

Peri-Urban Land Tenure in West Africa: When Housing Promoters Make and Break the Agglomeration of Saaba in Greater Ouaga in Burkina Faso

Assonsi Soma¹, Souleymane Karambir², Oumna Assétou Ouedraogo¹, Lasane Yameogo¹

¹Department of Geography, University Joseph KI-ZERBO of Ouagadougou, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso

²Department of Sociology, University of Gaoua, Gaoua, Burkina Faso

Email: somaas78@yahoo.fr, k_souleymane02@yahoo.fr, oumna94@gmail.com, yameoglass@gmail.com

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Abstract

This article addresses the issue of land mobilisation on the outskirts of African towns for housing promotion to the detriment of agro-sylvo-pastoral activities. In developing countries in general, and in Burkina Faso in particular, land is a major issue for local development and also a source of socio-economic fulfilment. Nowadays, one aspect of the land issue is housing development on the outskirts of towns, which since the advent of the popular uprising of 30 and 31 October 2014 in Burkina Faso, has caused a boom in land occupation in the country, more specifically in Greater Ouaga and in particular in the rural municipality of Saaba, closer to the country's Capital Ouagadougou. Our research aims to assess the state of land mobilisation by housing promoters in this municipality. To do this, cadastral data were used to assess the state of land mobilisation and to map housing promoters sites. Field surveys were also carried out to understand the factors promoting land mobilisation. The results show that more than twenty-three (23) housing agencies are active in the rural municipality of Saaba. These promoters have mobilised a total area of 8,257 ha, compared with 2,429 ha for operations carried out by the Government, i.e., a rate of 339.93%, and compared with 541 ha of land earmarked for future urbanisation projects, i.e., 137.37%. This pressure has led to a 14.78% decline in land suitable for agricultural and pastoral activities. In view of this situation, the study proposes the introduction of a land monitoring tool to survey the pressure on land from housing promoters in the municipality. The results of the study corroborate those of other authors who have studied the issue.

Keywords

Burkina Faso, Saaba Municipality, Housing Promotion, Land Pressure, Agricultural and Pastoral Activities, Greater Ouaga Master Plan

1. Introduction

In developing countries, cities are undergoing rapid urbanisation, which is swallowing up most of the land available for construction in urban and peri-urban areas, thereby fuelling the desire for land and causing prices to soar (Rémy, 2012 quoted by Hamadou, 2013). In West Africa, land is a major issue for urban development and a source of socio-economic fulfilment for the population (Azon, 2008). According to Assako-Assako and Djomo (2015), given the many opportunities that peripheral areas of urban agglomeration generally offer, it appears that land is at the heart of all covetousness, with various and varied issues at stake. As in several African countries, most of the land in Burkina Faso was governed by customary land law, institutionally represented by the chief of the lineage or chief of the land, who was responsible for managing the family landholding, arbitrating conflicts and granting temporary use rights to people from outside the lineage (Compaoré, 2018; Soma, 2023a). In addition to customary law, there is also modern colonial law.

However, since the 1983 Revolution occurred in the country, access to land has been governed by Ordinance 84-0580 on Agrarian and Land Reorganisation (RAF) of 4 August 1984, which was revised in 1991, 1996 and July 2012 to give rise to Law 034-2012/AN on Agrarian and Land Reorganisation (Presidence of Burkina Faso, 2012). Article 6 of this law divides the national landholding into three (03) blocks, namely the Government landholding, the landholding of local authorities and the landholding of private individuals. It should also be added that Burkina Faso's national decentralisation policy, through Act No. 2004-055/AN of 21 December 2004 on the General Code of Territorial Communities (CGCT), together with its amendments, has given the municipalities an important role in land management, with a view to improving efficiency. This management method has led to the creation of administrative sub-units, namely the territorial collectivities (regions and municipalities), which are managed by new actors.

In practice, on the ground, there is increasing pressure on land for agricultural, pastoral and housing development activities. The result is land grabbing and land speculation, particularly by housing promoters (Ministry of Urbanism, Housing and Land Tenure, 2023; Zoungrana et al., 2021; Soma, 2023b).

With a view to providing its population with decent housing and facilitating urban development, the Government adopted Act No. 057-2008/AN of 20 November 2008 on housing development in Burkina Faso, the purpose of which was to regulate this activity (National Assembly, 2016). This law was replaced in June 2023 by Law 008-2023/ALT of 20 June 2023 dealing with housing development.

