, Kwi, Rim and Bachit) as illustrated with Figure 2



**Figure 2:** Dispossessed Land Cultivated by ASTC

Source: <https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwjFtIHUlvuDAXUAUkEAHe87BUw4ChC3AnoECAsQAg&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Dx2nd3JxoYkE&usg=AOvVaw3DiNC283m2XYdqVbduJuVT&opi=89978449>.

Evidently, the process of land acquisition by government in Mangu, Bokokos and Barkin ladi LGAs was characterized by intense negotiations between the government of Plateau State on one hand, and the representatives of the host communities on the other hand. 99% of the respondents agreed that during the entire period of the negotiation between the government and the local communities, the real content of transparency, as enshrined in the principles of land acquisition (PLA), was upheld and sustained. The community leaders that were interviewed out rightly attested that there was transparency during the negotiations. In addition, the respect for their existing land rights and the mutual land benefits to both the local communities and government, especially on investment on agriculture and development of needed infrastructure, were considered during the acquisition process. In essence, a greater percentage of the respondents noted that the host communities were involved in the negotiation of the land deal with government. Thus, their submissions suggested that the three principles of land acquisition were entirely observed during the land acquisition deal with the government.

On the mutual benefit of the land deal, a substantial percentage of the respondents that were farmers by profession, affirmed that they benefited immensely from the

land deal with government. Some of the benefits they identified included: the availability and procurement of high yield seedlings and fertilizer at affordable rates, free or subsidized agro extension services and the assurance of ideal post harvest markets for most of their farm produce. In addition, the natives were, at intervals, provided with mechanized farming equipment, such as tractors, harrows, combine harvesters, etc. at subsidized rates, to facilitate land production and boost yield.

Table 2: Legitimate Land Acquisition and Land Use

LGA	Land Acquisition by State Actors		Land use by State Actors	
	Legal	Illegal	Farming	Non-farming
Mangu	99%	1%	97%	3%
Bokkos	99%	1%	97%	3%
Barkin Ladi	99%	1%	97%	3%

Source: Field Survey 2024

### Land Acquisition Strategy and Purpose by Non State Actors

Table 3 revealed that 99% of the respondents affirmed that the land acquired by non state actors in both Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi LGAs were illegal and a large expanse of the illegally acquired lands were used for non agricultural investments. From the table, it is evident that most of the lands acquired by the non state actors were grabbed since 99% of the dispossessed land owners attested that the procedure was illegal in both LGAs. What this suggests is that the procedure enshrined in the principles for land acquisition were significantly abused or disregarded. Thus, several of the respondents criticized the approach used by the non state actors to acquire land in the LGAs and described it as intimidating and confrontational. In the narration of some of the respondents, they claimed that they were attacked and chased out of their lands by heavily armed individuals, in the company of some that they had accommodated in their communities.

On the issue of illegitimate land acquisition in the LGAs under study, it is observed that several lands belonging to the dispossessed members of the communities were forcefully taken by non state actors as indicated in Table 3. While only 1% of the respondents attested that the grabbed lands are put to use for agricultural purpose by

the non state actors, 99% of them lamented that their grabbed lands are never used to advance any agricultural investments. What this implies is that a large expanse of the grabbed lands in the LGAs are being used for non farming purposes which have no significant benefit to the dispossessed land owners. From the interactions with the respondents in the LGAs, the grabbed lands are said to be used for grazing/pasturage purposes or for construction of houses that are subsequently occupied by the grabbers.

Table 3: Illegitimate Land Acquisition and Land Use

LGA	Land Acquisition by Non State Actors		Land use by Non State Actors	
	Legal	Illegal	Farming	Non-farming
Mangu	1%	99%	3%	97%
Bokkos	1%	99%	3%]	97%
Barkin Ladi	1%	99%	3%]	97%

Source: Field Survey 2024

### Land Grabbing and Agroeconomic Activity

Differing from land acquisition which involves the consensual mutual transfer of land ownership from the customary land owners to another party, land grabbing involves the coercive acquisition of land from the aboriginal land owners. Principally, land grabbing is a flagrant and coercive method of land acquisition that entirely disrespects the principles for legitimate land acquisition.

In defining the phenomenon “land grab”, Ojo & Offiong (2018), says it is anything that constitutes “the forced acquisition of land without valid consent and reasonable commitment to the future survival of the dispossessed” (p. 63). While their definition does not focus on the personality of the perpetrator, it presupposes the process that was taken to acquire the land to determine a land grab. From the data adduced for this study and their analysis, there is substantial evidence to show that instances of land grab have been entrenched in the selected communities in Mangu and Riyom LGAs.

99% of the respondents claimed, in Table 3, that their lands were illegitimately acquired by the non state actors in the selected communities in Mangu, Bokkos and

Barkin Ladi LGAs which is at variance with the percentage of respondents that agreed that their lands were legitimately acquired by the state actors in both LGAs as shown in Table 2. The respondents claimed that land grabs are usually preceded by unprovoked attacks on members of their communities or intimidating grazing on their farm lands by terrorists and their fifth columnists as captured in Table 4.

Table 4: Land Grab Strategy

LGA	Land Grab Strategy	Land use by State Actors			
Mangu	Provocative Grazing	Persons Killed	Houses Destroyed	Communities Affected	Persons Injured
	300 hectares	+207	+250	53	15
Bokkos	150 hectares	11	+180	28	11
Barkin Ladi	250 hectares	+110	+180	34	13

Source: Field Survey 2024

From the interviews and interactions with the respondents, about 53 communities were said to have been displaced and more than 207 persons were also said to have been killed in Mangu alone between May - June 2023. This information is also supported by the news commentary on the lingering killings on Plateau of J- FM (July 7, 2023) and on the Facebook media handles of Plateau Intelligentsia and Davidson Mallison.

