

# **'We are not the only ones to blame': District Assemblies' perspectives on the state of planning in Ghana**

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## **Abstract**

*Planning has failed to exert effective influence on the growth of human settlements in Ghana. As a result, the growth of cities has been chaotic. The district assemblies, which are the designated planning authorities, are commonly blamed for this failure, yet little attention has been given to district assemblies' perspectives of what factors lead to failures in planning. This paper attempts to fill this gap. Drawing on fieldwork in Ghana, it argues that, from the perspective of district assemblies, five major challenges inhibit planning, namely: an inflexible land ownership system, an unresponsive legislative framework, undue political interference, an acute human resource shortage, and the lack of a sustainable funding strategy. The paper concludes with proposals for reforming the planning system in Ghana.*

## **Keywords**

Planning, Urban, Local Governance, Ghana, Africa

## **1. Introduction**

From a population of 6 million in 1957, the number of people in Ghana increased steadily to 18 million in 1996 (Ghana Statistical Services 2000), and is now about 24 million, the majority of whom reside in cities (UN-Habitat 2009). Globally, this

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demographic and spatial change has significant implications for planning (Huxley and Yiftachel 2000:334).

In the Ghanaian case, urbanisation has outpaced planning. Planning is reactive, and planners take short-term measures to address problems associated with the demographic and spatial change in the population (Larbi 1996). Physical development has been haphazard (Ubink and Quan 2008), and an estimated 45 per cent of the urban population is trapped in slum and squatter settlements (UN-Habitat 2009). It is projected that the slum population could double every 15 years unless effective measures are implemented swiftly (UN-Habitat 2009:4).

This paper empirically investigates *why* planning has not been effective in Ghana, particularly from the perspective of district assemblies,<sup>2</sup> and offers some thoughts for improving the state of affairs. It is divided into four main sections: Section 2 gives an overview of the nature of the planning process in Ghana, and provides a summary of the results of various evaluations of the state of planning. These form the basis for the main research question. Sections 3 and 4 discuss methodology and findings, while section 5 considers options for reform.

## 2. Planning in Ghana

Generally, there is no marked conceptual difference between planning theory in the developed and developing worlds. Planning theory in Ghana as taught in institutions is strongly influenced by British town and country planning ideas which were handed down during the colonial period. The situation has not changed in the postcolonial period, partly because the planners in the country continue to be trained in the British system. It is in the realm of practice that the 'unique' Ghanaian experience becomes evident. According to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (the highest state institution that oversees planning in Ghana) planning should be regarded as:

- a process of preparing and implementing a set of decisions and actions at local, district, regional, and national levels
- that can effect a transformation in the living conditions of the people of an area and their environment in ways that improve their existing socio-economic

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<sup>2</sup> In accordance with article 295 (1) of the Constitution of Ghana and section 1 (1) of the Local Government Act of Ghana, Act 462, the term 'district assemblies' refers to local governments which have the responsibility to manage ordinary districts (settlements of 75,000 people), municipal areas (settlements of 95,000 people), and metropolitan areas (settlements with 250,000 people or more).

conditions and circumstances, their physical surroundings, and existing institutions (Adams and Annum 2005).

According to section 12 (1) of the Local Government Act (Act 462) of Ghana, it is the responsibility of local governments (district assemblies) to plan cities and towns. Other institutions which collaborate with district assemblies in performing this role are the Survey Department and the National Development Planning Commission.

The main planning function that the district assemblies perform is development control<sup>3</sup> (Flynn-Dapaah, undated). That is, controlling:

the carrying out of building, engineering, mining and other operations on, in, under or over land or the material change in the existing use of land or building and includes subdivisions of land or disposal of waste on land including the discharge of effluent into a body of still or running water and the erection of advertisement or other hoarding (Section 162, Local Government Act).

