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Urban development interventions and living conditions in the informal settlement of Yaounde

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Abstract. Since the mid-2000s, the political capital of Cameroon, Yaounde is undergoing construction with many urban development projects coordinated by the Yaounde City Council carried out in residential areas and informal settlements. These various activities as many other urban development projects have impacts on the living conditions of the inhabitants. This article focuses on the projects specifically carried out in the informal settlements, aims at analyzing the meaning and the scope of those projects in the lives of individuals and communities. Indeed, this work, is interested in the different operations of eviction, opening up and restructuring that took place in the informal settlements as well as their social consequences on the entire population of the city. It describes these different operations as public actions that are not deployed over the entire area occupied by the popular neighborhoods in Yaoundé, but only on certain slums concentrated around the central town. These results and conclusion are developed from data obtained during direct observations in the slums, from archives and from semi-structured interviews with some urban actors who participated in the implementation of urban development programs in the slums of Yaoundé.

Keywords. Slums, urban development, living conditions, public action, Yaoundé

Introduction

Slums can be defined as an urban area built spontaneously without a development project and, lacking basic services (roads, potable water, electricity, sanitation) where inhabitants live in houses that do not meet urban planning standards, in unhealthy, dangerous and overcrowded conditions with no guarantee of staying in the place (Mansion and Rachmuhl, 2012). Worldwide a significant number of urban population is settled in slums. According to the United Nations, the percentage of urban dwellers living in slums is about one billion since 2008. This figure represents about 47.7% of the global urban population (UN-Habitat, 2016). In these spaces where instability, vulnerability and poverty coexist, the highest urban population growth rates are evident. It is estimated that between 30 and 50 million new people worldwide move into slums and shantytowns each year, to the point where there are currently an estimated two billion people living in slums worldwide.

This observation has led the United Nations system, national governments and municipalities to integrate these marginalized areas as a development priority. In fact, for the past few decades, these marginalized areas have been the object of particular concern in the context of urban development, where programs for the improvement of slums and the

prevention of their development have been set up. UN-Habitat in particular has set the goal of significantly improving the lives of millions of slum dwellers by 2020. Thus, programs for water supply and sanitation, urban economic management, and improvement of the living conditions of disadvantaged populations have been initiated with international, national, and local funding mechanisms (Milbert, 2006). In this wake, various actions have been carried out, particularly by governments. Some have focused on the implementation of basic services in informal settlements. For example, water supply, sanitation, road improvement and electrification projects have been carried out in large slums around the world. Other programs have placed special emphasis on housing and income improvement. To this end, microcredit loans have been provided to slum dwellers to improve their homes and support informal activities (Wallace, 2014).

These different projects have improved the living conditions of populations in several cities around the world. The main findings of the studies carried out to analyze and evaluate the impacts of these projects have shown that slum clearance projects in some countries have led to the development of better quality garbage collection and refuse collection services that have impacts on pollution in urban areas and on the health of the urban poor (Turley et al, 2013). In other countries, these programs have provided informal settlements with access to city sewage systems as well as water supply and road improvements. In short, slum upgrading actions have connected informal settlements to existing urban systems (electricity, water, sewerage, proper roads). Slum upgrading interventions have been carried out on all the five continents. No region of the world and even no country has been left out of this vast movement that has been analyzed by various scholars. Actually, we have a constituted literature on the theme of slum upgrading interventions in different cities around the world. In this literature, we found three main themes developed. Some of the works emphasize on territorial, environmental and social recompositions noticed after the slum upgrading interventions (Le Tellier, 2008), while others address the question of the urban actors involved in the projects carried out in popular neighborhoods (Zaki, 2006). A third theme is developed on the issue of policies and programs implementation (Giraud, 2008; Navez Bouchanine, 2007, Legros, 2010). This research can be defined as a continuation of the scientific works carried out on the recompositions observed after interventions in slums. Its objective is to document the impacts of urban development interventions on the living conditions of population in the particular context of Yaoundé, the political capital of Cameroon where since a decade, several interventions in informal settlements have been carried out under the leadership of various national and international actors. Indeed, for more than ten years, operations of eviction, opening up, participatory development and restructuring operations with demolition of buildings have been carried out in the slums.

