Constraints in ameliorating urban habitat in Cameroon: Case study of Buea municipality

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Abstract
Demographic changes in Buea, capital of Cameroon’s South West region are taking place without quantitative and qualitative improvement in urban environmental services. Aggravated by improper management approach, lack of planning and high risk topography, the situation poses challenges to urban expansion. In addition to mounting housing deficits, poor housing practices and continuous hikes in cost of building land and rentable accommodation, conflicts exist between stakeholders in building land and accommodation sector which are partly attributed to the existence of natural and man-made factors that affect municipal expansion. The paper examines the problems and conflicts created by urban expansion in a municipality which is inadequately served with basic urban infrastructure and services and recommends collaboration between the various stakeholders and actors in the accommodation sector as the only way to lasting solution to growing urban problems in the municipality.

Key words: municipality, accommodation, stakeholders, collaboration, topography, residential districts, environmental problems, housing practices

1. Introduction
Housing is one of the most important basic necessities of life known to tremendously affect health and well-being of individuals and communities. It is widely acknowledged that adequate housing is not only essential for good life, but equally a key requirement for an efficient and satisfied force and the foundation of satisfactory community life. Furthermore researchers have shown that housing can affect mental and physical health, both positively and negatively (Fanning, 1967; Macpherson, 1979 and Riaz 1987). According to Cameroon’s National Five Year Development Plan (1971-76), housing does not only represent one of the basic human needs in terms of protection against natural elements, but also has a profound impact on health, welfare and productivity of the individual. It is a strong and indispensable casual element in all manner of progress initiated and sustained by both the individual and his society. According to Abrams (1964), housing is not only shelter but part of the fabric of neighbourhood life and of the whole social milieu affecting many facets of industrialization, economic activity and development. Nations and communities living in good housing conditions have always recorded fantastic progress in economic output and national development.

Demographic changes in Cameroon have resulted to increased demand for housing and rentable accommodation in urban areas. Due to increased demand and high cost of building land in urban areas households are acquiring land even in areas officially forbidden for human settlement(Amrobse Njoh,2002). The high demand for building land and inability of government agencies in the accommodation sector to monitor building construction in most residential areas has led to an increase or emergence of unplanned urban settings, which undermines city planning regulations on land acquisition (Mabunje,1996). The lack of competent planning, coordination, and monitoring of building construction has led to poor housing practices in most residential areas of urban centres( Adeyeni, 1994 and Castells, M 1997). The lack of proper planning and inadequate urban infrastructure has been
identified as push factors encouraging landlords to defy town planning regulations in urban Cameroon. Due to lack of planning proper planning most residential areas do not have access to amenities like roads, water and electricity. The situation has been aggravated by ineffective collaboration between official stakeholders¹ in land and urban housing (Ministry of State Property and Land tenure MINSPLT, 2006; Ministry of urban Development and Housing, MINUDH, 2009). In addition there exists a policy gap between official and private sector stakeholders responsible for urban accommodation.

Due to ever increasing demand for building land and rentable accommodation and ineffective monitoring of building construction as earlier mentioned most houses are constructed in total defiance of city and town planning regulations. The increased demand for building land and accommodation has also encouraged sales of land without title, contrary to official regulations on land acquisition in Cameroon (Chrsping Pettang et al, 1993). The increasing demand for building land and rental accommodation has been attributed to increasing urban population attributed to increase in birth rate and rural urban migration resulting from rural poverty and unemployment (Ngoe Fritz, 2012).

According to a UN Habitat Report in 1996, urbanization in Africa and the third world has been occurring as a result unabated rural-urban migration as well as the gradual transformation of rural areas to urban centres. According to the same report poorly managed cities have led to the deterioration of urban living conditions and the existence of urban poverty attributed to the inability of many countries, national and local governments to plan for the population increases, and failure to provide the required infrastructure, services and jobs (Ogunsakakin L, 1998). Inadequate or poor planning of most urban residential areas in Cameroon have resulted to poor housing systems which are responsible for environmental problems of hygiene and sanitation. Moreover, there also exist conflicts between stakeholders in the demand and supply side of the accommodation sector resulting from inadequate collaboration between institutions responsible for urban housing and accommodation.

According to Mope Simo (2003), tackling urban habitat problems in Cameroon requires an understanding of the socio-economic and cultural milieu, including government policy on acquisition of land in urban areas. In Cameroon land is either owned communally or individually; hence individuals have the right to sell land. Consequently due to increased pressure on building land, individuals sell land in fragrant violation of Decree Number 2005-487 of 16 December, 2005 which amended the provisions of Decree Number 76/165/April 1976 on the modalities of acquiring building land in urban areas. Both decrees stipulate that individual owning land should not engage in sales without acquiring land titles. Two factors have aggravated the sales of land without land certificates in Cameroon:

- Increase in demand for building land, and
- Difficulties encountered in obtaining land certificates
- Colonial heritage that respected customary rights in land ownership

The phenomenon of giving out land without certificates has also been influenced by the fact that prior to growing urbanization, government respected customary laws² which permitted individuals to sell land without title (Njoh A, 1995 and Samba Mokoko, 1996).

