

# Urbanization and Purpose-use Change in Diobu, Port Harcourt Nigeria

Edmund Chinem Nwokaeze<sup>1</sup>, Goodnews Izunna Uchendu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Environmental Science, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Urban and Regional Planning, Faculty of Environmental Science, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

Corresponding Author: edmund.nwokaezec@ust.edu.ng

**Abstract**— This study investigates the impact of urbanization on purpose-use change in Diobu, Port Harcourt, focusing on identifying the drivers of these changes, assessing their extent, evaluating their effect on neighbourhood quality, and proposing strategies for sustainable management. Through a mixed-method approach, including GIS mapping, survey, key informants' interview and direct observation, this research reveals that significant transformations have occurred in Diobu, primarily shifting residential spaces toward commercial and mixed-use purposes. Key drivers of these changes include economic growth, population expansion, and proximity to commercial activity centres. While the shift has contributed to economic opportunities, it has also led to adverse effects and challenges such as environmental degradation, increased crime rate, and reduced housing affordability. These findings underscore the need for strategic urban planning, stricter zoning regulations and rezoning where necessary, and community involvement to balance economic development with neighbourhood quality. This research provides insights into sustainable urban management, aimed at fostering balanced growth while preserving the character and livability of residential areas.

**Keywords**— Urbanization, Purpose-use change, neighbourhood quality, Diobu.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of urbanization and purpose-use change is a pivotal aspect of contemporary urban development, and its impact on localities can be profound. In the case of Diobu, Port Harcourt, this transition is particularly noteworthy. This transition levels into the dynamic interplay between urbanization and purpose-use change in Diobu, exploring the transformations in land utilization, infrastructure, and socio-economic patterns. Understanding the intricate relationships between these factors becomes crucial for sustainable urban planning and community well-being as urbanization accelerates. Through this study, we seek to unravel the nuances of urban evolution in Diobu, shedding light on the forces shaping its landscape and the implications for its residents.

Mbee (2022) opined that cities are growing rapidly in many parts of the world, including Nigeria. The expansion of human settlements caused by demographic changes, technological advancement, socio-economic, and political dynamics has indeed affected the physical, cultural, and social environment and the well-being of residents. Urban development has some negative effects on the planet's land surface (Ouedrago, 2006).

Akakandelwa (2012) and Egbenta (2009) defined change of use as a change in the purpose or circumstance, in which a building is used so that after the change the building or part of the building is used differently from the original use. This definition underscores the dynamic nature of urban spaces, acknowledging that buildings may undergo transformations that extend beyond their initial designations. The significance lies not only in the physical modification of structures but also in the broader implications for the surrounding environment and community. Changes in use can catalyze shifts in the socio-economic landscape, influence infrastructure demands, and impact the overall character of an area.

Understanding the intricacies of change of use is essential for effective urban planning, as it provides a framework for

navigating the evolving needs and functions of built environments. This concept becomes particularly relevant in Diobu, Port Harcourt, where urbanization and purpose-use changes are at the forefront of the local development narrative. By examining these shifts, we glean insights into the multifaceted nature of urban evolution in this dynamic community.

Urban planners have created a variety of land uses with the help of planning laws and conventions to guarantee the best possible use of the land. Most of the time, different land uses have been designed according to current land use norms, and when population, commerce, and industrial activity rise, the current land uses are changed. In some instances, as is the case of the Diobu neighbourhood, the broad land use may seem to retain its residential character but the predominant purpose for which some sections are used changes, with the buildings or street(s) succumbing to market forces. This consequential shift not only poses challenges to housing affordability but also raises concerns about the sustainable coexistence of diverse land uses within Diobu, Port Harcourt.

The study assesses the impact of urbanization on land use purpose change in Diobu, Port Harcourt with the following objectives;

- i. Identify the main cause(s) of purpose use change.
- ii. Determine the extent of purpose-use change.
- iii. Assess the effect of purpose-use change on neighbourhood quality.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Worldwide, more than half of the population are living in urban areas (Lakes & Lautenbach, 2008). Specifically, it is estimated that the urban population will double by 2050, where the urban population will grow from 3.3 billion in 2007 to 6.4 billion in 2050 (UN-Habitat, 2008). Ironically, these new urban residents will gather in cities of developing countries. This concentration of population results in significant effects on the

human-environment system regarding economic, social, and ecological matters. Addressing these issues is complicated by the rapid changes in urban land use patterns. This has happened in phases, first with the advancement of science and technology which midwife the birth of industrialization and then urbanization. Urbanization in turn has caused an increase in the population which is the resultant effect of the movement of people from locations that have lesser chances of economic survival to locations with higher chances. Rapid growth has in recent years constituted a major problem facing many cities of the world (Graham & Marvin 2020).

