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Urban planning and politics in Ghana

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Abstract Through an analysis of Ghana's political and administrative structure, which established the basis of urban planning practice, this paper shows how urban planning has failed to create liveable and functional cities in Ghana. This paper uses semi-structured interviews and agency consultations to supplement document reviews and news paper articles to address the dearth of research on the subject in Ghana. Findings show that dominant political elites, with little or no urban planning background, control and dictate urban planning activities resulting in chaotic scenes and urban blight across Ghanaian cities. Analyses here reinforce the growing recognition that urban planning outcomes in Ghana, and most African countries are not shaped by professional practice and do not reflect the aspirations of the community, but instead political elites. Urban planning agencies are left vulnerable as their activities are interfered, dictated and hindered by both traditional and mainstream political elites. This paper advocates for independence of urban planning agencies in the performance of their duties.

Keywords Ghana · Urban planning · Politics · Decongestion exercise · Traditional political system · Formal political system

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Introduction

The problems of urban planning seem so far beyond the reach of urban planning agencies in Ghana in particular and Africa as a whole that they often lurch from opinion to opinion and policy to policy with no optimistic, realistic and sustainable approach to cling to [see Cobbinah et al. 2015; Njoh 2003; Okpala 2009; United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UNHABITAT) 2002]. Rapid urbanisation, increased urban poverty, transportation challenges, traffic congestion, uncontrolled informal activities, poor sanitation and mushrooming slum development have become a commonplace in Ghanaian and many African cities largely due to poor and ineffective urban planning [Adarkwa 2011; Amoako and Cobbinah 2011; Cobbinah et al. 2015; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division's (UNDESA/PD) 2012]. Watson and Agbola (2013) note that conventional urban planning practices and systems in Africa are failing to counter these threats because they are not based on the principles of inclusiveness, equity and pro-

poor. In most cases, urban planning agencies watch as political elites augment urban planning challenges (e.g., through corruption) and offer to assuage them (UNHABITAT 2002). In Ghana, for example, it is not uncommon to find newspaper headlines expressing the distressing state of urban planning such as "Ghana faces tough questions amid deadly flooding" (The Seattle Times 2015) and "Make urban planning a priority" (Daily Guide 2015).

It is true that urban planning is necessarily and deeply political (Watson and Agbola 2013) as without resources and support of government, it is difficult to address the multiple challenges of urban planning in African cities (Adams 1994; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010). Yet there is little enthusiasm for reform from within the urban planning practice (Watson and Agbola 2013). The fact is that, when urban planning problems pass to, controlled or managed by political elites with little or no planning background, they suffer professional deficiency and local level input, and inadvertently tend to make bad situations worse. This situation is particularly prevalent in Ghana, where traditional and modern political systems have rendered the position of urban planning agencies untenable, and the role of urban residents in planning unimportant. For example, while the traditional political authorities act as custodians of about 80 % of all land in Ghana (Djokoto and Opoku 2010), and often allocate land for development projects lacking adherence to urban planning requirements and without the knowledge of urban planning agencies (Amoateng et al. 2013), the modern political authorities have also assumed the responsibility of urban planning agencies, as they dictate, direct and order the pattern of urban planning and management in Ghana (Cobbinah and Korah 2015; Fuseini and Kemp 2015). As argued by Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom (2010), the motivation of Ghanaian modern political elites is the desire to win or retain power which is contingent on votes. A well planned city does not vote but people who live in unapproved neighbourhoods do. In their reflections on undue political interference, Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom (2010) seek to portray effective urban planning in Ghana as a distant reality as long as political elites think it has the potential to affect their electoral fortunes. Regrettably, urban planning is the single most important tool that is available to governments for managing rapid urban population growth and expansion (Watson and Agbola 2013).

Research (e.g., Fuseini and Kemp 2015; Okpala 2009) indicates that no urban planning project or activity will succeed if it is not rooted in urban planning reasoning, and reflect the aspirations of the community. For it is the responsibility of urban planning agencies to plan for liveable cities, and the role of urban residents to act, given that they have to accept and co-operate with the outcomes of urban planning decisions. Unfortunately in Ghana, current urban planning practice is a reflection of far-reaching and unimaginable political control and dominance, as well as fundamental planning flaws that put the way of life of urban residents at risk (see Fuseini and Kemp 2015; Korah and Cobbinah 2016; Korah et al. 2016). Urban planning in Ghana, reflected in the state of cities, frightens the day to day activities of ordinary citizens who have to deal with the threats of urban planning failures. A case in point is the recent flooding in Accra—Ghana's largest city and national capital—which, due to among others poor urban planning (e.g., location of residential and other development projects in water ways), claimed the lives of over 150 people and destroyed millions of dollars worth of properties (The Seattle Times 2015). Although the indispensability of effective urban planning has been widely reported (Amoateng et al. 2013; Amoako and Cobbinah 2011; Fuseini and Kemp 2015), the two fold political pressures—i.e. activities of traditional political authorities at the local level, and those of modern political authorities at the national level—have contributed considerably to the inability of urban planning agencies to exert effective influence on Ghanaian cities (Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010). In such situations, it is not surprising that Adarkwa and Akyaw (2001) note that the approved conventional sequence of planning-servicing-building-occupation has now become occupation-building-servicing in Ghanaian cities.

In evaluation research, it is common for researchers to mention political interference as contributing to poor urban planning (e.g., Fuseini and Kemp 2015; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010). However, what is often overlooked is the extent of political pressures on urban planning and functionality of cities. In this paper, the future of urban planning in Ghana is analysed through the influence of traditional and modern political systems, in order to understand the state, challenges and effects of poor urban planning, and rethink sustainable future urban planning

practices. First, an understanding of the concept of urban planning is presented. Second, a description of the research setting and methods is presented. Third, the political administrative structure in Ghana is analysed. Fourth, an analysis of urban planning administrative setup in Ghana and why politics remains a challenge is outlined. Fifth, cases of political dominance and control in urban planning and management in Ghanaian cities are discussed. The paper concludes with some recommendations to improve urban planning in Ghana, and other African countries.