**Methodology**

The methodology adopted for the study is the stakeholders approach. The stakeholders are landlord, tenants, the Buea Municipal Council (BMC), Ministry of Land, Survey and State Property (MINLSSP), Ministry of Urban Development and Housing (MINUDH), and Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation(MINTAD). A total of 50 questionnaires were administered per

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¹ Official stakeholders in urban accommodation sector in Cameroon are the urban Councils, Ministry of State Property and Land tenure, and Ministry of Urban Development and Housing

² The amendment of decree number 76/165/ of April 1976 officially granted the Various regional head quarters to issue land titles instead of Yaounde alone.

³ Customary laws: Colonial Governments respected customary laws on issues concerning sale of land. After independence new laws were promulgated which failed to acknowledge customary laws on land matters in urban areas? This has led to disagreement between customary laws and possession of land titles as stipulated by subsequent Decrees
district as follows: ten questionnaires were randomly allocated to landlords and 40 to tenants. Focus group discussions were separately held with land lords and tenants; while group discussions were also held separately with the institutional stakeholders. Research investigation were focused on the type of houses in the municipality, type of construction materials used, household occupants and type of accommodation, environmental problems, household occupation by density are and by type of accommodation in the municipality. Data analysis was by use of tables, figures and bar charts. Based on the existing characteristics and land use the Buea Municipality was divided into three district zones based on population density:

- High density residential districts with population density of more than 500 persons per square kilometre of land;
- Medium density residential districts with population density between 100-300 persons per square kilometre;
- Low density population districts of less than 100 persons occupying a square kilometre of land.

Based on ethical consideration, residents in each of the three zones initially visited to seek their voluntary cooperation with the study team. The greatest cooperation was obtained in the medium and high density zones of Molyko, Small Suppo, Great Suppo and Mile 16 where many residents occupy houses on rental basis. The majority of the houses in the low density areas of Bokwango, Buea Town, Small Suppo and Mile 16 were owner occupied and some of the residents approached declined to participate. The least cooperation was given to the study in high density areas of Buea Town and Bokwango where houses were passed down from one generation to the next by inheritance and are largely owner occupied.

Description and history of study site

The Buea municipality is located in Fako Division and serves as the capital of Cameroon’s South West region. It is the nearest urban settlement to Mount Cameroon; an active volcano located in the North of the municipality extending west wards to the Atlantic Ocean on the West Coast of Africa. In the North West and South West of the municipality are found vast banana and tea estates owned by the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC). Buea has a humid cold climate while most of its landscape is rocky and stony due to deposits of volcanic sediments from numerous eruptions that occurred even before the settlement was established (Aaron Neba, 1982 and Maurice Tsalefac, 2006). The Buea municipality is divided into a number of settlements, namely Buea Town, Bokwango, Small Suppo, Great Suppo, Molyko, Muea and Mile 16 and Mile 17. Formerly Mile 17 was not a settlement but has attracted growing populations and construction of residential and commercial houses due to the transfer of the Motor Park from Buea town and its proximity to the University of Buea. Comparatively, Buea town has the poorest topography which is characterized by hills, rocks, stones and undulations than Bokwango which is comparatively a plane. Buea town and Bokwango are nearer the Cameroon Mountain than other settlements. Great and Small Suppo are stony and hilly and less rocky compared to Buea town and Bokwango; while Molyko, Muea and Mile 16 and Mile 17 are planes which are relatively less rocky than the other settlements. Formerly these settlements were separated by vast portions of undulating landscape but current demographic changes and high demand for building land have led to the gradual integration of the settlements which now make up the municipality. The presence of Cameroon Mountain and the plantations constitutes the natural and man-made factors which are greatly limiting the landscape for expansion of the city.

Buea has served as German colonial capital for Cameroon and latter the British Capital for Southern Cameroon mandated territory. In all these periods the municipality had never experienced demographic changes to affect its landscape. The Cameroon Mountain is an active volcano with the following records of documented eruptions: 1909, 1992, 1954, 1959, 1999 and 2002 (Aaron Neba 1982, MINGEOLMINES, 2005). However, these eruptions have never affected the settlement directly.

