



# Managing cities and resolving conflicts: Local people's attitudes towards urban planning in Kumasi, Ghana



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## ABSTRACT

This study explores local people's attitudes towards urban planning, and the effects of development benefits on local support for planning in Kumasi, Ghana. Kumasi is a rapidly urbanising city in Ghana where urban growth between 2000 and 2010 exceeded 5%, and where local support for urban planning has not been studied adequately. Based on Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly, Town and Country Planning Department and Ghana Statistical Service's residential area classifications, household survey with 360 respondents were conducted in nine high, middle and low class neighbourhoods in Kumasi, in addition to interviews with six representatives from two planning agencies. Results indicated that two-thirds of the household respondents were positive towards urban planning and support urban planning. The household respondents were aware that more development benefits are possible from an inclusive and pro-poor urban planning. There appears to be correlation between development benefits obtained by local people from urban planning, and support for urban planning, indicating that development benefits impact people's attitudes towards urban planning. Some of the main problems are social and spatial inequity among people living in different classes of residential neighbourhoods, and lack of locals' inclusion in urban planning and management. There is a need to clearly address these issues, so that urban planning may get the support of local people which may lead to sustainable urban development.

## 1. Introduction

The institution of urban planning has been the most widely accepted means of land use and development, and general urban management so far, supported by national and international organisations. By definition, the basis of urban planning implies the process of programming the management of the course, organisation and model of development, growth and management of urban areas to make certain that every essential land use requirements (such as economic, social, environmental, institutional, and cultural needs), for every socio-economic population group are made available for in a well-matched and symbiotic locational associations and densities (Okpala, 2009). In theory, urban planning should improve living situations in local communities through development benefits (Awuah et al., 2014). Development benefits, as used in this paper, refer to outcomes of urban planning practice that contribute to enhancing living conditions of people, and they may include improved housing, improved transport system, and availability of, and quality social services (see Njoh, 2003; Watson, 2009a). Yet these local communities have become increasingly

vulnerable to urban planning decisions particularly in developing countries of Africa where urban livelihoods revolve around such decisions (Cobbinah and Darkwah, 2016a,b; Obeng-Odoom, 2011; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom, 2010). Local communities pay indirectly not only by economic mismanagement – e.g., high inflation, and misappropriation of funds – but often by direct conflicts such as inadequate housing, slum development, uncontrolled urban growth, and inadequate services like water (Adarkwa, 2012; Boamah et al., 2012; Cobbinah and Amoako, 2012; Fuseini and Kemp, 2015; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom, 2010).

However, in recent years it is being increasingly recognised by researchers that urban planning in Africa should reflect local conditions and play a role in sustaining the livelihoods of local people, including those living in low, middle and high class residential neighbourhoods (Cobbinah and Darkwah, 2016a; Njoh, 2003; Okpala, 2009; Watson, 2009a). This falls in the context of the discussions within the Convention on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and its Goal 11 on sustainable cities and human settlements. This goal encourages national governments to implement economically and socially sound, as well as

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environmentally friendly, actions, for example urban policy for making cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable that provide incentives to local people in return for their support towards urban planning and management.

Several projects linking local livelihoods and urban planning have been promoted in developing countries, for example Habitat I, II and recently III (see UN-Habitat, 2017). The rationale behind such urban paradigms such as Habitat III was mainly to engender local support for urban planning and offer the platform for discussing challenges of ways of planning and managing urban environments in order to perform their function as drivers of sustainable urban development (discussed in Section 1.1). This was done by adopting the ‘New Urban Agenda’ by the United Nations which sets international standards of achievement in urban sustainability. The ‘New Urban Agenda’ also provides an avenue to rethink the pathways in which cities should be built, managed and inhabited based on cooperation with committed partners (e.g., urban stakeholders) in addition to the local community and private sector (United Nations, 2016).

However, the success stories from these urban paradigms in developing countries of Africa are few. Some researchers with political economist view attribute the poor performance to the lack of political will among African governments to make urban planning a priority by resourcing planning agencies to effectively perform their functions, as well as the availability of complex land tenure system (Mabogunje, 1962; Obeng-Odoom, 2011; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom, 2010). Others claim that the widespread practice of non-inclusive, and non pro-poor oriented urban planning is to be blamed for the poor performance of these urban paradigms in African cities, and argue for a more inclusive, pro-poor and equitable approach to urban planning (Cobbinah and Aboagye, 2017; Cobbinah and Darkwah, 2016a,b; Watson, 2009a; Watson and Agbola, 2013). But the general consensus is that such urban paradigms if successfully implemented with active participation of urban residents, would lead to improved urban living and better support from local communities towards urban planning and management.