Urban planning contextualised

The idea of urban planning, for many (e.g., Ward 2002; Wegener et al. 2007), is a product of the nineteenth century industrialisation and urbanisation that occurred in developed countries. Traditionally, urban planning concerned comprehensive designs of new settlements and the reconstruction of existing ones with the objective of achieving amenity, convenience, safety and public health in urban form, whilst reinforcing the march toward social progress (Adams 1994). By the turn of the twentieth century, urban planning focused less on civic design and became more a function of state policy. Presently, urban planning has become a professional field with many components such as spatial planning and collaborative planning (Fuseini and Kemp 2015; Healey 1997). In urban studies, it is customary, says Adams (1994), that urban planning is fundamentally concerned with the process of development, and that a separation of one from the other or dilution of their relationship weakens the potential of both. Urban planning has thus evolved with strong association with the development of cities focusing on asynchronous and symbiotic relationships in the process of urban change (Campbell and Fainstein 2003). To a large extent, the idea of urban planning is about people—urban residents, landowners, developers, investors, and politicians—whose actions and inactions shape the urban environment as they relate to each other and react to development pressure (Adams 1994).

The activities of the aforementioned stakeholders are often expected to ensure that urban areas particularly cities gradually evolve through a continuous process of change and development. In this case, urban planning neither overrides nor fully controls this continuous process of change and development, but instead, seeks to influence it as an incontrovertible programme for managing land use and environmental change (Healey et al. 1988). Here, urban planning can be described "as a form of state intervention in a development process dominated by the private sector" (Adams 1994, p. 2). This form of state intervention, according to Adams (1994), should lead to creation of better urban environment by successfully regulating various aspects of the development process. This process, of course, is dependent on the resources urban planning as a programme of intervention can attract, the powers with which it is entrusted, and particularly on the depth of its relationships with landowners, developers, investors and other important stakeholders, particularly urban residents. Pløger (2004) also identifies power plays and degree of communicative democracy as some key dynamics of urban planning in recent years. While some (e.g., Njoh 2003) believe that urban planning has always been a subject of power relations, others (e.g., Forester 1999; Healey 1997) emphasise inadequate, if not lack of, communicative engagement and ethic. In such situations, it is clear that management of power relations, collaborative engagement between stakeholders and availability of resources—logistics and personnel—are central to the process of actualising the ideals of urban planning (i.e. managing land use and environmental change to achieve improved living environment). For example, Gunder and Mouat (2002, p. 125) describe the absence of communicative democracy in urban planning as messy power and oppression symbolised by violence and institutional victimisation when the state acts upon urban residents against their interests and allows them no element of choice or freedom to resist.

Urban planning in practice, according to Adams (1994), should focus less on scientifically discovering the best technical solution to be implemented across urban areas for the benefit of urban residents. Rather, "it is about the processes of bargaining, negotiation and compromise over the distribution of scarce environmental resources, in which the planning authority, in attempting to mediate between conflicting claims on land, may promote particular interests above others" (Adams 1994, p. 2). In Africa, for example, there is gradual recognition and call for a shift from Western philosophy of urban planning based on orderliness, aesthetics and artistic principles to an inclusive, equitable and pro-poor approach

(Watson 2008). Of course, this approach does not diminish the vision of a well designed and attractive urban environment, nor deny the significance of fundamental urban linkages, but promotes the actualisation of urban planning philosophy of inclusivity and equity (Watson 2008). Nevertheless, given that urban planning has the tendency to change the resource use and distribution, often resulting in winners and losers, it is an intrinsically political activity in which controversy is extremely ubiquitous (Adams 1994). In this sense, it is therefore understandable that there is increased advocacy for urban planning and politics to move toward an improved collaboration and communicative democracy, which has the potential to transform political attitude to urban planning into a more responsive and contextual practice (Amin and Thrift 2002; Pløger 2004). This article presents an example of the influence of politics on the state of urban planning in Ghana.

Ghana's political administrative structure

In trying to understand the increasing political emphasis and orientation in urban planning in Ghana, it is important to appreciate how present political administrative structure has evolved over the years and how such evolution in turn has affected urban planning practice. Positing Ghana's political system in this manner not only ensures a deep historical perspective but provides an overarching framework which helps to tie together various challenges of urban planning. Ghana's political administrative structure dates back to pre-colonial times established in traditionally-based institutions commonly referred to as chieftaincy [Centre for Indigenous Knowledge & Organisational Development (CIKOD) 2010; Donkoh 2005]. This is not to deny the colonial influence on Ghana's political system. Rather it is to underscore the continuing recognition and resilience of traditional political system in Ghana's governance process, and thus prevent a simplistic view of its role. Scholarly opinion indicates that the resilience of traditional political system is evident in its demonstrated capacity to survive all three phases of Ghana's political history—i.e. pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods (Owusu-Mensah 2014). As a consequence, although Ghana is globally recognised as a perfect model of democratic governance in sub-Saharan

Africa, available literature shows that the country continues to uphold and maintain its traditional political system with about 80 % of Ghanaians professing allegiance to one chieftaincy institution or another (CIKOD 2010). The traditional political system in Ghana comprises chiefs, queen mothers, clan heads, elders, youth groups and traditional priests (Guri et al. 2008), and are:

"… greatly revered and held in awe as they are perceived to be the embodiment of the spirit of the ancestors and a link between them and the living community and further provide a renewed sense of belonging as well as being a powerful agent of social cohesion and harmony" (Donkoh 2005, p. 2).

Chieftaincy is considered as a repository of historical traditions; custodian of land, custom and usage; and the foundation of Ghana's society. In the pre-colonial era, the traditional political system was very powerful as Ghanaians were organised based on ethnic states (e.g., Asante, Dagomba, Gonja), with the chiefs acting as the executive head with the support of council of elders (Owusu-Mensah 2014). All land in Ghana was under various traditional control and management (Djokoto and Opoku 2010), as the traditional political system combined legislative, executive, judicial, religious and military roles across the various ethnic states (Owusu-Mensah 2014). The traditional political system performed statutory and non-statutory functions, with statutory functions including the collection, refinement, codification and unification of customary laws; adjudication of chieftaincy disputes; and compilation of lines of succession to offices in the various traditional areas. On the other hand, the non-statutory functions included the mobilisation of their people for development purposes. In this regard, the chiefs act as a medium linking their communities with development partners including NGOs, religious bodies and welfare associations. For example, traditional political system uses annual festivals to mobilise their people to plan and seek avenues and opportunities for implementing development projects (Donkoh 2005).