This law was revised in response to the enormous excesses of private housing promoters in the sector becoming a business. In fact, according to Granelle (2000), “private housing promotion is defined in practice as an activity that consists of designing, organising and carrying out the construction of blocks of flats intended to be sold on a co-ownership basis to subscribers who finance the operation”. However, in Burkina Faso, housing promotion by private agencies is more focused on mobilising land than on providing people with decent housing.

In addition, an urban planning document for Greater Ouaga (Ouagadougou and neighbouring rural municipalities) has been drawn up (Ministry of Economic and Finances, 2020, decree no. 2020-09-0915/PRES/PM/MUH/MATDC/MINEFID approving the SDAGO, horizon 2025), with a view to organising the spatial occupation of land by land stakeholders. It has to be said that, despite this legal arsenal, the issue of housing development has always been a hot topic, with offers of non-decent housing and cases of litigation linked to land grabbing.

In the light of all these difficulties, the following question arises: how many land hectares have been mobilised by housing developers in the rural municipality of Saaba? Who are the main actors? What are the issues at a local level?

The aim of this article is to analyse the extent of land mobilisation by housing promoters in the rural district of Saaba. The paper focuses on the following points: (i) the current state of land mobilisation; (ii) the interplay of stakeholders; (iii) territorial issues; and (iv) land monitoring.

2. Study Methodology

The methodological approach adopted have been essentially qualitative and quantitative using survey and interviews through the administration of interview guides. These tools focused on the spatial aspects of the intervention of private housing developers in the rural municipality of Saaba. The approach began with a literature review, followed by primary data collection in the field using conventional tools (survey sheets, interview guides, cameras, GPS), then data processing and analysis. The results of this approach call for discussion and suggestions. A field survey was also carried out in five (05) localities, where a sample of 150 stakeholders (Table 1) was selected at random.

Table 1. Breakdown by locality of stakeholders surveyed.

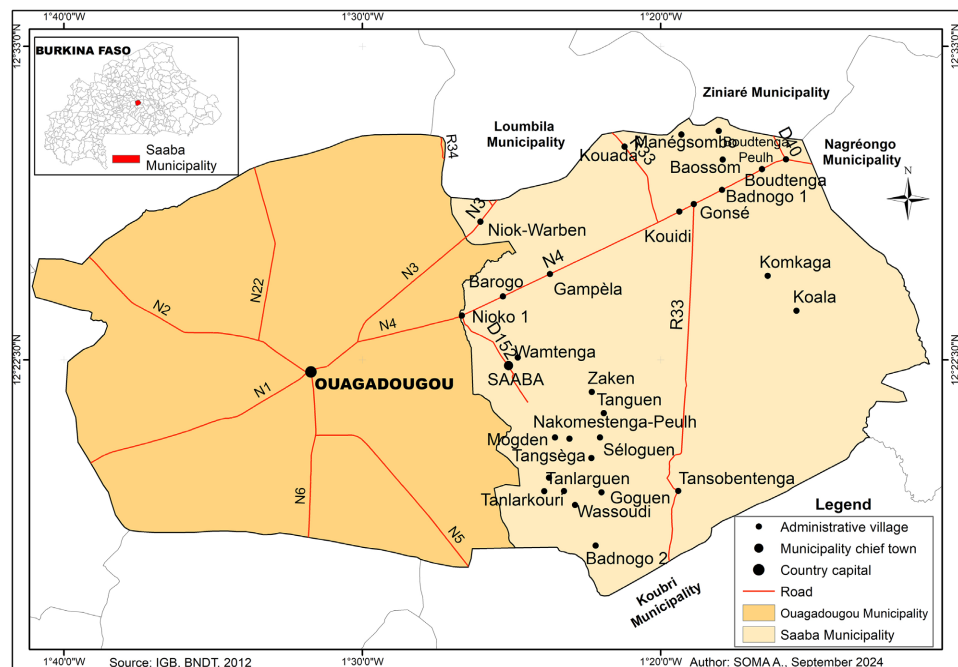
Localities	Headcount	Pourcentage (%)
Ouagadougou	10	6.67
Saaba center	40	26.67
Nioko 1	24	16
Zaken	51	34
Badnoogo	25	16.66
Total	150	100

Source: A. Soma, S. Karambiri, A. O. Ouédraogo, L. Yameogo, March 2023.

A series of questions were put to the interviewees. A spatial data collection form was used to record the characteristics of the land mobilised by housing agencies on the different sites. The data collected using Kobocollect and android devices was processed using Excel spreadsheet software. This was used to produce tables and graphs. Also, ArcGIS software was used to produce maps and figures.

