



## Research Article

# State of Urban Housing and Strategic Planning Orientations for Sustainable Housing Development in the Urbanizing Bamenda City, Cameroon

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**Abstract:** Given the importance of housing as one of the basic necessities for a good life and at the same time the adverse consequences that poor urban housing exerts due to accelerated unplanned urbanisation in most African cities (including Bamenda city), the impact has been manifested on its occupants. This study aims to diagnose the state of urban housing in Bamenda city and explore strategic planning orientations for sustainable housing development. The data were collected through a blend of published material and field work that was conducted in two phases over a period of 9 weeks through reconnaissance surveys and questionnaires administration using the *de jure* approach to house owners and tenants. Also, formal interviews were granted with authorities of the Northwest Regional Delegation of MINDUH (Ministry of Urban Development and Housing) and the department of urban development (including housing) of the Bamenda City Council (BBC). The data were processed and presented using descriptive techniques. The study reveals that the existing state of urban housing in Bamenda city is deplorable and sub-standard, characterised by inadequacy, poorly designed and haphazardly built residential buildings, lack of basic social amenities and adequate privacy, non-segregated of residential areas and unkempt/unsafe/unhealthy environments. The key factors responsible for this were the poorly understood patterns and trends of housing demand, an unauthorized housing supply which largely remains in the hands of private individuals with difficult access to land for construction and costly existing housing production process/procedure, rampant discrimination in the award of housing credits by *Credit Foncier du Cameroun* (CFC) and the lack of a coherent, consistent and realistic rules/regulations and housing standards. An efficient urban planning is the most fundamental process for sustainable housing development in cities and towns. This study advances strategic planning orientation for sustainable housing development in the city of Bamenda through social housing, segregation of residential areas, resettlement schemes in case of redevelopment, urban land reform for housing, efficient urban housing process and procedures and urban upgrading and renewal. These are more likely to constitute sustainable database for developers and planners in the domain of urban sustainable housing development and city planning in Bamenda.

**Keywords:** Urban housing, strategic planning orientation, sustainable housing development, Bamenda, Cameroon.

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## INTRODUCTION

Housing as one of the most important basic necessities of mankind is known to tremendously affect human well-being. It is a basic social requirement and the United Nations' Universal declaration on human right recognizes housing as a basic human right (Yetunde and Bayo, 2013). It is equally the basis for all human activities as every person is affected in the day to day activities by the type of house in which he or she lives in (Agbola and Adegoke, 2007). It is therefore an important urban survival strategy since as Mulder and Lauster (2010) and Yetunde and Bayo (2013) stated, its function is first and foremost to provide houses to families and other households and also offers protection as well as a place to lie down, security and privacy.

Eldredge (1967) cited in Adeoye (2016) conceptualises housing a bundle of goods and services which facilitate and enhance good living and a key to neighbourhood quality and preservation. It is a combination of characteristics

which provide a unique home within any neighbourhood, and an array of economic, social and psychological phenomena (Agbola, 1992). It is also a multidimensional package of goods and services extending beyond shelter itself. Adequate housing is essential for good life and is a key requirement for an efficient and satisfied labour force and the foundation of satisfactory community life (Adeoye, 2016). Adequate shelter has always been one of the very basic human needs and has become a critical component in the social, economic and health fabric of every nation (Jiboye and Ogunshakin, 2010). Overtime, humankind has housing provision in the form of dwellings which are temporary or permanent, natural or adapted (Ojo, 1998 cited in Jiboye and Ogunshakin, 2010).

Previous studies by Wanie *et al.*, (2017) highlighted that besides food, clothing, access to education and health care, water supply and electricity, housing also constitutes one of man's basic necessities for survival or livelihood. This assertion corroborates Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs postulated in

1943 in which the study identified the three fundamental needs crucial to survival to include food, clothing and shelter. Nevertheless, poor housing in urban areas can pose devastating consequences on the wellbeing of its occupants. This is particularly true as Okoye (1990) and Lawanson (2005) all cited in Jiboye and Ogunshakin (2010) observed, the provision of appropriate housing, particularly for the urban poor constitutes a major challenge to development in most African countries and developing nations at large. Page (2002), for instance, provides evidence supporting the view that poor housing can exacerbate existing health problems.