In principle, district assemblies follow two stages to control development. The first entails the declaration of an area as a 'statutory planning area', the appointment of a planning committee to determine the present and future needs of the area, and the preparation of a base map to be used by the Town and Country Department to prepare a planning scheme. The second step requires the publication of a planning scheme, an invitation to the public concerning permit applications and their subsequent assessment or evaluation. However, across these two stages, it has been established that there are several problems that inhibit effective development control. These challenges are discussed below.

***Ineffective planning: The perspective of district assemblies***

Most evaluations of planning in Ghana reveal severe deficits. The district assemblies undertake little forward planning and the few plans that are prepared are rarely implemented. For instance, between 1996 and 2000, most district assemblies did not implement any of the medium term development plans which they prepared (Mensah 2005). Therefore, the normative sequence of planning-servicing-building-occupation has now been replaced with occupation-building-servicing (Adarkwa & Akyaw 2001:203).

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<sup>3</sup> The construction of buildings or any activity, action, or alteration that changes undeveloped property into developed property.

Antwi and Deankin (1996) have noted that urban areas are dominated by problems of unauthorised developments, lack of infrastructure, poor sanitation, health hazards, fire hazard, crime and squatter settlements. Planning in Ghana has been reactive rather than proactive and does not “proceed on sustained planning basis” (Larbi, 1996:212). More recently, Ubink and Quan (2008:202) have described physical development in Ghana as haphazard. Other issues include planners using short-term measures to resolve intractable problems, and urban settlements that lack essential services such as adequate water supply and sanitation facilities. According to Hammond (2001) the institution of planning has done little to improve the design and functioning of the towns and country in Ghana. Several evaluations have also shown the deficit of effective urban management in Ghana (see Konadu-Agyemang 1991; Yankson and Gough 1999, Gough and Yankson 2000; Yeboah 2003; 2006; Grant 2009). What they do not show is why this problem persists. Moreover, evaluations of the district assemblies’ role as planning institutions have tended to be mainly accusatory. In contrast, this study draws on in-depth field investigation and analysis to ‘hear the voice’ of those assemblies. The main research question is: What are the challenges district assemblies face in performing their role as planning agents?

### **3. Methodology**

The field research was carried out between November 2009 and March 2010. Four district assemblies were chosen to reflect the urban and rural continuum in Ghana, and to take into account the different socio-economic, tenurial, and cultural characteristics of northern and southern Ghana (see Aryeetey-Attoh and Chatterjee 1988; Konadu-Agyemang 2004; Grant and Nijman 2004). The case study areas were the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly (an urban area in the south), Ejisu-Juaben Municipal Assembly (a peri-urban area in the south), the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly (an urban area in the north), and Savelugu-Nanton District Assembly (a rural area in the north). This paper, therefore, discusses the problem of planning based on evidence from two urban areas, one peri-urban area, and one rural area.

Within the case study areas, 200 structured questionnaires were administered to private property developers randomly selected from a list of applicants for planning permits. Other respondents were selected through a ‘strategic informant sampling technique’. A focus group discussion was held with the traditional authorities in Ejisu to understand the planning problems entailed in land management. In addition, two key players in

customary land ownership and management were interviewed in each of the other three study areas in order to establish the planning and land management challenges from their perspective. Likewise, two core members of staff of the planning department were interviewed in each of the four case study areas.

At the regional level, two respondents each were drawn from the Lands Commission,<sup>4</sup> the Land Administration Project, the Regional Coordinating Council, and the Town and Country Planning Department, which are the allied bodies involved in land management and spatial planning. At the national level, a total of 11 key stakeholders were interviewed. They were selected from the Lands Commission, the Land Administration Project, the Town and Country Planning Department, and the National Development Planning Commission. All the data collated from the different interviews was first transcribed into Microsoft Word and coded for examination and interpretation using content analysis.

