

SHAPING GREATER TAMALE: TOWARDS A PLANNED AND RESILIENT METROPOLIS



CONTEXT DOCUMENT



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Les Ateliers de Cergy is a non-profit association created in 1982 at the initiative of the urban planners of the New Town of Cergy-Pontoise. Today, it is an international network of professionals, academics and decision-makers in urban planning. Focused on the practice of urban project management, the association organises workshops conceived as spaces for collective design and creativity.

In France and abroad, these workshops provide project managers with an international perspective and illustrated proposals for territorial strategies and urban development projects. Through the convergence of different professions and cultures, they also serve to question learning processes and provide exchange opportunities at the highest level.

www.ateliers.org

This context document has been prepared by the assistants pilots of Les Ateliers de Cergy to provide workshop participants with an understanding of the historical, institutional, environmental, socio-economic, and spatial dynamics shaping Greater Tamale and its constituent communities, including Nyohini.

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V2, July 2026

The International Urban Planning workshop titled 'Shaping Greater Tamale: Towards a planned and resilient metropolis', held from June 29 to July 9, 2026 in Tamale, Ghana. This initiative takes place in the framework of the Sustainable Cities Project, funded by the European Union, and implemented by Expertise France through the Ministry of Local Government, Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs (MLGCRA).



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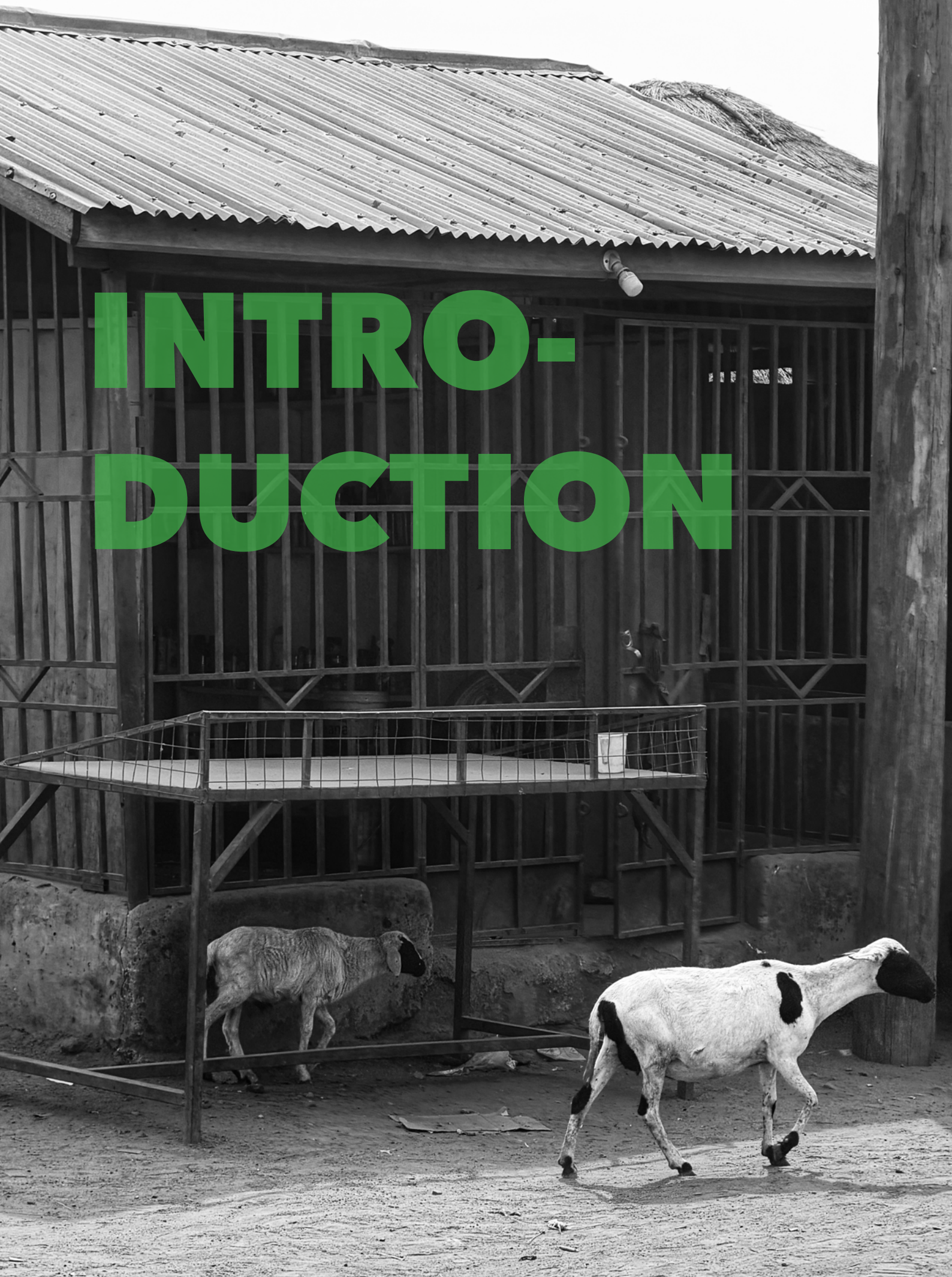
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INTRO- DUCTION



Greater Tamale is undergoing a **period of rapid urban transformation** characterized by population growth, spatial expansion, increasing demand for land, and the progressive conversion of open spaces and agricultural lands into residential and commercial developments. Communities such as Nyohini exemplify the opportunities and challenges associated with this urban growth. While urbanization has stimulated economic development and improved access to services, it has also contributed to **environmental degradation, pressure on infrastructure, loss of green spaces, informal settlement expansion, and increasing complexity in land governance.**

These challenges are particularly significant because Tamale's urban development occurs within a **pluralistic governance environment** where statutory planning institutions operate alongside **deeply rooted customary land tenure systems**. Traditional authorities, land custodians, municipal institutions, private developers, and community residents all play important roles in shaping the city's spatial future. The interaction between these actors often creates both opportunities for **innovation and challenges for coordinated urban management.**

Against this backdrop, the workshop seeks to **provide a platform for exploring innovative, inclusive and sustainable approaches to urban development in Greater Tamale.** By bringing together multidisciplinary teams, local stakeholders, technical experts, researchers, community representatives, and decision-makers, the workshop aims to generate practical proposals capable of addressing the complex social, environmental, economic and institutional issues confronting the city.

Les Ateliers Internationaux de Maîtrise d'Œuvre Urbaine (Les Ateliers) is an **international platform dedicated to collaborative urban planning and territorial development.** Since its establishment in France in 1982, Les Ateliers has organized workshops in cities around the world facing major urban transformation challenges. Its methodology is distinguished by its **emphasis on multidisciplinary collaboration, intercultural exchange, and co-production of knowledge.** Unlike conventional consultancy studies, Les Ateliers does not seek to produce a single master plan or technical blueprint. Instead, it assembles diverse teams of professionals and students from different countries and disciplines including urban planners, architects, landscape architects, engineers, sociologists, economists, environmental specialists, and governance experts, to work intensively on real-world urban challenges. Through field observations, stakeholder engagement, and collaborative design processes, participants **develop strategic visions and innovative proposals that stimulate dialogue and inform local decision-making.**

This context document has been prepared to provide workshop participants with an understanding of the historical, institutional, environmental, socio-economic, and spatial dynamics shaping Greater Tamale and its constituent communities, including Nyohini. It serves as a common knowledge base from which participants can develop informed analyses and proposals throughout the workshop process. The document highlights key opportunities and challenges relating to urban growth, land governance, environmental management, infrastructure provision, cultural heritage, and community development. It also identifies critical questions that require innovative responses to support a more inclusive, resilient, and sustainable urban future for Greater Tamale.

