

Challenges of Town Planning in the Bamenda Urban Space, North West Region of Cameroon: A Historical Investigation, 1972-2020

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ABSTRACT

Bamenda's urban landscape is a paradox: a city planned on paper yet built in defiance of every plan. This study investigates the persistent challenges of urban planning in the Bamenda urban space from 1972 to 2020. It argues that the Bamenda urban space faced severe challenges in town planning, which were overwhelming and remained unresolved over the decades. The study made appeal to some selected primary and secondary sources, and conclusions were drawn after a qualitative historical analysis. The findings reveal that among the many challenges, the Anglophone problem/crisis stood out as the most significant obstacle to effective planning in Bamenda.

Keywords: planning, Bamenda urban space, challenges, town planning, crisis.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 30 years, Bamenda's urban footprint has more than doubled, and the town has expanded exponentially to its extremities. Even as Bamenda is today bedevilled by an unending crisis, the region's population is increasing within the immediate urban sphere, creating the need for better town planning methods. Unfortunately, town planning and town planners in Bamenda remained affected by a variety of challenges ranging from limited resources, corruption, overlapping functions, no respect for town planning regulations, uncoordinated expansion of the town, poor urban road networks, and the Anglophone problem/crisis, among others.

Little wonder that perspectives on the constant degradation of urban towns in Africa and Bamenda in recent times continue to excite scholarship. In this regard, authors like John Friedmann¹ simply describes planning as the management of space in pursuit of collective welfare. Meanwhile, simply describe planning as the management of space in pursuit of collective welfare. Meanwhile, Patsy Healey sees town planning as a socially constructed and institutionally embedded process of collective action, through which stakeholders negotiate and shape the physical and social environments of urban areas².

According to Jane Jacobs, town planning is the art of designing and managing the physical and social environments of cities, with the goal of creating vibrant, diverse, and liveable communities³. In its own merits, this paper views town planning as all the cumulative effort made by the state, stakeholders and the local population to free the town of disorder, environmental impacts and a conscious desire to make the town liveable for the current and future generations.

¹ John Friedmann, *Planning in the Public Domain: From Knowledge to Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 3.

² Bent Flyvbjerg, "Rationality and Power." In *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1.

³ Jacobs Jane, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961), 23.

More fully, literature on town planning⁴ stresses that African cities grow through “sprawling urbanisation” with limited institutional oversight. Roy⁵ and Simone⁶ remind us that informality and improvisation dominate African urbanism. In Cameroon, Njoh⁷ links town planning failures to colonial legacies. Also, empirical studies on Bamenda highlight recurrent issues of poor drainage and flood risk⁸, proliferation of informal settlements⁹, and inadequate infrastructure¹⁰. Other works have noted the role of markets in creating spatial disorder¹¹, as well as the unresolved tensions of land tenure¹². Together, these works point to a city where planning remains reactive, fragmented, and politically constrained.

In fact, the situation of urban planning problems in Cameroon attracted this comment from a media man on the national station: “if one visits Yaoundé for the first time, the first impression he/she will have is that we are a developed village and not a developed city”.¹³ Those words extend to highlight the general worries of town planning in Bamenda as well.

In this study, we intend to examine the challenges faced in town planning in the Bamenda urban space from 1972 to 2020. To this objective, we argue that Bamenda faced severe challenges in town planning, which were overwhelming and remained unresolved over the decades. To make this argument self-evident, this study will be centred on a historical background of the study area; no respect for town planning laws; road infrastructure challenges to town planning in Bamenda; uncoordinated development of houses and quarters; and the Anglophone problem/crisis shall be our focus. On this basis, it is important to first of all examine the historical background.

Historical Background

The historicity of town planning in Cameroon dates back to the German period with the creation of the initial colonial cities. These pioneer cities were, among others, Douala, Buea, Yaoundé, Edea, Ebolowa, Bamenda and Lolodorf. For the English-speaking part of Cameroon, town planning initiatives, especially from 1955, were the outshoot of suggestions made in June of 1955 by V.E. Mukete, who was at the time Federal Minister without portfolio in the then Nigerian government. In his foresight, V.E. Mukete suggested securing the services of a qualified town planner on contract to carry out the task and argued that town planning would be a fair charge on development funds.¹⁴ Concurrently, the matter was thoroughly studied by the then premier of Southern Cameroon, Dr E.M.L. Endeley, the financial secretary and the principal surveyor of the lands and surveys department.¹⁵

In this particular instance, one early challenge to town planning that came up was the issue of availability of resources. This was apparent in a memorandum addressed to the Exco, and it was generally agreed that comprehensive planning of principal towns of the English-speaking regions or Southern/Western Cameroon was an ambitious proposal which was far beyond the resources available at the time and that a development plan prepared by an expert would be difficult to implement, as there was no way existing legislation, quite

⁴ Akin Mabogunje, *Urbanization in Nigeria* (London: University of London Press, 1990), 6.