#### **4. Findings**

Responses from the field survey revealed that there are several challenges which inhibit planning efficiency. Five of these are particularly pervasive, namely: inflexible land tenure systems; a weak legislative framework; undue political interference in the planning process; weak human resource capacity; and inadequate funding. These issues are inextricably linked and are mutually reinforcing. Furthermore, they are national in character, although Van Leeuwen and Van Steekelenburg (1995), Adarkwa and Post (2001), and Heuber and Veer (2001) have noted that the problems are more pronounced in urban areas owing to population pressures. The rest of the paper discusses each of these problems in turn, highlighting how they inhibit effective planning.

##### ***The land factor***

Planning is predominantly a spatial activity. As such, the management of land (mode of land alienation and the existing systems of tenure) has far-reaching implications for effective planning. It may even be asserted that whoever controls landholdings controls the land market and determines the nature of urban planning (Gareth 1991; Olima 1993; Kivell 1993).

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<sup>4</sup> Or 'the New Lands Commission', as it is currently called.

In spite of efforts by the state agencies such as the Lands Commission and the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands<sup>5</sup> to ensure effective land management, there is a recurrent problem of ineffective coordination and harmonisation between customary land holders and planning institutions in Ghana. Some customary landholders sell land for purposes which are different from the uses for which planners zone them. There is, therefore, no guarantee that the content of the plan can be realised in practice unless the landholders consent to the plans. This problem was revealed by one of the directors of planning, who noted that:

Effectively, the implementation of the plan is left to the customary land holders. It is their land and the final authority in terms of how they want their area to look rests with them. To them, an approved plan is only a proposal by the district and not definitive. You cannot force them to release their land to implement the plan and there is no guarantee that an area zoned for a particular use will indeed be used for the particular purpose.

In effect, the district assemblies and the other planning institutions are at the mercy of landholders in their attempt to implement development plans (see Larbi 1995; 1996; Kasanga *et al.* 1996; Ubink and Quan 2008).

Even though in theory a permit is needed from the district assemblies before one can acquire land for a particular development, in practice the allocation of most land is done without sufficient reference to planning requirements. This was noted by all the planning officers interviewed. In the Savelugu-Nanton district, for example, the planning officer conceded that:

They [developers] do not come to us for permits before they build and you cannot underestimate fact that chiefs do not consult us effectively is a contributing factor [sic].

The case was no different in Tamale, where one officer noted that:

The fact that we continue to write stop work and produce permit on ongoing developments may be the clearest indication that people do not acquire any authorisation from us before they build. The situation can only change if we are actively involved in the land transfer processes.

In Kumasi, similar observations were made by the metropolitan director, who said:

The first thing that goes into their [developers] mind [after acquiring land] is to dig the foundation and get some quantity of sand and gravels [all in preparation towards commencing development]. Coming to us [for planning permission] is not their priority.

The planning officer from the Ejisu Juaben planning authority also averred that:

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<sup>5</sup> *Editors note:* Stool lands are lands managed under customary systems.

If the planning authority had much more control with respect to allocating land, then a major hurdle that confronts the planning process would have been cleared.

This situation where land management practices differ substantially from what planners intend them to be has wide implications. For example, 45 per cent of the structures in cities do not meet planning standards (UN-Habitat 2009), and only 44 per cent of the dwelling units in Ghana are fit to be called 'houses' (Ghana Statistical Service 2000). Furthermore, most traditional authorities and some individuals engage in the multiple sale of the same land to different people, a situation that has led to several land-related cases in the law courts. As of 2003, it was estimated that there were about 60,000 land cases in Ghana (Kasanga 2003).

### ***The legislative framework for land use planning***

A sound legal basis is important for effective planning because it provides the supportive regulatory powers to the planning authorities to facilitate the achievement of planning objectives and goals. However, in Ghana, the planning laws have established a framework which is not very responsive to the socio-cultural and economic context. One regional planning officer asked rhetorically:

As a country, we need to rethink our planning. How can we still be using [town and country planning] laws and ordinances which were enacted in 1945? These laws are practically very limited in terms of their usefulness to our modern life.