But the relevance of traditional political system was contested during the colonial period between the late fifteenth century and mid twentieth century, when it was of strategic importance to deny achievements to colonised people. The key challenge for the

colonialists was to develop a governance framework that would allow for a dilution of the established traditional political system, in order to be integrated into the new colonial administrative system as a means of facilitating control and achieving cost-efficiency in governance (Owusu-Mensah 2014). It was certainly not a question of consolidating, modernising or formalising the traditional political system, but to abate its growing authority and dominance, and set the tone for indigenous exploitation and pilfering of natural resources. As a consequence, the land tenure system was modified through legislative and judicial processes leading to commodification and retention of some pre-colonial lands, and greater emphasis on state role in land administration based on English laws (Djokoto and Opoku 2010). This situation rendered traditional political system less relevant, as many chiefs became colonial agents and lost their long-held community reverence as social discontentment increased and formal/modern political system emerged. In his reflections on the emergence of formal political system, Owusu-Mensah (2014) reports that the formal political system established important state institutions including the Legislative Council, Judicial Council, the West Africa Frontier Force as well as the Gold Coast Police Force to perform governance functions. In this sense, the process of governance that was hitherto administered by the traditional political system was replaced by the formal system.

The formal political system was maintained and institutionalised after independence in 1957. Given the colonial dilution of traditional political system, the relationship between post-colonial formal political system and the traditional system was uncertain, as debate over whether the latter should be restored to its pre-colonial eminence or be subjected to the colonial status quo (Owusu-Mensah 2014). For example, the Nkrumah government (1957–1966) tried to shift land administration powers from the chiefs to the state under the State Lands Act in 1964, which was more than what the colonial administration ever did. During the same period, the Land Administration Act (1964) was enacted which was much more inclined to keep traditional powers intact. The tide turned with re-granting of land administration right to traditional political system in 1979 and the institutionalisation of democratic process in the 1990s. Political stability was achieved following the adoption of the 1992 Republican Constitution, which recognises both formal and traditional political systems, upholds the authority of the latter, and divides land management into customary (traditional political system) and statutory (formal political system) tenures. Today, Ghana's land tenure system is one of legal pluralism in which customary land managed by traditional political system, and statutory land managed by formal political system co-exist, with customary land constituting about 80 % of all land in Ghana (Djokoto and Opoku 2010). Whilst the chiefs are responsible for holding the customary land in trust of the people, the statutory lands are managed by established formal institutions such as the Lands Commission.

To facilitate development at the grassroots level, Ghana has been divided into ten administrative regions to replace the pre-colonial traditional ethnic states. A decentralisation policy was introduced in 1988 to stimulate locally initiated development. This policy further divided the regions into metropolises/municipalities/districts (MMDs), to facilitate effective administration at the local level. The decentralisation policy allows for the establishment of agencies of the formal political system at the district level, to ensure that development decision making and interventions originate from the local to the national level (bottom-up). As illustrated in Table 1, the current formal political system with well-founded administrative structures and boundaries, where an Executive President governs with the assistance of 10 regional ministers, 216 MMDs chief executives, is an indication of the evolutionary nature of political governance in Ghana.

In recognition of the role of traditional political system in complementing the formal system, the Ministry of Chieftaincy and Culture and the National and Regional Houses of Chiefs were established as the official institutions charged with the responsibility of assimilating traditional knowledge into national policy. Other roles such as appointment of representatives to various government statutory bodies, including the Council of State, Prisons Council, National and Regional Lands Commissions and Regional Co-ordinating Councils were performed by the traditional political system. Despite the willingness of the traditional and the modern political systems to work together, research has shown that mistrust and fear of conflicting power relations remain a challenge (CIKOD 2010). The following sections examine how Ghana's political system is influencing urban planning practice.

Table 1 Local government system in Ghana

National level

President

Council of ministers

Council of state

Unicameral parliament

Ten regions

Regional ministers

Regional coordinating council

District level

6 Metropolises	56 Municipalities	154 Districts	275 Constituencies
Chief executives/mayors	Chief executives	Chief executives	
Metropolitan assembly	Municipal assembly	District assembly	
Over 250,000 inhabitants	Over 95,000 inhabitants	Vast geographical areas, consist of both rural and small urban areas	
		Over 70,000 inhabitants	
Sub-metropolitan district council	Zonal council	Urban/town/area councils	
Town council			

Unit committees:

In urban areas about 1500 inhabitants

In rural areas about 500–1000 inhabitants

Research setting and methodology

Research setting

This research was conducted in Ghana. With a total land area of 238,537 km², Ghana is located in West Africa and is bounded to the west by Cote d'Ivoire, to the east by Togo, to the north by Burkina Faso and to the south by the Gulf of Guinea. Situated on latitudes 4–12°N of the Equator, Ghana is located in the tropical region, and lies on the Greenwich meridian. With an increase in population of 30.4 % since 2000, Ghana's population stands at 24,658,823 as at 2010, with an average annual growth rate of 2.5 % (GSS 2012). The rapid increase in Ghana's population has occurred in tandem with an increase in the proportion of the urban population (United Nations Population Fund 2007). For instance, the year 2010 was the first time in Ghanaian history that half of its population lived in urban settlements—communities with population of not less than 5000, and include towns, cities and metropolises. Table 2 shows the rapidly increasing urban growth in selected Ghanaian cities since 1970.

Table 2 Population size of selected cities in Ghana. *Source*: Ghana Statistical Service, 1970, 1984, 2000, 2010

Cities	1970	1984	2000	2010
Accra	624,091	969,195	1,658,937	2,070,463
Kumasi	346,336	469,628	1,170,270	2,035,064
Sekondi-Takoradi	143,982	188,203	289,595	539,548
Tamale	83,653	135,952	202,317	371,351
Cape Coast	56,601	65,763	82,291	169,894
Tema	60,767	100,052	141,479	139,784
Koforidua	46,235	58,731	87,315	120,971
Ho	24,199	37,777	61,658	104,532
Sunyani	23,780	38,834	61,992	74,240
Wa	13,740	36,067	66,644	71,051
Bolgatanga	18,896	32,495	49,162	65,549

According to the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) (2012), Ghana's urban population increased from 43.8 % in 2000 to 50.9 % in 2010. This figure is further estimated to rise to 63 % by 2025. Not unexpectedly, the number of urban settlements has been increasing over the past six decades. For

example, the number of urban settlements in Ghana increased from 41 in 1948 to 364 in 2000. By 2010, Ghana had a total of 636 urban settlements emphasising its rapid urban growth (GSS 2012; Naab et al. 2013), which has considerable implications on urban planning.

