Effect of Street Trading Activities on Urban Land Use in Akure, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Street trading represents a critical component of the informal economy in Nigeria's urban centers, yet its unregulated growth creates significant conflicts with planned land uses. This study investigates the spatial distribution, impacts, and policy implications of street trading in Akure, Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods approach that integrates field surveys, key informant interviews, and GIS-based spatial analysis, the study examines the nature of street trading, its effects on designated land uses, and the challenges faced by planning authorities. Findings reveal that foodstuffs dominate trade (37.6%), with sidewalks (41%) and road shoulders (24%) as key trading locations, reflecting strategic entrepreneurial rationality rather than random activity. Street trading significantly contributes to traffic congestion (28%), land-use conversion, and environmental degradation, with 84% of surveyed areas reporting conflicts between informal and formal uses. Planning authorities face resource limitations (55%), weak legal frameworks (15%), and trader resistance (28%) that hinder effective regulation. Stakeholder perspectives highlight tensions between livelihood security and urban quality of life, with residents favoring better regulation (41.2%) over elimination. The study recommends designated trading zones, integration of trading spaces in mixed-use developments, and adaptive governance frameworks to balance economic inclusivity with sustainable urban development.

Keywords: Street trading, Informal economy, Land use conflict, Urban planning, Akure, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Urbanisation in Nigeria has led to the rapid expansion of cities and towns, placing significant pressure on limited land resources for residential, commercial, institutional, and recreational purposes (Oduwaye, 2009). This growth, driven by rural-urban migration, natural population increase, and the reclassification of settlements, has intensified competition for land and increased the complexity of urban land management (Mabogunje, 1992). In many cases, formal planning and zoning regulations lag behind these demographic and economic changes, creating a gap between official plans and actual land use on the ground (Agunbiade, Rajabifard, & Bennett, 2012).

One prominent aspect of urban informality that influences land use patterns is street trading. Common in cities worldwide, street trading poses a challenge to urban organization. Streets, often described as the "blood vessels" of cities (Adedeji, Fadamiro, & Adeoye, 2014), serve as vital public spaces that support economic activities. Street trading refers to the informal sale of goods and services in public areas—such as sidewalks, road medians, street corners, and open spaces—without formal allocation, planning approval, or legal authorization (Omoegun & Ukpere, 2017). Adedibu and Okekunle (2006) describe street trading as a survival strategy for the urban poor, who lack access to formal employment and cannot afford rental space in conventional markets. Similarly, Owusu, Abrokwah, and Frimpong (2013) identify it as a visible feature of urban centers, particularly in central business districts, where people display a wide range of goods along major streets. Olokor (2001) suggests that the inability of many traders to afford market stall rents drives them to operate informally on streets.

In Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Ibadan, Onitsha, and Abuja, street trading has expanded significantly, transforming city centers and major thoroughfares into informal commercial corridors (Olujimi, 2009). Akure,

the capital of Ondo State, mirrors this trend. With formal employment opportunities failing to match population growth, many residents have turned to informal enterprises, with street trading emerging as a prominent expression of economic survival. Traders occupy major roads and intersections, reshaping urban land use and encroaching on road setbacks, pedestrian walkways, and spaces initially designated for public utilities or transportation infrastructure (Olurin, 2015). This informal occupation distorts planned land use and creates challenges related to traffic congestion, sanitation, and aesthetics (Nwaogwugwu & Ezeadichie, 2017). Consequently, street trading is both an essential economic activity and an ongoing planning dilemma, requiring strategies that balance livelihoods with orderly urban development.

As the capital of Ondo State and a regional commercial hub, Akure attracts migrants seeking economic opportunities, access to social amenities, and better livelihoods (Oduwaye, 2009). This rapid population growth has strained urban infrastructure, social services, and formal employment sectors (Olurin, 2015). Limited industrial development and a narrow formal job market leave many new residents, particularly youth, women, and unskilled workers, unable to secure stable employment. Street trading, with low entry barriers, minimal capital requirements, and immediate returns, has become an attractive livelihood strategy (Omoegun & Ukpere, 2017).