As the urban population continues to swell due to accelerated unplanned urbanisation especially in developing world countries, housing becomes a major problem to the urban dwellers. This is particularly true in most African cities where residential land accounts for the largest proportion of total urban land uses in these cities (Coker *et al.*, 2008). Despite this, most of the urban housing infrastructure in most African cities remains sub-standard. For instance, studies by Onibokun (1972), Wahab *et al.*, (1990), Olotuah, (2000b) and Jagun, (1983) all cited in Adeoye (2016) have shown that urban housing in Nigeria is in a deplorable condition as almost 75% of the dwelling units are sub-standard and the dwellings are sited in slums. There is need for urban management stakeholders to make urban housing sustainable (adequate and decent affordable urban housing). This view is supported by the study of Hamizah *et al.*, (2013) who advocated for the planning of sustainable housing, since sustainability is the most important element to be considered in planning of the urban areas (even though according to them the concept of sustainable housing is one that is much more consider in the city, but less attention has been given to it). As highlighted by Choguill (2008), a city is found to be unsustainable if one of its indicators which is housing is not considered sustainable. Also, sustainable urban housing through planning system and development plan plays a significant role in meeting all the three pillars of sustainable development which are social, economic and environment (Hamizah *et al.*, 2013). The authors further noted that a sustainable living environment can only be achieved if development and environmental issues and problems are given equal emphasis in urban housing development and basic human needs must be fulfilled, with living standards improved and our ecological systems sustained effectively. The above reasons explain why in some countries such as Malaysia, the initiatives in promoting sustainable housing has been taken seriously by the government (Hamizah *et al.*, 2013).

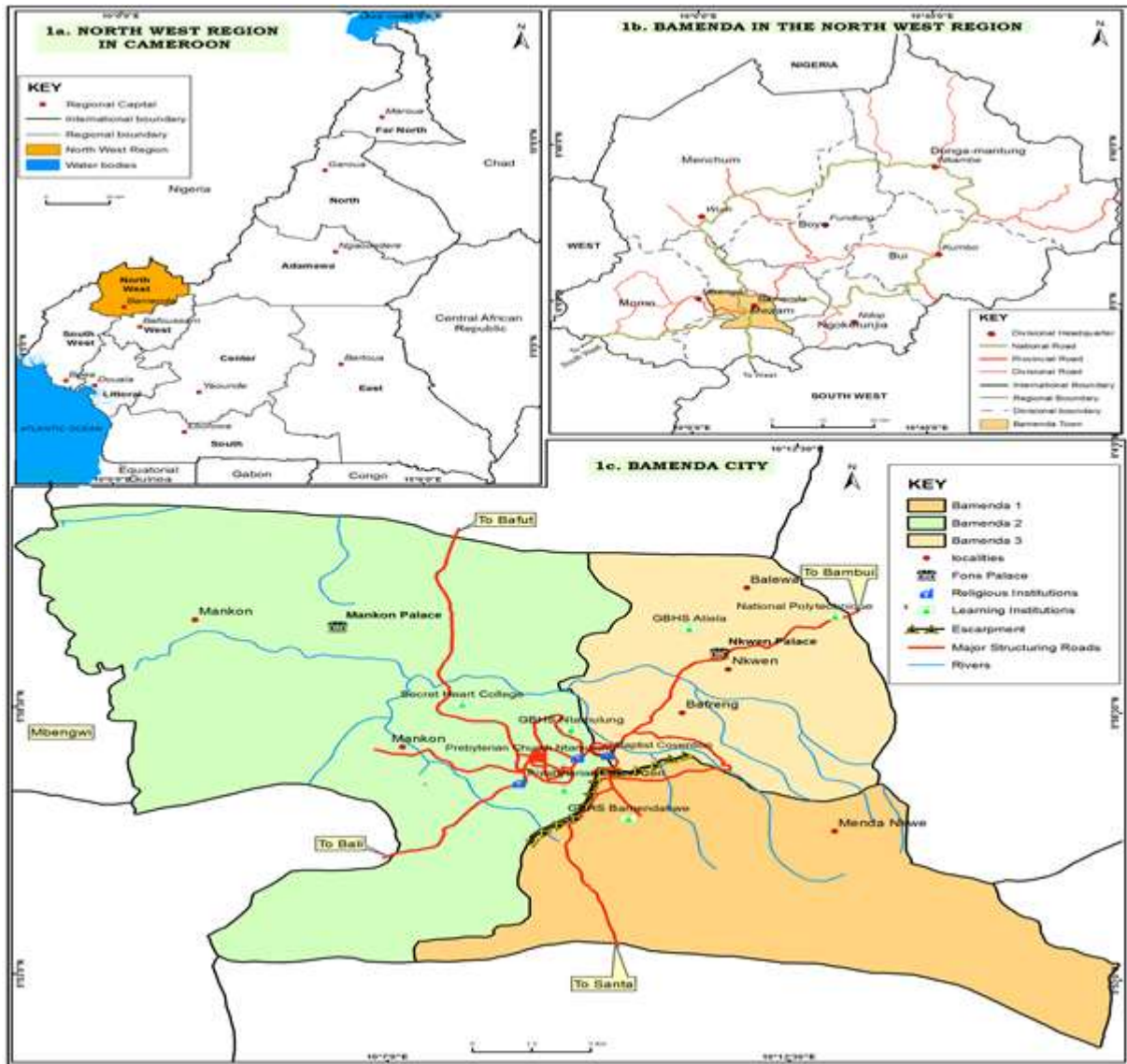
According to Wanie (2019), urban housing conditions in Cameroon are generally deplorable and appalling. For