Research methodology

This research relies heavily on literature review. Relevant literature on the subject in both Ghana and other developing countries was reviewed at two scales. The first focused on international literature on the philosophy, characteristics and outcomes of urban planning drawing insights from published books, referred journal articles and international reports. The local level literature review centred on government and planning agencies' documents and news paper articles on political governance and urban planning dynamics in Ghana in general and Accra—the national capital—and Kumasi—second largest city—in particular. The literature review revealed the pattern and extent of political dominance in Ghana's urban planning process, and formed the basis for the selection of the research participants.

To provide local understanding to the literature review, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used involving two relevant urban planning agencies across three Ghanaian cities. These agencies included the Town and Country Planning Departments (TCPD) in Accra, Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi, and the Public and Vested Lands Management Division and Land Registration Division of the Lands Commission offices in Accra, Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi (see Table 3). These TCPDs are responsible for the physical development and management of the aforementioned

Ghanaian cities, while the Lands Commission is in charge of managing public and vested lands. Officials of these agencies were involved in interview conversations on the direction of land development, urban planning and management challenges. Many (e.g., Sarantakos 1998; Mohd Noor 2008) have argued that the semi-structured interview conversations create an opportunity for researchers to explore in detail the phenomenon under study, and provide adequate flexibility in approaching multiple agencies and at the same time addressing various dimensions of the topic.

Agency consultations with the representatives of three district chief executives/mayors—political head of metropolises and districts in Ghana—and district coordinating directors (administrative head of metropolises and districts in Ghana) of the selected cities were conducted through telephone conversations regarding their perspectives on the recent patterns of political influence in urban planning practice in Ghanaian cities. Three main questions were asked on: (1) respondents' perspectives on the state of urban planning in Ghana; (2) the extent of influence of political elites on urban planning; and (3) the outcomes of urban planning practice in Ghana. In addition, using purposive sampling technique, quasi-institutions such as traditional leaders, district assembly representatives, unit and plot allocation committees within the selected cities were involved in face-to-face semi-structured interviews for the purposes of gathering first hand community views about the extent and impact of political-urban planning friction on urban development (see Table 3). Two traditional leaders from each of the three cities were selected including representatives of the Asantehene in Kumasi, Ga Mantse in Accra, and Essikadu Manhene in Sekondi-Takoradi. Three plot allocation committee members from each of the three cities were identified through land

Table 3 Research participants	Agency/participants	Number of participants
	TCPD	3
	Public and vested lands management division (lands commission)	3
	Land registration division (lands commission)	3
	City mayors	3
	District coordinating directors	3
	Traditional leaders	6
	District assembly representatives	12
	Plot allocation committee members	9
	Total	42

use planners in Kumasi, Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi, and involved in the study. Four district assembly representatives from each of the three cities were also involved based on their knowledge and experience in urban planning and the political context in urban Ghana, which were revealed during initial consultations with them at the various metropolitan assemblies.

In order to ensure that the perspectives of urban residents are also reflected, 10 urban residents each from three communities/areas that have experienced politically motivated urban planning actions were purposively selected and involved in interview conversations on: (1) their experiences with urban planning in the cities; (2) outcomes of urban planning decisions on their activities; and (3) their perspectives of political elites in planning the cities. The urban residents were selected from Old Fadama, a slum community in Accra, Kumasi central business district (Kejetia and Central Market areas), and Market Circle in Takoradi (see Table 3).

The conversations with the respondents provided detailed revelations of the conflict between urban planning and politics in Ghana as well as urban planning and management limitations in addressing the power-relations. The data collection was carried out in July–December 2015. The interview lasted between 60 and 90 min depending on the knowledge, experience and the interests of the respondents. The interview conversations were analysed using NVIVO 10 software programme to generate themes and categories, and ensured that findings of the interviews reflected the perspectives of the respondents. Validity and reliability were ensured by harmonising and comparing the literature review and interview findings.

Results and discussion

This section analyses urban planning practice in Ghana and the implications of politics, the extent of political influence on urban planning practice, and problems associated with politically controlled urban planning in Ghana.

Urban planning in Ghana: why politics remains a challenge?

One lesson to be learned from Ghana's political structure is the strong traditional political system at the community level and the dominance and control of formal political system at the national and metropolitan/district levels. There are many reasons for this and these reasons are pertinent to the debate on Ghana's urban planning practice (see Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010). One suggestion is that there are fundamental and enduring similarities between urban planning and politics, concerning the perception, reality and estimation of urban planning failures across Ghanaian cities (Fuseini and Kemp 2015). It is worth exploring this suggestion now, since it will help to steer the argument away from urban planning agencies as a professional body toward the pressures of partisan and indigenous political systems on urban planning. Detailed literature on the history of urban planning in Ghana abounds (see Adarkwa 2012; Cobbinah and Korah 2015; Fuseini and Kemp 2015).

During the nineteenth century, there emerged within British colonial administration in Ghana an enterprise called urban planning which, through the creation of town councils, focused on addressing poor sanitation and hygiene conditions, decongesting crowded neighbourhoods, and improving roads, telegraph and postal communications in Ghanaian cities particularly Accra (Gocking 2005; Quarcoopome 1993). Findings from the semi-structured interviews show that the introduction of the Town and Country Planning Ordinance 1945 (Cap 84) marked the beginning of nationwide urban planning practice. According to the TCPD official in Accra, the introduction of the Cap 84 led to the establishment of the TCPD as a body with the overarching responsibility of planning and managing urban and regional areas of Ghana, focusing on achieving efficiency, promoting orderliness, enhancing safety and health in human settlements. However, many urban researchers (e.g., Adarkwa 2012; Fuseini and Kemp 2015) have explored the contrasting myth of urban planning entertained by political elites. Their results suggest that the lack of local/district level structures to implement the Cap 84 and make effective the TCPD has led to a neglect of community aspirations in the process of urban planning. These findings were confirmed by the TCPD officials who mentioned the centralised approach to urban planning and the rigid nature of the Cap 84 emphasising design, orderliness and aesthetic as opposed to inclusivity, equity and pro-poor approach to planning as major causes of unsuccessful application of the Cap 84.