However, the proliferation of unregulated street trading poses significant challenges to Akure's urban land use system. Public spaces—including sidewalks, road shoulders, traffic medians, and building setbacks—are often appropriated by traders, distorting the city's planned land use (Agunbiade, Rajabifard, & Bennett, 2012). This unauthorized occupation compromises traffic flow, pedestrian safety, and overall urban aesthetics, particularly in areas with high trading concentrations along roads such as Oba Adesida Road and Arakale Street (Nwaogwugwu & Ezeadichie, 2017). Additionally, waste management becomes challenging, with poor sanitation and refuse accumulation deteriorating urban infrastructure (Adedibu & Okekunle, 2006).

While street trading plays a crucial role in reducing poverty and supporting low-income residents, its unregulated nature threatens the sustainability and efficiency of Akure's urban development. Balancing the accommodation of informal economic activities with the preservation of the city's land use framework is therefore essential (Olujimi, 2009). In Akure, street traders often occupy road setbacks, pedestrian walkways, drainage channels, and public open spaces, causing unplanned alterations in the spatial structure and functionality of the city (Olurin, 2015). This encroachment disrupts transportation and public utility zones, contributes to disorganized cityscapes, and places additional pressure on strained infrastructure (Oduwaye, 2009).

The study also examines the specific challenges that street trading poses to urban planners and development control agencies. These include difficulties in enforcing zoning laws, resistance from traders during relocation attempts, and political interference in regulatory processes (Omoegun & Ukpere, 2017). Urban planners face constraints such as limited institutional capacity, inadequate funding, and poor data on informal sector dynamics, making effective regulation highly challenging (Adedibu & Okekunle, 2006). This paper investigates the spatial distribution of street trading in Akure, its effects on designated land uses, the challenges faced by planning authorities, and possible strategies for harmonisation. The study aims to provide insights into how informal activities can be better integrated into planning frameworks to promote inclusive and sustainable urban development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Street trading is a prominent feature of urban informality in many African cities, providing employment opportunities and affordable goods while simultaneously shaping urban spaces. Scholars have highlighted that informal economies, including street trading, are vital for urban livelihoods but often generate spatial conflicts and governance challenges (Bromley, 2000; Skinner, 2008). In West Africa, street trading frequently dominates urban retail, accounting for more than 40% of city-level commerce (Otieno & Mitullah, 2017).

Street Trading in Nigerian Cities

In Nigeria, street trading is deeply entrenched in the urban economy. Cities such as Lagos demonstrate large-

scale displacements through mega-projects targeting informal traders (Adewale & Oni, 2019), while in Ibadan, traders coexist with formal land uses, often occupying road verges, sidewalks, and open spaces (Ojo & Ibitoye, 2021). These cases reveal patterns of rational site selection, where traders prioritize high customer traffic, accessibility, and low operational costs (Alabi, 2016).

Street trading in Nigerian cities is not only an economic activity but also a socio-spatial phenomenon. Traders often specialize by ethnicity or commodity: Yoruba traders dominate foodstuffs, while Igbo traders are prevalent in electronics and cosmetics (Owusu et al., 2013). This pattern reflects adaptive strategies that maximize profit and visibility while minimizing costs.

Theoretical Frameworks

Several theoretical frameworks help explain the persistence and spatial patterns of street trading:

- **Informal Sector Theory:** Traders operate outside formal systems due to barriers to entry in regulated markets (Hart, 1973; Chen, 2012). Informal activities provide employment and income for those excluded from formal labor markets.
- **Perfect Competition Characteristics:** Street traders often compete primarily through pricing, relying on affordability and flexibility to attract customers (Bromley, 2000).
- **Urban Land Use Conflict Theory:** Informal activities can conflict with planned land uses, generating congestion, sanitation problems, and aesthetic degradation (Mabogunje, 2015).