This growth has resulted in competition between the limited resources - land, with the ever-increasing uses to which it is used. Also, unplanned change of use has implications for the housing situation. This occurs because very few spaces are now available for residential purposes as succession by other uses has begun, worsening the housing shortage problem. This succession by other uses has brought about shortage in housing facilities for residential purposes. Inhabitants of the residential houses are not left with any other option than to move out in search of alternative houses. The increasing level of traffic associated with change of use has resulted in problems that the government must use scarce resources to solve. A specific land use can transform into another land use, as a piece of land may shift from its natural use as a forest to being utilized as farmland before eventually becoming an area designated for residential development, thus establishing a succession of land uses.

The theory of invasion succession is based on the principle that a particular land use invades an area and dominates it, thereby succeeding the existing land use (Cameron, 2016). This succession process comes after "invasion." Invasion refers to the encroachment of one land use by another due to economic, social, and cultural divergence between the previous and the new, which may eventually result in the new land use replacing the old one.

Glaeser (2011) reported that this phenomenon is usually a result of the characteristics of land resources to move to uses that offer the highest return for the utilization of net income that can accrue to a parcel of land essentially limited. This situation has been observed in areas like Ijaiye road, Akinwale Street, Kolawole Street, and Oredore Street in Lagos State, which were mainly for residential purposes, have given room for the invasion of commercial uses which now has a domineering effect on the old uses - residential uses. The study by Sui and Zeng (2001) also monitors land use changes, identifies driving forces and maps areas experiencing intense land use transformation. Repeatedly, properties have been created for specific uses only to be redeveloped within a short span of months or years for alternative functions that offer greater net benefits or returns.

According to Selmi (2010), change in use of land is any development or use different from the use last approved by the planning authority while the material change in use is described as the physical alteration of existing zoning conforming structure. One reason why no theory of land use pattern subsists in the long run can be explained using the analysis of the highest and best use which seeks to explain the competition for space among various human activities. Decisions to use land for a

particular purpose as well as demand for land at various points in time are subject to change. Households and corporate organizations at some point in time may need to expand, thus, either relocating or engaging in redevelopment of existing structures. There is also the inevitable process of obsolescence and reconstruction.

Due to the diversity of human activities, various land uses exist with a particular land use determined by topography, climate past (and present) social and religious, custom, legislation and legal decisions, demands for goods and services (including varying consumer preferences) and the policy of local and central government in the supply of public utilities and social services (Fischer & Nijkamp, 2019).

Furthermore, a particular land use can change into another land use as a piece of land can change from its natural as a forest to being used as a farmland before it becomes space to building residential uses thus, having a regime of succession of land uses. This succession process comes after "invasion." Invasion refers to the encroachment of one land use by another due to the economy. Social and cultural divergence between the old and the new may ultimately result in the new land use replacing the old. This practice of invasion and succession results in the highest and best use of land. In Akure, Ogungbemi (2012) observed that shops and offices compete for space, particularly along major transportation routes.

For Cervero, Guerra and Al (2017), access to transportation, markets, functional utilities and business requirements tends to attract new firms to central areas because of the increased cost of doing business out of the CBD but as these firms mature, they require more space. This development leads to relocation to low-rent areas or causes land use change in the form of property conversion to take place. According to Nwokaeze and Nwokaeze (2024), the conversation of one use to another is due to non-proper enforcement of the existing planning regulations. However, it could be said that this development is in realization of the principle of highest and best use thus, ascertaining the relevance of the theory. The existing planning laws have struggled to survive in the face of soaring demand for economic activities but because of the inevitable factor of obsolescence of existing buildings which has the stagnation or depreciation, invading prospective economic activities with higher returns succeed existing use and the influence of planning laws thus resulting in property conversion.

#### *Causes of purpose use change*

1. **Economic Factors:** Changes in economic conditions, such as rising land values or demand for different types of development, often drive purpose-use changes. For instance, areas with increasing commercial demand may see residential spaces converted to retail or office uses. (Carrión-Flores & Irwin, 2004).
2. **Population Growth:** Increased population density often necessitates changes in land use to accommodate more housing, services, and infrastructure. As urban areas expand, the purpose of land can shift from agricultural to residential or commercial. (Turner, Skole, Sanderson, Fischer, Fresco & Leemans, 1990)
3. **Technological Advancements:** Improvements in technology can enable new land uses or enhance existing ones. For

example, advancements in transportation can lead to increased suburbanization, prompting a shift from agricultural to residential or commercial land uses (Bhatta, 2010).

4. Policy and Regulation Changes: Shifts in government policies, such as zoning laws or land-use regulations, can lead to purpose-use changes. For example, changes in zoning may allow previously restricted commercial activities in residential areas (Schneider & Woodcock, 2008).

5. Cultural and Social Factors: Changes in societal preferences and lifestyles can influence land use. For example, a growing preference for mixed-use developments may prompt conversions from single-use residential or commercial buildings to mixed-use structures (Verburg, Ritsema van Eck, de Nijs & Schot, 2004).