The laws governing the requirements for obtaining a planning permit are a case in point. To obtain a building permit, a prospective developer in Ghana is required by Section 5(3) of the National Building Regulations to provide the following:

1. Clearly and accurately delineated plan in ink or otherwise to the scale of 1:100
2. A detailed description of the building showing clearly the purpose of each room
3. Indicate the stages and methods by which the developer intends to construct the building
4. Indicate the materials of which the building will be constructed and show clearly and accurately the position and dimensions of the foundations
5. Indicate the method of disposal of stormwater, domestic waste water and sewage, in a block plan to the scale of 1:1250
6. Clearly indicate the method of water supply
7. Include the plan and section of every floor and roof

8. A site plan to the scale of 1:1250 showing adjoining streets
9. A site plan which shows the height of adjoining properties.

In addition to the above requirements, applicants are expected to provide a land title certificate and detailed engineering, architectural and structural drawings and, sometimes, a geological certificate. The health and safety of physical developments in cities should not be compromised, so the intention behind these requirements to ensure decent physical development should be commended. However, conceptually, it is doubtful that they promote sound town and country planning in the context of Ghana. At their root are influences from indigenous elitism, colonialism, modernism and globalism (Njoh 2009), and, in practice, such requirements are very difficult to meet. It is hard to find enough professional architects, structural experts, geologists, and engineers who have the skill to produce all the drawings required to obtain a building permit. Obtaining detailed architectural and engineering drawings to different scales of the same proposed development is expensive. Moreover, title registration processes can take up to 3 years and may cost up to 5 per cent of the open market value of the parcel of land (Gambrah 2002). For that reason, the requirement for a land title certificate as a prerequisite for planning permission has proved to be counterproductive over the years. For example, in 2009, the inability of applicants to provide good title accounted for over 90 per cent of refused planning permit applications (Town and Country Planning Department [TCPD] 2009). Generally, it is estimated that less than 50 per cent of the urban population can satisfy the planning requirements in Ghana (Dowall 1992:23). In turn, there is significant incentive for breaching those requirements (De Soto 1989; 2000). As one planning officer said, the requirements for permit applications can be 'scary and intimidating'. Another officer noted:

[The requirements] in practical sense make it more difficult for people to come to us [for planning permit before development]. But not all the documents are important. If you are assessing [planning] applications, there are few major documents you really need to focus on [sic]. The rest, we do not scrutinise.

In light of the above, why these long lists of requirements continue to exist is puzzling. What is clear is that the legal framework is a major contributory factor to the poor state of planning in Ghana.

### ***Human resources***

Planners need a blend of academic training and practical experience to appreciate and respond to the growing spatial challenges. To be effective, they require the ability both to



analyze societal needs and to formulate policies and strategies to address them. A planner should, therefore, have a good understanding of socio-economic, political, cultural, and demographic issues and be competent in their analysis. Professionals with these essential planning skills are lacking in Ghana. A regional planning officer's rendition of this problem is revealing:

We are four planners and two sub-professionals who are responsible for the whole of the [Northern] region. We are responsible for 20 local planning authorities, about 2.5 million people and a land size of about 70,000km<sup>2</sup> which is almost 30 percent of the size of Ghana. Under such conditions, how do you expect us to deliver [planning services] effectively?

Moreover, only 50 percent of the 170 local authorities have planning offices. Of these, only one-third are staffed by professional planners. The 170 districts currently estimate their staffing requirement at 700, a figure which contrasts with the current stock of 101 planners (COWI 2009). While there may be other self-styled planners in the country, the Ghana Institute of Planners, the professional body, has only 270 members who serve a country with an estimated national population of 24 million. The planner-population ratio of around 1: 90,000 compares poorly with the situation in some developed countries such as the UK, where an estimated 22,000 planners manage the settlements of 60 million people (a ratio of about 1:2,300).

One official interviewed for this study noted that:

[Ghana's] population is fast growing but the number of planners keeps shrinking. Those who are retiring, dying, and resigning are not [being] replaced. The result is there for us all to see. If nothing is done urgently, Ghana will be left with no planners in the next few years.