Given global recognition of the need for local support for urban planning, research into local people’s attitudes towards urban planning, and the influence of development benefits on their support for urban planning is relevant. Regrettably, there are few studies (e.g., Awuah et al., 2014; Kleemann et al., 2017) which have attempted to explore the relationship between development benefits from, and local support for, urban planning in Ghana. For example, Kleemann et al. (2017) examined land use planning in Ghana within the context of peri-urbanism and found that locals do not adopt statutory land use planning due to mistrust of governmental or formal planning activities. Also, Awuah et al. (2014) assessed the economic benefits of land use planning in Ghana and found that major economic benefits from land use planning included tarred roads and concrete drains. This research contributes to this discussion by examining how Ghanaian urban planning has impacted on urban living, in order to understand more about:

- i What are the experiences of urban planning in different residential areas in Kumasi?
- ii What are the local attitudes towards urban planning in Kumasi? And
- iii How development benefits are influencing local support for urban planning?

The study assumes that development benefits through activities of urban planning can influence local communities in terms of improving their living conditions. Receipt of development benefits will in turn engender local communities support for urban planning and management. This assessment consists of five sections. Section 1 provides theoretical basis for urban planning and sustainable development in Africa. Section 2 describes the case study setting and planning characteristics in Ghana, and examines the research methods used. Section 3 presents the findings of the research. Section 4 discusses the findings,

and finally, Section 5 presents the conclusion of the paper.

### 1.1. Urban planning and sustainable urban development: exploring the link

Urban planning can generate development benefits through sustainable urban development. Sustainable urban development basically involves optimising economic efficiency in the use of resources (e.g., goods and services) offered by the natural environment; “maintaining natural resource stock at or above their present level; social equity in the distribution of development benefits and conflicts, and avoidance of unnecessary foreclosure of future development options” (Clarke, 1995, p.17). The importance of social and spatial equity in the distribution of development benefits is significant, and as Choguill (1993) states, sustainable urban development attempts to address the basic human needs of communities, and to deliver a resource-efficient economy where opportunities dominate challenges for improving livelihoods and supporting environmental sustainability.

The philosophy of sustainable urban development is viewed in many developed countries as an environmentally responsible way of development for reviving and supporting the long-term socio-economic and ecological wellbeing of urban communities (Wheeler, 1998). A similar view is gaining impetus in developing countries amongst urban scholars, particularly those in Africa, where the idea of sustainable development is increasingly advocated and becoming more popular in urban planning research (see Cobbinah and Darkwah, 2016a; Okpala, 2009). Thus, the concept of sustainable urban development is considered to have the prospects of revitalising distressed local communities and economies, support inclusive and pro-poor urban planning and, therefore, contribute to local empowerment in urban planning practice. Watson (2009a,b) discusses the importance of identifying and integrating sustainable urban development values (e.g., inclusiveness, pro-poor, social and spatial equity) that reflect local conditions and aspirations in urban planning in Africa, and other developing countries. The linkage between inclusive and pro-poor urban planning on the one hand, and urban sustainability on the other hand can be substantial. Cobbinah and Darkwah (2016a) in their study, for example, demonstrated that the integration of the values of sustainable urban development in urban planning in Africa could result in the restoration of depleted urban greenery.

Several studies have concluded that conflicts associated with poor urban planning – such as congestion, urban sprawl, avoidable disasters, slum development and destruction of ecologically sensitive regions – have negative effects on local attitudes, whilst development benefits from effective urban planning may have positive effects (Amoako and Cobbinah, 2011; Cobbinah et al., 2015a; Fuseini and Kemp, 2015; Korah et al., 2016; Njoh, 2003; Okpala, 2009). This suggests that, urban planning policy should promote sustainable urban development values within urban environments that can give rise to more development benefits to local communities. Also, these development benefits should be shared equitably especially with local people in low class and slum communities who are often negatively affected by urban planning decisions (Cobbinah and Nimminga-Beka, 2017; Watson, 2009a). However, in Africa, linking community development benefits to urban planning is difficult where locals are highly isolated from planning process, exclusionary approaches to urban planning are prevailing, and development benefits are skewed. This could be more serious if the development benefits from urban planning are enjoyed by privilege few, to the disadvantage of the entire local community (e.g., concentration of infrastructure and services in high class residential neighbourhoods).

### 1.2. An overview of the changing face of urban planning in Africa

In Africa, urban planning is foreign (introduced by European countries) and recent, when compared to many developed countries where urban planning is ancient and more active, promoted by the state

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