While substantial research exists on Lagos and Ibadan, smaller state capitals like Akure remain understudied. Understanding street trading in these smaller urban centers is crucial, as their informal-formal interactions differ from mega-cities, often reflecting weaker planning enforcement, rapid population growth, and localized economic patterns.

Impacts of Street Trading on Urban Land Use

Street trading influences urban land use in multiple ways. Unregulated trading often leads to the encroachment of sidewalks, road shoulders, pedestrian walkways, and open spaces, resulting in conflicts with planned land uses (Agunbiade, Rajabifard, & Bennett, 2012). This can disrupt transportation, reduce pedestrian safety, and degrade urban aesthetics (Nwaogwugwu & Ezeadichie, 2017). Furthermore, clustering of traders in commercial nodes can increase congestion, strain waste management systems, and deteriorate infrastructure (Adedibu & Okekunle, 2006).

Empirical studies in Nigerian cities have highlighted these challenges. For example, in Ibadan, informal trading has reshaped neighborhood morphology, converting residential areas into commercial zones (Ojo & Ibitoye, 2021). In Lagos, aggressive displacements and mega-projects have attempted to regulate informal traders but often exacerbate social tensions (Adewale & Oni, 2019). These findings underscore the tension between livelihood imperatives and urban planning objectives.

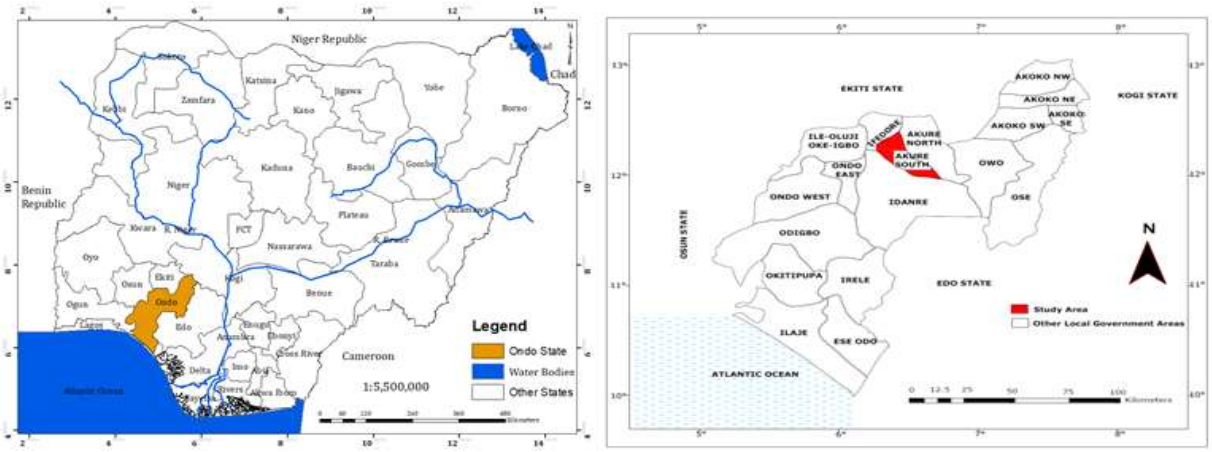
Strategies for Managing Street Trading

Several strategies have been suggested for harmonizing street trading with urban planning. These include the creation of designated trading zones, integration of street trading into mixed-use developments, participatory policy design, and formalization of trading activities (Obeng-Odoom, 2011; Mitullah, 2017). Evidence from Ghana and Kenya shows that negotiated relocations, infrastructure provision, and stakeholder engagement can reduce conflicts and improve urban functionality. These approaches emphasize co-production of urban policy, recognizing both the economic importance of informal activities and the need for spatial order.