⁵ Roy, Ananya, “Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning,” *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 71, no. 2 (2005): 147.

⁶ Simone, AbdouMaliq, *For the City Yet to Come: Changing African Life in Four Cities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 5.

⁷ J Njoh Ambe, *Planning in Contemporary Africa: The State, Town Planning and Society in Cameroon* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003).

⁸ R.A. Balgah and J. F. Kimengsi, “An Assessment of an Urban Development–Flood–Impact Relationship in a Near-Millionaire City of Cameroon: Bamenda,” *Journal of Geography and Regional Planning*, 9, no. 7 (2016): 112.

⁹ Z.N Fogwe, “Environmental Consequences of Rapid Urbanization: Bamenda City, Cameroon,” *African Journal of Environmental Science*, 11, no. 3 (2017): 239.

¹⁰ Global Scientific Journal, “The State of Urban Roads and the Implications on Mobility and Economic Progress: Bamenda Case Study,” *GSJ* 11, no. 1 (2023): 147.

¹¹ Journal of Geography, “Environment, Earth Science and Infrastructure Studies (JGEESI). “Spatial Configuration of Market Spaces: Accessibility and Management Issues in Bamenda,” *JGEESI*, 9, no. 2 (2025): 85.

¹² L. Fonjong and L. Fombe, *Land Tenure Practices and Their Implications on Sustainable Urban Development in Cameroon*, (Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2011).

¹³ Cameroon Radio Television (CRTV), “Comments from Doh Bertrand”, *Press Hour*, 7th September, 2025.

¹⁴ Master plans: are comprehensive urban planning documents that outline the long-term development strategy of a city or town. They include zoning regulations, land use plans and infrastructure development projects.

¹⁵ NAB, file No: Rela/1968/6 “merger of the federal state housing pool policy”, 45.

apart from the absence of other contingencies, could enforce such a development plan.¹⁶ As a result, it was decided that the lands and surveys department should undertake layouts of isolated areas, but, in order to avoid difficulties arising from claims to customary rights to land, these should in the first instance be confined to government land; thus, in Buea, Bota, Kumba and Bamenda, government residential areas were laid out.

However, in the years following, the 1961-62 estimates made provision for a town planning section of the lands and surveys department, but its functions were again not intended to be ambitious. In fact, in that scheme no attempt was made to include the planning of already inhabited areas owing to the obvious difficulties of paying compensation to owners of properties and providing alternative sites to those to be dispossessed. Furthermore, no adequate legislation existed under which native lands could be planned and the development plan enforced. In 1964 it was considered that the chaotic situation with regard to the development of native lands should not be allowed to continue, and as a result, the local authority (planning area) regulations of 1964 were passed. These were regulations made under the Land and Native Rights Ordinance empowering the local authorities to appoint a planning secretary of state.

As an effort in that regard, the planning authorities were empowered to declare certain areas within their jurisdiction as planning areas and then to proceed to draw up development plans and implement them. Notwithstanding, by 1966 the national parliament had passed law No. 6610 of 18 November 1966. This law laid down the urban planning regulations for the French-speaking part of the country.¹⁷ According to extant literature, the law came into force promptly with the implementation of a decree passed by the prime minister on 27th March 1968. The initial law was in place until the dismantling of the Federal System in 1972. Upon the federation of Cameroon, the planning law was revised in 1973, and the ordinance No. 73/20 regulating urban planning in the United Republic of Cameroon was enacted in replacement of the 1966 law.¹⁸ It is observed that despite the existence of that planning law, there was no change in building practices as people continued to build without regard for the existing planning laws. In fact, it was noted in 1989 that in breach of the 1973 ordinance, which required all local councils to develop and implement their specific town planning documents, most of the councils failed to put their procedures in place. In the years after, the government continued to put in place more town planning rules and give the mandates to town planning departments and the councils. The historical background leads this paper to examine the non-respect of town planning laws as a challenge difficult to deal with.