instance, rapid slum proliferation is an ongoing and dominant feature of Cameroon's urban centres. These neighbourhoods (slums) lack basic human social facilities such as water supply, sanitation, health, electricity, education, no sewage or solid waste disposal, roads and other means of public transit. With an alarming urban growth rate of around 54%, an estimated 60% of Cameroon's urban dwellers live in informal settlements and slums. Cameroon also falls under the countries with a high rate of slum development of between 60-79% (Arimah, 2010). Despite this scenario, housing is a fundamental and basic need which the government of Cameroon through MINDUH (Ministry of Housing and Urban Development) has embarked on providing its citizens, especially the poor and needy, with decent and affordable (sustainable) housing.

The main problem addressed by this study is the unsustainable nature of urban housing in Bamenda city, the capital city of the Northwest Region and the need for sustainable housing development. Urban housing in the city of Bamenda is currently inadequate, poorly planned, designed and constructed (haphazard) and underserviced with basic human requirements such as water supply, clean energy source, waste disposal and sanitary facilities. This present predicament greatly prevents the attainment of sustainable housing in the city. There is also the existence of the dual economy, whereby housing types which have not been segregated as low, medium and high income houses co-exist side by side. This makes urban planning onerous and equally mars urban aesthetics in the city. More so, the hill and valley side development of houses in the city has become risky and discourages sustainable housing to be achieved. There is the necessity for strategic planning orientations for sustainable housing development to occur in the city. Today, there is a dearth of publications on strategic planning orientations for sustainable housing development in Bamenda city. The aim of this study is to diagnose the state of urban housing in Bamenda city and explore strategic planning orientations for sustainable housing development.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study area (Bamenda) is the capital city of the Northwest Region of Cameroon. It is located between longitude 10° 09" and 10° 11" East of the Greenwich Meridian and between latitudes 5° 56" N and 5° 58" North of the equator (Neba, 2000). It is bounded to the north by Bafut and to the north east by Bambui sub-divisions. To the west and south west, it is flanked by Mbengwi and Bali sub-divisions respectively and to the south by Akum sub-division (Figure 1).