PROFILE OF GREATER TAMALE



GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

GEOGRAPHY, LANDSCAPE AND ECOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Northern Ghana is situated within the broader Guinea Savannah ecological belt of West Africa, a vast transitional landscape extending across several countries between the humid tropical forests to the south and the semi-arid Sahel to the north. The region is characterized by relatively flat to gently undulating terrain, open woodland savannah vegetation, scattered drought-resistant tree species such as shea (*Vitellaria paradoxa*), baobab (*Adansonia digitata*), neem (*Azadirachta indica*), and acacia species, interspersed with extensive grasslands. Seasonal rivers and wetlands punctuate the landscape, creating important ecological niches that support biodiversity, agriculture, and human settlements.

The Guinea Savannah environment experiences a unimodal rainfall regime, with annual rainfall ranging between approximately 900 and 1,100 mm concentrated within a short rainy season from May to October, followed by a

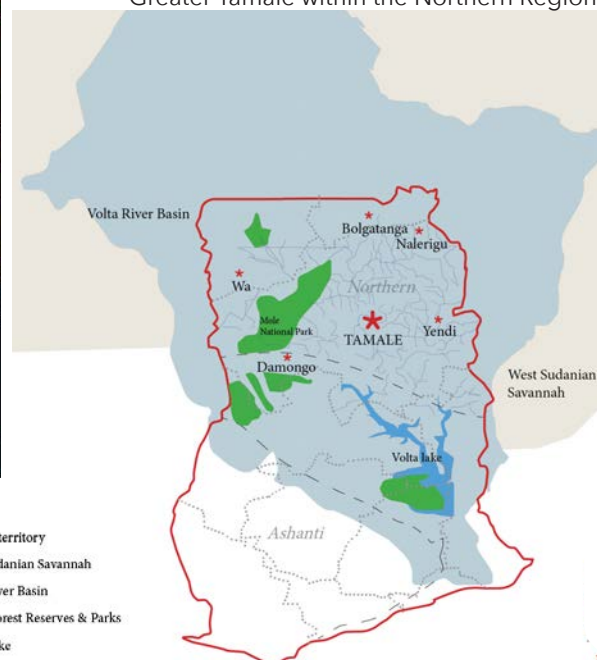
prolonged dry season lasting between five and seven months. Temperatures remain high throughout the year, often exceeding 40°C during the hottest months. This climatic regime creates a fragile ecological balance in which vegetation recovery, soil fertility, and water availability are highly dependent on seasonal rainfall patterns. Consequently, land-use changes such as deforestation, overgrazing, urban expansion, and wetland encroachment can have significant environmental consequences, including soil degradation, increased surface runoff, localized flooding, and declining ecosystem resilience.

A defining geographical strength of Northern Ghana is its position as a transitional ecological corridor linking the forest ecosystems of southern Ghana with the Sahelian landscapes of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Historically, this location facilitated trans-Saharan trade routes, migration flows, cultural interactions, and livestock



Ghana's situation in West Africa

Regional map showcasing the geographical assets of Greater Tamale within the Northern Region