3. Geographical Context of the Study

The rural district of Saaba is one of six rural municipalities in the Centre region of Burkina Faso. Covering an area of 446 kilometres square, it lies to the east of Ouagadougou, the country's capital, and is very close to it. It is bordered to the south and south-east by the municipality of Koubri, to the east by the municipality of Nagréongo and to the north by the municipalities of Loumbila and Ziniaré (Rural District of Saaba, 2019). It includes 23 administrative villages. The map below shows its location (Figure 1).



Source : Geographical Institute of Burkina (IGB), 2012; Authors, 2023.

Figure 1. Location of the rural district of Saaba.

4. Results of the Study

The results obtained are organised around the main issue of mobilising land for housing promotion in the rural municipality of Saaba and the spatial issues arising from this.

4.1. Overview of Land Mobilisation in Saaba

In this municipality, the local and Government authorities have mobilised 2,429 ha of land, most of which is located in the north-western part of the municipality

in the localities of Nioko1, Barogo and Saaba, which border on the urban municipality of Ouagadougou and merge with the Ouagadougou district and a little way into the centre of the municipality. In fact, according to the Saaba Municipal Development Plan (PCD) for 2019-2023, in its north-western part, the rural municipality of Saaba has benefited from housing developments in line with the urban area of Ouagadougou. The main beneficiaries are the localities of Saaba, Nioko 1 and Barogo.

In addition to the mobilisation of state and municipal resources, housing development in Burkina Faso has increased over the years, both in terms of the number of housing companies created and in terms of surface area. According to the 2022 database of the Central Region Land Registry and Works Department, the rural municipality of Saaba has twenty-three (23) housing promoters operating in the municipality, with 8,257 ha of land mobilised. These twenty-three (23) promoters are those who were able to be registered following a request for demarcation and/or by obtaining a land title from the Land Registry and Works Department of the Centre Region (SCTF-C); otherwise, the number on the ground is different. According to the December 2020 report of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry into the housing development system and practices, in Greater Ouaga, the rural municipality of Saaba is the district which counts the highest number of housing promoters, estimated to twenty-eight (28). This number is likely to increase in the future. As [Avril and Roth \(2005\)](#) said that housing promotion has become a profitable business that many people are interested. On the other hand, [Bachelet \(1968\)](#) concludes that the land reforms carried out by African governments pose more problems than they solve.

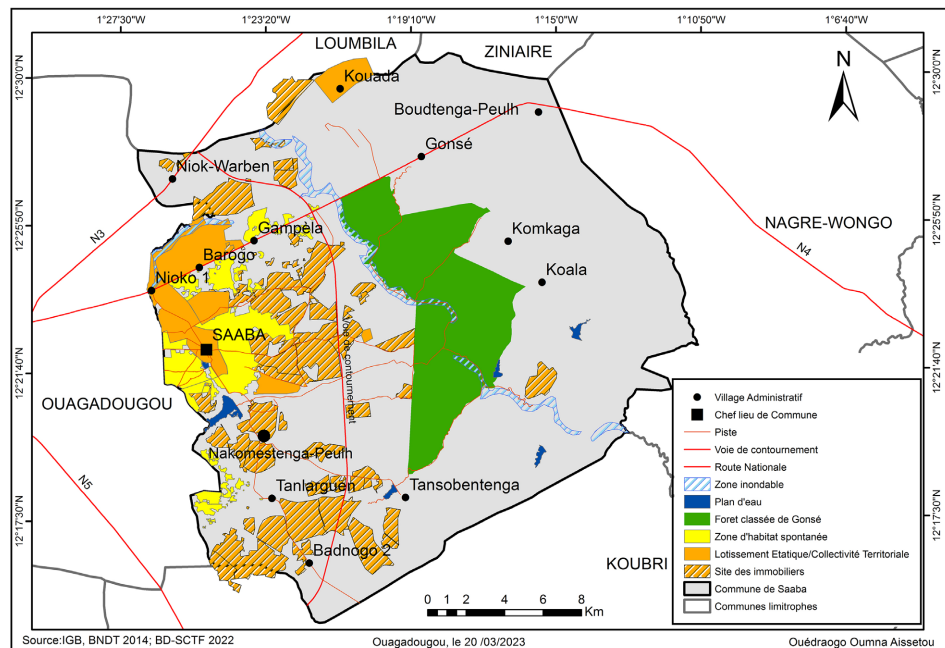
In parallel to the areas planned by the Government and housing promoters, other types of development have taken place, namely informal settlements that have sprung up in the vicinity of housing estates without any rules and with a different structure and architecture from that of the housing estates, as noted by [Ouedraogo and Sawadogo \(2018\)](#). **Figure 2** shows the current state of mobilisation.

