



## The Future of our Cities

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### ABSTRACT

The Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences devoted its conference in 1989 to the discussion of urbanisation in Ghana. Its verdict was a report called *The Future of Our Cities*. This essay reviews the future of Ghanaian cities as seen 19 years ago in that book and attempts an assessment of contemporary Ghanaian urbanisation, drawing on the literature on urban planning and on newspaper and radio commentaries. It is argued that although there have been some achievements in resourcing the police force, for example, waste is mismanaged, unemployment is high and traffic congestion is more pervasive than ever. Some proposals for mitigating these hardships are presented.

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### Introduction

African urbanisation is variously referred to as 'parasitic urbanism', 'urbanisation of poverty' and 'premature urbanisation' (e.g. Ravallion et al., 2007; Kinver, 2007), echoing Professor Mabogunje's (1968) claim that urbanisation has outpaced economic development. To the World Bank, Africa's urbanisation is runaway, negatively correlated with economic growth and fuelled by strife in rural areas (World Bank, 2000).

Like the rest of Africa, Ghana has had disappointing experiences with Rural Development and Structural Adjustment Programs aimed at addressing urban problems (Obeng-Odoom, 2007b). Agencies like the World Bank and the Cities Alliance believe that a new approach to *urban management* holds the key to Africa's urban problems and have 'advised' governments to accept it. The Government of Ghana has embraced *urban management* and, in 1989, the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences (GAAS), the highest think tank that advises the government, devoted its annual conference to the future of Ghanaian cities. Experts in the country were marshalled to offer solutions that would remedy the urban problems and shape the urban future.

The product of this conference was the book, *The Future of our cities* (GAAS, 1989). It was a team effort by contributors from academia (six contributors) and industry (four contributors), and remains the only 'Proceedings' of the Academy devoted to urban issues. These features make the book a 'must read' for all who believe that the future of Africa lies in the sound management of its cities.

In light of recent evidence that urban problems have intensified since the 1980s, it is useful to examine the solutions proffered by

GAAS. This essay does so by discussing current urban problems and providing recommendations for strengthening urban management.

### Urban problems in Ghana

The extant literature on urban studies points to two possible ways of analysing cities. The first, probably the more intellectually acceptable, is to have a series of testable hypothesis in a conceptual framework that guides the analysis. This approach was used by the Palmer Development Group (PDG) in studying urban poverty in Johannesburg (PDG, 2004), by the World Bank in its policy paper on Urban Policy and Economic Development (World Bank, 1991), and by Durantón (2008) in a recent paper on Cities as Engines for Growth and Prosperity in developing countries. The second, more pragmatic approach is simply to review aspects of the urban experience. This latter approach has been used by Mabogunje (1990) and is the one adopted by GAAS (1989). Given that my concern is with the work of GAAS, examining its proposed remedies in the light of current urban problems, the latter approach<sup>1</sup> is adopted here. To this end, the present essay discusses *urban transport, waste management, housing, crime and unemployment*.

### Urban transport

Speaking (Kwakye and Fouracre, 1998, p. 1) at a conference in Cape Town, South Africa, the Director of Planning at the Ministry of Transport and Highways, Ghana, and his advisor said:

<sup>1</sup> An inevitable setback in using this approach is that we also fall into the traps on GAAS! But on balance we are better off with this method, given that the adoption of a conceptual framework comes with its own 'new' weaknesses.

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The urban transport system in Ghana is characterised by the congested central areas of the cities, poor quality of service from public transport operators, high exposure to road accidents, and poor environmental standards. This is seen in long commuting times and journey delays, lengthy waiting times for public transport both at and between terminals, high accident rates, and localised poor air quality.