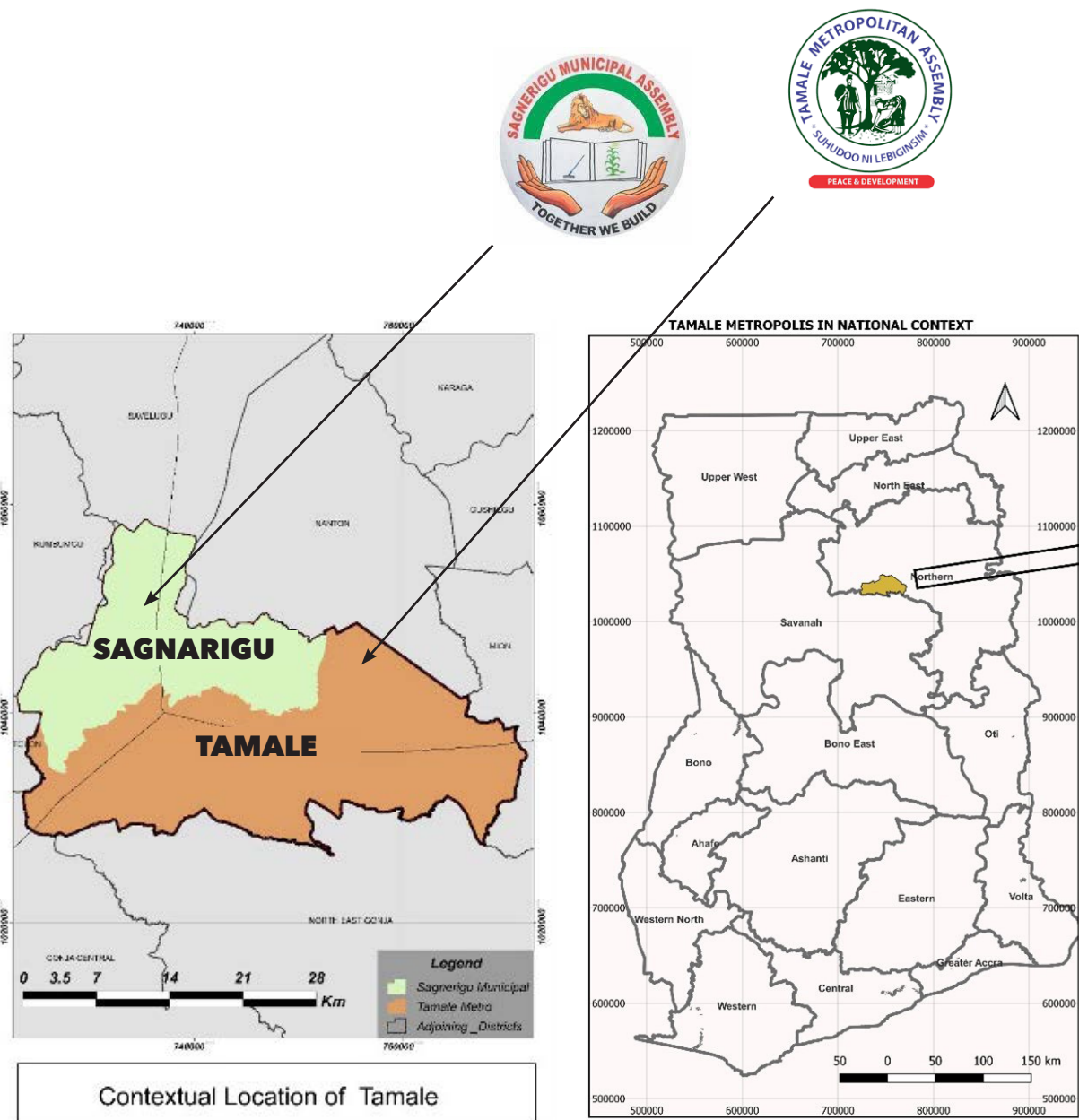


Source: Les Ateliers, 2026

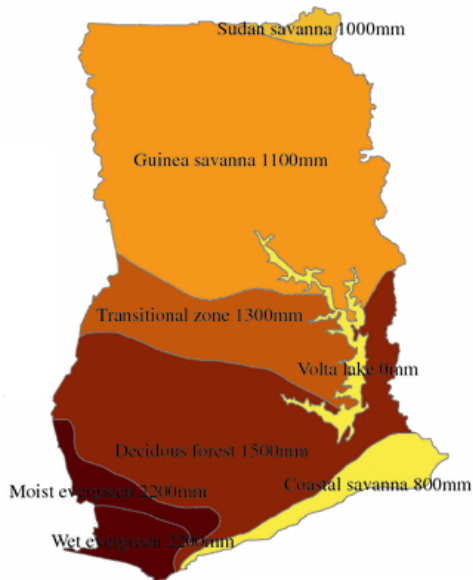
movements across West Africa. Today, the same geographical position provides strategic advantages for regional commerce, transportation, and cross-border economic integration. Major transportation corridors passing through Tamale connect southern Ghana to northern Ghana and neighbouring Sahelian countries, reinforcing the city's role as a regional gateway and growth pole.

The influence of the Sahelian environment is particularly evident in Northern Ghana's climate, vegetation structure, and land-use practices. Although the region lies south of the Sahel proper, it exhibits several Sahelian characteristics, including prolonged dry seasons, high evapotranspiration rates, periodic drought conditions, bushfires, sparse tree cover in some areas, and strong dependence on rainfall for agricultural production. The annual Harmattan winds, originating from the Sahara Desert, transport dry and dusty air masses across Northern Ghana between November and February, significantly reducing humidity and affecting vegetation health, water resources, and human comfort. These environmental conditions create a landscape that is inherently vulnerable to climate variability and environmental degradation.

Within this broader ecological setting lies the Greater Tamale area, comprising Tamale and Sagnarigu. The city is located on relatively low-lying savannah plains at an elevation



Mean Rainfall in Ghana



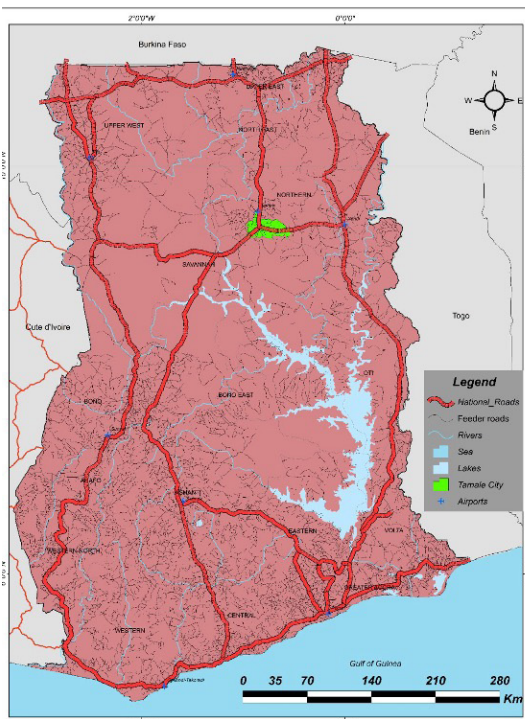
Source: Ghana Meteorological Service

of approximately 150–180 metres above sea level. The natural landscape historically consisted of open savannah woodland, seasonal streams, wetlands, agricultural fields, and communal open spaces that performed important ecological functions, including groundwater recharge, microclimate regulation, stormwater management, and biodiversity conservation. These green and open spaces also provided grazing lands, fuelwood resources, medicinal plants, and recreational areas for local communities.

The savannah ecosystem of Greater Tamale possesses several environmental strengths that have historically supported settlement and economic development. The relatively flat topography facilitates transportation infrastructure and urban expansion, while fertile alluvial soils in lowland areas support crop production. The abundance of shea trees and other indigenous species contributes to local livelihoods through non-timber forest products. Moreover, the mosaic of agricultural land, woodland patches, wetlands, and open spaces has traditionally enhanced ecological resilience by regulating local temperatures, reducing erosion, and supporting biodiversity.

However, these ecological assets are increasingly under pressure from rapid urbanization. As Greater Tamale expands, significant portions of the natural savannah landscape are being converted into residential, commercial, and institutional developments. Inner-city communities such as Nyohini, Gumbihini, and Kukuio have experienced substantial densification and loss of open spaces, while peri-urban areas in Sagnarigu have witnessed widespread conversion of agricultural lands and natural vegetation into built-up environments. The replacement of permeable vegetated surfaces with impervious structures not only alters local hydrological processes but also contributes to increasing urban heat stress, declining biodiversity, reduced carbon sequestration capacity, and heightened vulnerability to climate-related risks.

Consequently, the geographical and ecological characteristics of Greater Tamale make it a particularly important case for examining the interactions between urban growth, land governance, and environmental sustainability. The city's location within the Guinea Savannah-Sahel transition zone means that land-use decisions have implications not only for urban development but also for ecological resilience in one of Ghana's most environmentally sensitive regions. Understanding these dynamics is therefore essential for developing sustainable urban planning and governance approaches capable of balancing development needs with the protection of critical savannah ecosystems.



National Road Network (Ghana)