4.2. Linking Land Mobilisation with SDAGO Guidelines

Any city needs a good urban planning base for harmonious development. To this end, Burkina Faso has set up the Greater Ouaga Master Plan (SDAGO), an urban planning tool for the year 2050, which provides guidelines and projections for Ouagadougou city and its hinterlands in order to prevent the uncontrolled occupation of these areas.

For the rural municipality of Saaba by 2050, the SDAGO has earmarked 5,141 ha for future urbanisation zones. However, for the period 1998 to 2022, the Government of Burkina Faso mobilised 2,429 ha, of which 16.88% did not comply with the SDAGO guidelines. The situation for housing promoters is chaotic. Out of a total surface area of 8,257 ha, only 1,698 ha, or 24.04% of mobilised land, complies with the SDAGO guidelines. This leads to say that the Government and private housing promoters are not complying with the SDAGO guidelines for the

Saaba municipality. This result is in line with those obtained by [Soma \(2023a\)](#) and [Kouraogo \(2021\)](#), who point out that virtually all the housing projects built in Greater Ouaga have not been referred to this spatial planning instrument. The Government and private housing promoters are therefore acting illegally, and should in principle be punished according to urban legislation. The same observation is reported by [Kambiré and Kamagaté \(2018\)](#) in their analysis of housing promotion operations in the housing projects of the Cocody municipality (Abidjan) in Côte d'Ivoire.



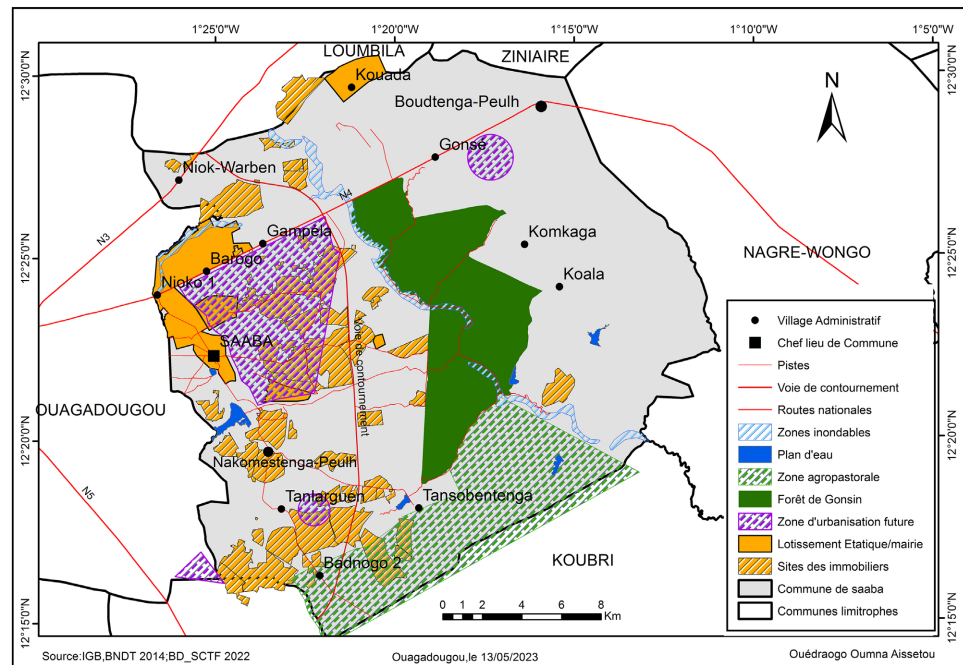
Source : Geographical Institute of Burkina (IGB), 2012, Surveyed data, Authors, 2023.

Figure 2. Overview of land mobilisation in Saaba.

Faced with the issue of non-compliance with the SDAGO guidelines and non-compliance with the texts in force by housing promoters during subdivision activities, this prompted action by the Department of Regional Planning, this prompted action by the Centre Region's Regional Department of Urban Planning, Land Affairs and Housing, which consisted of an operation to destroy the boundary markers irregularly erected by housing promoters at Songdin village in district no. 4 of the Ouagadougou municipality on 27 June 2023, in order to require them to comply strictly with the texts in force (publication in the *Journal Express du Faso* on 27 June 2023). **Figure 3** shows the configuration of the facilities and the SDAGO guidelines.