Non-respect of Town Planning Laws

The continuous non-respect of applicable laws by town planning authorities and the citizens constituted a major challenge to town planning regulations in Bamenda. Akonteh Ephesians paints the picture in this way:

Irrespective of the fact that the town planning department alongside the BUC made efforts to establish master plans for the town, such as those preceding the 1970s, 1985, 2004, 2008 and the 2011 plan that was expected to go up to 2027, the provisions of such plans were in most instances not respected. Even the law of revising town planning regulations after every ten years in order to meet the exigencies of the times was a far reality.¹⁹

This situation did not only pose a problem to urban development in the city, but it equally posed a serious problem to public hygiene and sanitation. The master plan and the structure plans had laid down strict rules regulating housing areas, industrial estates, public green areas and so on. According to the 1985 master plan of Bamenda, the floodplain of the Mezam River and the floodplains in the centre of Bamenda had originally been marked as green areas with construction prohibited. The disrespect of this statutory provision later forced the abandonment of this mono-centre.²⁰

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ « Le Guide de Reference » (Gouvernance, Locale, Tomel Urbanisme operationnel, 2011), 8.

¹⁸ Interview with Juluis Mbah Taku, 51 years, chief of service for Town planning in the Bamenda city council, Bamenda City Council premises, 23rd January 2025.

¹⁹ Interview with Ephesians Akonteh, retired council worker in the department of planning, T-Junction, 5th March 2025.

²⁰ Idem.

With regard to the flood plains of streams flowing through towns and cities, although not legally permitted, several owners built houses or other buildings in flood plains of streams. In some places buildings traversed streams, forcing them to divert. The streams and the flood plains were dirty with solid waste dumped by residents and with the continuous inflow of waste from connecting drains. Worst of all, in several sites some streams were almost blocked by the enormous quantity of waste. This was a typical characteristic of the mainstream draining Bamenda from the Holiday Hotel area, through Fishpond to La Chance Bridge and down. These scenarios compromised already made efforts of town planners and made future town planning of the city difficult.²¹

There was thus the construction of many houses in flood plains, often very close to the streams and thus narrowing the profile of the streams during the rainy season. It is reported that as part of the town planning efforts by the then Bamenda Urban Council (BUC) in 1994, a team of urban development experts from Dordrecht, Netherlands, while on fieldwork in Bamenda, were quick to notice the narrowing of stream profiles in the city, which was clearly attributed to the non-respect of the refusal of constructing houses on flood plains. This non-respect of the regulations, like other laws, later caused serious flooding problems during the rainy season. In this particular instance, the experts reported that:

In the flood plains of the Mezam River between La Chance Bridge and Church Centre, where the flood plain is 50-70 m wide, houses near the small pedestrian bridge stand 2 metres deep in water during the rainy season, and residents have to leave their homes for a period of time.²²

This disrespect for town planning construction rules exposed the inhabitants of such areas to various poor hygiene and sanitation hazards. Thereby, making the areas not liveable with other unhealthy consequences. Also, in a way to keep the town clean, the throwing of waste into streams and other drains was forbidden by the law even so, inhabitants continued discharging their waste into nearby streams and other drains. This made it difficult for drains to function properly, due to the large quantities of solid waste dumped into them. In particular, drains with bends, corners and narrow culverts were regularly blocked by waste. Many areas in the town had illegal waste dumps, often very close to streams.

Before 1998, the commercial avenue stretch and the Bamenda main market witnessed considerable congestion as hawkers who were constantly refused from selling around that premise continually did so. To salvage the situation, the Bamenda Urban Council reclaimed the swamped land at the former fish pond and constructed a new market on the site. The market went fully operational in 1998.²³ Following that construction, the BUC ordered all those selling food items along the streets of the main market to move to the new market. Hawkers who sold various items in trucks and wheelbarrows along the commercial avenue also moved to the new market, which became known as the food market. While that was a saluted measure by the BUC to decongest the commercial avenue stretch, hawkers have never been absent within that area, and the situation is even worse today. The inapplicability of sanctions and the general non-respect of these laws by the Bamenda city dwellers compromised town planning in numerous ways.²⁴

