

## ABSTRACT

In Cameroon, several aspects reveal the inefficiency and the failure of adjustment of its current method of production of urban settlements. Public institutions which are in charge of housing production, such as SIC or MAETUR, do not seem to have adapted to the new economic situation. The failure of supply to adjust to sociocultural contexts has left large unoccupied areas inside towns for long time. Paradoxically, the lack of housing of these towns is evident. On the other hand, the informal part of housing is prevailing more and more as a main operator. This way of housing has an abundant supply of labour and a wide range of materials and well-defined techniques of use and distribution. Furthermore, it has its own financial mechanisms, such as the *tontines*, which have proved to be efficient for years.

The quantitative insufficiency of planned housing supply in good condition and economically accessible to most inhabitants leads to the creation of spontaneous settlements. The 60% of the inhabitants in Yaoundé live in this kind of settlements. They are encased in the town slopes, between the crest lines where the higher standing settlements and watercourses that go through the bottom of the valleys are located. These settlements are characterized by the high density of population and their precarious building structures, as well as by a lack of infrastructure which guarantees the inhabitants access to basic services. The consequences of this set of problems, analysed in this survey of Melen quarter, are also revealed in the rest of dense spontaneous settlements in Yaoundé.

As far as drinking water is concerned, the town network follows the layout of main route axes, mainly providing service to inhabitants from higher standing and planned quarters. In peripheral and spontaneous quarters, only the third part of the families is connected to it. The rest, faced with the inability of paying a too expensive connection according to their income, have access to water, either by paying resellers higher prices than the ones stipulated or obtaining water from wells, springs or other natural water sources.

The population makes a selection of water source points according to use. Traditional water sources are mostly for domestic use such as the house cleaning or cloth washing, though in case of cuts in the water supply network, some of them are also intended to obtain water to drink. Nevertheless, for this last use, Melen inhabitants generally choose to buy water in private springs or from informal resellers which are connected to the network. The choice of one or other option depends on their purchasing power and also on their location inside the quarter, location which facilitates or hinders their access to different ways of obtaining water and determines as well, as a last resort, the quality of service they receive.

Yaoundé does not have a global draining network that provides service to the whole town. Water treatment plants built by the administration suffer from great running problems, above all due to the lack of resources and maintenance. Faced with this situation, self-made systems, such as latrines and septic tanks prevail in town. In dense-populated quarters, this constitutes a great health problem. Traditional latrines, possessing non-watertight tanks or directly emptied to the environment without any type of previous treatment, are the main polluting source of underground water, from which a great part of the population are supplied. On the other hand, the lack of a rain network and infrastructures that pipe and evacuate dirty water leads to the fact that dirty water runs freely through the quarter paths. This gives place to water stagnancy and the spread of mosquitoes carrier of water diseases such as malaria, often widespread among the population of spontaneous settlements. Deficiencies in draining have direct consequences on inhabitants' health and their living conditions in general.

As regards the electricity network, most Melen inhabitants have electricity at home. The network covers all the surface of Yaoundé, unlike the drinking water network. However, this does not mean that all inhabitants are subscribed. Many families in Melen cannot afford the price of a private connection and therefore, they choose between two options: they are either connected to the neighbour's network, thus paying for their consumption, or they are illegally connected to the lines that cross the quarter. The quantification of expenses on electricity shows that the type of connection determines the amount consumed and therefore, the quality of service that families receive.

The relationship with the type of house, as an indicator of the family socioeconomic background, reveals that there is a clear relationship between the family socioeconomic background and the quality of urban services which they can have access to. The research from indicators which are representative of different systems of access to urban services allows us to establish the thresholds that typify every family within the different levels of access to services. It also defines the characteristic features that determine the jumps of quality in service.

The intervention in the improvement of urban services aimed at raising the quality of life of inhabitants in these areas should take into account the mechanisms regulating every system of access to basic services and define actions that influence directly on the improvement of the quality of service that families in Melen obtain.