**Fig.1.** Location of the study area (Bamenda city) in the Northwest Region of Cameroon Source: Modified from School Atlas for Cameroon (1985)

Bamenda city is an amalgamation of seven villages- Mankon, Mendakwe, Nkwen, Chomba, Mbatu, Nsongwa and Bandzah and lies at an average altitude of 1430m (Bamenda Master Plan, 2013). Bamenda’s location constitutes a significant deterrent to sustainable urban development as it falls around the Cameroon Volcanic Line (CVL). The town is implanted on two well distinct environments; Down Town with an altitude of 1105-1270m above sea level and Up Station with an altitude of 1270-2950m above sea level. The slope escarpment traverses the urban space dividing it into the up-station and downtown areas. Slopes of over 30° are common while near vertical slopes occur in the immediate vicinity of the fault line (Achoo, 1998). Although man has defied the physical constraints and inhabited part of this escarpment, the difficulties and threats of slope failure to the houses and human life remains evident. Most of the built up structures of this escarpment seem to be in ‘transit’ whenever the heavy rains and surface runoff show their ugly appearance (Lambi, 2004 cited in Akoh *et al.*, 2017). The nature of urban streams is also a serious natural constraint to sustainable urban development as they lack clearly defined head streams and reach the foothill zone through a series of small waterfalls over bare hill slopes which, together with the hills, form the most striking feature of the Bamenda urban area (Achoo, 1998). Since the streams are youthful, flow is rapid. Thus, debris and watershed runoff from the slope sub-system become part of the input of the stream channels. During the rainy season, the dendritic streaming

system combines with various erosional processes, subjecting houses and properties, particularly those along stream courses, to periodic flooding during torrential rainstorms and, therefore, further urban environmental dysfunctioning.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The study method was a blend of published sources and field work. The published materials from library, the various internet search engines such as google search and google scholar and archival sources made use of reports, books, scientific journal and articles and newspaper related to sustainable housing development. On the other hand, field work was mainly done through the administration of questionnaires. A total of 180 residential buildings were sampled for distribution of questionnaires. The questionnaires were administered in neighbourhoods of low, medium and high housing density from all directions within the city. These different density areas were established on the basis of their population sizes or number of inhabitants. The proportion of questionnaires administered to residential buildings in each type of density neighbourhood was as follows; low density 25% (n= 45), medium density 35% (n= 63) and high density 40% (n= 72) (Table 1). This choice of questionnaire administration was tailored or justified by the assumption that high density areas significantly witnesses urban housing challenges than the low and medium density ones.

**Table1:** Residential buildings selected for sampling by the questionnaires

S/N	Residential Density	Residential areas	No. of households selected	Total No. of households
1	High Density	Azire	15	72
		Ntambru	15	
		Nitop I, II and III	15	
		Musang	12	
		Ntabag I and II	15	
2	Medium Density	Alakuma	15	63
		Ntarikon	16	
		Mulang	15	
		Bayelle	17	
		Lower Ngomgham	15	
3	Low Density	Nchobuh	15	45
		Ntaghem	15	

The questionnaires were administered using the stratified random sampling method involving both house owners (those who have constructed a house) and tenants (those who occupy their houses on rental basis). The *de jure* (usual or legal residence) approach was used to administer the questionnaires to the sampled households. Some of the information entailed by the questionnaires included the current state of buildings capturing basic deficiency with respect to water supply, toilet/bathing facilities, source of electricity, means of sewage disposal, environmental conditions and durable planning options/solutions for sustainable housing development. The field work was undertaken in two phases. Phase one which lasted for 3 weeks entailed the identification and coding of the housing units to be sampled. The second phase which covered six weeks was for the questionnaire administration proper. Besides questionnaire administration, direct personal interviews were also made with other housing stakeholders from MINDUH's regional delegation for the Northwest Region (Bamenda) and authorities of the Urban Development Department of the BCC (Bamenda City Council). The use of the *de jure* method in questionnaires administration ensured that a 100% reception of the 180 questionnaires

distributed. The collected data were processed and presented using qualitative techniques.