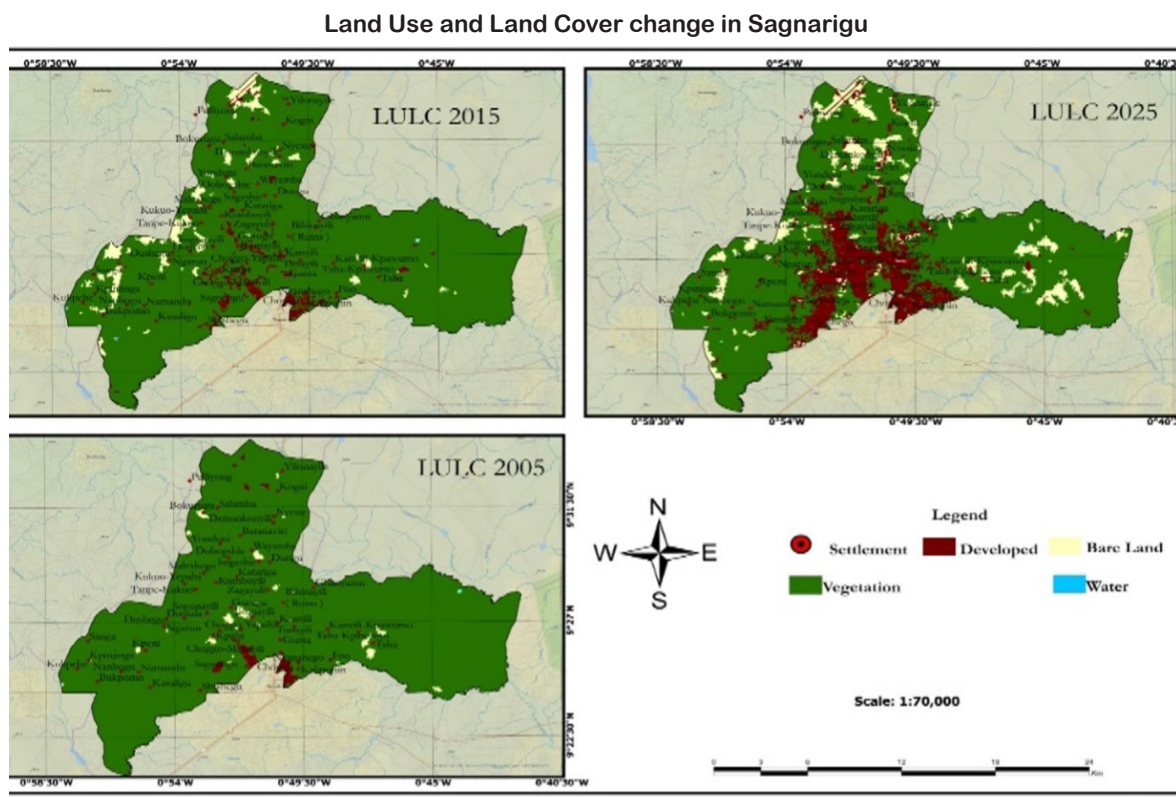
VEGETATION

The vegetation of Greater Tamale is predominantly characterized by Guinea Savannah vegetation, consisting mainly of grasslands interspersed with scattered trees and shrubs. The natural vegetation cover includes drought-resistant tree species such as shea (*Vitellaria paradoxa*), baobab (*Adansonia digitata*), neem (*Azadirachta indica*), acacia, dawadawa (*Parkia biglobosa*), and mango trees. The herbaceous layer is dominated by tall grasses that become more prominent during the rainy season (Dickson & Benneh, 2004).

The natural vegetation cover within Greater Tamale has however undergone significant

transformation due to rapid urbanization, population growth, infrastructural development, fuelwood extraction, and agricultural expansion. Increasing conversion of open spaces and peri-urban lands into residential, commercial, and institutional developments has contributed to the decline of natural green cover in many parts of the metropolis (Akaateba et al., 2025).

Despite these pressures, patches of natural vegetation and planted trees continue to provide ecological services such as temperature regulation, erosion control, biodiversity conservation, and improvement in urban environmental quality.



Source: Sagnarigu Municipal Physical Planning Department

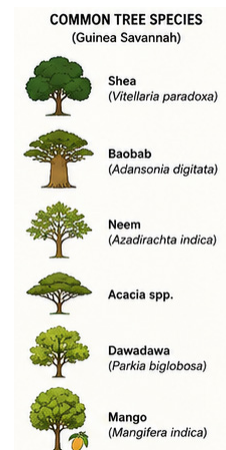
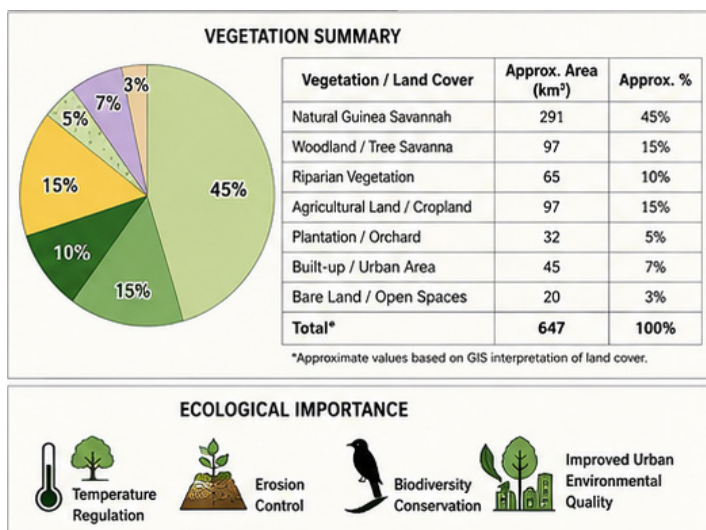
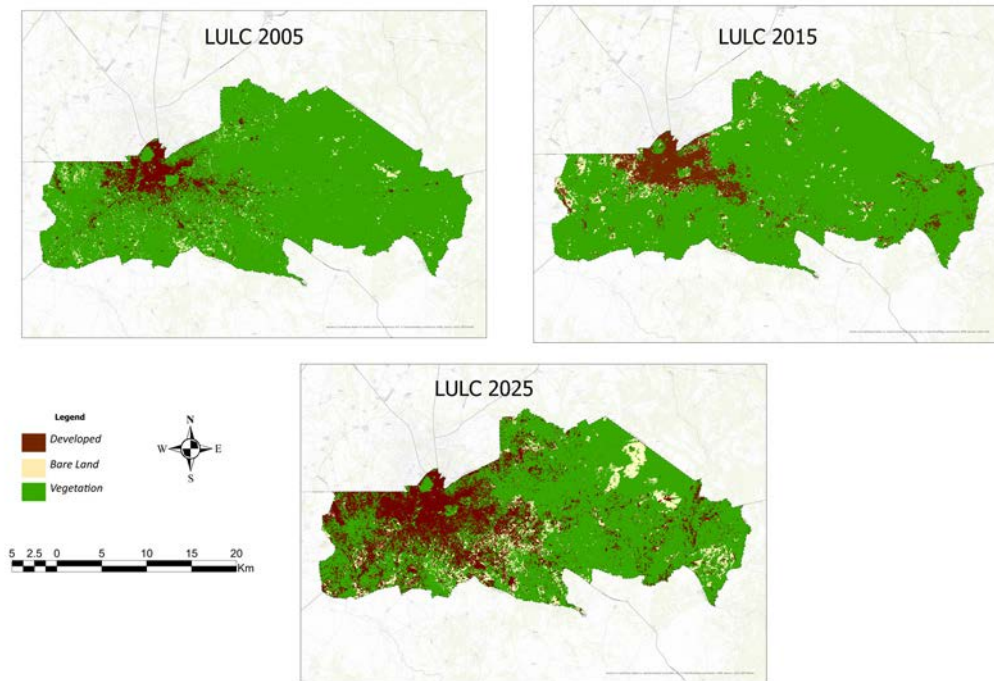


Agricultural land on the road to Tamale's airport



Jana, suburb of Tamale

Land Use and Land Cover change in Tamale



CLIMATE

Greater Tamale experiences a tropical continental climate characterized by distinct wet and dry seasons. The area experiences a unimodal rainfall regime, with the rainy season typically occurring between May and October, while the dry season extends from November to April. Annual rainfall averages between 900 mm and 1,100 mm, although rainfall distribution is often erratic and variable from year to year (Ghana Meteorological Agency, 2020).

Temperatures are generally high throughout the year, with average daily temperatures ranging between 28°C and 35°C. The hottest period usually occurs between March

and April, just before the onset of the rainy season. During the dry season, the area experiences the Harmattan, a dry and dusty north-easterly wind originating from the Sahara Desert, which significantly reduces humidity and visibility (Dickson & Benneh, 2004).