This non-respect of the SDAGO guidelines for the municipality of Saaba by the housing promoters may be due to the failure of the authorities to disseminate the plan to the stakeholders concerned and the effectiveness of certain measures in the legislative and regulatory texts, such as the setting up of certain land-related

structures or agencies. This is the case for the inter-ministerial commission responsible for giving an opinion on the transfer of land in the private domain of Government intended for housing development. Despite being provided for in article 190 of the 2012 RAF law and article 335 of its implementing decree, this commission has never been set up, even though its operationalisation should contribute to the supervision of land mobilisation and prevent certain abuses in this area.



Source : Geographical Institute of Burkina (IGB), 2012, Surveyed data, Authors, 2023.

Figure 3. Coordination of land mobilisation with the SDAGO guidelines.

Field surveys showed that 62.5% of housing promoters were not aware of the existence of the SDAGO, compared with 37.5% who said they were aware of the SDAGO, but did not know of its guidelines for the rural commune of Saaba.

4.3. Viewpoints of Stakeholders

In the rural municipality of Saaba, it appears that the Government or the local authority plays a secondary role in the process of mobilising land for housing development. This is due to a mechanism that they have had to put in place to facilitate the mobilisation, and the administration only intervenes in the process of drawing up the administrative deeds.

Firstly, housing promoters wishing to acquire a plot of land on which to carry out their business, register their intention to acquire a plot of land in a given locality with a canvasser/land chief (the person responsible to the village chief for land management)/village development adviser in the said locality. The latter is responsible for prospecting and negotiating with the landowner. In some cases,

however, the developer contacts the landowner directly. Once a conclusive agreement has been reached between the housing promoter and the landowner, the latter will call in a bailiff or notary to transfer the property rights between the buyer, i.e. the housing promoter, and the seller, i.e. the land promoter, and to sign the agreement protocol.

The next step is to apply to the state and local authorities to obtain the necessary administrative documents. Some housing promoters sometimes carry out their projects without these various deeds. In fact, according to the person in charge of state affairs for company X, “*our company has 5 sites in Saaba out of the five (05), only the Saaba 4 site has all the paperwork, and for the other sites we have submitted the files, but nothing for the moment until we have the administrative deeds, so we are carrying out our activities there*”. **Figure 3** shows the informal framework for land mobilisation by housing promoters.

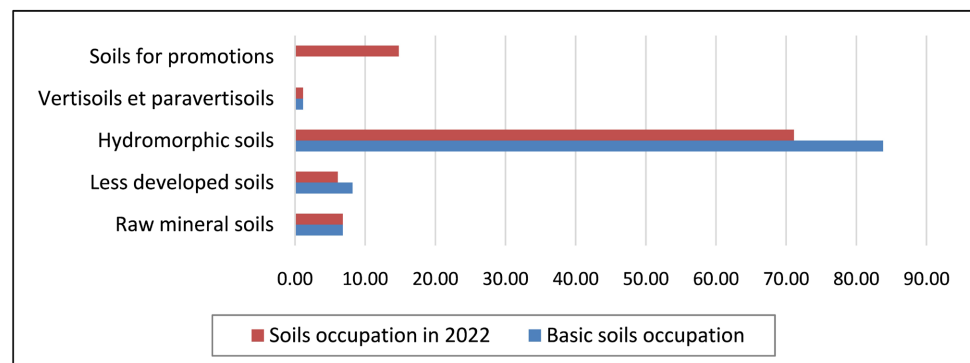
Although the very first law on housing development was adopted in 2008, it is now fifteen (15) years since the Burkina Faso authorities have struggled to enforce the texts they adopt. This analysis corroborates that made by **Halleux (2005)** on the guidance document known as Ruimtelijk Structuurplan Vlaanderen (Spatial Structure Plan for Flanders or RSV), which was adopted in 1997 to limit new areas dedicated to residential urbanisation in Belgium. It notes that after eight (08) years of adoption, the guidelines set out in this plan are struggling to be put into practice on the ground.