### Findings

The study findings is presented in two sections; current state of urban housing in Bamenda city and strategic planning orientations for sustainable (durable, adequate and decent affordable) housing development.

### Current State of Urban Housing in Bamenda City

The existing state of housing in Bamenda City is characterized by inadequate, poorly built houses which are randomly and haphazardly arranged. Many houses are poorly designed and lack have the basic utilities such as pipe borne water, regular energy supplies and sanitarily fit sewage systems. Housing types, largely unsegregated as low, medium and high income houses are found side by side. Generally speaking, housing environments are unkempt, unsafe, lack privacy and unhealthy. The state of basic social utilities present in the sampled 180 households in Bamenda city is depicted in Table 2.

**Table2.** Social utilities of 180 sampled households in Bamenda city

Type of utility	Number equipped	Percentage	Number not equipped	Percentage
Energy supply (Electricity)	136	75.6	44	24.4
In-door pipe borne water system	20	11.1	160	88.9
Sanitary facilities and sewage disposal system	18	10	162	90

Source: Author's Field Work (2019)

The key factors responsible for the present undesirable state of housing can be attributed to the fact that patterns and trends for demand for housing are not adequately understood and the supply of houses is unorganized as it is largely in the hands of individuals either struggling to house themselves or make profit from their constructions. Access to land for housing especially for the poor is also difficult due to the absences of an organized land market which favours the poor and disadvantaged. More so, existing housing production processes and procedures are unclear, complicated, time consuming and costly as they depend on individual initiatives and abilities with

little institutional positive support. The only organized housing credit facility is CFC (*Credit Foncier du Cameroun*), which offers selected housing credits to a few who qualify and the poor are mostly left out. The rest who are mostly middle income and non-civil servants depend on their limited personal means and informal financial assistances from family members, *njangi* groups, credit unions and some, mostly the high income civil servants with  $\geq 500,000$ FCFA from commercial banks with high interest rates (Table 3). More so, the housing sector lacks coherent, consistent and realistic rules, regulations and standards and so depends on the whims and caprices of those in charge.

**Table3.** Sources of financial assistance for housing in Bamenda city

S/N	Sources of finance	Number of respondents (f)	Percentage	Cummulative percentage
1	Family members	2	1.1	1.1
2	'Njangi' groups	11	6.1	7.2
3	Credit unions	96	53.3	60.5
4	Loans from commercial banks	71	39.5	100
<b>Total</b>		<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Author's Field Work (2019)

## STRATEGIC PLANNING ORIENTATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT IN BAMENDA CITY

An efficient urban planning is the most fundamental process in sustainable housing development in cities and towns. The strategic planning orientations advanced by this study targeted both long and short term planning horizons in the achievement of sustainable housing in Bamenda city. It highlights that in the short term, the existing stock of houses should be upgraded and improved upon while also ensuring that the gap in the shortfall of housing stock should gradually be bridged in the medium term. In the long term, planned and serviced housing should be supplied far ahead of needs and demands for housing so as to enable the continuous supply of adequate housing to match population growth and change. It is in this light that the following strategic planning orientations for sustainable housing development in Bamenda city are advanced.

### Urban Upgrading and Renewal

Urban upgrading is usually carried out in densely built and dilapidated urban areas and aimed at improving the physical, environmental and living conditions of slum areas. It involves improving on the existing state of road and drainage networks. It usually also involves the extension and upgrading of public utility networks and the rehabilitation, refurbishment and renovation of existing houses. In this process some moderate rearrangements of land uses can be done and open spaces provided where feasible and necessary. Urban upgrading and renewal can be done either through 'Urban Infilling' or 'Urban Land Pooling'. Urban infilling involves improving on the physical, environmental and living conditions of moderately dense middle urban suburbs by upgrading the existing road and drainage networks; extending and upgrading existing public utility networks and capacities; providing lacking public and community facilities such as schools, health centres, open spaces, building on vacant plots and encouraging high rise buildings where necessary. It also involves dissolving existing boundaries of irregularly sub-divided land parcels, re-organising the area into regular parcels of buildable plots and providing them with infrastructures and other public utilities and services in a well-planned manner. It requires the willingness of the various land owners concerned to come together in order to merge their lands. Urban land pooling is an answer to urban disorder and urban anarchy. The existing situation of land ownership in Bamenda II for instance makes it extremely difficult for any meaningful town plans to be prepared and implemented. The current situation requires fundamental land reforms for urban upgrading, infilling, planning and systematic development of priority areas which necessitates the pooling of land within the planning area. The objectives of urban land pooling include; facilitating urban upgrading, urban land infilling and systematic strategic planning and development of priority development areas. It also enhances land ownership security and makes it possible to conserve cultural heritage and protect the environment.