The prevailing climatic conditions influence agricultural productivity, water availability, vegetation patterns, and urban living conditions. Rising temperatures and increasing urban heat associated with rapid urbanization have also heightened concerns regarding environmental sustainability and green space conservation within the metropolis.



Mango tree on the side of the road

RELIEF

The relief of Greater Tamale is generally characterized by low-lying and gently undulating topography typical of the Northern Savannah plains. The area lies at an average elevation of about 150–200 metres above sea level and is largely composed of broad plains with isolated gentle slopes and few prominent hills (Songsore, 2011).

DRAINAGE

The drainage system of Greater Tamale forms part of the White Volta Basin and is characterized mainly by seasonal streams and ephemeral watercourses. Most rivers and streams within the metropolis flow primarily during the rainy season and dry up considerably during the dry season. The area contains several small streams, dugouts, ponds, and wetlands that serve domestic, agricultural, and ecological functions (Kranjac-Berisavljevic et al., 1999).

Drainage patterns in Greater Tamale are influenced by the relatively gentle relief and seasonal rainfall regime. During periods of intense rainfall, inadequate drainage infrastructure and encroachment on natural waterways

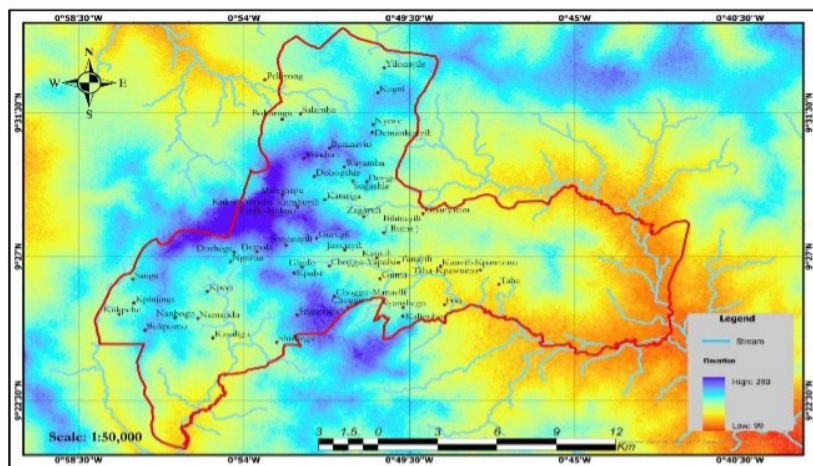


Russian bungalow community in Tamale

The relatively flat terrain has facilitated urban expansion, road construction, and infrastructure development across the metropolis. However, in some low-lying areas, poor drainage and surface runoff during heavy rainfall periods contribute to localized flooding and erosion problems. The physical landscape therefore plays an important role in shaping settlement distribution, transportation networks, and patterns of urban development within Greater Tamale.

often result in flooding in some urban communities. Rapid urbanization and land-cover changes have also affected natural drainage channels through increased surface sealing and reduction in vegetative cover.

Despite these challenges, water bodies and wetlands within the metropolis remain important ecological resources that support urban agriculture, biodiversity conservation, groundwater recharge, and micro-climatic regulation. The management of these hydrological features has therefore become increasingly important within the context of urban environmental governance and sustainable land-use planning in Greater Tamale.



Drainage Map Of Sagnerigu Municipality

Source: Sagnerigu Municipal Physical Planning Department

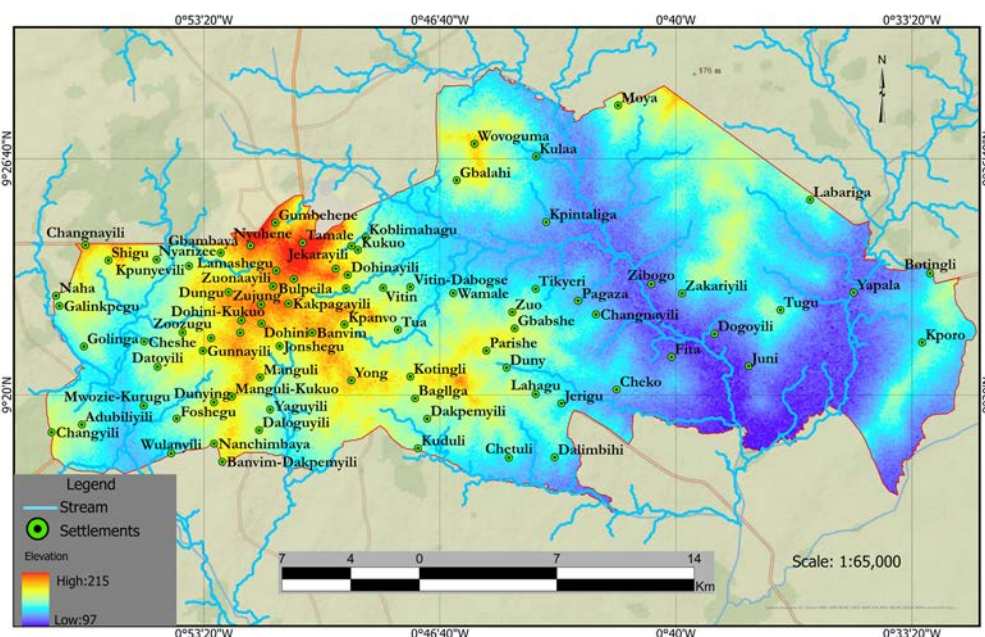
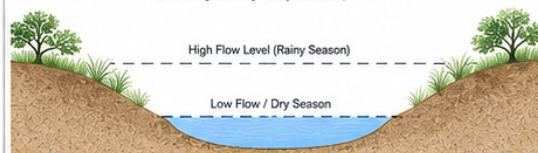
DRAINAGE CHARACTERISTICS

- Drainage system is dominated by seasonal streams and ephemeral watercourses.
- Streams flow primarily during the rainy season and dry up significantly in the dry season.
- The area contains several ponds, dugouts and wetlands that support domestic, agricultural and ecological uses.
- Gentle relief and seasonal rainfall influence drainage patterns, making the area prone to flooding during intense rainfall events.

KEY FUNCTIONS OF WATER BODIES & WETLANDS

- Support urban agriculture and livestock watering
- Biodiversity conservation and habitat for wildlife
- Groundwater recharge and water storage
- Micro-climatic regulation and temperature moderation

TYPICAL CROSS-SECTION: SEASONAL STREAM (Flowing during rainy season)



Drainage of Tamale Metropolitan Assembly

Source: Tamale Municipal Physical Planning Department



Drainage systems in Tamale

HISTORY

The historical development of Greater Tamale is deeply intertwined with the socio-political evolution of the Dagbon Kingdom, one of the most influential traditional states in Northern Ghana. Established by the Dagomba people between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the Dagbon Kingdom developed a centralized political system headed by the Ya-Na, with Yendi serving as its traditional capital (Staniland, 1975). In the Ghanaian context, a centralized political system refers to a hierarchical traditional governance structure in which authority is concentrated in a supreme ruler and exercised through a network of subordinate chiefs who administer local territories on behalf of the central authority. As the King of Dagbon, the Ya-Na occupied the apex of this governance system, overseeing political administration, dispute resolution, security, and customary land governance across the kingdom through divisional, district, and village chiefs.