Study Area: Akure, Nigeria

Akure, the capital of Ondo State in Southwestern Nigeria, lies between latitudes 7°15′N and 5°15′E. With a population exceeding 700,000 (NPC, 2023), the city serves as a commercial and administrative hub. Akure has

expanded rapidly over the past three decades, transforming from a primarily administrative town into a diversified urban economy. The city's land use pattern is characterized by residential dominance, interspersed with markets, institutional facilities, and transport nodes. In recent years, commercial encroachment has intensified, particularly along major roads such as Oba Adesida Road, Arakale Road, and Oyemekun Road. These corridors have become hotspots for street trading due to high vehicular and pedestrian traffic.



Figures 1 & 2: Akure in the context of Nigeria

Source: Department of Surveying & Geo-informatics, Federal University of Technology, Akure, 2024

Street trading in Akure is not only a response to economic necessity but also reflects broader socio-spatial processes, including weak planning enforcement, rapid population growth, and ethnic specialization in commodity trade.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Data Collection

- **Surveys:** Structured questionnaires were administered to 300 street traders across major trading corridors. The survey captured socio-demographics, commodity types, location preferences, and perceived challenges.
- **Key Informant Interviews:** Conducted with planning officials, market associations, and residents to triangulate survey results.
- **GIS Mapping:** Spatial data on street trading locations were collected using handheld GPS devices and integrated into ArcGIS 10.8 for mapping hotspots and land use conflicts.

A stratified random sampling method was adopted, stratifying by trading corridor (e.g., Oba Adesida, Arakale, Oja-Oba). Within each corridor, traders were selected proportionally to ensure representativeness. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations in SPSS 25. Spatial data were analyzed in ArcGIS to generate thematic maps of trading hotspots, land use conversions, and congestion zones. Qualitative data were coded thematically to extract insights into stakeholder perspectives.

RESULTS

Nature and Spatial Distribution of Street Trading in Akure

Findings reveal that street trading in Akure is a sophisticated informal economy rather than a random or chaotic activity. From figure 3, foodstuffs account for 37.6% of items sold, followed by clothing (22.9%),

electronics (16.3%), and cooked food (12.6%). Ethnic specialization emerged, with Yoruba traders dominating foodstuffs while Igbo traders controlled electronics and cosmetics.

Traders' choice of location reflects entrepreneurial rationality. About 41.9% prioritize high customer traffic, 32.7% choose proximity to home, while 22.3% cite lower operating costs. Sidewalks (41%) are the most used trading spaces, followed by road shoulders (24%), traffic medians (19%), and areas around public buildings (11%).

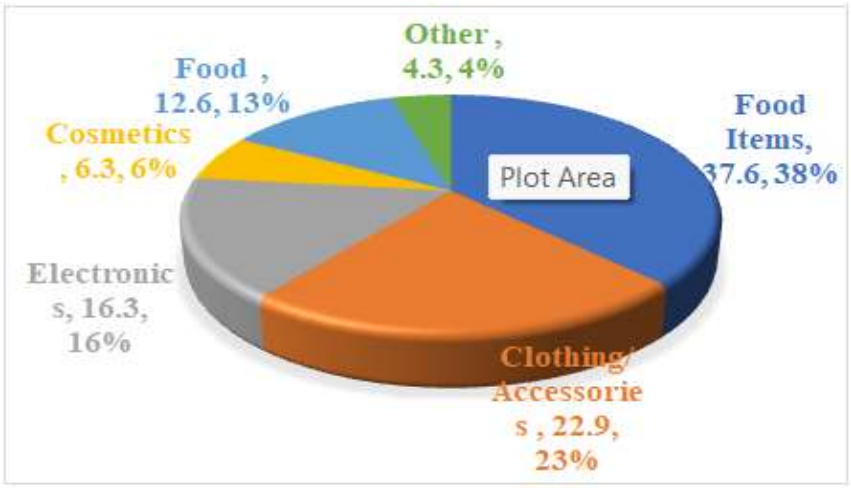


Figure 3: Type of Goods Sold

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Figure 4: Land Use Conversion in Isikan District, Akure

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Effects of Street Trading on Land Use

Street trading significantly disrupts Akure's planned land uses. From figure 5, about 28% of respondents identified traffic congestion as the primary impact, followed by poor sanitation (20%) and aesthetic degradation (15%). More than 84% of surveyed areas reported frequent conflicts between street trading and designated uses. The most prominent land use conversion is residential-to-commercial (40%), followed by residential-to-mixed-use (36%). Specifically, 21.9% of residential buildings have been converted for commercial trading, while 15.3% of open spaces and 14.2% of road shoulders are occupied (Figure 6).