The analysis and solution to urban transportation problem in the GAAS study was provided by Addo (pp. 49–53) and Tamakloe (pp. 31–37). They suggested that Ghana is 'over-urbanised'. Given the country's technological backwardness and weak management, they argued, satellite towns should be created and linked to the main cities by excellent communication lines. They also argued that the planning gap between highway engineering and Town Planning should be closed and that institutions responsible for transport planning be brought under one umbrella. While these solutions may promote administrative efficiency, it is difficult to see how they could have remedied the root causes of the urban transport problem. Indeed, GAAS noted that urbanisation is unstoppable. Thus one wonders whether satellite towns may also not become 'over-urbanised'. It is argued here, more fundamentally, that the urban transport problem is the expression of a stressed system which is typified by the absence of alternative transport like rail, poor quality public transport, low tech urban roads, the surge in on-street hawking of goods and services and the either weak and/or poorly enforced urban transport regulations. This is a system that claims about 1600 lives and causes over 10000 injuries on an annual basis.<sup>2</sup>

When one wants to travel within the city, there are usually two options available: either a private car or public transport. If the person wants to travel between two cities, usually there is a third option, a public bus. The number of private cars in Ghana is increasing. Overall, the number of registered vehicles in Ghana increased from 511,063 in 2000 to 841,314 in 2006 (National Road Safety Commission, 2008<sup>3</sup>). Private cars in Ghana are generally not available on hire purchase and so it requires significant income to purchase one. Generally, private cars are owned by medical doctors, bankers, lawyers, accountants and politicians.<sup>4</sup>

Public transport is the more common means of movement around the cities. A recent study (ABLIN Consult, 2008) found that 'over 80% of road transport passenger services are predominantly provided by commercial transport services'. Here too, there are two types: taxis (for the middle class) and mini buses called 'trotros' or 'trotros' (for the rest). There is a relatively new type of public transport, introduced by the current Kufour government and therefore given the name, 'Kufour buses'. These are cheap in fare but woefully inadequate and riddled with poor management. Though they have helped the transport situation in Ghanaian cities, they are relatively unknown.

'Trotros' have no signs to inform potential passengers of their destinations. At their terminals, there are about 3–4 criers hawking around the buses and screaming their destinations, as in 'Kanes-

hie', 'Kaneshie', 'Kaneeeeeeshieeee'! Once the 'trotros' set off, passengers can alight anywhere in the course of the journey: all a passenger needs to do is to scream his readiness to alight. Once the passenger screams, the bus conductor, often called the 'mate', hits the side of the car repeatedly while shouting *owom* to let the driver know that a passenger wants to alight. As a seat becomes empty, the 'mate' sticks his head out of the bus and starts calling out its destination. Pedestrians who want to go to such destinations only have to point repeatedly and furiously to the ground to indicate to the driver and his 'mate' that the bus should stop.

Apart from stopping to pick a passenger, a 'trotro' can stop under three (other) circumstances: first, passengers want to buy from hawkers who have invaded the streets and have caused congestion in the cities (Akamin, 2008). Thus in the course of the journey, one can see traders offering food, water and other wares such as dog chains to passengers. Second, a policeman stops a 'trotro' to either query the driver about an offence or extort some few cedis from him. Third, the 'trotro' breaks down in the course of the journey. Though some 'trotros' are roadworthy, many of them are not. With inscriptions like 'God is in control; be still' and 'Fear not', the drivers try to persuade potential passengers to ignore their rickety vehicles. An interview by Akoto et al. (2007) tells of a 'trotro' driver who goes the extra mile to claim that the pitch black smoke that emits from the exhaust pipe of his 'trotro' is abundant proof that the engine of his 'trotro' is strong!!

Through this brief account, it can be argued that the mode of operation of 'trotros' and the condition in which they operate have worsened the urban transport problem even though there have also been some achievements. In Accra, for example, there has been the development of the Nkrumah Circle-Ofankor, Tetteh Quarshie-Aburi, and Mallam-Kasoa roads. Since 2001, over 1000 km of feeder roads have been surfaced nationwide. In addition, about 4800 km have undergone rehabilitation, 10,000 km have undergone spot improvement, and 2300 km have been re-gravelled (Ghanaweb, 2008).