### Social housing provision

Social housing should be provided within each sub-divisional council (Bamenda I, II and III). Within each of these sub-divisional council, urban district should have a balance of low, medium and high income social houses. The responsibilities for facilitating the provision of the social housing should be devolved and localized at the sub-divisional council level. This means that each sub-divisional council shall facilitate the supply of planned and serviced plots within its jurisdiction to match demands and the needs of all socio-economic groups. The cost of doing so could later be recovered from beneficiaries. Also, the sub-divisional councils in collaboration with the City Council (BCC) should be empowered to declare Priority Housing Development Areas (PHDA). They shall 'pool' the land, develop it and reallocate it to original occupants and owners. All land transactions should be done through the City Council. The City and sub-divisional councils should be empowered to freeze development in non-priority development areas such as road

sides and public utility networks should not also be extended to non-priority development areas outside the social housing area.

### Segregation of residential areas

Strategic planning orientation for sustainable housing development should take into consideration neighbourhoods in each of the urban districts. Residential segregation could be carried out as follows; 50% of the housing should be for the poor, 30% for the medium income and 20% for the high income. This means that out of a population of about 10000 inhabitants, 5000, 3000 and 2000 shall be of low, medium and high income respectively. This is because the majority of the urban dwellers are poor and will seek for a house of their standard or status quo. It is also absolutely necessary to discourage huge housing areas based on social class or ethnic or racial origins. This has been the tendency in the inner and middle areas which should be avoided in the peripheral and fringe zones.

### Resettlement schemes

In the process of redeveloping already built areas and developing areas of urban expansion in order to upgrade slums (such as in Sissia quarters), it is absolutely necessary to gradually, humanely and permanently resettle those affected on suitable and well planned serviced sites. In doing so, large scale resettlements schemes especially of households from the same background and socio-economic status group should be avoided. Instead, households to be resettled should be integrated in housing programmes (such as the PHDA) within priority housing development areas. This could favour the social mixing and integration of the population over time and space *vis-à-vis* land use planning mechanism.

### Urban land reforms for housing

Urban land reforms refer to new ways of managing urban land in favour of common interests without unfairly reducing private interests. It is the reallocation of land rights in order to establish a more equitable distribution of land. It is also a powerful planning strategy for the promotion of both socio-economic development and environmental quality. Suitable strategies for urban land reforms involve the proper mastery of the territory, the area concerned and pattern of land ownership; preparation of neighbourhood and local plans in partnership with community stakeholders and funding partners; proper legal framework for urban development and sound redevelopment projects and finance and sponsorship of redevelopment projects. Urban land reforms aim at promoting the effective management of urban lands and social support centres for the development of sustainable infrastructures (including housing) and other approved developments projects within the city centre and the hinterlands and enhancing effective land use planning and regulation systems which promote optimal land utilization in all areas and sectors. Urban land reforms also ensure clearly defined property rights supported by an effective judicial and governance system. Such a system further guarantees that all citizens, especially the poor, women and the youths have a reasonable opportunity to gain access to land with secure rights, in order to fulfill their basic needs for housing and productive livelihoods. Finally, it facilitates secure forms of long-term land tenure for resident and non-citizens engaged in approved investments projects.