Also, according to **Kanga (2014)**, in 2013 the Ivorian state adopted decree no. 2013-224 of 22 March 2013 regulating the purging of customary land rights in the public interest. The aim of this text was to regulate the cost of purging, which is facing difficulties in enforcing the text given the price of purging on the Ivorian market. In view of all these difficulties faced by the authorities in implementing laws and decrees, why this contempt for the text, which seems to be prejudicing the Government by failing to collect the taxes due? Why do even notaries and bailiffs, men of the law, for the most part bow to the demands of housing promoters? An analysis of the various speeches reveals the reality that all parties are circumventing the law, as mentioned by **Koffie-Bikpo and Adaye (2015)**, analyzing the situation in Sassandra in Côte d’Ivoire. The question still remains: why this violation of the law, which seems to be to the detriment of the Government or local authorities (failure to collect taxes due), but more to the benefit of estate agents who manage to get away with it? However, as **Kouassi-Koffi, Kassi-Djodjo and Serhan (2018)** said, the housing promoter must comply with a series of regulatory procedures in order to ensure the harmonious and coherent development of urban areas.

4.4. Spatial Issues

The non-respect of the SDAGO’s guidelines, largely by property developers, the multiplicity of players and the high level of land mobilisation are not without impact. They are leading to the spread of communal areas and land speculation. This

could have consequences for arable land, because in rural municipalities, communal space is dedicated to agro-sylvo-pastoral activities. As indicated by [Ouedraogo & Sawadogo \(2018\)](#), there has been a 14.78% decline in less developed soils and hydromorphic soils in favour of housing. The same observation was made by [Bawa \(2018\)](#), [Takili et al. \(2020\)](#). and [Kouraogo \(2021\)](#) who note that, in fact, the rapid reduction in farmland is a major challenge for agriculture, especially in peri-urban areas in Togo and Koubri in Burkina Faso. Also, [Dauvergne \(2011\)](#) concludes that agriculture, which takes place in intermediate spaces between rural and urban areas, competes with urban activities for resources, particularly land in the cities of Accra and Lomé. However, these soils are ideal for sorghum, rice and cereal production. **Graph 1** below shows land use in 2022 in the rural municipality of Saaba.



Source : Soma A. Karambiri S., Ouédraogo O. A., Survey results, 2023.

Graph 1. Land use in 2022 in the municipality of Saaba.

Despite the importance of the spatial and economic stakes they represent, the economic sectors of land and housing promotion remain complex in terms of the relationships that are established and broken down between the many players involved, as mentioned by [Halleux \(2005\)](#) in a similar case study in Belgium.

4.5. Proposal for Land Monitoring in the Rural Municipality

For rational and sustainable land management in the rural municipality of Saaba, it is advisable to set up tools or systems for monitoring land. To do this, a functional GIS cadastral database needs to be set up for the benefit of the players in the property production chain, in particular the agents of the Centre's land registry and land works department. This will give a clearer picture of the impact of property development on arable land and any non-compliance with the SDAGO 2025 guidelines. This is a very important tool that enables better monitoring by the competent authorities, as also proposed by [Ouedraogo and Sawadogo \(2018\)](#).

In sum, Housing promotion in Burkina Faso presents significant territorial challenges that influence urbanisation and land use. In the rural municipality of Saaba, housing promoters activities involve different stakeholders. These are

mainly housing companies, the municipal administration and the relevant decentralised technical services (in particular the land and town planning departments), which should be involved in the process.

5. Conclusion

At the end of this study, we can note that housing promotion in Burkina Faso presents significant territorial challenges that influence urbanisation and land use. In the rural municipality of Saaba, housing promoters' activities involve different stakeholders. These are mainly property companies, the municipal administration and the relevant decentralised technical services (in particular the land and town planning departments), which should be involved in the process.

Housing promoters, particularly those in the private sector, have mobilised large areas of land in the rural municipality of Saaba to carry out their activities. While this practice has helped to increase the supply of housing via housing parcels, it has also led to unprecedented spatial sprawl or rurbanisation. The practice of this activity also poses a problem of spatial functionality, since most of the land mobilised for this activity in the rural municipality of Saaba was intended for agrosylvopastoral activities, according to the guidelines of the Greater Ouaga Master Plan (SDAGO).

Furthermore, the reality is that the procedure for mobilising land resources by private housing companies in Saaba is informal, without the involvement of all stakeholders, in particular the Government and the municipality. The latter are generally only involved at the stage of drawing up the administrative deeds.

In an attempt to contain these all-out interventions, which are leading to the phagocytosis of peri-urban areas, and to preserve the vocation of the land, Law 008-2023/ALT of 20 June 2023 was adopted, limiting housing promotion to five (05) hectares per project. This should prevent land grabbing and protect rural land intended for agriculture, all of which will make it possible to contain the territorial and socio-economic issues linked to land.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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