*Similarities Between Land-Use Change and Purpose-Use Change*

1. Spatial Transformation: Both land-use change and purpose-use change entail spatial transformations within a geographic area. They involve modifying the allocation and arrangement of land for different activities, such as residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, or agricultural purposes.

2. Human Intervention: Both processes typically result from human interventions, decisions, and activities, whether driven

by economic development, urbanization, demographic shifts, policy changes, or environmental considerations.

3. Regulatory Framework: Land-use and purpose-use change are often subject to regulatory frameworks, such as zoning ordinances, land-use plans, environmental regulations, and development policies. These regulations may dictate permissible changes in land use and guide spatial planning and management efforts.

4. Impacts on Communities: Both types of change can have significant impacts on communities and the environment. They can affect the quality of life, economic opportunities, social dynamics, environmental sustainability, and resilience of urban and rural areas.

5. Adaptive Processes: Land-use change and purpose-use change are adaptive processes that respond to evolving societal needs, economic conditions, technological advancements, and environmental pressures. They reflect dynamic interactions between human activities and the natural environment.

6. Multifaceted Considerations: Both processes require consideration of multifaceted factors, including land availability, market demand, infrastructure provision, environmental sustainability, cultural values, and community preferences. Decision-makers must balance competing interests and priorities to achieve desired outcomes (Seto & Ramankutty, 2016).

TABLE 1: Differences between Land-Use Change and Purpose-Use Change

No	Land Use Change	Purpose Use Change
1	Land-use change refers to broader alterations in the overall utilization of land, including changes in land cover types such as forests, agriculture, urban areas, and natural habitats. It encompasses transformations in the landscape's primary functions and activities. (Turner, Skole, Sanderson, Fischer, Fresco & Leemans, 1990; Seto & Ramankutty, 2016).	Purpose-use change, on the other hand, focuses specifically on modifications in the intended or permitted uses of land within a smaller scale, such as individual plots, neighbourhoods, or zoning districts. It involves shifts in the designated purposes or activities allowed on a particular piece of land. (Phelps & Tewdwr-Jones, 2020).
2	Land-use change can involve significant transformations over large geographic areas and extended periods. It may include the conversion of natural habitats to agricultural fields, urban expansion into previously rural areas, or reforestation efforts on degraded lands. (Mabogunje, 1968; Pérez et al., 2021).	Purpose-use change tends to be more localized and incremental, occurring within specific parcels of land or relative proximity. Examples include converting a vacant lot from residential to commercial use, rezoning a neighbourhood to allow for mixed-use development, or repurposing a building from industrial to residential use. (Schneider & Woodcock, 2008).
3	Land-use change may involve regulatory processes and land management decisions at various levels, including national, regional, and local governments. It often requires comprehensive land use planning, environmental assessments, and public consultations to address potential impacts and ensure sustainable development. (Bhatta, 2010).	Purpose-use change is typically governed by zoning ordinances, land use regulations, and planning policies established by local authorities. These regulations dictate permissible changes in land use within specific zones or districts and may require formal approvals or permits for alterations in land use. (Seto & Ramankutty, 2016).
4	Drivers of land-use change can be diverse and complex, including population growth, economic development, urbanization, agricultural expansion, infrastructure projects, and environmental factors such as climate change and natural disasters. Its impacts can affect ecosystems, biodiversity, water resources, air quality, and overall landscape functionality. (Turner et al., 1990; Seto & Ramankutty, 2016).	Purpose-use change is often driven by more localized factors, such as market demand, land value appreciation, demographic shifts, neighbourhood revitalization efforts, or changes in community preferences. Its impacts are typically more immediate and directly influence the character, function, and aesthetics of specific areas within a community. (Phelps & Tewdwr-Jones, 2020).

The summary of Table 1 above is that although land-use change and purpose-use change have similar characteristics and are often used interchangeably, they are not necessarily the same phenomenon. The transformation observed in Diobu which this study unpacks is purpose-use change, where the land use conversion is not total but a change in the purpose for which the properties are used without any regulatory authorization.

III. MATERIALS AND METHOD

The study utilized the mixed method research (MMR) methodology and the approach of inquiry is the explanatory sequential method which comprises the collection of

quantitative and then, qualitative data. Quantitative data was obtained from a multi-stage probability sample of one hundred (100) respondents, as a one-time cross-sectional survey of households using semi-structured questionnaires, drawn from five (5) streets selected purposively. Survey questionnaires were distributed proportionally using a simple random sampling technique. The streets were mapped using QGIS version 3.22.14 software. Qualitative data was obtained from government records and open-ended interviews with eight (8) key informants. The interviews targeted community stakeholders; chiefs and community development committee members, vigilante leaders and market association leaders. The

data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and patterns.

#### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

##### Causes of Purpose Use Change in the Study Area

The data from this study examined the main causes of purpose use change in Diobu as several factors are integral in the formation of these changes. These factors are part of the causes of change and the shift from residential purpose use to commercial uses or mixed uses. The data in Table 2 show each of these elements and their diverse impact on the changes. Emphasis is placed on the causes with significant impact.

##### 1. Economic Activities

As an area with increasing urbanization, commerce has led primarily to the demand for space in the study area. The pull factors are present and form an attraction to individual and businesses that increases the need to repurpose their establishments and capitalize on the bustling environment. Table 2 captures this impact, showing that 66% of the respondents rated economic activities as very significant, reflecting the high impact of economic factors on purpose-use change. This transformation is largely motivated by the potential for higher income returns from commercial rather than residential uses as observed by the key informants, thus, incentivizing property owners to modify their properties accordingly.

TABLE 2: Rating of causes of purpose use change in the study area

S/No.	Factors	Very Significant (5)	Significant (4)	Moderate (3)	Insignificant (2)	Very Insignificant (1)
1	Population growth	59	34	6	0	1
2	Economic activities	66	31	3	0	0
3	Lack of urban planning and regulation	25	15	18	25	17
4	Government policies	4	13	21	33	29
5	Real estate development	5	8	22	35	30
6	Land value	16	14	22	24	24
7	Accessibility	19	30	33	10	8
8	Infrastructure available	19	33	34	11	3
9	Proximity to markets	71	17	10	2	0

##### 2. Population Growth

The demographic data in the study show that 35% of respondents fall within the ages of 26-35 which demonstrates a vibrant aspect of the neighbourhood. Typically, an economic area with a high and active population in turn intensifies the pressure and demand for quality and affordable housing, services, and even commercial spaces. As a result, residential areas are increasingly predisposed to commercial or mixed uses to accommodate the needs of the growing population. Table 2 further supports this, with 59% of the respondents rating population growth as very significant in driving purpose-use changes, showing its strong impact in altering land use patterns in Diobu.

##### 3. Proximity to Markets and Accessibility

The location of Diobu in the urban center and accessibility to commercial centers, play a crucial role in driving purpose use change. This ease of access encourages property owners to repurpose their property for commercial uses as proximity to these markets boosts the desirability and potential profitability of properties, Table 2 shows that 71% of the respondents rated proximity to markets as a very significant factor, underscoring its pivotal role in driving the shift from residential to commercial applications. This proximity not only increases demand for business spaces but also accelerates the rate at which residential areas are converted into commercially viable properties.

##### 4. Lack of Effective Urban Planning and Regulation

There is an absence of stringent urban planning regulations in Port Harcourt (Nwokaeze & Nwokaeze (2022); Nwokaeze & Nwokaeze (2024) as is evident in Diobu, which has facilitated an environment where purpose-use changes occur with limited oversight. Although zoning regulations exist, their enforcement appears inconsistent, allowing property owners to repurpose

their buildings with minimal restrictions. This regulatory gap is evident with 42% of respondents observing that current urban planning policies are ineffective, and 46% are uncertain about their adequacy, highlighting the perceived ineffectiveness of existing zoning practices. The mixed responses reflect a lack of confidence in the regulatory framework, which has contributed to a reactive approach to land use management and enabled unchecked transformations toward commercial conversions. Table 2 indicates that 25% of the respondents consider a lack of effective urban planning and regulation as having a very significant impact in influencing purpose use change. Interestingly, another 25% opine that it is insignificant, 18% rate it as moderate, 17% consider it very insignificant and 15% rate it significant. The lack of effective urban planning and regulation, though a negative phenomenon is regarded as positive because public resentment of development control in Port Harcourt is enormous. Key informants noted that there have been cases of assault on development control officials in the neighbourhood.

##### 5. Factors with less impact

Table 2 further shows that some factors have less impact on purpose use change such as; real estate development (35% Insignificant, 30% Very insignificant, 21% Moderate, Significant 8% and 5% Very significant). Government policies also had less impact with 4% very significant, 29% very insignificant, and 33% insignificant. Land value too was 24% very insignificant, and significant, 22% moderate, 14% significant, and 16% very significant. Accessibility and availability of infrastructure also performed poorly in influencing purpose use change. This buttresses the unique character of the Diobu neighborhood and how it reacts to the dynamics of urbanization.