Ghana's decentralisation policy of 1988, according to the city mayors, offered a glimmer of hope in achieving a broad community-based approach to urban planning by creating Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs):

> … This system of planning [decentralisation] became operational following the passage of Local Government Act of 1993 (Act 462) which declared all communities in Ghana as statutory planning areas… So there was no excuse for haphazard development… City Mayor 3, July 2015.

The Act 462, in addition to other planning legislations such as the National Development Planning Systems Act of 1994 (Act 480) and National Building Regulation Act (LI 1630), provided a framework for MMDAs to perform urban and regional planning functions at the district and community levels, and without prejudice mandated the MMDAs to:

> "prohibit, abate, remove, pull down or alter so as to bring into conformity with the approved plan, a physical development which does not conform to the approved plan, or the abatement, removal, demolition or alteration of which is necessary for the implementation of an approved plan" (Local Government Act of 1993 (Act 462), Section 53).

Besides, other recent developments to restructure urban planning in Ghana to respond to emerging challenges of urban growth were mentioned by the agency officials, including the introduction of the Ghana National Urban Policy Framework in 2012, and the Land Use and Spatial Planning Bill which was recently (July 2016) passed by Ghana's parliament (The Ghanaian Times 2016). With these urban planning legislations, policies and institution in place, one would expect some form of inclusiveness and equity in spatial, socio-economic and environmental opportunities in Ghanaian cities as well as healthy urbanism. Instead, field observations show that chaotic scenes, in terms of congestion, unregulated physical development and struggle for livelihood resources/space, and urban blight are the defining characters of Ghanaian cities. For example, majority (23 out of 30) of the urban residents across the three cities reported of limited space for their activities, insanitary conditions and lack of basic municipal services:

> …We don't have water, drains and toilet facilities here… Some people bath in the open, others to throw their rubbish on the open streets… Nobody cares about us; look at the quality of houses we live in, it is very bad… Old Fadama 3, October 2015.

Available research confirms indescribable scenes of haphazard physical development, urban sprawl, slum expansion, inadequate housing, uncontrolled informal activities, traffic congestion and poor sanitation in Ghanaian cities (see Adarkwa 2011; Amoako and Cobbinah 2011; Amoateng et al. 2013; Cobbinah and Amoako 2012; Fuseini and Kemp 2015; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010). In urban planning commentaries on Ghana, it is not uncommon for researchers to blame urban planning agencies' (TCPD) short-sighted and reactionary approach to urban planning which have proved futile in addressing the growing urban challenges in this urban millennium (Adarkwa 2012; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010). While this may be true to some extent, a review of Ghana's political history and urban planning antecedents and interview conversations with the selected agencies suggest that politics, both formal and traditional systems underlie the poor state of urban planning in Ghana. One of the agency officials commented that:

> As you may be aware, even today the planning department [TCPD] is not autonomous and independent. Our bosses [political elites] always tell us what to do, even when they know it is not appropriate just to gain political advantage… TCPD 2, August 2015.

In relation to the influence of the formal political system, interview with TCPD and Lands Commission officials show that the TCPD continues to suffer political neglect by successive governments since independence, often swinging between ministries depending on the agenda of the political party in power:

> … the Department [TCPD] was categorised under the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development from 2001 to 2008 under former president Kufour's administration, but currently falls under the Ministry of Environment, Science, Technology and Innovation, under president Mahama's administration…

the neglect of and lack of seriousness to the Department by successive governments is evident in its limited and under-resourced capacity, in terms of logistical and personal support and autonomy… TCPD 1, August 2015

Although the city mayors mentioned that all government's departments in Ghana have problems with adequate logistics and personnel, research on urban Ghana reveals that inadequate financial support and human resources (e.g., low staff strength), and laxity in the enforcement of planning legislations are some indications of political neglect of the Department (Amoateng et al. 2013; Fuseini and Kemp 2015; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010). Complicating matters further, the TCPD officials reported the control and dominance of urban planning practice by formal political system. They argued that in many cases, political elites assume the role of urban planners, dictating where new developments should take place. Interestingly, interviews with the representatives of the mayors and district coordinating directors revealed a growing perception of formal political system as the major development instrument, and that political elites should determine the pattern of development including urban planning activities:

> … The government is accountable to the people not planning institutions … So we [Mayors], as representative of the government at the local level, have to determine what is good for the people and do it for them. Planning institutions are supposed to help government realise its promises but not to dictate to government … City Mayor 3, July 2015.

This finding corroborates Adams' (1994) claim of controversies and power relations that ensue when there is inadequate consultation and negotiation in the process of urban planning. However, as argued by Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013), mistakes in urban planning are difficult to undo as planning interventions such as infrastructure investments, land use system and layouts are literally cast on stone, often with unalterable and complex implications. Thus, without adequate and effective urban planning, cities may 'break' in terms of their capacity to respond to emerging challenges and create liveable environments (Cobbinah et al. 2015). Unfortunately, as Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom

(2010) observed, political elites in Ghana are only concerned about winning or retaining power but not the creation of liveable neighbourhoods. In this sense, it is somewhat unsurprising that the interview findings indicate that the role of the TCPD has been rendered untenable in so many spheres, as it only performs reactionary and piecemeal planning functions. As a result, many (13 out of 30) urban residents could not differentiate between the role of urban planners and political elites (mayors), as they assumed that mayors are responsible for planning and managing the cities:

> This place [Old Fadama] was given to us by the government but now the mayor is saying we can't live here anymore … What can we do? He [the mayor] has power to tell people where to live and where not live and where to work and where not to work, so we have to move, even if we don't agree … Old Fadama 1, October 2015.