Methodology

This article is a reflection based on empirical data. The data presented in the results were obtained during interviews with urban development actors and with inhabitants of some slums where various interventions were carried out. These include the inhabitants of the Nkolbikok, Melen, Ngoa-ékellé, Obili and Mvog Ada neighborhoods, which are located in the intervention zone of the projects, and the residents of the area that was evicted in the Nlongkak and Mokolo neighborhoods. As part of this work, we met with some of the workers of the NGO Era-Cameroon who were involved in the management of, the participatory slum upgrading program (PSUP) in Yaounde and with executives of the Yaoundé City Council. A total of 40 semi-structured interviews were conducted over a period of 30 days. The data collection began with interviews at the NGO Era-Cameroon located in the Mendong Maison Blanche neighborhood,

where we met with officials and people involved in the implementation of the PSUP. Afterwards, we went to the city center to conduct interviews at the Yaoundé Urban City Council. This part of the survey with resource persons working in the coordination of slum operations, where we interviewed 10 key actors in these programs, it was carried out over a period of about two weeks. The survey was spread out over this long period because the actors were not always present at their workstations and the interview appointments were sometimes postponed. The interviews with the population took place over the course of two weeks, during which we travelled through various neighborhoods in order to meet with the slum dwellers and understand the social impacts of these various operations. In these various places, we also consult archives of their libraries.

Data collection was done using an interview guide and in French. Data was collected on the following items: the missions of the project team, the work carried out during the implementation of the programs and projects, and the social effects of the project on the lives of the local population and the city's residents. These data were recorded on a tape recorder, transcribed and recorded before being subjected to a thematic content analysis during which the data were categorized and coded.

Results

I. Yaoundé, a capital city where spontaneous housing is widespread

Yaoundé, the political capital of Cameroon, like the majority of cities in developing countries, is an urban territory with multiple faces: spaces equipped with modern infrastructure and respecting urban planning norms, spaces with a rural character, squatters' neighborhoods that invade unhealthy land that is not active, and spaces with spontaneous constructions commonly called informal neighborhoods, spontaneous neighborhoods, neighborhoods on the fringe, slums (Roncayolo and Paquot, 1992; UN-Habitat, 2007). These neighborhoods occupy a fairly large area of the city's territory and continue to expand over time. Located in all the seven districts of the city, the shantytowns found near or far from the city center reflect Cameroon's two-speed urbanization. The city of Yaoundé is developing with the development of certain spaces by municipal authorities, urban development companies, and private partners in urban development on the one hand, and with the anarchic and spontaneous occupation of space by the population with the help of illegal developers commonly called "landowners" on the other hand. In other words, the Cameroonian city is built from above and below, with the help of institutions and isolated actors who present themselves as actors in the creation and transformation of the urban landscape.

The anarchic occupation of space, which represents about 70% of the territory of the city of Yaoundé (Mougoue, 2010), is a very old phenomenon. It even preceded the creation of the city of Yaoundé. When the municipality of Yaoundé was created in 1956, the territory was already occupied by the administrative authorities and their collaborators, but also by peasant and merchant populations whose families had been settled on the site of the city for decades. Over time, these spontaneous neighborhoods have expanded in size with the important role that the populations play in accessing land through the sale of land located in previously undeveloped localities. With this evolution in time and space, the informal settlements of the city of Yaoundé are classified by the urban community into two major groups: the pericentral informal settlements or the park of old neighborhoods, and the peripheral informal settlements (Yaoundé Urban Community, 2008).

The park of old neighborhoods, or the block of traditional high-density neighborhoods, is made up of informal settlements located in the central and pericentral hillside sites of the city. These are the Briqueterie, Mokolo, Nkomkana, Oliga, Madagascar, Melen, Elig Effa, Etoa-

Meki, Djoungolo, Nkol-Eton, Elig-Edzoa, Mvog-Mbi, Mvog-Ada, Nkolndongo, Etam-Bafia, Nsam, and Tsinga neighborhoods among others. These neighborhoods have the particularity of dilapidated buildings and equipment and are connected to the city center by asphalt roads in good or poor condition. These neighborhoods have developed around the downtown ring, which is made up of administrative and commercial neighborhoods (Franqueville, 1984).

The spontaneous peripheral neighborhoods, on the other hand, are all of the neighborhoods that have developed on the edge of the city and along the penetrating roads. Unlike structured neighborhoods, which are created after the installation of various networks, certain facilities and roads without the construction of housing by the various urban development actors. Spontaneous neighborhoods are the product of populations who put parcels of land for sale, build housing and develop informal activities, whether or not they respect urbanization standards and land use planning principles. They are characterized by their under-equipment, a connection to the city's road network through unpaved roads and difficult access during the rainy season with deteriorating access roads.