Tragically, corruption has inhibited the transforming effect of these achievements. For instance, in October 2005, Mr. S.O. Owusu Bempah, former technical manager of the Metro Mass Transit Ltd., was caught siphoning diesel from MMT bus with registration number AS 1127 U to his KIA cargo truck No. AS 8163 W (The Ghanaian Chronicle, 2007).

## Urban waste management

Both Otoo (pp. 71–77) and Armah (pp. 78–83) analyse waste management in *The Future of our Cities*. They suggest that the problem is poor enforcement of Environmental Laws and inadequate provision of public toilets. Curiously, in offering solutions, they mention environmental impact assessment (p. 74) and participatory waste management (p. 82).

The urban waste situation needs continuing attention because it is a major problem. It has recently been reported that some communities in Accra fight over garbage because they need the garbage to prevent flooding of their homes! The Daily Guide (2008a) notes the growth of the notorious 'open-range shitting system' where both adults and children defecate in the full glare of the public. Heaps of garbage can be seen everywhere in the cities, including sometimes the Parliament House (The Mirror, 2007). Accra alone generates 60 tons of plastic waste per day and 22,000 tons of such waste per year (GNA, 2007a).

According to Korboe and Tiple (1995), the mandate of waste management in the 1990s in cities like Kumasi was passed from the city authorities to scavenger birds like the vulture. What the authors failed to document is the bizarre urban waste management practice of employing human beings ('latrine boys') to empty

<sup>2</sup> This comes from a quote attributed to the Minister of Transport on the website (<http://www.nrsc.gov.gh/>) of the National Road Safety Commission-Ghana. The website was accessed on 18-8-08.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nrsc.gov.gh/statistics/statistics.htm> 'Statistics'.

<sup>4</sup> Even in the universities, the possession of a private car demonstrates the differences in incomes among academics. A recent article humorously describes the situation in Ghana's premier university, the University of Ghana, in the 1970s, when 'the vice-chancellor, full professors, deans, and department chairs were known to drive, or be driven, in Mercedes-Benz 220s; associate professors drove new Volvos of the GL140 range; and senior lecturers, new Toyotas or Datsuns. The lowest-ranking lecturers had to make do with a variety of second-hand models of no particular mark or distinction' (Chalfin, 2008, p. 432).

septic tanks and carry the excreta meant for disposal in head pans.<sup>5</sup>

Debate on the attitude of Ghanaians to urban sanitation is oft aired on radios and television. Some argue that litter is thrown anywhere because the city authorities do not provide enough bins. The authorities respond that the few bins they have provided have been spirited away at night. Despite this excuse, one gets the impression that the authorities have no sustainable waste management plan. They are often dormant and bounce back to life during important occasions. A recent plan was when the Accra Metropolitan Authority embarked on a massive clean-up exercise code-named 'Jubilee cleanup' to rid the capital of filth to welcome international guests during Ghana's Golden Jubilee (GNA, 2007b).

The ruling government perceives the problem as one of institutional inattention to urban areas and so created the Ministry for the Modernisation of the Capital City. The Auditor General has argued that corruption in the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development is part of the problem. As evidence, he tells the story of an ex-minister who ordered payment for 87 garbage-collection vehicles, even though only 23 of them were delivered (Crusading Guide, 2008). The Chairman of the National Development Planning Commission, out of frustration, has wondered if such failures are in the Ghanaian genes (Joy FM, 2007). The presidential candidate of the New Patriotic Party believes that the problem is caused by the failure of regulation of domestic waste management and has therefore promised to increase sanitation inspectors, often called *tankas*, should he be elected as president (Akuffo Addo, 2008).

A few successes in urban waste management can be found. For example, Zoomlion Ghana Waste Ltd., a private waste management group, is working tirelessly to keep cities clean. Thus during the recent May Day celebrations, the president of Ghana, John Kufour, commended the company not only for keeping cities clean but also for generating jobs for youth.