##### Extent of Purpose Use Change in the Study Area

In assessing the extent of purpose-use change in Diobu, the findings reveal a substantial shift from residential to commercial use, along with a marked increase in mixed-use spaces. This transformation points to a widespread trend influenced by urbanization and commercialization pressures, reshaping the neighbourhood’s spatial dynamics as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

The data indicates that residential-to-commercial conversions are prevalent in Diobu, with 93.8% of respondents reporting observable land-use changes within their neighbourhoods. The majority of these changes involve the conversion of residential spaces into commercial establishments, such as retail stores, offices, and various other

business venues. This shift illustrates a notable reallocation of space within Diobu, where the residential character of many areas is gradually giving way to commercial activities, fueled by demand for business premises in prime locations. The study further emphasizes the extent of this trend, as 89% of the respondents rated the transformation from residential to commercial as very significant with a sharp drop in residential use from 87% to 15.2% while commercial use skyrocketed from 6% to 53.5%. Changes from residential to industrial and commercial to residential received lower ratings, reinforcing that the primary conversion observed is from residential to commercial as revealed by Figures 1 and 2.

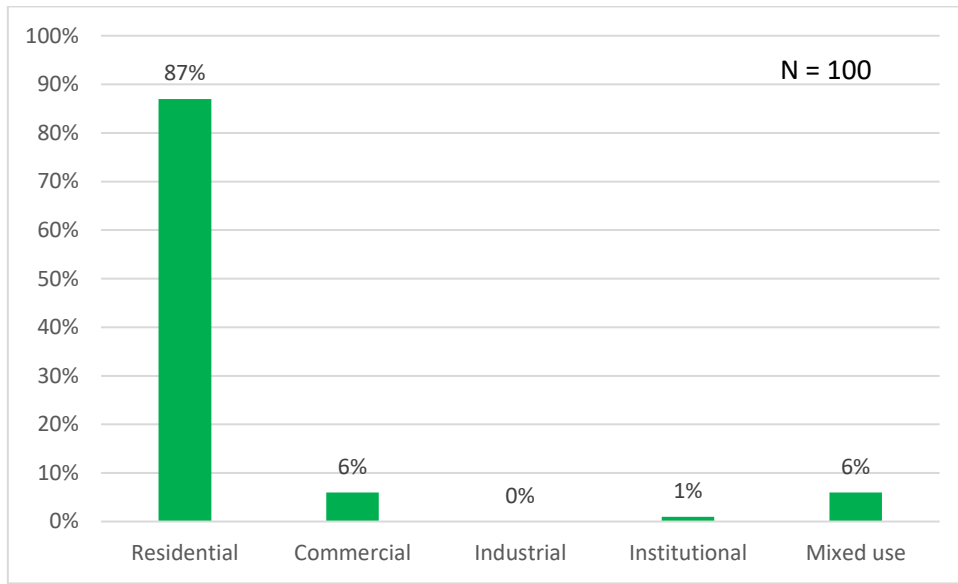


Fig. 1: Initial use of buildings

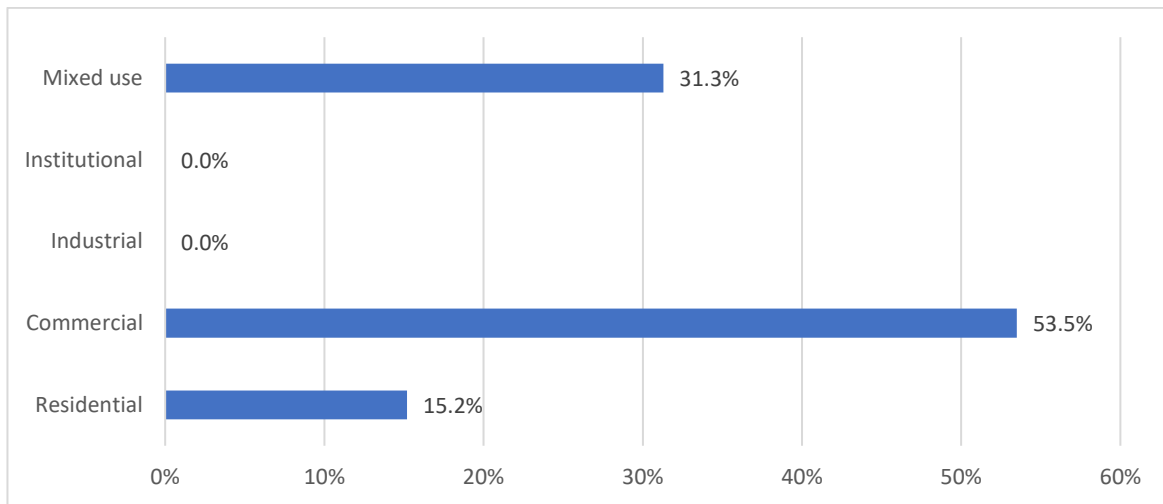


Fig. 2: Current use of buildings

Key informants observed that the conversion of purpose use from residential to commercial use usually begins on a small scale and proliferates organically. Ostensibly, similar goods and services congregate forming an agglomeration economy such that some streets are now known by the preponderance of

trading activity that occurs in it. For example, Ojoto Street is known for household appliances like refrigerators and air conditioners; Iloabuchi is known for electrical and electronic types of equipment while tyres and car parts are found in

Anozie Street. These trading activities are both retail and wholesale.