4 Landlords are the owners of houses hired by tenants or also land owners.
The growing perception of impending eruptions and the ethnographic nature of the environment reflect the nature of houses constructed in the settlement. ‘Buea town’ which is nearer the mountain has predominantly wooden houses while Suppo constitutes both wooden houses and cement blocks constructed houses. Molyko, Muea and Mile 16 which are relatively planes have increasing number of block houses than wooden ones. Also the predominance of wooden houses in most parts of Buea has been due to ethnographic factors because formerly wood was abundant and cheap and therefore economical to construct wooden houses than other building materials that were relatively expensive and scarce. According to Municipal authorities wooden structures have been known to reduce the extent of destruction during tremors than block houses. It is strongly believed that both perceptions and impact of the mountain prevented households from constructing permanent structures compared to other parts of division. However in recent years there have been increasing number of block houses in most areas of the municipality due to increasing cost of wood accounted by deforestation, increasing distances from forests, cost of transportation, and the increasing use of industrial building materials which are more durable than wood. It was observed that wooden houses constitute the oldest houses in the municipality and most of them are dilapidating and increasingly being replaced by cement brick houses due to demographic accounted for by the establishment of Buea University since 1993. The demand for accommodation by the ever growing student populations has created accommodation crisis responsible for an increase in demand for building land and housing with Molyko highly affected because of its to the University. As a result households acquire building land even in high risk zones where human settlements have been officially forbidden. The demographic changes reflect the cost of rental accommodation in every area of the municipality with Molyko experiencing highest cost of both rental accommodation and building land compared to other areas in the municipality.

According to Buea council authorities (2010):

“Between 1962 to 1990, house rents and cost of building land in Buea was cheap in all areas of the present municipality. House rents ranged from 300 to 500 Francs per room in a wooden apartment and 600 to 1000 Francs per room in a block house depending on the location of the house. People who are presently land lords in Buea acquired many hectares of land for less than 30,000 Francs in those days. Today the situation has changed because few square metres of land sell for hundreds of thousand Francs”.

The above information highlights the cost of rentable accommodation and building land before the advent of urbanisation in the early nineties and the direct impact of demographic changes on the demand for building land and rentable accommodation. Buea municipality has one major highway linking the town from other areas of the division and the country as a whole. Most of the municipality is linear settlement due to inadequate or lack of roads. Buea municipality ranks among the most underdeveloped regional capitals in terms of infrastructure despite its historical importance compared to other regional capitals created after independence and reunification. Access roads are few and in many areas non existent. Most residential areas are enclave; making it difficult for households to have access to basic social amenities.

Presentation of results

Acquisition of land in urban Centres

In Cameroon land is officially acquired through the state layout and also from individuals who have land titles. However land can also be acquired from individuals without titles. The later way of acquiring building land is more popular in urban areas because the procedure are simple and less complicated than acquiring titled land( Njoh, 1995). Individuals without land titles have considerable influence over ownership, sale or transfer of land in the urban areas. According to the study, the proportion of individuals without land titles outnumbers those with land titles in the municipality and elsewhere. It was realised in Buea that land was formerly acquired with respect to with respect to customary laws which granted rights to individuals and communities to sell land. Another aspect realised in the study is that most land was handed down to individuals or their communities through inheritance and transfer of land was due in accordance to customary laws recognised by the British Colonial and German Colonial administrations. Thus a majority of land sales or transfer in Buea
municipality is done with respect to customary laws which conflict with official laws put in place by the modern or contemporary state. Acquisition of land through customary laws involves fulfilling some cultural rights required by the land owner. The requirements vary from one community to another based on the location of land. In Buea municipality after payment of money for the land transfer from to the new owner or land lord, a simple document is signed between the previous land owner and new land lord with witnesses. The witnesses always include the quarter heads, notables, family members and friends. The buyer and seller are asked to bring two witnesses each whose signatories are endorsed in the land agreement. The chief of the area also signs as custodian of the people. The buyer is asked to bring along food items meat, bottles of whisky, few crates of beer, and one bag of salt. Once an agreement is signed between the buyer and the seller, the ownership of the piece of land changes in favour of the buyer. After the agreement the food and drinks are served for all the participants to the agreement.

According to the study untitled landlords dominate the supply side of building land market because provisions of the decrees already mentioned conflict with customary loss on land ownership. According to MINSPLT, 2007 since the amendment of the decree number 76/165/ of April, 1976 by decree number2005-481 of 16 December 2005, there have been an increase in number of landowners with land titles in some settlements or districts of the Buea Municipality.

Main while a majority of the landlords interviewed in various districts of the municipality about the provisions of the amended decree complained that bottlenecks still existed at regional level because the process has been flawed with corruption and bureaucratic bottlenecks which contribute to delays in processing of the required documents. Landlords interviewed were expressed their opinion that bureaucracy and difficulties of obtaining land titles has encouraged sales of land without titles, poor planning of residential areas, and poor housing practices in various districts of the municipality; given the high demand for building land and rentable accommodation. Figure 1 indicates the proportion untitled land lords per district covered by the survey.