Another aspect of non-conformance to town planning rules was noticeable in the transportation sector. In March 2003, the BUC ordered the relocation of bus stations from their previous locations within the town to new locations at the outskirts of the town.²⁵ The purpose was to decongest the town and reduce, most especially, traffic congestion. In that regard, three bus parks thus sprang up: Mile 18 Mankon, for buses plying the Bamenda-Fundong road and the Bamenda-Kumbo-Nkambe road; and Miles 1 and 2 Up Station, for buses plying the Bamenda-Bafoussam-Yaounde axis and the Bamenda-Bafoussam-Douala roads.

²¹ Idem.

²² Co-operation between BUC and the City of Dordrecht, "Fieldwork Report and Recommendations for Drainage and Solid Waste Management within the Bamenda Urban Council Area", March 1994.

²³ Andrew Ashu Obi, "The socio-economic and environmental impacts of urbanization in Bamenda" (DIPES II Dissertation, ENS Yaoundé, 2004), 70.

²⁴ Interview with James Atando, 73 years, former tax collector for the BUC, Meta Quarters, 4th March 2025.

²⁵ Andrew Ashu Obi, "The socio-economic and environmental impacts of urbanization in Bamenda", 70.

The effects of these arrangements were plausible. However, the illegal operation of bigger agencies within the main town, like Amour Mezam, Moghamo, Vatican, Nso Boys and many other agencies, undermined such well-intentioned town planning efforts. Plate 1 is a 2003 picture of the new bus park at Mile 2 Up station aimed at decongesting the town.

Plate 1: New bus Park at Mile 2 Up station, 2003



Source: Andrew Ashu Obi, “The socio-economic and environmental impacts of urbanization in Bamenda,” 70.

Although this significant effort was made as early as 2003 by the BUC, the decision did not help town planners to the extent intended. This is so because at the finance junction, it was possible to see buses plying the Santa-Mbouda-Bafoussam stretches, clandestinely loading passengers instead at the designated Up station park. Therefore, the non-respect of rules led to traffic congestion, and the illegal sales were made by vendors of all kinds.²⁶ To further understand the congestion issue table 1 is very demonstrative of areas of agency concentrations.

Table1: Locations of Travel agencies in Bamenda

Travel Agencies	Locations
Psalms 23	Mile 3
Nso Boys	Mile 4
Amour Mezam Express	Mile 2
Jeannot Express	Sonac street
Grand Jeanot Express	Sonac Street
Vatican Express	Sonac Stree
Avenir Express	Bamendakwe
Guarantee Express	Big Mankon
Moghamo Express	Sonac Street
Mondial Express	City Chemist
Musango Express	City Chemist
Oasis Express	City Chemist
Axus	Mile 4
Peoples agencies	Ntarikon

Source: Bamenda city council and field work, 2023.

The table above shows that most of the agencies were located in the heart of the town. Their illegal but open presence mostly around the Sonac Street stretch and City Chemist within the heart of the town was a major

²⁶ Interview with Erasmus Njoukon, 60 years, Long time Bamenda City Dweller, Way in Nkwen, 6th April 2025.

reason for traffic congestion and severe hold-ups. Because of the non-respect of these laws, which sometimes had corruption as a factor, it was difficult to maintain town planning programmes in Bamenda. Aside from the non-respect of town planning regulations, road infrastructure also proved difficult for town planners, as considered next.

Road Infrastructure Challenge to Town Planning in Bamenda

Bamenda generally lacked quality road infrastructure. The deteriorated state of roads in Bamenda significantly hindered the achievement of effective town planning objectives. For what was obtained, many roads remained unpaved, poorly maintained or rendered impassable, thereby restricting movement, limiting access to essential services and contributing to the fragmentation of urban space.²⁷ The inadequate road infrastructure in Bamenda accelerated the growth of informal settlements, encouraged unregulated land use and widened socio-economic disparities across the city. Road networks in Bamenda were characterised by poor connectivity and linkages. Generally, urban roads in Bamenda were classified into regional roads, primary distribution roads, secondary distribution roads, and collector and access roads.²⁸ Regional roads were paved with a size of 8 m, which are limited in capacity. Primary distribution roads were between 6 m and 7 m wide with no shoulders. Most of the roads were paved more than 30 years ago and characterised by potholes and poor drainage systems. And that was the same for secondary distribution roads. Collector roads remained undeveloped and characterised by gullies, no culverts and no drainage. The town had limited road capacity, intersection problems and traffic holdups, thereby making life difficult for town dwellers.