Boadi (2004, abstract) has argued that the waste problem is a symptom of much deeper structural causes like 'poverty, inadequate provision of facilities, lack of environmental health awareness and the neglect of the poor in decision making'. Hence, a top-down approach, as in official regulation or a grassroots approach without regulatory backing, would do little to help the situation. Neither can epileptic approaches such as 'Jubilee clean-up' solve the problem. It would seem that a well-planned approach informed by grassroots views, backed by regulation, and sustained by frequent evaluations could be useful.

### Urban housing, architecture and planning

Tetteh's analysis (pp. 22–30) of the 'role of Architecture and Planning' in *The Future of Our Cities* was very insightful. He argued that urban bias, past economic development policies, and inadequate and inappropriate institutional structures are the main causes of the urban problems (p. 22). He argues that central government takes the responsibility of planning the cities while city authorities are tasked with controlling the development they did not plan for. This causes a dearth of understanding of how to manage the city and explains why many areas in Ghanaian cities are without parks, schools or streets (p. 24). On this basis, he suggests that both planning for, and controlling of, development should be done by city authorities. Also, planning has failed to provide affordable housing to the poor (p. 26).

The problems identified by Tetteh have since become more acute. Urban housing in Ghana is characterised by a housing deficit and high rents. According to the most recent population census (conducted in the year 2000), the current housing deficit is 1,526,275 units. The urban housing deficit, on the other hand, was around 800,000 housing units. This means that although housing deficit is a general problem, it is more severe in urban areas. Rent in urban areas, especially in Accra and Kumasi, is so high and rental housing is so inelastic in supply that landlords are able to ask for 3–4 years' rent in advance. Therefore, decent housing is only available to the minority rich, who often live in 'super star' areas of cities like Accra (Buckley and Mathema, 2007a; Abdulai and Ndekugri, 2007).

The demand-supply framework is useful in discussing the housing problem. On the demand side, urban housing demand has soared. This emanates from the increase in the share of the population that lives in urban areas. In 1931, for example, only 9% lived in urban areas, but as of 2005, the per cent of the urban population had galloped to 47.8. On the supply side, the state cannot be exonerated from the status quo. This is not to suggest that the state should pursue discredited policies like rent control, but it should not condone land speculation. Currently, the property rate in Ghana does not fall on bare land (Act 462). This encourages speculators to defer development or sales to earn unearned profit. Another area where the state is culpable is in its hasty development of a secondary mortgage market (e.g. The Home Finance Company) when the primary mortgage market was wobbly and characterised by insecure and opaque land title registration, an inelastic housing supply, the absence of pro-poor mortgage instruments and high inflation (currently 13.8%) (Asare, 2006; Bank of Ghana, 2008). The corollary is that the cost of supplying one housing unit is very high.

Past attempts by the state (e.g. 1959–1964 Development Plan) to go into direct provision of housing failed. Thus the state now encourages a private sector housing supply. However, driven by private interest, the private sector supplies housing to meet the demand of the minority rich even though this is done under the banner of 'affordable housing'.

In comparison with other sub-Saharan African countries with similar levels of development, monthly wages in Ghana have been among the lowest (Trades Union Congress (TUC) Ghana, 2004). Given the low earnings, high housing prices and high housing demand, it could be argued that effective demand for urban housing comes from the minority rich who, in general, lived or currently live overseas (Buckley and Mathema, 2007b). There seems to be a cycle of urban housing deficits, in which the state is unable to provide adequate housing units, while the private sector supplies housing to meet demand by the rich, most of whom live overseas and leave the houses to accumulate higher value by speculation. When the rich do rent out the houses, they price the rent above the reach of the poor majority. So there is a vicious cycle of urban housing problems.