Figure 1. Proportion of landlords without titles

![Figure 1. Proportion of landlords without titles](image)

Evidence shows that untitled landlords dominate the supply of building land and housing in the municipality. Further evidence indicates that most land owners in Buea Town and Bokwango interviewed are yet to obtain land titles. It was realised that these settlements are dominantly inhabited by indigenous people and most land was acquired through inheritance. It was further observed that most landlords in Buea Town and Bokwango pay more allegiance to customary land laws on ownership and transfer than to the official regulations.

According to official statistics a number of factors have created limitations to municipal expansion in Buea and other towns in Fako division. The factors implicated are:
• The Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) which according to official statistics from MINSPLT occupies about 50% of the land mass of Fako Division
• The presence of the Cameroon Mountain which occupies vast areas of land which hinders the expansion of several towns notably Buea, and villages like Batoke, Bakingili, Idenau among others
• The presence of Atlantic Ocean which has greatly affected the expansion of coastal towns of Limbe and Tiko, including the coastal villages of Batoke, Bakingili, and Idenau.

These natural and man-made limitations coupled with high demand for building land have influenced price hikes for both building land and rentable housing. These factors have also encouraged the construction of houses in high risk zones\(^5\) (swamps and hills); and have also been implicated for the construction of storey buildings in contemporary Buea municipality. Presently due to pressure on land resulting from vast demographic changes taking place in many towns of Fako division, government and the local councils have compelled CDC to construct to surrender some of its land holdings for the development of village communities of the coastal towns of Limbe and Tiko; excluding Buea. It is hoped that government and its agencies will do same in Buea municipal area. The construction of storey buildings is raising concern of institutional stake holders due to tremors that accompany mountain eruption. These fears are obvious because Mount Cameroon is an active volcano which could erupt and cause large scale destruction of life and property. In addition most wooden houses are been transformed into cement block houses which are more vulnerable to destruction in the wake of tremors.

According to the regional director of Town Planning and Housing for South West Region:
“The increasing demand for building land and rentable accommodation has led to the phenomenon of constructing skyscrapers or storey buildings in Buea municipality. These types of houses could be seriously affected in the event of earth movements which accompany volcanic eruption”

These remarks by a statesman are obvious because the Cameroon Mountain is still an\(^6\) active volcano; and storey buildings in the municipality are not equipped with safeguards which monitor earth movements and give warnings for residents to evacuate prior to the occurrence of a tremor like buildings in Japan and other developed countries situated in high risk zones. These views have been supported by the work of Ayinsola and Olaluvi(2004), on an “Environmental assessment of building Failures “which recommended that storey buildings and sky scrappers are unsuitable in areas prone to tremors because inhabitants suffer immerse material damages and loss of life when buildings collapse during earthquakes or tremors. These views have also been well documented by (Njoh, 2002 and BMC, 2007).

**Problems of planning and demographic changes**

According to the study the problems of planning currently confronting the contemporary Buea municipality have their origin from the colonial period. Neither the German or British imperial administrations had a master plan for the town. Efforts at planning have been rendered ineffective due to enclavement, lack of access roads, poor topography, demographic pressure, disrespect of town planning regulations, and lack of a master plan for the city (MINSPLT, 2007 and BMC, 2010); it was realised that most houses are constructed without the knowledge of the municipal authorities and other institutional stakeholders for urban housing. Such houses have neither building plans, council approval nor is there any official supervision in course of construction to ensure that city and town planning regulations put in place are respected. Buildings were found randomly clustered along the few available roads making it difficult to construct more access roads without causing destruction in the neighbourhood. According to the Buea Municipal Council (2011) authorities desenclaving Buea municipality by creating access roads remains a herculean task which may lead to demolition of houses, increased poverty, crime rate, and loss of daily means of livelihood among the affected

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\(^5\) High risk zones are areas officially forbidden for households to construct houses. They include swampy areas, slopes, valleys and near hills, beside hills or around mountains.

\(^6\) Active volcano: During the 2002 Mount Cameroon eruptions geologists and other Scientists from Cameroon, USA, France and Britain indicated that the mountain has an unspecified number of eruptions before it could be declared domant.
households. According to the same authorities Buea municipality cannot be disenclaved without financial assistance from the government because the council lacks the necessary human and material resources to finance reconstruction, demolitions and resettlement of the affected populations. This study also identified lack or inadequate collaboration between institutional stakeholders in the accommodation sector due to similar functions allocated to them by the government.

Resolution of land disputes between actors
Any settlement confronted by challenges of changing demography is bound to develop conflicts when there is inadequate planning of residential areas (Arimal. B and Adeabgo, 2000). The major areas of conflict identified by the study include double dealing, trespassing or encroachment between actors on land in Buea Municipality. Customary rights permit the double dealer to reimburse money paid to the second client or buyer while the first client is made to assume ownership of the land. If the former land owner refuses to reimburse the money to the second client or does not allocate any land to the second client to compensate for the land lost; the matter is forwarded to the Buea Land Consultative Board including all parties and witnesses to the agreement. The conflicting parties bear the responsibility of entertainment and other costs related to the settlement. Under customary laws when an individual double deals or trespasses, all parties to the agreement; that is, the chief, quarter heads, notables, family members and other signatories to the agreement are invited for settlement of the dispute. It is only when the two parties disagree with the ruling of the traditional authorities that the matter is forwarded to the Land Consultative Board.