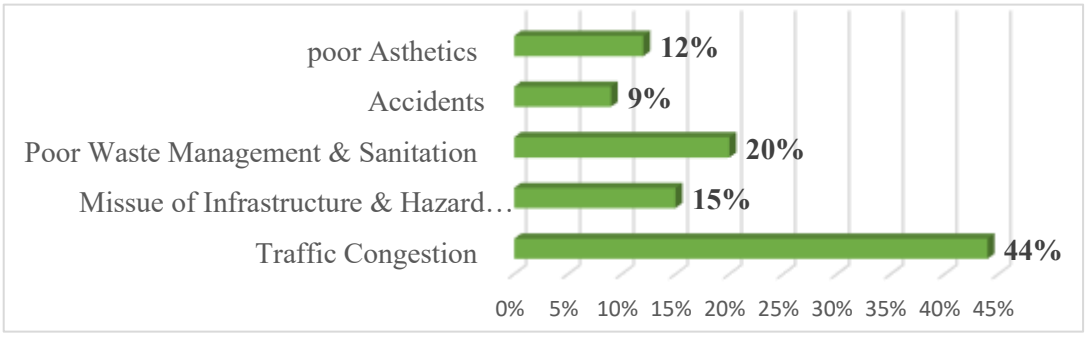


Figure 5: Impact of Street Trading Activates on

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Land Use

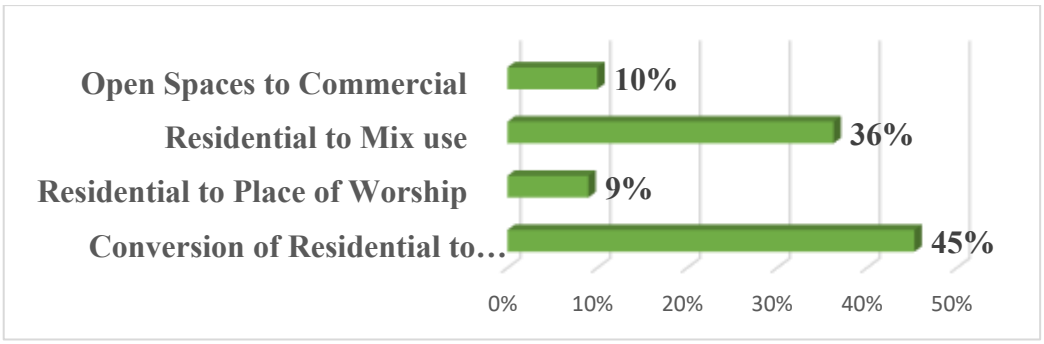


Figure 6: Land Use as a result of Street Trading Activities in the Study Area

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Challenges Encountered by Planning Authorities

Planning authorities reported significant constraints. The most cited challenge was inadequate resources (55%), including insufficient staff, technology, and funding. Trader resistance (28%) emerged from economic survival concerns and political patronage networks that shield traders from enforcement (Figure 7). Weak or outdated legal frameworks accounted for 15% of responses, while overlapping agency jurisdictions (12%) created enforcement conflicts.