On the other hand, at the community level, the agency interview findings show that the TCPD is further stifled by the activities of the traditional political system. As earlier discussed, about 80 % of all land in Ghana is held in trust by the traditional leaders for the members of the community. With almost all human activities and socio-economic development of people finding expression in space, land remains indispensable in the urban planning process (Fuseini and Kemp 2015). According to the Lands Commission officials, the land administration law in Ghana stipulates that traditional leaders dispose of these lands in conformity of the planning regime of the various metropolitan/municipal/district assemblies. However, the problem of laxity in the enforcement of planning legislations, in terms of getting the requisite staff and police support to enforce the land administration law is rife and real in Ghana (Adarkwa 2011; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010):

> … There are widespread cases of land allocation and leasing by chiefs and land uses by developers across Ghanaian cities without the knowledge of planning authorities, and that do not conform to planning and land use requirements… Lands Commission 1, August 2015.

A study by Amoateng et al. (2013) also found that chiefs in peri-urban areas of Kumasi, particularly

Abuakwa, have, in addition to their fundamental role as custodians of the land, assumed the role of determining the use of land, resulting in a situation whereby land earmarked for public uses, such as open spaces by the TCPD is leased by chiefs for residential development. Insights from Amoateng et al.'s (2013) study reveal that encroachment on, and conversion of ecologically sensitive areas such as areas liable to flooding, open spaces and waterways within and at the peripheries of Ghanaian cities are, to a large extent, outcomes of the activities of chiefs. Available literature also reports of widespread cases of traditional political interference in land use determination and poor location of residential and related developments in Ghanaian cities (see Ahmed and Dinye 2012; Cobbinah and Amoako 2012; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010). However, interview conversations with the traditional leaders and plot allocation committee members show that they consider as part of their traditional role to allocate land especially to their community members for their socio-economic activities, and do not necessarily consider urban planning requirements as binding:

> … the land is ours [traditional leaders]. We are the traditional custodians … Nobody can develop our land without our consent, not even the government. If the planning people [TCPD] want to plan our community or land, they should contact us first and seek our approval … Traditional Leader 5, September 2015

In such a situation, it is understandable that the TCPD officials mentioned that the reverential and authoritative nature of traditional political system in Ghana often compelled the TCPD to reform their planning designs/schemes to accommodate unauthorised uses/developments. Interestingly, most (23 out of 30) urban residents expressed their support for the traditional authorities in relation to land allocation and use, indicating the political elites are corrupt and often exploit land registering and titling process. Unfortunately, the implications of such planning failures are enormous—from haphazard development, urban sprawl, slum developments, congestion, land disputes, to flooding (e.g., Ahmed and Dinye 2012; Cobbinah and Amoako 2012; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010)—and as Sustainable Development Solutions Networks (2013) indicated, these are often difficult to undo. The interview findings and the literature review

seem to suggest that the outlook of urban planning in Ghana is bleak.

In a variety of ways, it is true that urban planning agencies in Ghana have failed in some respects, such as coordinating with other planning related agencies in relation to plan design and implementation (Fuseini and Kemp 2015; Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom 2010). However, the preceding discussion suggests that politics, both formal and traditional, have impacted considerably on the misfortunes of urban planning in Ghana. The next section highlights cases of major planning decisions taking by political elites, which have perpetuated urban planning challenges, resulted in loss of lives and properties, and generated distrust toward urban planning agencies.

Cases of politically-induced urban planning decisions and interventions

The political realities within the Ghanaian urban society that are in direct opposition to effective urban planning have been discussed in the preceding sections. It is reasonable to describe urban planning challenges as posing a radical threat to humanity, and demanding some kind of comprehensive solution that requires a complete outlook of the TCPD and the exercise of far-reaching professional urban planning powers. On the other hand, there is growing deep distrust toward politicians and urban planning agencies amongst urban residents, a distrust so far-reaching as to cause urban residents who feel it to disregard urban planning promises from political elites, and put personal precaution ahead of all other planning requirements. This distrust has arisen due to constant politically-induced urban planning promises to address the several urban development and management challenges which are never realised. Political decisions on urban planning in Ghana, in terms of policies, are widespread (see Fuseini and Kemp 2015).

However, this section of the paper focuses only on politically-induced urban planning decisions and interventions that generated immediate effects on urban planning and urbanism. These decisions or interventions of correcting the ills of urban planning have largely been harsh decongestion or eviction exercises. Obeng-Odoom (2011) presents a picturesque image of forced decongestion and eviction

exercises in Ghanaian cities as "the roar of bulldozers, the clutter of the hammer, the rant of armed police-men, the screams of women, the wails of men, and the tears of children" (p. 355). Indeed, decongestion and evictions are policy interventions which only give weight to the fact that urban planning has failed to appreciate the nature of urban growth processes in Ghana and most developing countries—a process Pieterse and Simone (2013) rightly describe as rogue urbanism.

Change everything but touch nothing, according to Scruton (2012), is a strange counsel. But that is what Ghanaian cities are experiencing from a politically dominated urban planning philosophy that fails to address pervasive and emerging urban challenges. Findings from this research show many cases of decongestion and eviction exercises initiated and carried out by political elites (e.g., city mayors) to create liveable urban environments without adequate forewarning to urban residents but turned to aggravate the situation, due to limited cognizant of due urban planning process.

> … Over the years, several attempts have been made to ensure that the city [Accra] is liveable. For example, in 1991 and 1993, the AMA [Accra Metropolitan Assembly], in an attempt to create a more functional urban environment, undertook decongestion exercise to relocate informal work-ers (hawkers) and moved a local market (yam market) respectively from the Accra city centre to Old Fadama [the biggest slum area within the city popularly known as 'Sodom and Gomor-rah']… Mayor 1, July 2015.

However, some researchers (e.g., Appiah 2015a; Obeng-Odoom 2011) believe that these decisions were largely political and suffered professional planning deficiency, as a result they contributed to the expan-sion of the Old Fadama slum, while unauthorised informal activities at the city centre intensified. Today, the Old Fadama slum community, albeit serving as home for thousands of migrants mostly from Northern Ghana (Appiah 2015a), is described as the most polluted location on earth owing to poor urban planning (see Obeng-Odoom 2011).