Double dealing and trespassing invokes serious repercussions for the defaulter. The matter is always forwarded to the land consultative board and all the institutional stakeholders are invited in all the proceedings. According to the respondents, resolving a land issue under the supervision of land consultative board is not only expensive but takes a long time. The dissatisfied client and the defaulter bear the cost of all expenditure demanded by the stakeholders including the inspection fee and feeding. Gifts worth colossal sums of money are also handed to the members of the official or institutional stakeholders in every hearing session. One of the respondents who happened to be a victim of titled land dispute testified that it takes many years for the land consultative board to resolve a land matter. In Buea it is only the land consultative board which authorises conflicting parties to take hearings to court when they are dissatisfied with its rulings.(BMC, 2011 and MINDUH,2010).

Characteristics and types of houses per district
The characteristics and type of houses constructed and hired for accommodation in Buea is a reflection of location, income level of the occupant, and the type of accommodation. Most houses constructed in Buea Town are wooden because historically this district was nearer the mountain forest which provided cheap wood for construction. Formerly wooden houses were cheaper to build than cement block houses, a reason why Buea town has been dominated by old dilapidating wooden houses. Another reason behind the dominance of wooden houses is that the during eruptions the impact created in wooden houses is always less severe than that of cement block houses. According to a 77 years old resident who has witnessed several eruptions from childhood, the extent of damage and destruction experienced is more severe to residents in cement block houses than those living in wooden houses. As a result many people in Buea preferred to construct or live in wooden houses because they were cheaper to build and also to hire than cement block houses. Thus even in contemporary Buea municipality, wooden houses are cheaper to hire than cement block houses. This explains why houses

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7 Double dealing is a situation whereby a landlord or owner sells a piece of land to more than one person. The phenomenon is common in areas undergoing rapid population growth and high demand for land.
8 Encroachment is when a buyer of land or landlord alters the agreed land boundaries and puts into use land not belonging to him with reference to the agreement.
9 The Land Consultative Board comprises the Senior and assistant Divisional officers, the mayor of the town or city, and members from institutional stakeholders already mentioned.
are relatively cheaper in Buea Town than other parts of the municipality despite the high level of urbanisation.

According to the survey 72.8% of the respondents in Buea town live in wooden buildings, while 27.2% lived in cement block houses in collective buildings consisting of single, and multiple room apartment. Also in Great Suppo, 56% of the respondents testified that they live in wooden houses; while is 48% of those interviewed live in cement block houses. Study observation showed replacement of wooden house by cement block houses in Great Suppo and Small Suppo including the introduction of storey buildings in the same areas. Other observations made in these two districts include innovations of old wooden buildings and an increase in economic activities even in the most remote parts of the settlements due to the invading demographic changes.

Also in Molyko 28.8% of the respondents live or occupied wooden houses while 61.2% occupy cement block buildings in single or collective buildings. It was further observed that Molyko has greater commercialisation of houses than other districts surveyed. There was also a gradual replacement of wooden houses to modern cement block buildings due to increase in demand for rentable housing caused by the annual influx of students in the Buea University and other institutions of learning. It was realised that wooden houses which attracted low cost for rents in other districts of the municipality attracted relatively higher rents in Molyko due to high demand for accommodation by students and owners commercial businesses.

Main while 62.8% of the respondents in Muea live in wooden houses; while 38.4% live in cement block constructed buildings with relatively lower cost than in Molyko and Small or Great Suppo. About 55% of the respondents in Mile 16 live in wooden houses while 45% stay in block houses. These areas have also been threatened with rapid urbanisation due to their proximity to Molyko. Most of the respondents in Mile 17 were businessmen who operate in block houses but do not live in Mile 16; Most of the businessmen were attracted by the Mile 17 Motor park which has attracted a lot of commercial activities in the area.

According to the Buea Municipal Council (2011), the plane like nature of Mile 16 and Mile 17 topography and their comparatively longer distances from the Cameroon mountain, and the increase in commercial activities including population influx have contributed to the construction of storey buildings in that part of the municipality. A salient reason for the construction of storey buildings advanced by respondents has been that Mile 16 and Mile 17 hardly experiences the effects of tremors during volcanic eruptions.

In Bokwang 60.4% of respondents lived in wooden houses; while 39.6% of those interviewed live in cement block constructed accommodations in collective and single buildings with more than two room apartments.