In addition to the shift toward commercial use, there was a notable rise in mixed-use spaces in Diobu. Originally residential buildings were increasingly inclined to commercial purposes, a trend aligning with the community’s evolving needs and growing population. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate a new adaptation, showing that mixed-use increased drastically from 6% to 31.3%. The residents now identify their buildings as

mixed-use, combining living spaces with commercial functionalities. This shift reflects an effort by property owners to maximize both the utility and profitability of their properties, responding to the demand for spaces that cater to residential and business needs. Consequently, buildings previously serving a single purpose are now configured to support a combination of residences, shops, and offices, showcasing the community’s adjustment to economic opportunities and spatial constraints.

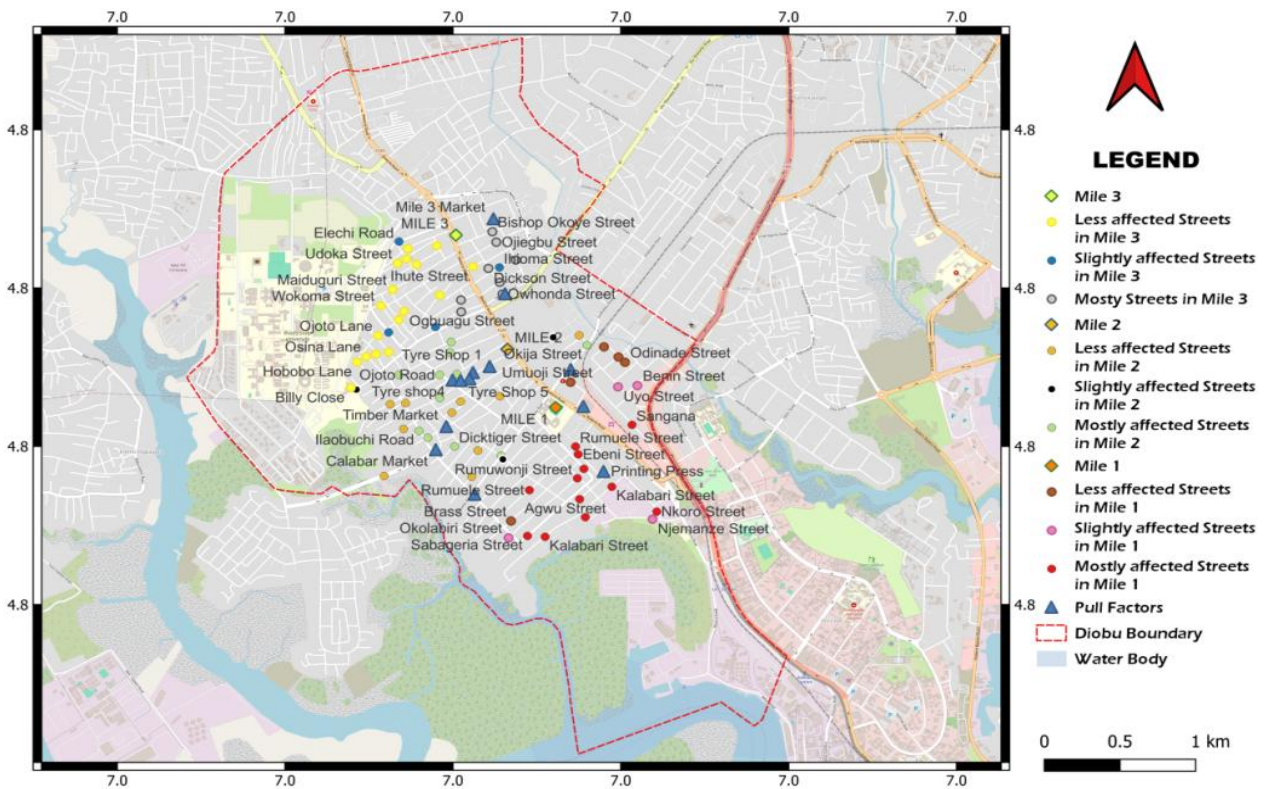


Fig. 3: Spatial distribution of market influence on purpose-use changes in Diobu

The extent of purpose-use change in Diobu is substantial and widespread, impacting various areas across the neighbourhood. The data provides insights into the influential factors driving these changes, with economic activities and proximity to markets indicating a strong market influence in the neighbourhood. Figure 3 shows the spatial distribution of market influence on purpose-use change in Diobu. The map contextualizes the reasons behind such a high volume of residential spaces being repurposed for commercial or mixed uses with market forces as pull factors. The findings suggest that this shift is not an isolated occurrence but part of a broader, structural transformation where residential land use is progressively supplemented or replaced by commercial and mixed-use arrangements, which is now a new normal in the area.