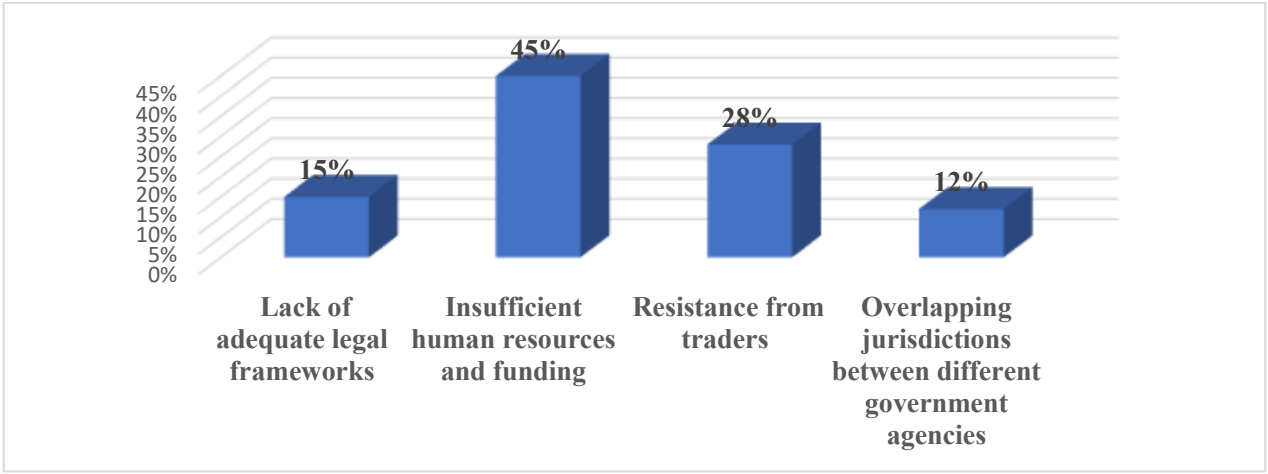


Figure 7: Regulatory Challenge faced by Town Planning Authorities

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Stakeholder Perspectives on Street Trading

Stakeholder views reveal deep tensions between livelihood security and urban order. About 70.3% of residents view street trading as improper, compared to 21.6% who consider it acceptable. Interestingly, 56.5% of traders themselves admitted their activity is not proper, acknowledging its illegality but emphasizing necessity (Table 1). Traders cited reduced income (46.3%), higher operating costs (24.2%), and limited growth opportunities (17.8%) as outcomes of regulation. Only 11.5% reported gaining legitimacy from formalization (Table 2). Meanwhile, 41.2% of residents preferred improved regulation rather than total elimination, reflecting recognition of convenience despite nuisances.

Table 1: Traders' perspective on Street Trading with Land Use

Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not Compatible	103	56.5%
Fairly Compatible	50	25.7 %
Very Compactible	29	14.9 %
Total	**194**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2: Residents perspective on Street Trading

Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not Compatible	128	70.3%
Fairly Compatible	42	21.6 %
Very Compactible	12	6.1 %
Total	**182**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Strategies for Harmonizing Street Trading and Planning

Stakeholders in Table 3, expressed strongest support for designated trading zones (43.9%), followed by mixed-use developments (24.7%), mobile trading systems (18.1%), and vertical markets (13.1%). Designated zones are favored for their practicality and provision of infrastructure, while mixed-use solutions are seen as more sustainable long-term.

Table 3: Effective integrated planning approach

Factors	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Designated trading zones with supporting infrastructure	80	43.9%
Mixed-use development incorporating trading spaces	45	26.9%
Mobile trading systems	33	18.1%
Vertical integration in multi-story complexes	24	13.1 %
Total	**182**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