Within these marginal neighborhoods, the habitat is characterized by constructions made of risky materials (poto-poto, mud planks), and sometimes of cement blocks. The houses merge with the plot of land, the limits of which are marked by small paths between the houses that serve as service roads for the inhabitants and for wastewater. These neighborhoods "offer the landscape of a cluster of houses served only by very narrow alleys that delimit the properties" (Mougoue, 2010: 64). The space is saturated and there is a high density of population and buildings. Household waste is dumped in nearby waterways, which are sometimes used as septic tanks, or on the edges of the street where it forms a mass of garbage.

II- Actions in the slums: between evictions, equipment and restructuring in the pericentral districts of Yaoundé

The slums of the city of Yaoundé have been, on several occasions, areas where actions have been carried out by the City Council in collaboration with different development partners. These operations can be classified into three: demolition and forced evictions operations, slum upgrading and sanitation operations, and operations to restructure informal settlements.

II-1) Demolition of buildings and forced evictions

During the second half of the 2000s, we witnessed the demolition of residential buildings in the shallows and swamps adjacent to the Tsinga, Messa, Ekoudou, Nkolbisson, Ntaba-Longkak, Messamendongo, Tropicana, Tongolo, Djoungolo, Etetak, Madagascar, and Olézoa neighborhoods. These operations, conducted exclusively by the Yaoundé City Council, are part of two programs (the fight against urban disorder and the campaign to colonize swampy lowlands). These programs have many objectives. Among others, we can mention: to make the populations respect the rules of urban planning, hygiene, community life, to fight the anarchic occupation of urban spaces, and to reclaim the wetlands of the city to make them urban forests. They have led to the evictions of some inhabitants of these localities and the reclamation of the State's real estate. The swampy lowlands were a target within this program because they are part of the public river domain and their occupation by the populations is an anarchic occupation of the public domain of the State according to Ordinance 74-1 of July 6, 1974 where the land tenure system in force in Cameroon is recorded. Thus, although these operations have been perceived as abuses by the Yaoundé City Council against the poor, because they accentuate the precariousness of this category of poor people, from a legal point of view, it is an operation that is based on a solid and secure legal foundation. The population and victims of this operation are invited to be disciplined since they are in a situation of infringement because unduly

occupying the real estate of the State; reason why within the framework of these operations of evictions and dislodging, the dislodged populations could not benefit from any form of compensation nor from resettlement. During these different operations, not all the lowlands were affected. Some families are still living in the swampy lowlands of the following localities: Mfoundi Valley, Ebogo Valley, Ewoé Valley, Ake Alley, between the Nsam, Efoulan, and Dakar neighborhoods, the Valley between Efoulan, Nsimeyong, and Mvolyé, Biyenne, Abiergue, and the Okozoa. According to the city's urban development master plan, eviction operations will continue and will be carried out in these localities over the next few years.

The demolition of buildings and forced relocations in Yaoundé's swampy lowlands are similar to the displacement operations in other African cities, where the methods used to displace people are characterized by violence, brutality, and haste in which displaced people are not always given time to gather their belongings. In fact, during these different operations, the actors of urban development have resorted to the use of force and even violence to reclaim the State's real estate assets that were unduly used and annexed by the populations. The methods of social dialogue were not put forward with activities such as the holding of dialogue meetings with the populations with the aim of informing the slum dwellers of the municipality's projects and discussing the deadlines for the evacuation of illegally occupied dwellers. The populations were informed of the demolition of the site just a few days before the beginning of the work by the personnel of the Yaoundé Urban City Council carrying out the demolition. In this haste, the poor families settled in the swampy lowlands for decades were not able to recover their material goods which were destroyed in the course of the demolition. Apart from the destroyed houses, the inhabitants of the Elobi (specific name given to swampy lowlands in Yaounde), where the eviction operations took place suffered enormous losses ranging from house furniture and other domestic goods (kitchen utensils, clothes ...) to means of production (sewing workshops, carpentry, hairdressing salons etc.).

II-2) - Slum upgrading interventions: equipment and sanitation operations

Conducted by the Yaoundé City Council with several partners including the French Cooperation, the European Union, UN-Habitat, the African Development Bank, companies, local and international NGOs since 2006, these operations have placed particular emphasis on equipping the informal settlements located in central and pericentral hillside sites of the city. These operations, which can be found in two major programs (the opening up of the popular neighborhoods and the participatory slum improvement projects), have been carried out in several phases: the study phase, the project implementation phase and, the sustainability phase. With these projects, operations such as waste pre-collection have become part of the daily life of the population living in the slums.