*The Effect of Purpose Use Change on Neighborhood Quality in the Study Area*

In assessing the effect of purpose-use changes on neighbourhood quality in Diobu, the findings reveal both positive and negative impacts. While some respondents

acknowledged improvements in economic opportunities, others highlighted significant concerns regarding environmental quality, safety, and housing affordability. The figures provided in the analysis illustrate the mixed nature of these effects and their implications for neighbourhood quality.

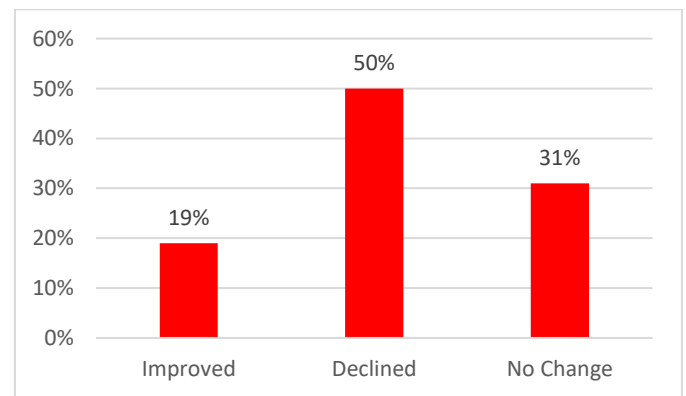


Fig. 5: Perception of purpose-use changes on quality of life in the neighbourhood

Figure 5 indicates that 19% of respondents have the perception that changes in purpose use have improved their quality of life, while 50% believe it has declined, highlighting concerns about potential negative impacts such as increased traffic congestion, loss of community cohesion, high crime rate, nuisance and pollution, and challenges of housing affordability. 31% reported no change, suggesting a polarized view on how these transformations are affecting their daily living conditions.

Whereas, one of the most positive outcomes of purpose-use change in Diobu is the reported increase in economic opportunities, as more residential spaces are converted for commercial use, business and employment prospects have expanded, benefiting local economies. Thus, 36% of respondents noted improved economic activities as a direct impact of purpose-use changes in their neighbourhoods. This suggests that, for some residents, the commercial transformations have positively affected their economic well-being, offering new income-generating opportunities and fostering business growth within the community. However, the study further probed the negative outcomes of purpose-use changes. Data in Table 3 and responses from key informants show the areas of concern.

TABLE 3: Negative Impact of Purpose-Use Change

S/No.	Negative impact	No	%
1	Housing affordability	55	21.6
2	Environmental quality decline	64	25.1
3	Access to services and amenities	31	12.2
4	Traffic congestion	27	10.6
5	Crime and insecurity	50	19.6
6	Social cohesion	26	10.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>100</b>

### 1. Environmental Quality Decline

The influx of commercial activities has led to concerns about environmental quality. “Increased commercial use has introduced pollution, waste, and higher traffic levels which were non-existent previously in Diobu” are the exact words of one key informant (an octogenarian) who has lived in the neighbourhood for over 50 years. Many residents view these occurrences as a deterioration of their living environment. Table 3 illustrates this issue, with 25.1% of respondents identifying environmental quality as one of the most affected aspects of neighbourhood life due to purpose-use changes. This decrease in environmental quality reflects how intensified commercial development can disrupt community aesthetics and visual quality, reduce green spaces, and contribute to noise and air pollution as shown in Figures 6, 7, and 8.



Fig. 6: A typical residential building converted to commercial use in Anozie street, Mile 2, Diobu, Port Harcourt.



Figs. 7 & 8: Front view of residential buildings used for commercial activities (mixed use) in Abissa and Odunze Streets, Mile 3, Diobu, Port Harcourt.

### 2. Crime and insecurity

The findings further reveal an increase in crime and security concerns associated with purpose-use changes. As residential

areas are increasingly repurposed for commercial use, the rise in traffic and visitor inflow has been linked to higher crime rates and security risks in the neighbourhood. This was corroborated

by a key informant who is a member of the Diobu Vigilante Group who confirmed the prevalence of crimes such as; burglary, cult-related homicides, kidnapping, robbery and pick-pocketing. He further noted that the neighbourhood has become a crime flash point and is challenging for the Police to secure, hence, the vigilante group was established as a community policing initiative with huge success. Table 3 indicates that 22.1% of respondents feel that crime and security have worsened as a result of purpose-use changes, signaling that the shift toward commercial land use may be compromising neighbourhood safety. This perceived increase in crime rates underscores the need for enhanced security measures in areas undergoing such land-use transitions.

### 3. *Housing Affordability*

Another adverse effect of purpose-use changes is the impact on housing affordability. With more residential properties being converted for commercial purposes as shown in Figures 6, 7, and 8, the availability of affordable residential housing has decreased, putting pressure on residents seeking affordable living spaces. Table 3 shows that 21.6% of respondents cited housing affordability as a primary concern linked to purpose-use changes. This suggests that the restructuring of residential spaces to commercial use has contributed to an increase in housing demand and costs, making it more difficult for lower-income residents to find affordable housing options within their neighbourhoods. Key informants noted that the Diobu neighbourhood is a planned high-density, low-income residential area with fewer commercial activities, but that has changed tremendously.