It is a problem that is likely to worsen as about 23 per cent of the existing professional planners are due to retire in the next five years (TCPD 2009:4).

### ***Political influence***

Planning is a tripartite activity, involving a professional bureaucracy, interest groups, and politicians (Kivell 2003:8). Thus the process is necessarily political. The Statutory Planning Committee (SPC) of each district is the technical body responsible for assessing applications, and enforcing development plans. The SPC is inter-departmental, made up of officials from the Town and Country Planning Department, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Survey Department, the Fire Service, and utility companies. It meets periodically to assess applications for planning permits. The composition of the SPC is cross sectional in order to ensure an integrated approach. The chairman is the

chief executive of the local government authority, who is appointed by the central government (Gyampo 2008).

As the representative of the central government, the chief executive officer is the single most powerful political person in the district, and the most influential in the SPC. So, although the chief executive may not be a professional planner, his views on planning issues can override professional planning decisions, echoing Flyvberg's (1998:323) assertion that in open confrontation between technical rationality and power, rationality yields to power. One planner recounted that:

The politician is only motivated by the desire to win or retain power which is a matter of vote. A nicely planned neighbourhood does not vote but people who live in unapproved developments do. There is no chance for any [planning] proposal succeeding if our political leaders think it has the potential to affect their electoral fortunes.

This view resonated with an earlier opinion by another official that:

The politician who should back you to enforce our plans is interested in his own political cost and benefit analysis. If to him [or her], strictly implementing and enforcing the plan can be costly [politically], then that is the end of it. After all what do they lose when plans are not implemented? As long as politicians will continue to have a big say in the implementation and enforcement of plans, then succeeding as planners will be difficult.

The chief executive officer in Ghana determines the final plan, a power he exercises not necessarily in accordance with planning principles. Of course, everywhere, political leaders take decisions based on other factors apart from technical planning advice. What makes the Ghanaian case different is that the leaders are not necessarily accountable to local citizens (Obeng-Odoom 2009). Thus the degree of political involvement in the planning process in Ghana could arguably be described as political *interference* rather than *involvement* in the planning process. The chief executive or the head of the planning team has upward accountability to the central government, not downward accountability to the people who are supposed to benefit from the planning process. In turn, the decision about what to do with slum dwellers, for example, does not come from planners but from the central government and the chief executive officer. A recent development in Sukura and Sodom and Gomorrah is illustrative.

Sukura and Sodom and Gomorrah are highly populated slum enclaves within the Ablekuma South and Ododiodio constituencies respectively. Both areas are under the jurisdiction of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA). It is generally held that, while

residents of Sukura are ardent supporters of the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP), Sodom and Gomorrah is the home of people who are sympathetic to the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC). Table 1 shows the results from the last two presidential elections.

**Table 1: Results of Presidential Elections for 2004 and 2008**

Ablekuma South Constituency			Odododiodio Constituency		
Year	NDC	NPP	Year	NDC	NPP
2004	43.8%	55.0%	2004	51.9%	46.8%
2008	48.1%	48.8%	2008	58.2%	40.7%

*Source: Electoral Commission, 2010*

The table suggests that there is some truth about the political affiliation of residents in Sukura and Sodom and Gomorrah. As part of an urban renewal programme, the AMA earmarked the slum settlements in both Sukura and Sodom and Gomorrah for demolition. When work commenced at Sodom and Gomorrah, the residents threatened to defect *en bloc* to the opposition NPP, and asked whether the government did not know that the place was a slum when they campaigned in the area for their votes (*Daily Graphic* 2009). This threat drew a quick intervention from the president, who instructed the AMA to discontinue the eviction. According to the president, the chief executive officer had to “suspend the decongestion exercise [because ]... when we are working to improve the economy, it is not proper for us to treat our people in this manner” (Gobah 2009:1)