These problems have not been addressed since the GAAS analysis except that NGOs like Habitat for Humanity Ghana (HFHG) have been 'encouraged' to provide housing for the poor. The paradox here is that NGOs' activities are highly localised. Also, they do not really attempt to help the poor; they only satisfy the 'guidelines' of their funders and conduct bureaucratic evaluations to please their donors. They do not address the root cause of the housing crisis – poverty (Petras, 1997). A recent study (Obeng-Odoom, 2008, abstract) of the HFHG project in Agona showed that 'though the housing scheme has made progress in accommodating the low income community... 80% of the houses develop cracks soon after completion. Probably, the most serious downside of the scheme is that it makes no serious effort to create economic opportunities in the community apart from housing. Little wonder that about 64% of the beneficiaries are yet to repay their loans'. It is argued that

<sup>5</sup> The supreme court of Ghana has just outlawed this practice effective July 8, 2008. The suit for the outlaw of the practice was filed by Nana Adjei Ampofo, a private legal practitioner.

because the housing crisis is a function of urban poverty, it will persist, unless there is a concerted effort to stamp out poverty in urban areas.

### Urban crime

The surge in urban crime like drug trafficking and armed robbery is also a major problem in Ghanaian cities. Assimeng (pp. 54–62) and Nortey (pp. 63–70) discussed this issue in their contribution to the *Future of our Cities*. They observed that urbanisation is unstoppable and that the best approach to looking at it is to learn to live with it. They demonstrate the positive link between increasing poverty, slums and crime, but suggest a breakdown of systems to arrest crime in urban areas.

Rather than averting these problems, the Ghana Police has been caught in accusations of corruption and unprofessional behaviour. Three examples buttress this point. On September 17, 2007, the Daily Graphic reported that

Lance Corporal Haruna Adama of the Armoured Squadron Unit and Lance Corporal Gomez Abane of the Police Striking Force were arrested for teaming up with some civilians to rob articulated trucks that carry rice and sugar from the Tema Port to various parts of the country.

DSP Ofori said ex-Constables Mahamadou of the Highway Patrol Unit and Setsoafia of the Panthers Unit at the Police Headquarters were found guilty of forcibly collecting GH¢2380 (€23.8 million) from a victim under the threat of arresting him on October 2, 2006.

Also the 2008 Afro barometer Report of the Centre for Democratic Development, Ghana (CDD, Ghana) ranked the Ghana Police as the most corrupt public institution in Ghana.

The police service has its own problems.<sup>6</sup> There are only about 17,000 policemen in Ghana. Given that the total population is about 22 million people, there is a police-civilian ratio of 1:1282. This figure is less than half of the United Nations' required benchmark of one policeman to five hundred civilians (1:500) (Tankebe, 2008). Apart from this inadequacy, the practice of developing estate housing without making any provision for police stations in neighbourhoods inhibits the ability of the police to respond quickly to crimes, since they have to drive miles to get to the crime scene (GNA, 2008a). The Police Training School is under-resourced. In the face of modern-day urban crime, the police still rely on antiquated training methods like training in the use of weaponry in the full glare of the public at places like the Teshie Shooting Range. The service has been described in popular journalism as having become almost like beggars with cup in hand to beg for alms in order to resource the Ghana Police Training School (Daily Graphic, 2007). In 2001, the entire Service had only 53 vehicles to police a population of around 20 million. A police constable around that same period was paid an annual salary of \$198 (Yeebo and Porisky, 2008).

The Police Administration has, however, recently embarked on programmes to improve the communication skills of the police personnel and has dissuaded its men from taking bribes (GNA, 2008b). Police stations have been increased from 626 to 675 and the divisions in the police service enlarged from 30 to 54 since 2002 (Daily Guide, 2008b). These have resulted in improved policing generally. For example, 'the timely response of the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service to the SOS message of an informant has foiled a [Gh €50,000] deal in which a five-year-old boy was to be sold' (Bennette, 2008). This

said, low wages and decrepit houses sometimes called 'pigeon holes' remain synonymous with the Ghana Police Service. Urgent reforms of the service are long overdue.

### Urban unemployment

GAAS (1989) did not discuss urban unemployment in any detail except to mention that it is the result of rapid urbanisation (p. 10) and that cities of the future should provide jobs (p. 26). We know from the Harris-Todaro model that cities in developing countries do not provide enough jobs for new urbanites (Todaro, 1971 work).