Similarly, in a focus group discussion with some of the respondents, 7 people, including 2 women, were said to have been killed in Kongol and Panyam and 3 injured with several houses burnt between 5 and 6 July 2023.

From Table 4, more than 80 communities were said to have been destroyed and more than 400 houses were either burnt or destroyed in Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin Ladi LGAs. Some of these communities include: Mairana, Bwai, Farinkasa, Sabon gari, Halle, Panyam, kongol, Mararaban kantoma, Mangu, Kwi, Wereng-Camp, Wereng, Kum, Byei, Jol, Tashek, Tanjol, Rim, Sara of Ganawuri, etc.

Surprisingly, while several red alerts of impending invasions by Fulani militias trouting from Marit forest, Kantoma chiyawa forest, Mahanga, Fass and Guava were raised by concerned individuals and members of the communities, the security personnel were unable to prevent the resultant coordinated attacks, within the period of this study.

It is evident, from Table 4, that the strategy adopted by the land grabbers is not in harmony with any of the principles of land acquisition. In fact, approaches, such as the wanton destruction of lives and property, inflecting injury on innocent people, including women and children, etc., are used to depict various forms of outlawry that are commonly applied by terrorists (cf. Marcus, Pam & Umar, 2022; Odinkalu, 2018; Oluwadoro, 2017).

More worrisome, is the purpose for the subsequent grabbed lands in the study areas, which was not solely intended for agricultural activities as revealed in Table 3. The implication of this is an expectant drastic reduction of land for food production which is the prevalent means of livelihood for majority of the dispossessed land owners in the LGAs. With this position, the agro-economic sector, which is very resourceful in the LGAs, is undoubtedly, under threat. The implication of this is that the production of grains (such as maize, millet) and vegetables (such as carrots, green beans, peas, cucumber) in the LGAs will be largely affected. The consequence of the low yield of these produce can create food insecurity and inflation, not only in the LGAs but to the entire state and country.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has appraised land grabbing in Plateau State with a focus on its implication on agro-economic activities in the predominant agrarian LGAs of Mangu, Bokkos and Barkin ladi. First, the paper has established the prevalence of land grabbing in several communities in the LGAs and has shown that a lot of people have been dispossessed from their ancestral land. Furthermore, the study revealed that land grabbing in the study areas is orchestrated by state and non state actors. While the study found that land acquisition by the state actors was legal and legitimate in the LGAs, that of the non state actors was illegal and does not respect any of the land acquisition principles. In addition, the study has found that land

acquisition by non state actors, which is perpetrated by mostly Fulani militias or their fifth columnists, is terrorist-driven and destructive to the agro economic activity of the communities in the LGAs.

The study therefore recommends that all destroyed and dispossessed lands should be rebuilt by government and returned to their ancestral owners. To achieve this, government should immediately, shut down all communities that are being occupied by terrorists and initiate their rebuild and subsequently, return to the natives. In addition, government should fulfil the assurance made by the previous administration of relocating all internally displaced persons in the state to their ancestral homes before the end of 2018.

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## Appendix I

Some Statistics on previous reported attacks on Northern and Central Parts of Plateau State

Date	Place	Number of People			Houses Destroyed or Burnt
		Displaced	Killed	injured	
8/7/2023	Sabon Gari	58	12	25	several
6/7/2023	Kwi	18	3	3	3
5/7/2023	Panyam	36	2	12	5
6/7/2023	kongol	27	5	3	2
30/5/2023	shou	20	3	1	3
9/6/2023	Farin lamba	33	8	15	several
13/6/2023	Jol	28	6	10	several
11/7/2023	Gohotkung, Pushit	23	-	20	
11/7/2023	Ta-hoss		4	1	

## Appendix II

1. 30/5/2023 - Suspected Fulani militias attacked Rarin village of Sho Community, Barkin Ladi. 3 persons have been reportedly shot dead while 1 was injured
2. 24/5/2023 - jol, Byei, Kum and Tashek villages in Riyom LGAs were invaded by hundreds of fulani militias on motor bike
3. 8/7/2023 - 12 people killed at Sabon Gari community of Mangu LGA and Some houses razed down - Plateau Intelligentsia - Davidson Malison - posted 9/7/2023
4. 5/7/2023 - 2 women attacked and killed in Mangu
5. 6/7/2023 - 5 people killed, 3 injured and 2 houses burnt in Kongol, Panyam district in Mangu
6. 7/7/2023 - Mwaghavul Youth President was attacked by Fulani
7. 11/7/2023 - armed men, suspected to be Fulani militias defied the curfew imposed on Mangu LGA and attacked Gohotkung community in Pushit district. Several people were injured and houses raised down
8. 11/7/2023 - 4 persons were ambushed and killed and 1 injured in Ta-hoss village in Riyom LGA

9. 15/5/2023 - unknown gunmen killed about 130 people and burnt about 100 houses in well coordinated attacks in about 22 villages in Mangu and Riyom LGA. Some of the villages affected include Fungzai, Hale, Kubwat, Bwoi and many other communities of Kombun District of Mangu LGA and some communities in Riyom LGA.
10. 21/5/2023 - Suspected Fulani herders attacked some farmers in Kwi community, Riyom LGA and shot one person dead.

Sources: [James Abraham](#) Punch online

Marie-Therese Nanlong Vanguard news online

Davidson Mallson - Facebook handle

Plateau Intelligientia - Facebook handle