Within the framework of the project "opening up of the popular neighborhoods in the city of Yaoundé", carried out with funds from the debt-development contract (CD2), a network of secondary and tertiary roads have been built with asphalt concrete, cement concrete, cobblestones and concrete pavements in about ten informal settlements (Mballa II-Tongolo, Mimboman, Messa-Carrière, Essos, Nkolndongo, Briqueterie, Kondengui, Mvog-Ada, Melen, and Olézoa). These neighborhoods, also benefited from the construction of pedestrian paths and gutters for the collection of rainwater and runoff water, the improvement of the coverage rate of the potable water and electricity network, the realization of crossing structures, and waste management. With these different operations, the informal settlements located in central and pericentral hillside sites of the city have undergone many changes. The garbage has been reduced with the pre-collection of waste by local NGOs, the secondary roads are paved with paving stones or concrete, the secondary and tertiary roads are lit and the neighborhoods are

connected to the drinking water network. In addition, these different roads contribute for easy circulation in the neighborhoods and the city, with the different roads built being used as shortcut to reach the city center.

The second program, the Participatory Slum Upgrading Program (PSUP), is a joint project of the African-Caribbean-Pacific Group of States, the European Commission and UN-Habitat. Through its main focus on participatory planning methods, this program with budgetary allocations and multi-stakeholder partnerships works for the sustainable improvement of the living conditions of slum dwellers. In the city of Yaoundé, this program has been carried out on one site, Nkolbikok neighborhood. In this neighborhood, the following projects were carried out: installation of public lighting, cleaning of waterways with installation of bar screens, rat control campaign, waste collection, construction of crossing structures (secondary and tertiary roads, crosswalk) and creation of a water retention basin to prevent flooding in the neighborhood. These different projects were made possible with the strong participation of the inhabitants of the Nkolbikok neighborhood. Indeed, the populations formed associations and participated in the implementation of the projects through financial contributions and participation in the works. Throughout the implementation of this program, the adherence of the population to various projects was an important element for the success of the interventions. Project funding was allocated by donors after the population had signed up for the project. When the population did not reach a consensus, the project was interrupted while it was still at the conception phase. With this working method, some projects that were initiated could not be realized. This is the case of projects initiated to secure land tenure and the installation of standpipes. These projects were interrupted after the emergence of internal quarrels between the population.

III- Living in informal settlements after urban development interventions

As presented above, two types of interventions took place in the slums: evictions and upgrading operations. The operations of equipment and sanitation in the slums in particular, are programs that have improved the living conditions of populations in the various neighborhoods where they have been carried out while the interventions of evictions have negative impacts on the population as soon as the inhabitants lost many goods during the operations carried out in the swampy lowlands. Indeed, with the operations of equipment and sanitation some positive impacts such as the improvement of hygiene and sanitation conditions were observed as soon as there is a better circulation of water in the streams and gutters as this lady from the Ngoa ékelle neighborhood attests:

"Here in our neighborhood, with the project, some works were carried out on the stream beds. They are some hydraulic vertical screens installed in the streams, they block the garbage and with them we have a better circulation of water and less flooding in the neighborhood"

Moreover, these projects have improved the physical accessibility of the neighborhood, as this gentleman from the Ngoa Ngoa ékelle neighborhood attests:

"With the road works, the construction of crossing structures such as small bridges, and street lighting, the neighborhood has changed. Car owners are no longer obliged to park their vehicles at the service station, they can now park them at the entrance of their homes. Cars and Taxis can now enter in the neighborhood. With this, mobility and transportation are easier. For example, if you have to move with a patient to the hospital, it is now easier".

Let's say that the slum dwellers are not the only beneficiaries of these projects. Some projects such as road and crossing structures constructions benefit to all the people living or passing in the town as this gentleman of Mballa II-Tongolo, precises:

“With the road works, we are not the only beneficiaries. The whole city benefits. Now cars pass through our neighborhood during rush hour to avoid the traffic jam on the main road. So the projects are advantageous for us, but also for all the population of the town and even of other towns, since with this road in our neighborhood the traffic is more fluid on the main road.”