### 4. *Social cohesion*

A key informant who is an indigenous elite observed that some communities in Rebisi, Ikwerre ethnic nationality owned the Diobu neighbourhood before the government acquired it. However, these communities have lost social cohesion as a result of urbanization. Furthermore, purpose-use changes have eroded the sense of community and shared values which natives and residents in Diobu previously had. 26% of the respondents in Table 3 noted that social cohesion has declined in the neighbourhood as more living space gives way for commercial activities and the population become more heterogeneous with the vagaries of urbanism.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study on purpose-use changes in Diobu highlights significant shifts from residential to commercial and mixed uses, driven by economic growth, population increase, and proximity to commercial hubs. These changes have led to both positive and negative impacts, while they have expanded economic opportunities and enhanced commercial viability, they have also strained neighbourhood quality by reducing environmental quality, increasing crime rates, and diminishing housing affordability. The findings underscore the need for well-balanced urban planning and zoning regulations to manage these changes sustainably, aligning urban growth with the needs of both businesses and local people. This is the creed of SDG 11- Make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the following measures should be put in place as strategies to manage purpose-use change in the study area;

### 1. *Implementation of Stricter Zoning Regulations*

Stricter and more consistent zoning laws should be enacted and enforced to maintain a balanced land-use structure. The Planning Authority should clearly define residential, commercial, and mixed-use zones to ensure that land-use changes do not negatively impact neighborhood quality. These zoning policies should address land-use conflicts and prioritize residential stability while accommodating commercial growth in designated areas. By enforcing clearer and more rigid zoning laws, the community can better manage the balance between residential and commercial areas, preserving the neighborhood's residential character while still accommodating economic growth.

### 2. *Enhance Urban Planning Policies*

Urban planning should take a proactive approach, creating comprehensive development plans that anticipate future growth while preserving essential neighborhood qualities. Planners should integrate environmental standards, traffic management, and infrastructure upgrades in the urban plans for Diobu, ensuring that rapid urbanization does not compromise livability. Effective urban planning involves proactive measures, such as structured development plans and land-use guidelines, to guide the growth and evolution of the neighborhood. Prioritizing urban planning, and emphasizing the need for well-coordinated and long-term development strategies to prevent haphazard transformations in land use transformation is imperative.

### 3. *Increase Community Involvement*

Encouraging active community participation in decision-making processes can lead to more inclusive planning and balanced development. Platforms for regular community feedback on zoning and land-use issues, such as neighborhood councils, can improve transparency and accountability, giving residents a voice in shaping the future of their neighborhood. By incorporating the input and perspectives of residents, urban planners and government authorities can ensure that land-use policies align with the community's needs and priorities. This approach fosters collaboration and accountability, ensuring that purpose-use changes are implemented in a way that benefits the community as a whole.

### 4. *Strengthen Government Oversight and Development Control*

Government oversight should be reinforced to monitor and regulate land-use changes effectively. This includes increased funding for local planning authorities and improved coordination with other regulatory bodies. Effective development control, regular inspections and evaluations should be conducted to ensure compliance with zoning regulations. Government can invoke the power of eminent domain when necessary to preserve the urban landscape (Nwokaeze, Okonny & Visigah, 2025). Active government



intervention is essential to enforce zoning regulations, monitor land-use changes, and mitigate any adverse effects on neighborhood quality. Effective government involvement can help prevent unauthorized uses and conversions and provide support for sustainable development.

##### 5. Public Awareness and Education Campaigns

Public awareness initiatives can educate residents and property owners about the benefits and responsibilities associated with sustainable land use. Workshops, informational sessions, and online resources can encourage compliance with zoning laws and foster a shared commitment to community well-being and environmental quality. Raising awareness can encourage community members to support sustainable development and make informed decisions about property usage. These awareness initiatives can target focused groups to foster greater community cooperation in managing purpose-use changes.

##### 6. Support for Affordable Housing Initiatives

To address the reduction in housing affordability, the government should introduce affordable housing policies, such as rent control in highly commercialized areas or incentives for developers to maintain residential units. This can help balance the demand for commercial space with the need for affordable living options, ensuring that long-term residents are not displaced by urban changes.

##### 7. Rezoning of Sections of the Neighbourhood

As land use dynamics change with the vagaries of urbanization, there is a need for urban planning to respond to these variations by rezoning some sections of the neighbourhood that have completely been altered. Some of these sections or streets can be rezoned to commercial or mixed-use because urban planning should prioritize the right plan for the right people at the right time. This will engender inclusivity and sustainability.

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