Accordingly, the demolition was halted. Shortly thereafter, the AMA began to demolish 140 unauthorised developments in the Sukura area. The Sukura residents, following the Sodom and Gomorrah example, called on the president to intervene. But, unlike the Sodom and Gomorrah case, the president did not. When demolition commenced, the opposition NPP strongly challenged the legitimacy of the exercise and threatened to sue the AMA. According to the NPP General Secretary, the party executives considered suing the AMA because they felt the demolition was ‘politically-motivated’. He furthered averred that “the exercise is a calculated attempt by the ruling National Democratic Congress (NDC) government to make life unbearable for supporters of the main opposition party”. He again accused the AMA of political selectiveness and wanted to know “why the Accra Metropolitan Assembly refused to demolish similar structures in

Sodom and Gomorrah” (Afriyie 2010). Thus, it would appear that political interference in the planning process may have contributed to the ineffectiveness of urban planning.

### **Funding**

Most of the writing on local government finance in Ghana has been concerned with poor revenue generation (e.g. Crawford 2004) and the distribution of revenue between capital and recurrent expenditure (e.g. Obeng-Odoom 2010). The widely held view is that financial constraints on district assemblies are self imposed, especially in light of the introduction of central government funding through, for example, the District Assemblies' Common Fund.

From the perspective of district assemblies, however, there are three main restrictions on raising finance for their activities. First, article 88 of the Constitution of Ghana limits the ability of local governments to borrow money to US\$2,000. If local governments require more than this amount, they are required to go through a labyrinthine procedure, including a requirement to seek approval from the Minister of Finance and Economic Planning. Second, although the planning department generates considerable revenue through permit application fees and other charges, it has no control over these funds.<sup>6</sup> Third, the existing arrangement where part of their funding comes from the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and the Ministry of Science, Environment and Technology has paralysed the planning departments. In addition to the problem of piecemeal financing, the officials of the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development usually feel that the planning of settlements should be funded by the Ministry of Science, Environment and Technology. This situation has compounded the problem of poor funding for planning activities in the districts. In Tamale, for instance, planning officials noted that:

We do not have any budgetary allocations. If you submit your budget to the district and you are lucky, you can get between 15-20 percent [of the amount requested]. Without funds, we are like a car without fuel. That is why we have almost grinded to a halt.

## **5. Options for Improving the State of Planning**

The combined effect of the problems discussed above is a situation where rapidly urbanising settlements are poorly planned and managed. The present government has demonstrated some commitment towards addressing this state of affairs. Principal among

<sup>6</sup> The only exceptions are the Kumasi and Accra Metropolitan Assemblies where the Town and Country Planning Department retain up to 15 per cent of all internally generated funds

the government's efforts is the drafting of the National Urban Policy (NUP) (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development 2010) which seeks to "promote a sustainable, spatially integrated and orderly development of urban settlements with adequate housing and services, efficient institutions, sound living and working environment for all people to support rapid socio-economic development of Ghana" (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development 2010: xii). It is a comprehensive and cross-sectoral document which "makes a bold statement to promote socio-economic development of Ghanaian urban centres" (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development 2010:ii). However, whether this policy offers adequate solutions to arrest the current ineffectiveness of planning is open to debate.

For example to address the land problem, the policy recommends that:

Land development planning for the purposes of human settlement will have to make adequate provision for the population density, growth and distribution pattern; physical growth, including direction of such growth (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development 2010:46).

With regards to laws related to land use planning, the policy suggests that:

[Efforts] must be directed at searching for and adopting new and innovative means of promoting development control and enforcement of regulations in our towns and cities (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development 2010:47).

Again, the policy recommends that:

Laws regarding access and rights to land must be reviewed to avoid discrimination on basis of gender and social status (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development 2010:47)

These aspirations are welcome. The challenge, however, is to think through possible ways of achieving them, and thereby overcome some of the problems this study has outlined. The following are some specific suggestions for the improvement of the planning situation in Ghana.