Some (like the World Bank, 2000) argue that urban unemployment is caused by a lack of entrepreneurial urban governance and rapid urbanisation. This explanation ignores the structural roots of urban unemployment. During the so-called lost decade of the 1980s, when Ghana had to 'adjust' in order to be 'efficient', there was a massive retrenchment in the Civil Service, state enterprises were privatised and Ghana's fragile market was opened up. These neoliberal policies led to a fall in the share of workers in the formal sector. Between 1987 and 2000, over 300 state enterprises were sold. The net effect of such policies was that formal sector employment shrunk from 18% in 1989 to 15% in 1992 and to 13% in 1999. In 1988, the state enterprises employed 123,000 workers (roughly 2% of the total workforce); by 1999, this number had been reduced to 53,000 (roughly 0.6% of the total workforce). This shows that 70,000 people lost their jobs in state enterprises between 1988 and 1999 (Adu-Amankwah, 2007).

Most of these jobless people went into the informal sector, sometimes into legitimate activities like petty trading and small scale motor mechanics and sometimes into illegitimate activities such as stealing. All these shared the common characteristics of low wages and precarious working conditions, characteristics which maintain the levels of profit of the owners of capital. As of 2007, over 7 million out of the 9 million people who made up the labour force in Ghana were in the informal sector (Adu-Amankwah, 2007). Given the continuation of privatisation (e.g. the recent sale of Ghana Telecom to Vodafone UK), it could be argued that further unemployment in the formal sector should be expected. Apart from the loss of a source of income to the unemployed, unemployment leaves human resources unused, a situation that has a precarious effect on the demand for goods and services, the capital accumulation process and the bargaining power of labour (Stilwell, 1993, 1995). This partly explains why urban poverty in Ghana is so high (about 20%) and why its cities remain at the periphery of world globalisation (Obeng-Odoom, 2007a; Njoh, 2005).

### Conclusion

Nineteen years after GAAS (1989) was published, the future of Ghanaian cities does not look any brighter. About 20% of the urban population lives in poverty, and about 70% lives in slums. Urban unemployment is as high as 13.4% (Obeng-Odoom, 2007a) and the urban housing deficit is around 800,000 housing units (Abdulai and Ndekugri, 2007). City authorities still chase hawkers away from the streets while providing them with no alternative places to carry out their trade. They clean gutters while leaving unprosecuted the people who dump garbage into these gutters. They try to exterminate prostitution from places like 'Soldier Bar' while making no effort to generate jobs. They complain of limited financial resources while many city dwellers do not pay a cedi for the services they enjoy.

The continuing, and in some cases intensifying, nature of these problems indicates the need for a reconsideration of urban policy. Attempts to reverse/slow down urbanisation through rural devel-

<sup>6</sup> This section gives only a brief account. For a fuller version of policing in Ghana, the reader is directed to Tenkebe (2008) Colonialism, legitimisation and policing in Ghana, *International Journal of Crime, Law and Justice*.

opment and structural adjustment programmes have failed. Some have called for *urban entrepreneurialism* (e.g. Hall and Hubbard, 1998) or *urban management* (Davey, 1993), typified by the prioritisation of pro-growth local economy. An institutional overhaul – from urban government to urban governance – should be proactive in making the city prosperous and enhancing its job creation and investment prospects. The goal should be cities that encourage even small businesses to flourish, that attract new forms of investment, that provide jobs to residents and that are internationally competitive. Through this form of entrepreneurialism, cities should also be able to expand their local tax base to modernise and expand existing infrastructures.

While the approach looks appealing, it seems to ignore the fact that 'urban problems' could be problems *in* cities or problems of cities. In other words, the problems discussed in earlier sections could be the result of poor urban planning or a feature of the underlying mode of production (see Stilwell, 1995, p. 27). Can urban management/entrepreneurialism rescue Ghanaian cities? More research is needed to address this question (Gilbert, 2006). Meanwhile, city authorities are '...like sailors who must rebuild the ship in the open sea, never able to dismantle it in dry dock and to reconstruct it there out of the best materials' (Otto Neurath [1882–1945], 1959).

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