An overall assessment of the road network situation showed that tarred and paved roads constituted a very small percentage, approximately 13%, of roads within the city.²⁹ To these roads have been added a new form of earth roads comprising previously tarred roads which, due to rapid deterioration, have seen their tarmac surface completely erased.³⁰ The stretch of Longla Street from Longla Gate to the end of the tar Longla is a vivid example of this type of earth road. The city road belts that served as bypasses for transmitters were also in this road category. A survey of these roads showed that they had an average width ranging from 4 m to 7 m, and very few of these roads were being improved upon by the council. This is evident as seen on plate 2.

Plate 2: State of some Roads in Bamenda



A Road at Meta quarter



B La Chance bridge



C Rendez- vous junction



D Cow street

Source: Edna Namondo Njei, field work April 23rd 2024

²⁷ Interview with Cornelius Fombang, 57 years, geography teacher, Mile 4, 23rd April 2025.

²⁸ Human Technology Resources, "Master Plan of Bamenda city council 2011-2027, Physical Development plan" (May 2012), 6.

²⁹ Bamenda city council, "Preparation of Bamenda land use plan. Phase II. Diagnosis of the existing situation and strategic orientation (April 2014), 8.

³⁰ Ibid.

These pictures in plate 2 indicate the terrible state of the poor road networks in Bamenda from Meta Quarters to La Chance Bridge, Rendez-vous Junction to Cow Street and many more. The deterioration of these roads was more intense from 2018, when the crisis in Bamenda embraced a spiralling turn.

Moreover, unplanned roads in Bamenda led to a disorganised city layout and traffic congestion, especially from Foncha Junction to Mobile, and, as mentioned earlier, from areas hosting travelling agencies. These road infrastructure issues were very visible challenges to town planning.³¹ Also, the poor road networks led to poor service delivery and urban disorder. This made stronger planning and upgrades essential. The roads in Bamenda were characterised by an incoherent hierarchy of road networks, most of which were used for commercial and residential activities instead of moving persons and goods.³² Moreover, most of the roads were poorly aligned, poorly constructed and not well drained. Even when tarred, the roads were not permanently surfaced and degraded rapidly. In addition to that, the road had a few undersized roundabouts which were largely occupied with commercial activities.³³ The overall alarming road network situation in Bamenda affected expansion and brought in negative dynamics for the city people. The following theme examines uncoordinated development of houses and quarters amongst the myriad of town planning challenges.

Uncoordinated Development of Houses and Quarters

Historical accounts hold that until independence in 1961, there were only six quarters in Bamenda town, viz., Station, Abakpa (Old Town), Ntamulung, Atu-Aziri, Mugheb and Musang. However, with the reclassification of Bamenda town as the provincial headquarters of the North West, the growth and evolution of quarters were rapid due to the influx of migrants and the increasing demand for habitable land. Quarters such as new layouts, Abangoh, Nitop, Sisa and Ntabesi were developed. This was to the extent that even the steep slopes of the Bamenda escarpment were fast giving up their natural looks to residential sites. Thus, with little or no planning control, the town evolved from small scattered settlements to a compact of unplanned settlement patterns.³⁴

The unregulated town planning of Bamenda further compounded issues. Low-quality houses emerged in especially old towns. The houses had deteriorated walls and rusted roofing sheets. In other areas like Swine and Sisia Quarters, overcrowding was common, and it was estimated by 2004 that there were between 20 and 25 houses per square kilometre.³⁵ This overcrowding, even in approved living areas, made accessibility to essential services like pipedwater, parking sites, electricity extension and other services difficult. See plate 3 on the uncontrolled growth of houses within the Bamenda escarpment as of 2004.

Plate 3: Low Quality housing on the Bamenda escarpment slope as of 2004.



Source: Andrew Ashu Obi, “The socio-economic and environmental impacts of urbanization in Bamenda”, 20.

³¹ Interview with Rofina Mbaku, Vendor at Amour Mezam, Amour Mezam, 5th January, 2025.