### ***The land factor***

The land challenge for planning results from the fact that land is mainly held privately while planning remains a public function. Under this arrangement, the district assemblies are mandated to control the growth of human settlement through the granting of development rights by issuing planning permits. Assemblies are limited to approving, modifying, or refusing applications for development rights. This approach has, however,

failed to effectively manage urban growth leading to the creation of slums and other problems resulting from unplanned settlement. What has proved to be problematic over the years is that acquisition of land for development is the result of private negotiations with limited state intervention. The continuous supply of developable lands through processes which are mainly outside the domain of the planning authorities has often led to a situation in which land owners allocate land for uses that are inconsistent with public plans (Barratt 1976; Asiama 2008).

The rapid pace of urbanisation has resulted in the continuous accretion of peri-urban areas with minimal planning influence. An estimated 51.5 per cent of the population lives in urban areas and the figure is expected to rise to 75 per cent by 2050 (Department for Economic and Social Affairs [DESA] 2008). Therefore, an appropriate land policy for urban management must be proactive in enabling district assemblies to plan the urban fringes in anticipation of urban sprawl. Currently, the transformation of urban-fringe lands from peri-urban to urban uses usually takes place by the subdivision of separate landholdings, and is subject to the problems of scattered development and poor subdivision design. This further leads to backlogs in the provision of public utility and roadworks, land shortages, excessive land speculation, and high land prices. Clearly, regulating urban growth through issuing development permits has proved to be inadequate for the purpose of ordering development. There is an urgent need to rethink the basis on which urban land policies are grounded.

For planning to succeed, the state needs to exert significant control over the supply of land for development (see Kivell 1993; Luitlen 1997 and Dixon 2009 on the UK case; Holzman-Gazit 2007 on Israel; and Huang 1986 on Hong Kong). A more active involvement of the district assemblies in the land delivery process is a prerequisite for effective management of urban growth.

The concept of land pooling has not been used in Ghana. Under a land pooling model, the public planning agency or development authority temporarily brings together a group of peri-urban landowners for the purpose of planning (Ballaney 2008). Thus district assemblies could manage settlement growth by preparing development plans and planning schemes for the agricultural land at the periphery of the cities and towns, or smaller settlements that are not yet urbanised, in anticipation of urban or non-agricultural uses. The owners would contribute land for communal uses such as roads, open spaces,

schools, and hospitals, and the remaining land would be 'readjusted' into suitable parcels for development. Also, services such as improved water supply, roads, water, and electricity would be provided.

Assembling peri-urban lands for the purpose of planning and servicing ahead of urbanisation in this way has two main benefits. First, land pooling acts as an urban containment strategy. Secondly, it ensures that planning influences the future growth of settlements. Earlier analyses by Acharya (1988) and Archer (1988) have provided a review of the strengths of land pooling and adjustment. More recent studies by Gurumukhi (2003), Karki (2004), Home (2007), and Ballaney (2008) have further illuminated the success of this model. Ballaney (2008) has observed (correctly) that land pooling delivers developable lands with regular shape, improvement in accessibility, increased potential for development, availability of social and physical infrastructure in the neighbourhood, better linkages with other parts of the city and improvements in the living environment.

One phenomenon which distorts orderly urban growth is land speculation. Speculators hold land outside the market in anticipation of higher land values. Land speculation creates dispersed human settlements, interspersed with vacant or unused lands, a feature which, subsequently, increases the cost of providing services. The land pooling technique checks this phenomenon by ensuring systematic delivery of planned and serviced lands for developers.

Land pooling can be self-financing and, hence, sustainable. Planning and servicing peri-urban lands usually enhances land values. In countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and India, where land pooling has been intensively applied, Conellan (2002) found that local authorities imposed betterment charges on developers. This practice gave the district assemblies a revolving fund for further land pooling projects. This ability to self-finance would be especially welcome in the Ghanaian case where funding for planning activities is inadequate.