Conflicts between stakeholders in different types of accommodations

One of the greatest problems identified by the study in the different types of accommodation was poor housing practices which creates conflicts between stakeholders in various parts of the municipality. The commonest conflicts are between tenant/tenant, tenant/landlord and land lords/land. Tenant/tenant conflicts were mostly identified in the high density areas than the low density areas of the municipality. Landlords tenant conflicts are fuelled by inability of most tenants to cope with the ever increasing rents by unscrupulous landlords; while landlord/landlords conflicts were identified from trespassing. Problems of hygiene and sanitation were identified as common sources of problems between tenants in high density than in low density areas of the municipality.

The commonest types of houses identified for accommodation in Buea municipality are those with single or double bedrooms with common pit latrines for dwellers and those with double rooms having internal or external toilets. Most collective buildings with double or single rooms constructed with wood or cement blocks were identified with the use of common pit latrines among tenants. Conflicts between users emanated when occupants ignore the roster for cleaning the latrines and are abandoned unkempt. Most of the toilets are too near the homes and pungent or abusive odours could be felt around the homes vicinity. One of the problems identified among latrines in Buea was that most were shallow because of the presence of stones or rocks underground. Such toilets easily got filled and
often became a source of conflict between tenants and landlords with respect to hygiene and sanitation. Most tenants testified that the landlords were not interested in maintaining an environmentally friendly environment, because they are only interested in collecting rents from tenants.

A relationship was acknowledged between the nature of household occupation and types of accommodation. It was observed that a majority of students preferred to occupy single bed rooms’ apartment in wooden or cement blocks constructed houses in all density areas; while most workers preferred two or more bed rooms’ apartment in all density areas. Most couples preferred to hire two or more bed rooms apartment constructed with wood or cement blocks in various parts of the municipality. It was also realised that most households especially couples preferred to hire wooden houses than cement blocks constructed houses because the wooden houses have comparatively larger rooms which are more spacious than those in block houses. According to the respondents most of the wooden houses were constructed long before urbanisation and the landlords respected council’s regulations on the dimension of rooms for accommodation. These regulations were strictly obeyed and any landlord who flawed the regulation was asked to dismantle their houses or face disciplinary measures which attracted fines by the Buea Council. These regulations according to the respondents are hardly obeyed in contemporary Buea municipality. Consequently most houses constructed during this period of demographic changes have smaller rooms which contain few household belongings. It was revealed that tenant-tenant conflicts are more common in collective buildings with single rooms where tenants share common toilets and bathrooms than those in single rooms not sharing common facilities in high density areas. Conflicts were also observed to be common when the number of occupants increase per accommodation unit. Most landlords limited the number of household occupants per apartment, an issue which creates conflicts with tenants and human rights activists. According to a 25 year old law student resident in Molyko police always punished unscrupulous landlords who intervenes with the rights of occupants. According to the same respondent most land lords were of the opinion that increasing occupants per household made them to spend money to construct new toilets since toilets often got filled. It was also observed that tenants living in collective buildings in the outskirts of the municipality have fewer conflicts related to hygiene and sanitation than those in high density and medium density areas. Also households living in isolated non-collective buildings with two or more bedrooms were identified with fewer conflicts with respect to hygiene and sanitation than those in collective building because they have adequate space for disposal of sewage and waste.

Studies by Njoh, 1995 confirms that tenants in collective buildings sharing common pit latrines and bathrooms have more conflicts related to hygiene and sanitation than residents occupying more than double bedrooms apartment with in-door toilets and bathrooms. The survey identified landlord and tenants conflict as earlier mentioned in collective buildings in medium and high density areas where landlords’ arbitrary increase rents regardless of environmental conditions of the buildings. In most high density areas surveyed, there were no drainages and most pit latrines were overused and full, polluting air in the neighbourhood.

**Environmental problems caused by poor housing practices**

Elsewhere it has been identified that the disrespect of town and city planning regulations have been responsible for poor housing practises in Buea Municipality. In high density areas for instance most household are confronted with problems of pollution caused by unacceptable habits of disposing water, waste and sewage. Most houses in high density areas are constructed without taking to consideration the environmental problems arising from absence or inadequate spacing of houses. Most landlords occupy all land with commercial houses and leave limited space for sewage and waste disposal. Houses are so close that in the event of any disaster like fire or tremor all houses can be simultaneously affected with attendant loss of life and property. Households living in enclosed areas face difficulties to evacuate household refuse due to lack of access roads. According to the respondents the sewage and waste units of the Buea Municipal Council is unable to extend its services to the enclosed areas of medium and high density areas due to lack of access roads. During the course of these studies (2010-2012), garbage was discovered abandoned in remote areas of Molyko, Great
Suppo and Buea town with offensive ardour in the neighbourhood. It was observed that most residents in enclaved and remote areas of the municipality dispose garbage and other household refuse in streams and running water during the dry season.