³² BCC, “Preparation of Bamenda Land use plan. Phase II. Diagnosis of the Existing situation and strategic orientation” (April 2014), 7.

³³ Interview with Terence Ndzeyuy, 40 years, road user and teacher at the Government Technical College Kumbo, 24th May 2024.

³⁴ Interview with Cornelius Fombang.

³⁵ Andrew Ashu Obi, “The socio-economic and environmental impacts of urbanization in Bamenda”, 38.

It should be indicated that the construction of such houses in plate 3 was against town planning norms. The steep slopes posed serious problems during construction. The occupants dug seriously in order to cut terraces along the contours. Accessibility was difficult. The roads created by residents were usually narrow, slippery and not motorable. It raised danger in the case of a landslide. Since it was a form of an illegal settlement, SNEC and SONEL, which were water and electricity companies, did not extend their services to these areas. Such illegal construction robbed the town of its beauty and kept the lives of dwellers at risk. These unacceptable settlements complicated future town planning activities in the town and made it that, right till 2020, the town continuously suffered a number of issues.

One reason for the uncoordinated growth of Bamenda town was the economic crisis of the 1980s and 1990s and the 2008 struggles. These crisis moments increased the migrant population in Bamenda without infrastructural development to accommodate them.³⁶ In fact, during these periods, there were many Bamilekes and youths from neighbouring towns who had hoped to make their lives better. They were determined to survive through hawking and other activities of the informal sector. In line with this, the town grew up to unplanned areas of Nitop I, II, and III; Musang; Ntabag I and II; Alakuma; Ntarikon; Mulang; Bayelle; Ngomgham; Ntughem; and other unplanned settlements. As the inhabitants moved without infrastructure, it became expensive to relocate them in the course of rehabilitation.³⁷ By that, such undeveloped and unplanned areas remained the same for years.

Most generally and in terms of housing, the difficulties usually stemmed from the fact that the city did not possess adequate quality housing to keep up with the population growth arising both from natural increases and the involuntary displacement of thousands of village dwellers who could not be absorbed by the rural economy and had to migrate to Bamenda town, which in itself was unprepared to receive them in terms of providing adequate housing or having employment opportunities to offer them. In the Bamenda city area, and as noted earlier, the problem was not only restricted to the quantity but also the poor quality of housing units and environment.³⁸ Following the various themes handled it is apparent that the Anglophone problem/crisis worsened all other challenges as discussed lastly.

Anglophone Problem/Crisis

The interplay between political instability and urban planning in Bamenda offers a critical lens through which to examine how crises can reshape cities. The political crisis in Bamenda profoundly disrupted urban governance and town planning, creating a landscape of spatial fragmentation and institutional collapse. Scholars like Piet Koning and Francis B. Ngamnjoh argued that the post-reunification neglect of Anglophone regions by the Cameroonian government, for which Bamenda was one of its capitals, entrenched systemic marginalisation, leading to inadequate urban infrastructure investment.³⁹ This neglect became acute in the 1980s when Bamenda master plans, such as the 1983 urban development scheme⁴⁰ were routinely ignored, allowing unregulated settlements to sprawl into ecologically sensitive zones.⁴¹

By the 1990s, decentralisation policies under law No. 96/06 (1996) further weakened planning coherence, as competing municipal authorities and traditional leaders clashed over land allocation, exacerbating haphazard urbanisation.⁴² The early 2000s saw a surge in politically motivated land grabs, where elites exploited weak enforcement to annex public spaces for private development, eroding green belts and flood plains.⁴³ This institutional decay set the stage for the current crisis where urban planning has become a casualty of broader geopolitical strife.

³⁶ Interview with Joseph Ntiekan, 80 years, retired worker with the then Bamenda Urban Council, Ntaseng, 23rd January, 2025.

³⁷Idem.

³⁸ Lawrence Fombe, "The Bamenda Space- Evolution and Organisation (Master Dissertation in Geography (The University of Yaoundé, October 1983), 93-95.

³⁹ Piet Koning and Francis B. Ngamnjoh, "The Anglophone problem in Cameroon" *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35, No. 2 (1997): 207-229.

⁴⁰ Bamenda Urban Development Plan 1983, "North West regional Archive Bamenda" (BUDP) 83/Arch/12., 4.

⁴¹ Republic of Cameroon "law No. 73/15 of 7th December 1973 on the establishment of SONEL (Yaoundé: Government. Printer, 1973). 12.