The agency interviews supported by literature show that decongestion and eviction exercises, due to their political motivation, have assumed 'machoistic' status where aggression rather than negotiation,

combativeness rather than cooperation and impulsion rather than mutuality are used against perceived informal activities, unauthorised structures/buildings and informal settlements (Obeng-Odoom 2011). Obeng-Odoom (2011) indicates that decongestion and eviction attacks are mostly ferocious in Ghanaian cities such as Kumasi. This image evokes a tenor of terror that urban planning philosophy, an activity expected to reflect the aspirations of the people was subjected to. Similar sentiments were expressed by the urban residents:

> We [market women] don't know when they [decongestion/eviction taskforce] will come, that's my fear because I don't have any where to go and sell my products … They are very brutal; they will take all our items away, and in some cases demolish people's stores … Kumasi Central Business District 9, November 2015.

Unfortunately, agency interview findings show that subsequent mayors of Kumasi, though less tyrannical, followed politically entrenched urban planning approach, evicting and decongesting without commu-nity engagement, urban planning agency involvement, and adequate forewarning. However, these claims were disputed by the mayor and district coordinating director of Kumasi:

> Our fundamental objective is to serve the people of Kumasi. So we will do what it takes to create a functional urban environment for all through consultation and negotiations. Creating a live-able urban environment is a matter of under-standing and negotiations among all stakeholders … Mayor 3, July 2015.

In Ghanaian cities, decongestion and eviction exercises can be said to be directed toward improving urbanism and restoring failed urban planning practice. Indeed, interviews with both the mayors and planning agencies indicate that reasons proffered for decongestion and eviction exercises in Ghanaian cities are based on health and security issues, as well as non-compliance of planning requirements (e.g., building/development permit) by some urban residents. True, all 10 urban residents in Old Fadama, coupled with 6 and 4 urban residents in Kumasi Central Business District and Takoradi Market Circle, reported that they do not have building or development permit for the areas they occupy. However, findings from the

literature review suggest that their relations in terms of timing and conflicts within cities look more like seeking political control and recognition rather than real urban planning interventions. Obeng-Odoom (2011) argues that these decongestion exercises are often triggered by political events such as anniversaries, and preparation for political visits. Here, there are cases of stalls in Accra being set ablaze by AMA officials in an attempt to decongest and beautify the city to welcome the United States President, Barack Obama in 2009 (Joy FM 2009). Other cases reported by Obeng-Odoom (2011) in the Ghana's capital, Accra were the expulsion of informal traders/activities from various parts of the city prior to the country's Golden Jubilee celebrations in 2007 to welcome international political dignitaries to mark Ghana's 50 years of dependence from British colonisation.

This perception of politically induced decongestion exercise may be true as available urban planning policy documents that proffer sustainable management of Ghanaian cities are frequently not implemented, but political elites hasten to execute decongestion and eviction exercises without any long term guide. The National Urban Policy Framework of 2012 (Ministry of Local Government & Rural Development 2012) and the Strategic Plans for Accra (Volumes I, II and III), which prescribe sustainable ways of managing Ghanaian cities particularly Accra to avoid cases of flooding suffered implementation challenges. For example, the Accra structural 'Strategic Plan for the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area Volumes 1, 2 and 3' which provided an accurate prediction of urbanisation and urban growth of the city and appropriate planning responses suffered implementation challenges due to apathy among political elites, and limited involvement of urban residents (Accra Planning & Development Programme 1985, 1991, 1992). Similarly, the National Urban Policy Framework of 2012 which is the first comprehensive urban policy to be formulated to promote sustainable, spatially integrated and balanced 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 in the face of rapid urbanisation and climate change. Yet, after nearly five years of its publication and promulgation, the policy remains unimplemented. Within this context, it is reasonable to argue that if these policies and

plans had been implemented, these decongestion and eviction exercises would not have been necessary.

It is thus not surprising that interviews with TCPD officials indicate that decongestion exercises are triggered by a major disaster resulting from urban planning failure. For example, a major flood case recorded in Accra in June 2015 (The Seattle Times 2015), which claimed the lives of over 150 people and destroyed millions of dollars worth of properties, according to the agency officials, was followed by knee-jerk political decisions by the AMA and Ga West Municipal Assembly led by their chief executives to demolish parts of the Old Fadama (Sodom and Gomorrah) slum, and remove land uses (e.g., service station) that are perceived to be located on waterways respectively (Appiah 2015a; Joy FM 2015). These vignettes depict but a few of the many urban planning decisions motivated by political elites.

Albeit urban planning process advocates for stakeholder consultations, Obeng-Odoom (2011) describes the brute force employed in decongestion exercises, often with little or no forewarning, and, in some cases, journalists are assaulted in the process. Interview conversations with district assembly representatives in Accra show that city residents affected by these forced eviction and decongestion exercises are developing resistance, and often taking their own precautions:

> … a short-sighted political decision taken by the chief executives of AMA and Ga West Municipal Assembly to demolish Old Fadama and decongest some parts of Accra respectively following the deadly flooding was met with community resistance… District Assembly Representative, July 2015.

This perspective was emphasised by urban residents in Old Fadama. The residents of Old Fadama protested violently against the demolition of their homes (Gadugah 2015):

> The government people [political elites] don't think about us. This [Old Fadama] is where some of us have lived for over 10 years, how could you [demolition taskforce] come and demolish our homes just because there is flooding in Accra? … They [political elites] should remember that we [residents of Old Fadama] are also humans not animals … Old Fadama 4, October 2015.

Similarly, as reported by Joy FM (2015), while a female resident posed nude to deter a demolition of a service station in the Ga West Municipality which was perceived to be in an unauthorised location, others engaged the services of 'strongly built men' to mount fierce resistance against the demolition exercise. Unfortunately, findings from this research indicate that political elites have subjected such important urban planning decisions and actions to partisan politics, with those in the ruling government accusing the opposition party for instigating Old Fadama resident's demonstration against the demolition exercise (Gadugah 2015), and further blaming its own party leaders for transcending the agreed demarcation for the Old Fadama slum's demolition (Appiah 2015b) without recourse to ensuring the independence of the urban planning department. Interestingly, interviews with the city mayors and district coordinating directors reveal that the issue of decongestion or eviction evaporates during election time, a period when activities occupying illegal locations flourish, and political elites become friends with the so-called informal workers or people occupying unauthorised locations:

> … You know, election time is different … You can't introduce harsh policies or embark on decongestion exercises during election, you will definitely lose … Mayor 2, July 2015.