In other areas people dump waste in seasonal streams during dry season waiting evacuation by floods or running water during the rainy season. Also in some high density areas located near streams latrines have been constructed near streams used for other economic and social activities. Researcher was rightly told that the septic tanks of most of the toilets are occasionally opened during moments of floods to allow the flushing away of waste into running water during the rainy seasons.

Studies by Asangwe (2002) on environmental issues in urban Cameroon identified typhoid and paratyphoid fevers, malaria, yellow fever, pneumonia, tuberculosis among other water and air borne diseases common to urban areas not served by adequate facilities for sewage and waste disposal. This study ranks Molyko as the most affected by environmental pollution due to high population density, increase in commercial activities and proximity of houses resulting from the fragrant disrespect of town planning regulations. Bokwango and Buea town were ranked least in the classification due to low level of economic activities, low level of noise and low demand for rentable accommodation by some socio-professional groups, dominance of houses occupied by couples, workers, the aged and retired people living non-rental accommodation. The study also reveals that most compounds with houses harbouring students and youths of diverse socio-professional groups tend to be noisier than those occupied by couples and the aged in all density.

Figure 2. Waste disposed in a stream pending evacuation by rain water areas.

Source: Field work report on Improving urban habitat in Cameroon
Analysis of household occupation by type of density area

The study reveals that concentration of households in Buea Municipality is relatively high among single room dwellers with the high density zone of the municipality where more than 70% of the household lives. In contrast, households living in flats of two or more rooms are found in low and medium density areas of the city. Most medium and low density areas are found in the outskirts of the town, government residential areas, and areas with poor topography where construction works are often difficult due to the presence of many stones and rocks. While high density areas have been identified in Molyko, Muea, Great Suppo, and Mile 16; low and medium density areas were identified in virtually all districts or quarters of the municipality. Table 2 is an analysis of types of accommodation available in each density area of the municipality.

Table 2: Types of accommodation in each density area of Buea, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of accommodation</th>
<th>Low and medium density areas</th>
<th>High density areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of households</td>
<td>Percentage of total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single rooms</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>23.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat with two rooms</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>61.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flats with more than two rooms</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>73.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ngoe Fritz data on improving urban habitat in Cameroon, 2010-2012

The study illustrates that concentration of households is higher among single room dwellers within high density zones where 76.7% of this class of household lives. In contrast households living in flats of two or more rooms are found in medium and low density situated mostly in the outskirts of the municipality; 61% and 38.96% respectively. According to the survey, 71.13% of households occupying flats with more than two rooms live in low and medium density areas; while 27.87% of the same category of households lives in high density areas. The survey also indicates that majority of households living in single rooms in low and medium density areas are mostly students, low income earners, and the unemployed. It was observed that houses in medium and low density areas are spacious and less prone to poor housing practices due to availability of land for waste disposal.

According to the study household in single room accommodation dominate high density areas; that is, 76.7% than low and medium density area (23.3%). A typical high density area studied in Molyko showed the worst aspect of mixed land used and several evidence of street congestion and indecent surrounding polluted with waste. This area exemplifies the worst sanitary conditions associated to poor housing practises. In the same area the buildings in addition to residential rooms also contained craft shops, carpenter workshops, furniture making, liquor bars, photography studio, hairdressing saloons, watch repairing, and record selling shops which blared music with deafening noise all day long. Two of the buildings in the same areas contained offices and restaurants in addition to some residential rooms.

It was also realised that most residents living in single and two rooms accommodation in low and medium density areas were tenants belonging to socioprofessional groups; while 40% living in more than two rooms in the same density area live in non rental accommodation( personal buildings or houses handed down to relatives or family members). It was realised that in most high density areas many households acquired apartments for multiple purposes; that is, for living accommodation and business.

As clearly evident in the study, the lumping of various economic activities with residential accommodation in high density areas of the municipality has not only generated health problems, including unabated noise, but also the resultant congestion has also increased incidence of social and physiological conflicts for the individuals in the community. In comparism, the low and to a lesser extent the medium density areas where fewer urban dwellers live are not afflicted with such problems. The physical and mental health as well as the social wellbeing of the inhabitants in some medium density area, are therefore by virtue of their relatively cleaner, more refined and quieter living
environment is more conducive to better quality of life than those of their fellow citizens living in high density areas. In the case of Buea municipality, most medium and high density areas are highly enclave. Much better life can be guaranteed if the residential areas could be disenclaved and provided with social amenities worthy of urban dwellers.