DISCUSSION

The findings affirm street trading's dual role as both a survival mechanism and a disruptive force in Akure's urban fabric. Similar to studies in Lagos (Adewale & Oni, 2019) and Accra (Brown, 2015), traders in Akure exhibit rational location strategies based on visibility, accessibility, and customer flow. This reinforces the argument that informal trading is not chaotic but represents adaptive entrepreneurship within constrained urban contexts (Skinner, 2008). However, the extensive land use conflicts and environmental degradation highlight weak governance and regulatory systems. The 40% residential-to-commercial conversion mirrors trends in Ibadan where informal trading has reshaped neighborhood morphology (Ojo & Ibitoye, 2021). This suggests that informal economic logics can override formal planning when enforcement is weak. Stakeholder perceptions reveal a governance legitimacy gap. Residents and traders both express dissatisfaction with current enforcement-heavy approaches, echoing findings from Nairobi (Mitullah, 2017), where punitive regulation exacerbated conflicts. The preference for designated trading zones suggests the need for co-production of policy between planners, residents, and traders, as seen in Ghana's "market relocation with negotiation" models (Obeng-Odoom, 2011). Overall, Akure reflects the broader African urban paradox: informal economies sustain livelihoods but simultaneously undermine spatial order. Inclusive governance frameworks that balance these competing needs are urgently required.

Effect of Street Trading Activities on Urban Land Use

The research hypothesis examines the relationship between street trading activities (independent variable) and urban land use (dependent variable) in Akure, Nigeria.

- **H_0 (Null Hypothesis)**: Street trading activities do not have a significant effect on urban land use in Akure.
- **H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis)**: Street trading activities have a significant effect on urban land use in Akure

The test uses a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed), A significant correlation ($\rho >$ critical value or $p < 0.05$) would reject H_0, indicating street trading significantly affects land use patterns, such as conversions or conflicts (Table 4). Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (ρ) measures the monotonic relationship between the two ordinal variables, with values ranging from -1 (perfect negative) to +1 (perfect positive). The formula used is:

$$\rho = 1 - \frac{6 \sum d_i^2}{n(n^2 - 1)}$$

ρ = Spearman's rank correlation coefficient
d_i = difference between the two ranks of each observation
n = number of observations

- **Spearman's $\rho = 0.555$** (moderate positive correlation).
- **p-value = 4.21×10^{-16}** (highly significant, $p < 0.001$).

Table 4: Spearman Rank Correlation Results

Variable Pair	ρ Value	p-value	Significance (α = 0.05)	Interpretation
Street Trading Level vs. Land Use Conflict Level	0.555	< 0.001	Significant	Moderate positive correlation

Source: Author's computation using SPSS v.22

The Spearman's ρ value of 0.555 indicates a moderate positive monotonic relationship between street trading

activities and urban land use impacts in Akure. This suggests that as the intensity of street trading increases (e.g., from low/small-scale to high/large-scale operations), the level of disruption to designated land uses also rises proportionally, though not perfectly linearly. The correlation strength aligns with the descriptive findings that high trading concentrations are associated with elevated conflicts and transformations. For instance, areas with high trading levels predominantly reported high conflicts reflecting systemic encroachments on transportation and public spaces. The highly significant p-value (< 0.001) rejects the null hypothesis (H_0) and supports the alternative (H_1), providing statistical evidence that street trading activities have a significant effect on urban land use in Akure. This significance holds even after accounting for the sample size ($n=182$), as the test statistic exceeds the critical value for ordinal data at $\alpha=0.05$ (approximately 0.14 for large n). The result underscores the informal sector's role in reshaping urban spaces, consistent with broader literature on Nigerian cities (Olusa, Omole, & Abereola, 2021; Omoegun & Ukpere, 2017), were unregulated trading drives land use conversions amid rapid urbanization.

CONCLUSION

Street trading in Akure represents a rational but unregulated informal system. Its spatial distribution reveals adaptive strategies that sustain livelihoods but disrupt urban order, causing congestion, sanitation problems, and land use conversions. Planning authorities face systemic challenges of inadequate resources, weak laws, and resistance from traders, creating a persistent governance gap. Stakeholder perspectives underline the inadequacy of punitive regulation, with stronger support for inclusive solutions such as designated zones and mixed-use integration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Integrating Street Trading Hotspots into Urban Planning for Sustainable Economic Development

