Case Study Report

Promotion and protection of inclusive housing for healthy cities

Participatory development of urban plans in popular neighbourhoods

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Abstract

The spectacular growth of the population is accompanied by a vast movement of urbanization in all the big cities of the world. This rapid urbanization results in the rise of exclusive cities, mass evictions of low-income people, due to so-called anarchic occupation of cities, promoting the imbalance of the right of access to the city, the proliferation of under-structured, unhealthy and under-equipped neighborhoods, called slums. In Cameroon, the civil society organization CODAS Caritas Douala has been working since February 2019, for the promotion and protection of inclusive housing through the Popular Neighborhood Improvement Project. This project consists of mobilizing state actors and populations on the participatory and concerted development of urban plans for neighborhoods, in order to encourage the construction of human, safe, resilient, sustainable and accessible to all. Thanks to the social engineering techniques developed by the project team, five (5) participatory urban development plans for five (5) neighborhoods in the target municipalities have already been developed and submitted to the administrative authorities for implementation. The participatory development of urban plans is the relevance of this case study for rich cities to healthy cities

Keywords

Urbanization, inclusive, slums, cities, Habitat, participation

1. Project for the development of working-class neighborhoods in Douala

1.1. The initial problem addressed by the project

The project for the promotion and protection of inclusive housing for healthy cities is implemented in Cameroon by CODAS Caritas Douala. It is being implemented in five (05) of the six municipalities in the city of Douala, namely Oyack 1, Mambanda, Bepanda-Yonyong, Bonewonda-Matanda, and Newtown-aéroport II. The initial problem addressed is that of the urbanization of cities without the participation of the inhabitants who live there (Agnès, Deboulet. 2016, Repenser les quartiers précaires), thus creating, social inequality of access to the city by all, massive evictions of people with low incomes for the construction of sports, road and industrial infrastructure, the proliferation of under-structured and unhealthy neighborhoods still called slums (Eric, Maurin. 2004, Le ghetto français. Enquête sur le séparatisme social).

With regard to slums (Nitaya, C. Ochareon, U. 1980 Bangkok, Thailand", in Mahdu Sahrin (dir.), Policies Towards Urban Slums), the project attempts to address a second problem, that of deconstructing their negative perception. The organization CODAS Caritas Douala believes that the name "slums" for certain urban housing areas is pejorative and discriminatory, and advocates instead for the name "popular neighborhood". The concept of " neighborhoods" is associated with other terminologies such as: spontaneous, unregistered, informal, anarchic or illegal district, and is defined as a district lacking basic urban services such as drinking water supply, public lighting, electric power supply, household waste collection service, land insecurity and difficult living conditions. The difficult living conditions in the "working-class neighborhoods" generally translate into little attention to the quality of the living environment. However, these neighborhoods have a lot of potential, and their development would contribute to involving the inhabitants in the elaboration of inclusive urban plans, for sustainable housing and cities accessible to all.

1.2. Context of the project

The Project is situated in a particular socio-political, economic and legal context.

On the socio-political level, the Cameroonian population is estimated at 26 million inhabitants (BUCREP 2005, Répertoire actualisé des villages du Cameroun). The demographic boom and the attractiveness of the city (Ela, J. M. 1988, Les villes d'Afrique noire) favor the massive displacement of populations from rural areas to urban areas in search of better living conditions (Mbaha, Joseph. Pascal. Olinga, Joseph. Magloire. Tchiadeu, Gratien. 2013, Fifty years of spatial conquest in Douala : From colonial heritage under construction to socio-spatial heritage vulnerable to natural hazards). This leads to rapid and uncontrolled urbanization (Dominique, Malaquais. 2005, VILLES FLUX. Imaginations of the urban in Africa today). The richest people have favorable spaces in secure housing with all the basic social services. On the other hand, low- and middle-income people live in under-structured spaces, where there is total promiscuity. This low-income population is more numerous, and their habitat occupies large, unhealthy urban spaces. The anarchic occupation of urban spaces leads to the degradation of the urban fabric (Donzelot, Jacques. 2006, Quand la ville se défait. Which policy to face the crisis of the suburbs?), it complicates urban mobility, accelerates the pollution of water and soil by the discharge of non-biodegradable and non-recycled waste, and accelerates the destruction of green and aquatic spaces. In order to solve the problem of urban disorder, the State proceeds to evict thousands of people living in working-class neighborhoods, for reasons of urban planning. However, a concerted and participatory restructuring of these neighborhoods would allow the inhabitants to propose development plans that would not exclude anyone from the city (Lefebvre, H. 1968, Le droit à la ville), taking into account environmental protection and resilience to climate change.

Economically, the city attracts many job seekers because of its strong industrialization and investment opportunities. The bulk of the cities' labor force curiously resides in the working class neighborhoods. Thanks to informal activities, working-class neighborhoods contribute to the strengthening of the economic fabric (Kengne, Fodouop. 1991 Les petits métiers de la rue et l'emploi : le cas de Yaoundé). Cheap labor in industrial enterprises. This potential of working-class neighborhoods is not negligible and must be taken into account in the participatory development of urbanization plans (Kengne, Fodouop. 1996, Le secteur informel, un antidote contre la crise économique en Afrique Sud-Saharienne ?).