Ya-Na, King of Dagbon, Abukari II

This institutional arrangement promoted political cohesion and coordinated territorial management, distinguishing Dagbon from more decentralized societies where authority was dispersed among clan heads and local elders. Within this broader political landscape, Tamale emerged as an important settlement and trading node due to its strategic location along regional trade routes linking different parts of Northern Ghana and the wider West African hinterland. Early settlement development was largely shaped by customary institutions, kinship networks,

and indigenous land management systems, with chiefs and tindanas exercising authority over land allocation, settlement expansion, and resource use (Yaro, 2010). Through the interaction of these traditional governance institutions and evolving trade networks, Tamale gradually developed into a significant political, economic, and cultural centre within the Dagbon Kingdom and, subsequently, Northern Ghana.



Poster for the King of Dagbon

While historical accounts often portray Dagbon's traditional institutions as cohesive governance structures, their influence on urban development has been more complex. On one hand, customary authority provided social cohesion and regulated access to land. On the other hand, the concentration of land administration within traditional institutions established governance arrangements that continue to shape contemporary debates over land ownership, urban planning, and development control in Greater Tamale. These historical legacies remain particularly visible in peri-urban areas where customary land tenure continues to coexist, and sometimes conflict, with statutory planning systems. The colonial period marked a significant turning point in the evolution of Tamale. Under British indirect rule, Tamale was deliberately selected as an administrative centre for the Northern Territories because of its central location and accessibility. Colonial investments in roads, administrative offices, schools, health facilities, and transport infrastructure

transformed Tamale from a relatively small traditional settlement into an emerging urban centre (Songsore, 2011). However, these investments were not merely developmental interventions; they reflected broader colonial objectives of administrative control, resource mobilization, and territorial integration. The concentration of infrastructure and public services in Tamale contributed to its growing regional prominence but also reinforced uneven patterns of development within Northern Ghana. Consequently, Tamale began to attract migrants, traders, and public servants from surrounding communities, laying the foundation for its future urban expansion.

Following Ghana's independence in 1957, Tamale experienced rapid demographic and spatial growth driven by rural-urban migration, population increase, and expanding economic opportunities (Fuseini, 2016). State investments in education, healthcare, transportation, and public administration further consolidated the city's position as the administrative and commercial hub of Northern Ghana. Yet this growth has not been without challenges. The expansion of the city has increasingly placed pressure

on customary lands, intensified competition over urban space, and contributed to the conversion of agricultural lands and natural vegetation into residential and commercial developments. Local perspectives on this transformation are often divided. While many residents and policymakers view urban growth as a symbol of modernization and economic opportunity, others—particularly traditional authorities, farmers, and environmental advocates—express concerns over the erosion of customary land rights, loss of agricultural livelihoods, and declining environmental quality.

Thus, the historical evolution of Tamale is not simply a story of urban growth and modernization. Rather, it is a story of how traditional authority, colonial interventions, post-independence development policies, and contemporary urbanization processes have interacted to shape the spatial, institutional, and socio-economic character of Greater Tamale. Understanding these historical dynamics is essential for explaining current land-use transformations, governance challenges, and the ongoing decline of urban green spaces within the metropolis.



Encounter with the King of Dagbon in February 2026

POLITICAL & ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The political and administrative structure of Greater Tamale is characterized by the coexistence of formal state institutions and customary governance systems. Comprising the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly (TaMA) and the Sagnarigu Municipal Assembly (SagMA), Greater Tamale operates within Ghana's decentralized governance framework while simultaneously functioning within the traditional authority structures of the Dagbon Kingdom. The interaction between these formal and customary systems shapes land administration, urban planning, environmental management, conflict resolution, and development outcomes within the metropolis (Ayee, 2013; Fuseini & Kemp, 2016).

The formal governance system is embedded within Ghana's broader political structure. Since January 2025, Ghana has been governed by the National Democratic Congress (NDC) under the leadership of President John Dramani Mahama, following the 2024 general elections. Under Ghana's decentralization framework, Metropolitan and Municipal Chief Executives are appointed by the President, creating an important link between local governance and national politics. Consequently, changes in national political leadership often influence local development priorities, resource allocation, and administrative appointments.

FORMAL ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

The Tamale Metropolitan Assembly and Sagnarigu Municipal Assembly constitute the highest political and administrative authorities within their respective jurisdictions. Their responsibilities include development planning, land-use management, infrastructure provision, environmental protection, revenue mobilization, and service delivery (Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936)).

A notable feature of Ghana's local governance system is the combination of elected and appointed officials. At the local level:

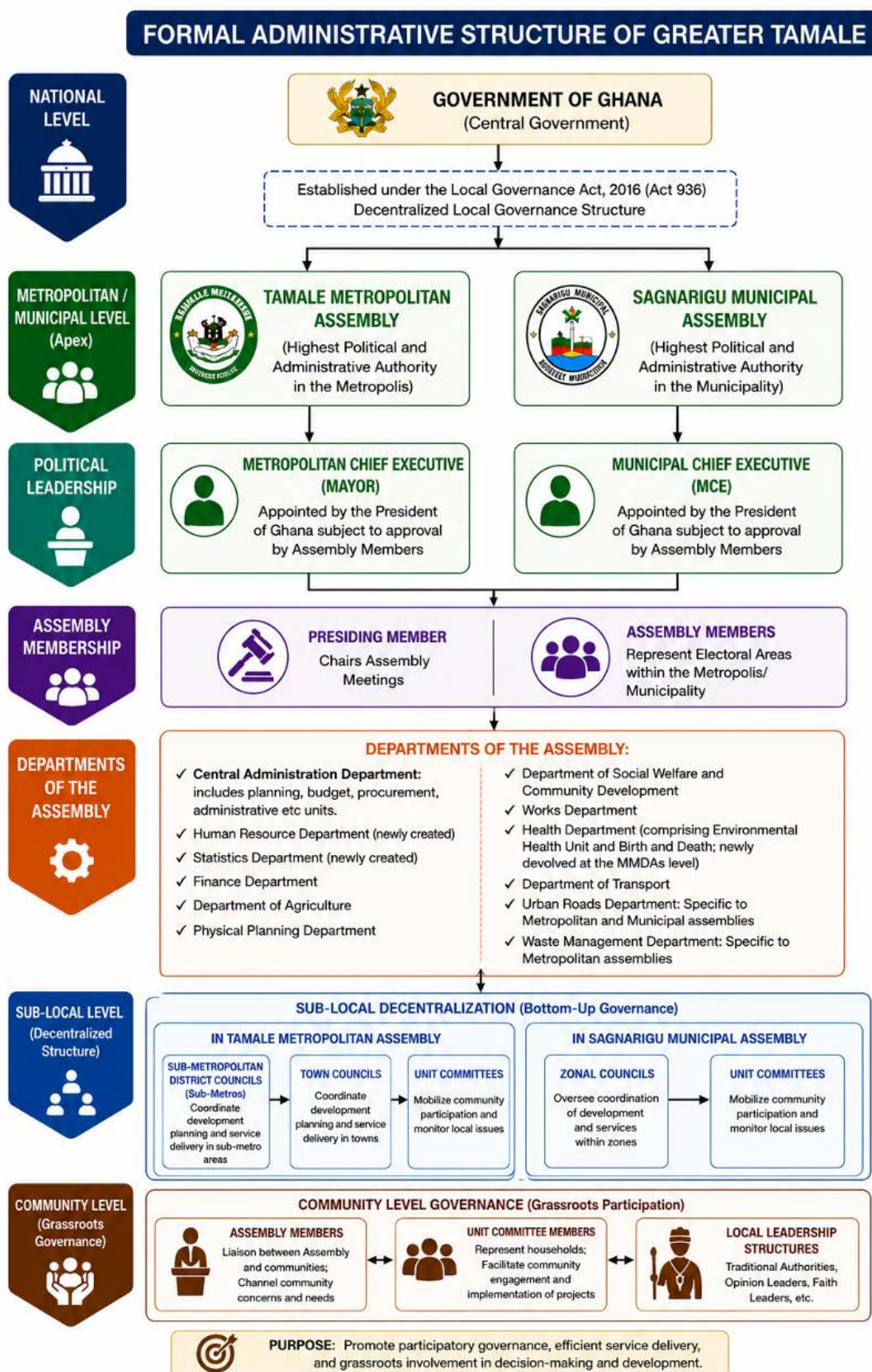
- The Metropolitan Chief Executive (Mayor) of Tamale and the Municipal Chief Executive of Sagnarigu are appointed by the President.
- Approximately 70% of Assembly Members are elected from electoral areas through local government elections.
- The remaining 30% of Assembly Members are appointed by the President in consultation with traditional authorities and local interest groups.
- The Presiding Member, who chairs Assembly meetings, is elected by Assembly Members from among themselves.