⁴² Henry Kam Kah, "Decentralization and urban Governance in Cameroon", *African studies Quarterly* 15 No. 4 (2015): 45.

⁴³ Aaron Neba, *Land tenure and conflict in the North West Region* (Bamenda: Unique printers. 2005), 78.

Then too, the escalation of the Anglophone conflict after 2016 transformed Bamenda's urban dysfunction into outright territorial warfare, with town planning tools weaponised by both state and non-state actors. The imposed "ghost town" lockdown paralysed municipal services, halting critical infrastructure projects and maintenance.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, separatist enforcement of "non-construction" edicts in disputed zones created pockets of forced urban stasis, while Internally Displaced Persons settlements (IDPs) ballooned without sanitation planning.⁴⁵ The deliberate burning of planning offices erased land records, accelerating chaotic construction in hillside danger zones.⁴⁶

Also, during the crisis, Bamenda urban planning workers attempted limited field operation but faced severe restrictions, particularly in red zones like Ground Zero (Ntarinkon) and Blood Slope (Mile 4), where separatist bans and active combat prevented official access.⁴⁷ Even in inaccessible areas, workers risked kidnapping or arson attacks, leaving Bamenda post-2016 constructions uninspected.⁴⁸

Significantly, therefore, the Anglophone crisis fundamentally transformed urban planning in Bamenda, creating a landscape where governance structures collapsed while field data demonstrated that planned infrastructure projects were abandoned between 2017 and 2020.⁴⁹ Within that time too, unauthorised constructions in high-risk zones increased by 30%;⁵⁰ the lack of routine town planner visitations during the Anglophone crisis resulted in uncontrolled urban sprawl, illegal construction and exacerbated deteriorating infrastructures. To that, informal settlements expanded into high-risk zones, increasing vulnerability to floods and landslides, while neglected road and drainage systems worsened living conditions.⁵¹

While the Anglophone crisis wreaked havoc on the aspects of town planning, it should be clear that the Anglophone crisis did not create Bamenda's planning challenges, but it revealed them with brutal clarity, stripping the city bare of its fragile urban order.⁵² Notably in June 2024, a newspaper tabloid reported, "Insecurity disrupted service delivery, while displaced persons settled informally in Bamenda, worsening congestion and straining infrastructure".⁵³

In all, it could be concluded that conflicts in Bamenda weakened the normal functioning of planning institutions, diverted budgets and complicated the delivery of basic services and enforcement of urban regulations. This overlay of insecurity magnified existing planning challenges.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion made in this paper, it is apparent that the issue of town planning continued to be burning in Bamenda amidst struggles to handle the challenges. This paper had as its main focus the investigation of town planning challenges in Bamenda. To have expounded on the themes, the paper was divided into five parts. The first interest was to look at the historical background leading to the challenges in town planning. Also, non-respect of town planning laws, the road infrastructure challenge to town planning in Bamenda, uncoordinated development of houses and quarters and the Anglophone problem/crisis were the themes of interest. From the themes considered, the paper reveals that Bamenda faced severe challenges in town planning, which were overwhelming and remained unresolved over the decades, particularly in relation to the Anglophone problem/crisis.

⁴⁴ Harrison Awah, "Ghost Towns and Urban Resistance in Cameroon", *conflict studies Quarterly* 24 (2018): 33-50.

⁴⁵ Grace Mbu, "Non-state Governance in Anglophone Cameroon", *journal of contemporary African studies* 38, No. 3 (2020): 412.

⁴⁶ Lawrence Fombe, "Arson and institutional memory in crisis cities", *urban geography* 4 No. 9 (2019): 1347-1365.

⁴⁷ Bamenda city council, Restricted zone Directives Kef.BCC/SEC/014, 2023), 1

⁴⁸ Interview with Anonymous Inspector of sites and member of building committee Bamenda council, Up station, 23rd March 2025.

⁴⁹ Lawrence Fombe, "Arson and institutional memory in crisis cities", 34.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Interview with Louise Ntemgang, 57 years, expert in town planning, Opposite PMI Nkwen, 15th August 2025.

⁵³ The Guardian. "What Were You Expecting? A Bloodless War? How Cameroon Became Trapped in a Forgotten Standoff," *The Guardian* (June 2024).

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