**Analysis of household occupation by type of accommodation**

As collorary to the above the pattern of household occupation by type of accommodation will be considered. In this regard, the case of Buea municipality looks conspicuous especially as table 3 indicates that 89.9% of all households surveyed in some low, medium and high density areas of the municipality lived in single rooms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Housing type</th>
<th>Number of occupants</th>
<th>Percentage of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single rooms</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>89.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flats with two rooms</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flats with more than two rooms</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of households</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to the study there is a correlation between the household occupation and the type of accommodation. As indicated in table 3, the percentage of household falls as the number of rooms increases per type of accommodation. A majority of households especially students, the unemployed and low income earners prefer to live in single rooms because they are relatively cheaper in all density areas. Most households in this category cannot afford rental accommodation for two or more rooms, except in situations where the houses are handed down through inheritance. Also a majority of workers identified to be living in two rooms apartments are mostly workers and households of average income in society. It was also realised that majority of households occupying more than two rooms in some low and medium density areas live in non rental accommodation owned by government or constructed by the occupants themselves. Others in this category of accommodation are high income workers like Directors, service heads, medical doctors, and engineers to mention but a few. From the study more than 70% of households in flats of more than two rooms in high density areas are businessmen, while the rest are built by occupants or handed down through inheritance. It was also realised that most high density areas in the municipality contain clusters of old dilapidated houses mostly built of wood.

The situation depicted in the study can be seen as follows:

a) A reflection of the inability of a larger majority of low income groups to finance the construction of their own dwelling units

b) A reflection of the high income classes to provide their own houses

c) A reflection of the failure of the government housing programmes so far to make responsible impact on the housing needs of the low income class of citizens

d) An implication that land lords dominate the supply side of housing market and building land, and therefore

e) Constitute a permanent situation of intense exploitation of majority of low income dwellers through a devious pattern of ever-increasing rents for the few available and rentable residential buildings.

**Summary and recommendations**

**Summary**

This paper highlights habitat problems and consequences of poor housing practices among residents identified with changing demography, lack of planning, and the high demand for building land and rentable accommodation in the Buea municipality. It also examines the various conflicts identified among stakeholders in the accommodation sector including the difficulties of obtaining land titles vis-a-vis the high demand for building land and rental housing.

The difficulties in obtaining land titles have been identified as major factor contributing to land sales without title and the construction of houses in defiance of town planning regulation in Cameroon. Furthermore the indiscriminate or haphazard way of constructing houses and the enclavement of most residential areas have limited access to basic infrastructure and services for households in virtually all density areas. The haphazard nature of building houses has also been aggravated by ineffective
monitoring of building construction by the municipal council and other stakeholders in the urban accommodation sector. This has contributed to the escalation of environmental problems of hygiene and sanitation because most households have inadequate access to waste disposal facilities offered by the city council.

Recommendations

- There is an urgent need to implement in practise the provision of Decree N° 2005/481 of 16 December 2005 which liberalises the issuing of land titles. Though the decree officially authorises issuing of land titles at regional level, the procedures are still flawed with abusive irregularities because many stakeholders are involved in the issue. These irregularities and bottlenecks could be drastically reduced if government reduces the number of stakeholders involved in processing documents for acquiring land certificates. By limiting the number of stakeholders involved in the issue, bureaucracy, cost and time of processing documents will be reduced and many land owners will be motivated to acquire land titles.

- Since man-made factors such as the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) plantations are among the factors limiting municipal expansion; there is need for government to put pressure on CDC to surrender some portions of its agricultural lands for expansion of the Buea municipality. This will relax city congestions, reduce emerging urban sprawls, improve on environmental hygiene and sanitation, and reduce the advent of diseases emerging from poor housing practices and environmental pollution in the city.

- One of the most prominent factors interfering with sound urban policies in most cities and towns in Cameroon has been the development of master plans which will enforce effective monitoring of building sites in the municipality. In Buea this problem has been perpetuated by lack of a master plan for the city from time immemorial. There is need to develop a master plan which will be implemented with collaboration by all stakeholders in the urban accommodation sector. This will help to enforce town planning regulations largely ignored by stakeholders in the building sector. This is because even if CDC surrenders part of its landholdings for urban expansion, urbanisation problems are unlikely to be contained in the absence of a master plan for the growing municipality.

- Development plans in the seventies and eighties ranked housing as major area of government priority after agriculture. During the period of economic liberalisation in the late eighties and early nineties when the country abandoned development planning by allowing development to tangle with market forces, this veritable sector was grossly neglected alongside agriculture. Hence very little has been accomplished to improve the urban housing situation. With the failure of economic liberalisation policies government should develop and encourage mortgage institutions to grant loans at low interest rates to individuals and institutions involved in real estate and also reduce the cost of building materials to permit people in the lower income strata to construct homes.

- The increasing cost of urban accommodation is alarming and becoming a major area of concern that could ignite social and political upheavals in the country. Land lords increase house rents astronomically making the urban poor and low income workers to live under undesirable housing conditions. Government and other institutional stakeholders in the accommodation sector should intervene by restricting rampant increase in rents through a legal framework which penalises landlords from increasing rents in urban areas.

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