- Members of Parliament (MPs) representing constituencies within Greater Tamale are directly elected through national parliamentary elections and participate in local development processes, although they do not vote on Assembly decisions.

This mixture of elected and appointed representation is intended to combine democratic accountability with technical expertise and stakeholder representation. However, critics argue that the appointment of Chief Executives and a proportion of Assembly Members can limit local autonomy and increase political influence from the central government (Crawford, 2004; Ayee, 2013).

At the sub-local level, the governance structures differ between the two local authorities that constitute Greater Tamale. Within the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly, administration is decentralized through Sub-Metropolitan District Councils (Sub-Metros), Town Councils, and Unit Committees. In contrast, the Sagnarigu Municipal Assembly operates through Zonal Councils and Unit Committees. These decentralized structures are intended to promote grassroots participation, strengthen community engagement, and improve

the responsiveness of local governance. In practice, however, many of these institutions face persistent challenges, including inadequate funding, limited technical capacity, and low levels of citizen participation, which constrain their effectiveness in influencing urban planning and development decisions.



Generated with Genora AI, Source: Ubink and Quan 2008; Yaro, 2010

Critical Reflection

Rather than viewing Greater Tamale's governance system as a straightforward hierarchy, it is more accurately understood as a negotiated governance arena where:

- National political actors influence local administrative decisions;
- Metropolitan and municipal authorities exercise statutory planning powers;
- Chiefs and tendambas (earth priest or original land custodians) retain significant authority over customary lands;
- Assembly Members respond to local electoral pressures; and
- Residents, developers, and civil society groups compete for influence over urban space.

These overlapping governance arrangements help explain why urban expansion, land-use change, and green space management in Greater Tamale are often contested and uneven across different parts of the metropolis. Such complexities are central to understanding the governance challenges associated with rapid urbanization in Northern Ghana.

TRADITIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

Alongside the formal administrative system exists a deeply rooted traditional governance structure linked to the Dagbon Kingdom. Traditional administration in Greater Tamale revolves around chiefs, tendambas, family heads, and community elders. These actors continue to play significant roles in customary land administration, dispute resolution, social regulation, and cultural preservation (Ubink & Quan, 2008).

Chiefs exercise authority over customary lands and local communities under the broader traditional hierarchy of Dagbon headed by the Ya-Na. In many communities within Greater Tamale, chiefs are recognized

as custodians of customary lands and are involved in land allocation, settlement approval, and mediation of communal disputes. Tendambas, particularly in indigenous communities, hold spiritual and historical authority over land and are regarded as original settlers and custodians of the earth. Their influence remains important in matters relating to customary land ownership, boundary issues, and traditional rites associated with land use (Yaro, 2010).

Family heads and community elders also form part of the traditional administrative structure. They play important roles in maintaining social cohesion, resolving family disputes, regulating inheritance matters, and representing family interests in communal affairs. Traditional institutions therefore remain highly influential in shaping settlement development and community governance within Greater Tamale (Awedoba, 2009).



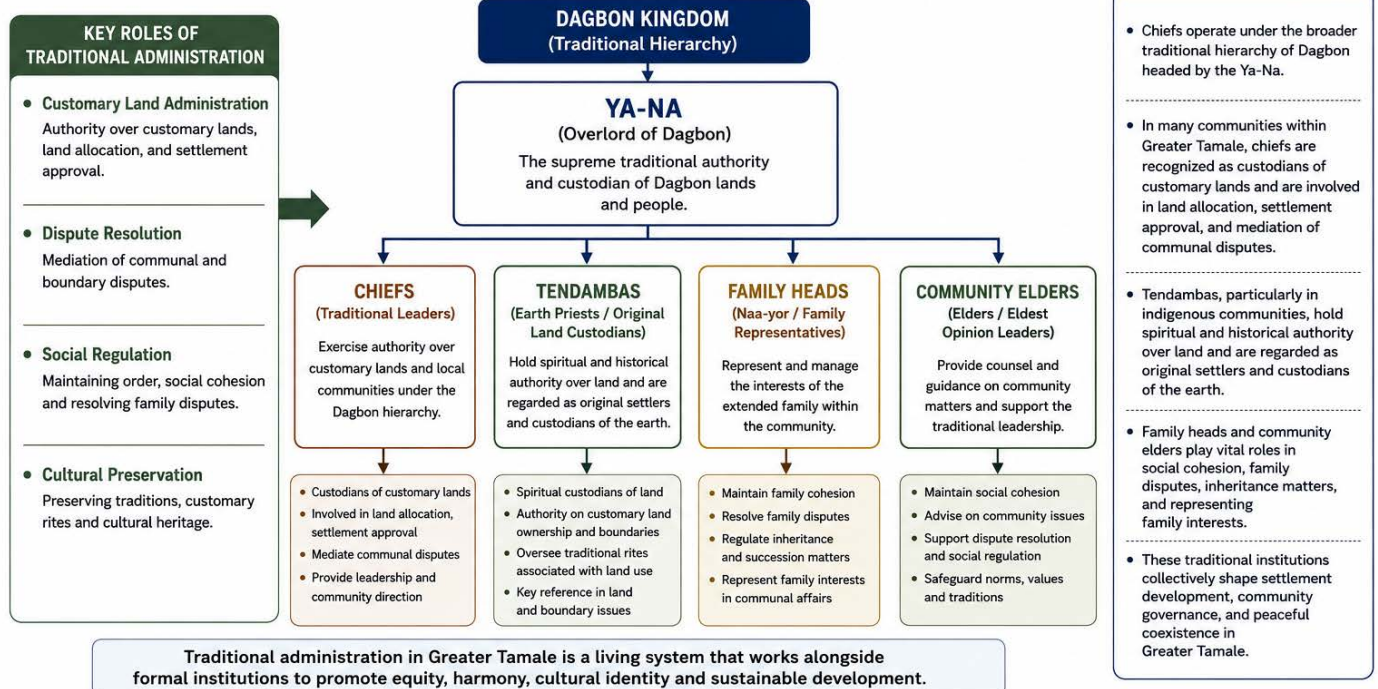
Chief of Kasalgu



Tamale's chief Palace

TRADITIONAL ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE ALONGSIDE THE FORMAL ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