Obtaining access to land for the purpose of planning through outright nationalisation often proves confrontational, partly because of the assessment and payment of compensation, which explains why, since independence, only 0.1 per cent of all compulsorily acquired land in Ghana has been used for the purpose of planning (Larbi *et*

*al.* 2004:122). The fieldwork on which this research is based showed that the problem of coordination between landowners and planning authorities arises from mistrust underpinned by the fear that the government may take over their land under the guise of planning. This was clearly illustrated in Ejisu where the planning authority altered the boundary between two landowners, sparking a boundary dispute. From this perspective, an effective approach to managing urban land should be participatory in character. Land pooling meets this requirement. Through land pooling, planning authorities assemble peri-urban lands in a participatory approach where landowners and other stakeholders are duly engaged (see Oli 2003 and Karki 2004 for reports on the Nepal and Kathmandu Valley experiences respectively). Land pooling, therefore, promotes coordination between planning authorities and landowners, an outcome which has remained elusive under the current land management policy.

### **Funding**

The provision of adequate and sustainable funding for the core operations of the local planning authorities is central to the success of any planning reform. The authorities currently raise funds through various application fees, fines, and search for zoning status fees. Only a few town and country planning departments generate sufficient funds to meet their operational expenditure. For example, in the fast urbanising Accra metropolitan area, the planning authority generated more than 10 per cent of its expected annual expenditure in 2009. In the peri-urban area of Suhum, the activities of the planning authorities generated four times their annual budgeted expenditure between 2006 and 2009. In Ejura, Kintampo, and Kumasi, the operations of the planning authorities generated an estimated 50-75 per cent of their annual expenditure. However, as noted earlier, these revenues are for the use of the local government as a whole. So, the planning department still depends on annual budgetary allocations that may be inadequate.

One way to resolve this problem could be to introduce ring fencing of revenues for the planning department. Although there are no studies in Ghana to determine the effectiveness of this mode of funding, evidence of the benefits of ring fencing in countries such as Denmark, France, Germany, the Republic of Ireland, the United States of America and Hungary highlights its merits (Jokay *et al.* 2004; Lacsmandi *et al.* 2004; Falk 2004).



***Human resources***

To overcome the crisis in human resources, a twin strategy could be considered. First, the state could train more professional planning personnel who have the requisite knowledge for managing human settlements. Out of the 30 accredited tertiary institutions in Ghana, only one trains planners. Since the 1980s, the planning profession has failed to attract students mainly because it is considered to be uncompetitive in terms of remuneration. Thus a second strategy to improve the human resource needs for planning is to improve wages and other working conditions for planners, especially at the local level. Currently only 101 out of the 270 planners in Ghana registered with the Ghana Institution of Planners are working with local planning authorities (COWI 2009).

Thus in the short term, the human resource challenge can be tackled to some extent by attracting the 169 planners currently employed in other organisations by offering competitive salaries and benefits. In the long term, there needs to be a radical realignment of planning education in all tiers of the Ghanaian education system. The introduction of accredited planning programs in tertiary educational institutions across the country will be vital to addressing the human resource shortage.

**6. Concluding remarks**

Planning has the fundamental goal of creating places that are economically vibrant, environmentally sustainable, and socially inclusive. However, these expected outcomes of planning have only been achieved in Ghana to a marginal extent. There is a proliferation of uncontrolled informal structures in almost every available open space in the built-up areas. Cities are rapidly sprawling and gradually losing their basic infrastructure and services. Planning in Ghana has failed to become effectively future-oriented and has instead remained reactionary.

Most writing and analysis has tended to blame 'planners' or the 'planning institutions' for these deficiencies. However, this paper has shown that the planners and the planning institutions themselves work within severe constraints, ranging from issues in land ownership and supply, through poor funding and inadequate human resources, to a weak legislative framework. They are correct in saying that: 'We are not the only ones to blame'. This perspective shows that nothing short of a comprehensive strategy that addresses both the failings and justifiable concerns of district assemblies can improve the effectiveness of planning in Ghana.

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