Mapping trading hotspots and incorporating them into urban plans is essential for enhancing economic viability while minimizing spatial conflicts. Street trading, though informal, plays a significant role in providing livelihoods and affordable goods to urban residents. However, the absence of proper spatial integration often leads to congestion, obstruction of pedestrian walkways, traffic delays, and conflicts with formal land uses as observed during the field survey. By systematically identifying and mapping areas with high concentrations of trading activities, urban planners can designate appropriate zones that accommodate traders without undermining city functionality in Akure. This approach not only legitimizes and supports the economic contributions of street traders but also promotes order, safety, and accessibility in urban spaces. Ultimately, integrating trading hotspots into planning frameworks ensures a balance between informal economic activities and sustainable urban growth in Nigeria.

ii. Enforcing Zoning Regulations and Providing Waste Management Infrastructure for Environmental Mitigation

Enforcing zoning regulations and providing waste management infrastructure is crucial for mitigating environmental impacts and aligning street trading with planned land use. Informal trading often results in littering, poor sanitation, and degradation of public spaces, exacerbating health risks and urban blight in areas like Akure. Strict enforcement of zoning laws would prevent unauthorized encroachments, while dedicated waste collection systems such as bins, recycling points, and regular clean-up schedules, would address the byproduct of high-volume trading. This dual strategy not only protects the environment but also integrates traders into formal urban systems, fostering cleaner, more livable cities. Thereby, it supports sustainable development without stifling the economic role of street vendors, ensuring that trading activities contribute positively to the overall urban ecosystem in Nigeria.

iii. Increasing Funding for Urban Planning, Clarifying Legal Frameworks, and Fostering Authority Collaboration to Streamline Regulation

Increasing funding for urban planning, clarifying legal frameworks, and fostering collaboration between authorities are vital steps to streamline regulation of street trading. In Nigeria, fragmented policies and limited

resources often lead to inconsistent enforcement and bureaucratic hurdles that hinder effective management of informal economies. Enhanced funding would enable comprehensive planning initiatives, while clear, updated legal guidelines would reduce ambiguity for traders and officials. Collaborative efforts among local governments, state agencies, and national bodies would promote coordinated action, minimising overlaps and disputes. This approach not only improves regulatory efficiency but also builds a supportive environment for informal traders, driving economic inclusion and orderly urban development in cities like Akure.

iv. Engaging Stakeholders in Policy Design and Implementing Awareness Campaigns to Enhance Regulatory Acceptance

Engaging stakeholders in policy design and implementing awareness campaigns is key to highlighting the benefits of regulation and improving acceptance among street traders and communities. Resistance to rules often stems from a lack of involvement and perceived threats to livelihoods, as seen in field interactions in Akure where traders expressed concerns over displacement. Inclusive consultations with traders, residents, businesses, and NGOs during policy formulation ensure that regulations are practical and equitable, incorporating diverse perspectives. Complementary campaigns through workshops, media, and community outreach can educate on how formalized trading leads to safer, more profitable operations without eroding informal vibrancy. This participatory method ultimately fosters buy-in, reduces conflicts, and promotes a regulated yet thriving street economy that aligns with sustainable urban goals in Nigeria

v. **Prioritizing Designated Trading Zones with Infrastructure and Piloting Mixed-Use Developments for Balanced Urban Sustainability**

Prioritizing designated trading zones equipped with infrastructure and piloting mixed-use developments is essential for balancing economic benefits with urban sustainability. In rapidly growing cities like Akure, unregulated trading strains infrastructure and limits long-term planning, leading to inefficient land use and social inequities. By focusing on well-equipped zones complete with shelters, utilities, and security authorities can consolidate activities, easing pressure on other areas while boosting trader productivity. Pilot mixed-use projects, blending trading with residential or commercial elements, test innovative models that integrate informal economies into formal structures. This targeted strategy not only sustains livelihoods and economic contributions but also advances eco-friendly urban design, ensuring that street trading supports rather than hinders Nigeria's vision for resilient, inclusive cities.

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