Large parcels of land in the fringe zone of Bamenda City Planning Area are occupied and owned by families within which each member of the family is entitled and claims part. Family lands are usually subdivided informally into irregular plot shapes and sizes. Some members of the families may have land titles while others do not. To ensure the regular subdivision of family lands in conformity with an approved land use plan requires that irregular subdivision of family land within the declared planning area should stop. Instead, each family land within the planning area must be formally subdivided and approved before it is allocated. The subdivision of family land must conform to approved land use plans and requirements and planning principles and standards. From the date of approval of

the land use plan, all informal, irregular and illegal subdivision of land within the Planning Area should be forbidden.

**Efficient urban housing process and procedures**

A sustainable housing production process for Bamenda city should involve the following process and procedures and actors as presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Processes and procedures and actors responsible for sustainable housing development in Bamenda city

S/N	Housing development process/procedure	Actor(s) responsible
1	Designating priority five yearly housing development areas	Bamenda City Council (BCC) and Sub-Divisional Councils (SDC)
2	Officially declaring priority housing development areas	BCC and Senior Divisional Officer (SDO)
3	Preparing cadastral plans of priority housing areas	BCC
4	Land 'pooling' within priority housing areas	BCC
5	Planning and laying out priority housing areas	BCC/SDC
6	Preparing topographic plans of priority housing development areas	Lands/surveys
7	Preparing a detailed land use plan of priority housing development area	Developers and planners
8	Preparing a detailed network plan of Priority Housing Development Area (PHDA)	BCC and SDC
9	Preparing layout plans of neighbourhoods in PHDA (low density/high income; medium density/medium income; high density/low income and mixed commercial/residential).	BCC and SDC
10	Approving PHDA plans	BCC and SDO
11	Developing PHDA as approved	BCC and SDC
12	Extending primary and secondary roads to site	BCC
13	Extending primary and secondary public utility networks to site	BCC
14	Constructing of tertiary roads on site	SDC
15	Beaconing of plots	Landlords
16	Allocating/selling of plots	BCC land market commission Minister of Lands, Survey and State Property (MINDCAF) and BCC
17	Issuing of land titles to individuals	
18	Reticulating of tertiary public utility networks within site (water supply, electricity supply, drainage, sewage and communication facilities)	SDC
19	Designing of buildings for individual plots	Landlords
20	Issuing of building permits	BCC
21	Construction of buildings	Landlords
22	Occupation and use of buildings	Occupants
23	Maintaining of buildings	Landlords

Source: Authors Field Work (2019)

The provision of public and community facilities such as school, service centres, open spaces, cultural facilities, play grounds amongst others could done by the government, BCC, SDC and communities concerned.

Figure 2 summarises the state of urban housing and advances guidelines for sustainable housing development through strategic planning orientation in Bamenda city.



**Fig.2.** Summary of existing state of urban housing and guidelines for sustainable housing development through strategic planning orientation in Bamenda city.

Source: Author's Conception (February, 2020)

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Achieving urban sustainable housing is a complicated process involving several stakeholders who play different, but sometimes, complementary roles. Therefore, sustainable urban housing in Bamenda city can only be achieved through careful strategic planning orientations by developers and planners involving social housing, segregation of residential areas, resettlements schemes, urban land reforms for housing, an efficient urban housing process and procedure and urban upgrading and renewal. There is also a real need to develop a local housing policy which puts the Bamenda city and sub-divisional councils in a position to facilitate and enable the private sector, individuals and groups to provide a variety of adequate, decent, durable and affordable houses with package of services such as clean water supply, adequate sewage disposal to improve the wellbeing of the community. With the new dawn of implementation of the decentralization process in all the ten regions of Cameroon, the government should concentrate on assisting councils and stimulating the private sector. To achieve the sustainable housing goal, it is also necessary to improve on the understanding of trends and patterns of housing needs and demands, formally organize the supply of housing to ensure the effective participation of all stakeholders and facilitate access to affordable housing/land credit techniques and technologies especially for the poor and disadvantaged urban dwellers.

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