In fact, these operations have impacts on the environment with the reduction of floods, and water pollution. Some social impacts as the physical accessibility of social infrastructures, access to potable water and electricity, better management of garbage are also noticed. These impacts appear as a beginning of solutions to slums problems. They have not been able to entirely upgrade the slums in the town of Yaounde. Firstly, the interventions were not extended to all the popular neighborhoods. Only few about twelve quarters were concerned and this neighborhoods are located in central and pericentral hillside sites of the city. The slums located at the peripheral areas were not concerned. These areas were excluded from these programs. They do not benefit from the attention of the Yaounde City Council and the other urban planning actors working in the city of Yaoundé; while these areas are the most vulnerable. In these neighborhoods, the consumption of water from wells and springs is almost daily and the management of garbage is unhygienic with garbage refuse near the concessions or dumped in waterways; which is at the origin of a high prevalence of diarrheal diseases (Nguendo Yongsu et al, 2008). Moreover, in the peripheral popular neighborhoods, secondary roads are in poor condition and impassable during the rainy season. The marginalization of spontaneous peripheral neighborhoods in urban planning programs is an observable fact in programs already implemented, such as the project of opening up of popular neighborhood in the town of Yaoundé, but also in the programs that will be executed in the future. When looking at the projections made by the Yaounde City Council for the decade 2020-2030, upgrading slum activities are programmed. They will be carried out in the slums located in central and pericentral hillside sites of the city. The peripheral slums are not amongst the target. Therefore, the interventions do not affect the whole area where slums are installed in the town. Moreover, even in the neighborhoods where the upgrading slums operations took place, a complete reorganization of the neighborhood is not observed. The operations were mainly carried out in the main streets of the neighborhood and few secondary streets. The water supplies as well as the electrification of the streets were only carried out along the main streets, the territories far from these axes being neglected.

Thus, except the few places where the operations were carried out, most areas occupied by slums are still nowadays characterized by lack of basic services (roads, potable water, electricity, sanitation) and living conditions that do not meet urban planning standards. In fact, these interventions have not been able to transform the slums; as this neighborhood chief asserts: *“The entire neighborhood has not benefited from the projects. The projects targeted only a few areas of the neighborhood where road works and the creation of pedestrian crossings were carried out. The rest of the neighborhood is unchanged. Even the secondary streets were not electrified.”*

Thus, the programs appear more as programs that were implemented partially in the slums. They are not projects that aim to renovate the whole area occupied by slums in the town of Yaounde. After these operations, informality has disappeared neither in the town nor in the neighborhood where the projects were implemented. The inhabitants are still living in vulnerable conditions. Urban poverty is what characterized the daily life of the slums inhabitants. And as soon as the interventions carried out in the slums have positive impacts on the traffic within the town, these actions can be interpreted as that are part of a development

project for the city center and its surroundings and not as programs to renovate the popular neighborhoods of the city as a whole.

Conclusion

Urban development interventions in the city of Yaounde can be classified into two categories: slum upgrading and forced evictions interventions. These activities have participated in social and sustainable development of the town. Nowadays, some informal settlements are improved with roads for emergency access, waste collection, street lighting, paved sidewalks, and better access to facilities such as schools, hospitals and public places. Furthermore, with these interventions, the swampy lowlands were released from informal occupation and now contribute to sustainable development. With these impacts, urban development interventions in Yaounde appear as right actions for the resolution of the problems faced by slums in the Cameroonian political capital. There are therefore activities to promote the operations executed but they have not been able to really transform the slums of the cities which are still vulnerable places. These interventions appear as a beginning of solutions to slums' problems. Actually, the informal settlements are still characterized by lacking basic services (roads, potable water, electricity, sanitation) and do not meet urban planning standards. This because, geographically, it is not all the surface of the town occupied by the slums that was concerned by the urban development interventions. Only few about twelve neighborhoods benefited from the programs out of about forty neighborhoods having informal settlements. Furthermore, in the informal settlements such as Mvog Ada that benefited from this programs, it is not all the areas of the settlement that were touched. Thus, in this neighborhood, some sections have improved while others are still the domain of vulnerability. With this configuration of urban development interventions in general and upgrading slums programs in particular appear as very challenging activities as written by França (2013) developed in his work on the slum grading in Sao Paulo in Brazil. It is not an easy job because as experienced by the participatory slum upgrading program (PSUP) in the Nkolbikok neighborhood, slums' problems being complex. Indeed, slums are complex settlements particularly with regard to tenure arrangement, social cohesions (conflicts of interest existing between slum dwellers) and with regard to the governance and involvements of community in decision making as developed by Lea Mugari (2011). Furthermore, slum upgrading practices are expensive as well as technical activities. Indeed, it is not all activities, political actions that can really improve the living conditions of slum dwellers. For these operations to be efficient, institutional, financial and technical capacities are needed (Lucci, 2015). Upgrading slums appear thus as an activity which has to be taken very serious by the authorities and various national institutions of African developing countries where slums nowadays occupy vast territories in cities and host the majority of the urban population.

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