At the legal level, the lack of knowledge of the legislative texts on urban planning by the majority of citizens, the insecurity of land tenure, the difficulties of land registration procedures, the failure to respect urban planning rules, and the laxity of the authorities in securing non-constructible spaces, encourage the uncontrolled occupation of cities. A revision of the legal texts on access to land ownership would therefore be necessary to facilitate inclusive housing and the controlled and sustainable occupation of urban spaces.

In addition, raising people's awareness of urban planning legislation will help to reduce the degradation of the urban fabric.

1.3. Technical approach of the project

The project's approach to the promotion and protection of inclusive housing is part of a multidisciplinary dynamic, based on surveys, studies, advocacy and lobbying of state actors, community mobilization of neighborhood residents around urban planning issues, capacity building of actors, media communications (Baud I. and N. Nainan 2008 Negotiated spaces for representation in Mumbai: ward committees, advanced locality management and the politics of middle-class activism). As far as advocacy and lobbying are concerned, the aim is to interest public actors in urban planning proposals put forward by the inhabitants of working-class neighborhoods. As far as community mobilization is concerned, this involves door-to-door techniques in the neighborhoods, in order to collect the needs of the inhabitants on the urban development of their locality. Then organize meetings between all the inhabitants met, so that they transform their problem into an urbanization project with the support of urban planners. At the end of these different meetings, the inhabitants draw up a development plan that they propose to the public authorities. The exchanges between the inhabitants of the working-class neighborhoods and the public authorities lead to a consensus to modify or validate the implementation of the proposed development plans (Communauté Urbaine De Douala 2012, Plan Directeur D'urbanisme De Douala à L'horizon 2025).

1.4. Project results

The results of the project are visible from several angles. From a technical point of view, currently five (05) participatory plans for the development of popular neighborhoods have been developed in five (05) of the project's target neighborhoods. Their implementation is progressively taking place. The social engineering developed by CODAS Caritas Douala through community mobilization is being used by public authorities for other urban restructuring projects (Isagha Diagana, Jérôme Chenal, and Stéphanie Hasler (2018), Villes africaines: restructuration des quartiers précaires). Community mobilization approaches (Mustafa, Poyraz. 2013, Les animateurs des quartiers populaires: entre la régulation sociale et l'éducation populaire), have fostered a harmonious rapprochement between all urban development actors. The inhabitants of popular neighborhoods implement initiatives for the development of their locality, and the public authorities provide considerable financial and technical support. The target working-class neighborhoods are organized and structured (Elizabeth, A. 2007 Culture and working-class neighborhoods) to deconstruct the negative and discriminatory perception that society has of them. As a result, they regularly organize sanitation work in their locality (Perlman, J. 2014, What Happens When Marginal Becomes Mainstream?), they are trained in household waste recycling techniques in order to fight against environmental pollution (Navez-Bouchanine, F. 2007, Le développement urbain durable: "best practice" ou leurre méthodologique?).

1.5. Wider impact of the project

Beyond the capitalization of the project's best practices, and the desire to test them in other localities, the project's broader impact is perceptible through the animation of debates on the need to revise legal texts on the protection of the right to housing, the fight against the practice of inhumane forced evictions, and the facilitation of land registration procedures. On the other hand, the impact reinforces the mutualization of the various sectors of interventions on the protection of the environment for an effective and efficient urban climate resilience, the acceleration of the themes of reflections on the construction of green and inclusive cities. In this order of ideas, we are gradually moving away from the state as animator of urban policies to a state as federator of urban policies (Donzelot Jacques, Mevel Catherine and Wyvekens Anne, 2003 Faire société : la politique de la ville aux États-Unis et en France). A participatory slum clearance

program is being implemented by the Cameroonian Ministry of Urban Planning. In addition, since 2019, CODAS Caritas Douala has been organizing a high-level forum called the "Salon Villes et toits du Cameroun" (Cities and Rooftops of Cameroon) every October, in partnership with local government agencies. The "Salon Villes et toits du Cameroun" is a forum for sharing, valuing, and presenting inclusive urban development techniques, between the inhabitants of working-class neighborhoods, public administrations, international institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations (https://www.projet-aqp.com/?cat=47).

2. Some images of the achievements

Figure 1 door-to-door method to mobilize residents: Source AQP project CODAS Caritas Douala

Figure 2. Community mobilization and participatory mapping of neighborhood development. Source: AQP project CODAS Caritas Douala.
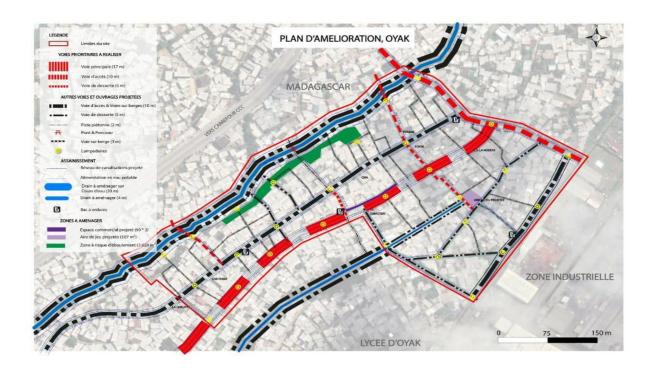
Figure 3 example of a development plan proposed by the inhabitants of the Oyack district Source: AQP-project CODAS Caritas Douala

Figure 4 example of a development plan proposed by the inhabitants of the Bepanda Yonyong district Source: AQP-project CODAS Caritas Douala

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