This finding is consistent with Yeboah and Obeng-Odoom (2010) claim that winning or retaining power is more important to political elites in Ghana than creating inclusive and liveable urban environments.

Findings from this research show that this situation of poor urban planning is further complicated and aggravated by the activities of traditional political system. As discussed earlier, traditional political system, through land allocation and leasing, have contributed to poor urban planning in a number of ways including haphazard development, encroachment and conversion of land uses, and land disputes. In addition, the traditional political system often tends to attribute major misfortunes arising from poor urban planning to superstition. For example, the cause of recent flooding in Accra which was largely due to urban planning failure was attributed to the 'doing of the gods' by traditional authorities in Accra (Ga Traditional Council) (Citi FM 2015). The Ga Traditional Council blamed some celebrities who organised

a well patronised vigil dubbed 'Dumsor must stop vigil' to protest and express their displeasure about the worsening power crisis in Ghana. According to the Council, the said vigil was organised at a time when there was a ban on drumming and noise making in parts of the capital city. Thus, the celebrities' defiance is purported by the Council to have caused the deadly flooding (Citi FM 2015). However, as earlier discussed, traditional authorities are powerful political forces in Ghana and are highly revered. It is thus not surprising that many Ghanaians do believe this superstitious cause of flooding rather than making urban planning a priority. For example, some (14 out of 30) urban residents indicated that they believe this superstitious cause of flooding and any other decrees by the traditional authorities because they act as the medium between the dead (ancestors) and the living, and that they are privy to matters of the spiritual realm.

In summary, while both the actions of political elites and traditional authorities have contributed to poor urban planning with associated harsh consequences, urban residents expressed strong disappointment and dissatisfaction with the political elites, but support for and adherence to traditional authorities. This underlies the dominance and reverential nature of traditional authorities in Ghana (CIKOD 2010; Donkoh 2005; Owusu-Mensah 2014)

Conclusion and recommendations

Findings from this research suggest that urban planning in Ghanaian cities can well be described as a political reaction by both traditional and mainstream political elites in a bid to address distortions in urban land use and other pathologies of Ghanaian urbanism. These distortions and pathologies are unfortunately the products of political dominance, dictation and control of urban planning practice, devoid of professional sufficiency. Whilst mainstream political elites appeared to be stifling urban planning agencies, by under-resourcing them and manipulating their activities, traditional political system also seemed to have compounded the struggles of urban planning agencies by allocating, leasing and determining the use of land. The dual political attack on urban planning, rendering urban planning agencies largely ineffective, is reflected in the chaotic scenes and dysfunctional state of Ghanaian cities: urban sprawl, haphazard

development, congestion, land disputes, slum development, poor sanitation etc.

Regrettably, the findings indicate that main strategies adopted by political elites for the resolution of the multiple urban challenges are vicious and acrimonious attacks on people and activities, strategies which are at variance with urban planning principles of promoting negotiation, inclusiveness and communicative democracy (see Adams 1994; Pløger 2004; Watson 2008). As a result, it appears that as political elites attack, city residents resist. What is often ignored are the effects of such political decisions on economic development, human lives, social advancement and environmental conservation. Should current trend of political dominance in urban planning continues, the future of Ghanaian cities maybe unknown. It is about time urban planning in Ghana is given a high priority by political elites, as efforts to reverse this trend are increasingly becoming urgent and tenable. Interesting, the main battlefield for the resolution of the many urban planning challenges is in the political arena, both traditional and mainstream through negotiation, consultation and collaboration as well as enforcement of urban planning laws.

This paper recommends that urban planning agencies should be recognised by political elites as an institution with the mandate and capacity to plan, develop and manage cities in Ghana and other African countries in consultation with the urban residents. In Ghana, institutions such as Ghana Judicial Service and the Electoral Commission of Ghana are independent and well resourced due to their perceived importance in sustaining Ghana's democratic process. On the other hand, the research findings indicate that the TCPD is politically controlled and under-resourced, despite Sustainable Development Solutions Network's (2013) assertion that poor urban planning breeds urban patterns that are difficult to undo. Just like the Ghana Judicial Service and Electoral Commission of Ghana, this paper proposes that the TCPD should be made an independent entity, devoid of undue political interference and control but works collaboratively with both urban residents and political elites.

This, of course, is not a guarantee that issue of poor urban planning would be resolved when the TCPD is made autonomous. In fact, there are cases in urban Ghana where the activities and beliefs of urban planners have negatively influenced urban planning practice (see Cobbinah and Korah 2015). However, as earlier mentioned, the TCPD remains one of the under-resourced institutions in Ghana, as it has become a pendulum swinging between different ministries under different political administrations. Perhaps, the recognition and empowerment of the TCPD as an autonomous institution may bring decorum and professionalism in urban planning practice and provide some level of order in the built-environment in urban Ghana. The recognition of the importance of the TCPD should be accompanied by legal and resource support—personnel boost, capacity training, and logistic provision.

In this direction, the Land Use and Spatial Planning Bill 2016 which was recently (July 2016) passed by parliament of Ghana and awaiting presidential assent is a commendable and a step in a right direction (The Ghanaian Times 2016). The Bill makes provision for the creation of a Planning Authority, as it proposes the upgrading of the TCPD to a Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority to give it some autonomy and resources to help deal with the excessive influence of politicians and traditional leaders. Thus, the institutionalisation of the TCPD as an independent entity responsible for all planning and management aspects of Ghanaian cities has the potential to revive community trust in urban planning. In this sense, urban planning decisions will be taken by professional urban planners in consultations with other stakeholders particularly city residents. In addition, land use allocation and leasing will be supervised by urban planners, with urban planning agencies further determining the various uses of land by involving urban residents. It is at this point that urban planning practice can move beyond politically-induced short-sighted piecemeal and reactionary measures to long-term sustainable approaches.

However, care should be taken to ensure that, like the National Urban Policy Framework of 2012 and other plans, the Land Use and Spatial Planning Bill is not abandoned but implemented together with the available policies (e.g., the National Urban Policy Framework of 2012) to the later. In this case, further research exploring ways or mechanisms for translating planning policies/laws/schemes into reality and the challenges therefore would provide insights into the role and relationship of urban planning and politics toward sustainable development of Ghanaian cities.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest   The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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