Alongside the formal administrative system exists a deeply rooted traditional governance structure linked to the Dagbon Kingdom. Traditional institutions remain highly influential in shaping settlement development and community governance within Greater Tamale.



Sources: Ubink & Quan (2008); Yaro (2010); Awedoba (2009)

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INTERACTION BETWEEN FORMAL AND TRADITIONAL STRUCTURES

The governance of Greater Tamale is largely shaped by the interaction between formal administrative institutions and traditional authority systems. Although the formal assemblies are legally mandated to oversee urban planning and development control, customary authorities continue to exercise substantial influence over land ownership and allocation because a significant proportion of land within Greater Tamale remains under customary tenure (Fuseini & Kemp, 2016).

This interdependence creates both cooperation and tensions within urban governance processes. Chiefs and tendambas often collaborate with metropolitan and municipal authorities in land acquisition, dispute resolution, and community mobilization for development projects. Traditional leaders are also frequently consulted during planning processes and infrastructure development initiatives because of their influence within local communities (Ubink, 2008).

However, overlapping authority between statutory and customary systems sometimes generates institutional conflicts, particularly in relation to land administration, unauthorized developments, and planning enforcement. In some instances, customary land allocations by chiefs may conflict with formal planning regulations and development control measures implemented by the assemblies. These tensions are further intensified by rapid urbanization, increasing land values, and competition over peri-urban land resources (Yaro, 2010; Fuseini, 2016).

Despite these challenges, the interaction between formal and traditional governance systems continues to shape the spatial growth, socio-political organization, and development trajectory of Greater Tamale. The city's urban expansion and land-use dynamics are therefore products of both statutory administrative frameworks and customary socio-cultural institutions operating simultaneously within the metropolitan region.

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS AND SPATIAL EXPANSION

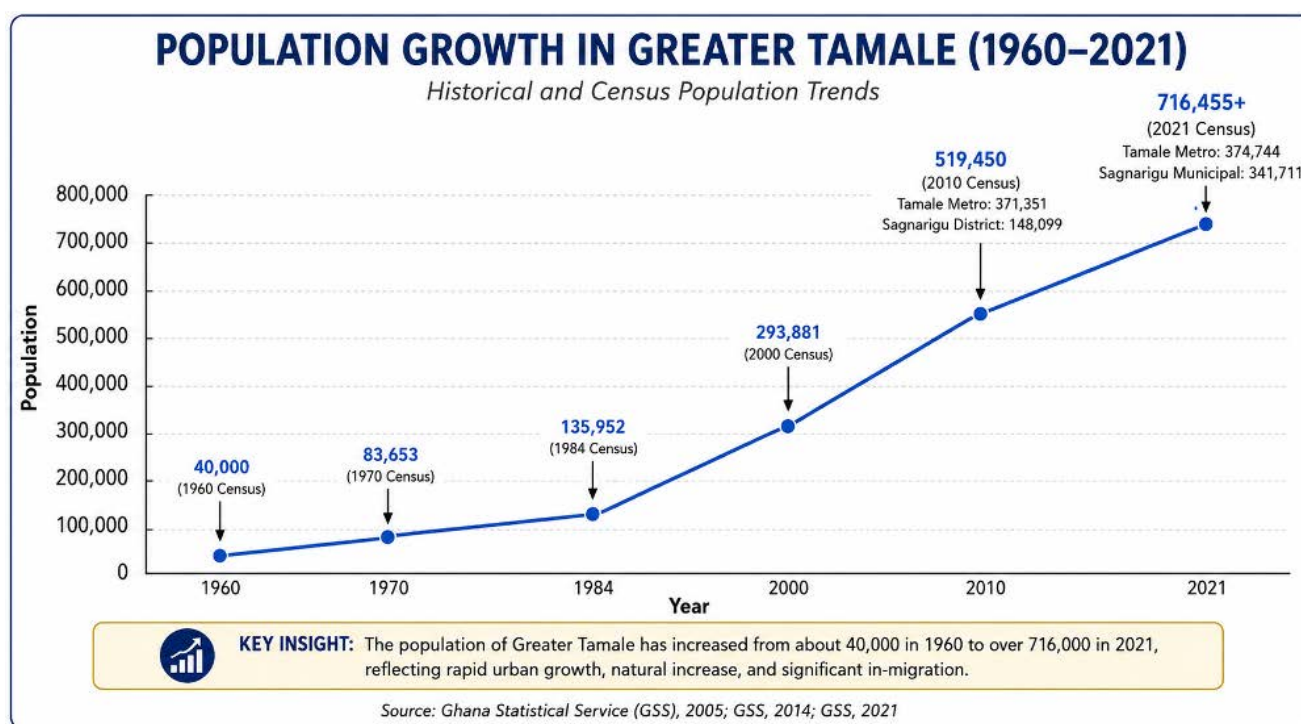
The demographic structure and spatial growth of Greater Tamale reflect its transformation from a relatively small administrative town into the largest and fastest-growing urban centre in Northern Ghana. The area has experienced sustained population growth, increasing urbanization, and outward spatial expansion driven by natural population increase, rural-urban migration, economic diversification, and institutional development. These demographic and spatial dynamics have important implications for land use, infrastructure demand, housing development, and ecological sustainability.

POPULATION SIZE AND GROWTH RATE

The population of Tamale has grown rapidly over the past six decades, reflecting its increasing socio-economic and administrative importance in Northern Ghana. Historical census data show a consistent upward trend in population growth. In 1960, Tamale recorded a relatively modest population of about 40,000 inhabitants. This increased substantially through successive census periods, reaching approximately 83,653 in 1970, 135,952 in 1984, and 293,881 in 2000 (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2005).

By the 2010 Population and Housing Census, Tamale recorded a population of 371,351, while the newly created Sagnarigu District

recorded 148,099, bringing the broader urban area to over 519,000 people (GSS, 2014). According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, the Tamale Metropolitan District had a population of 374,744, while the Sagnarigu Municipal District recorded 341,711, resulting in a combined population of approximately 716,455 within the Greater Tamale Metropolitan Area (GSS, 2021). This substantial population reflects both natural increase and significant in-migration from surrounding rural districts and neighbouring regions, reinforcing Greater Tamale's role as the principal urban and economic hub of Northern Ghana.

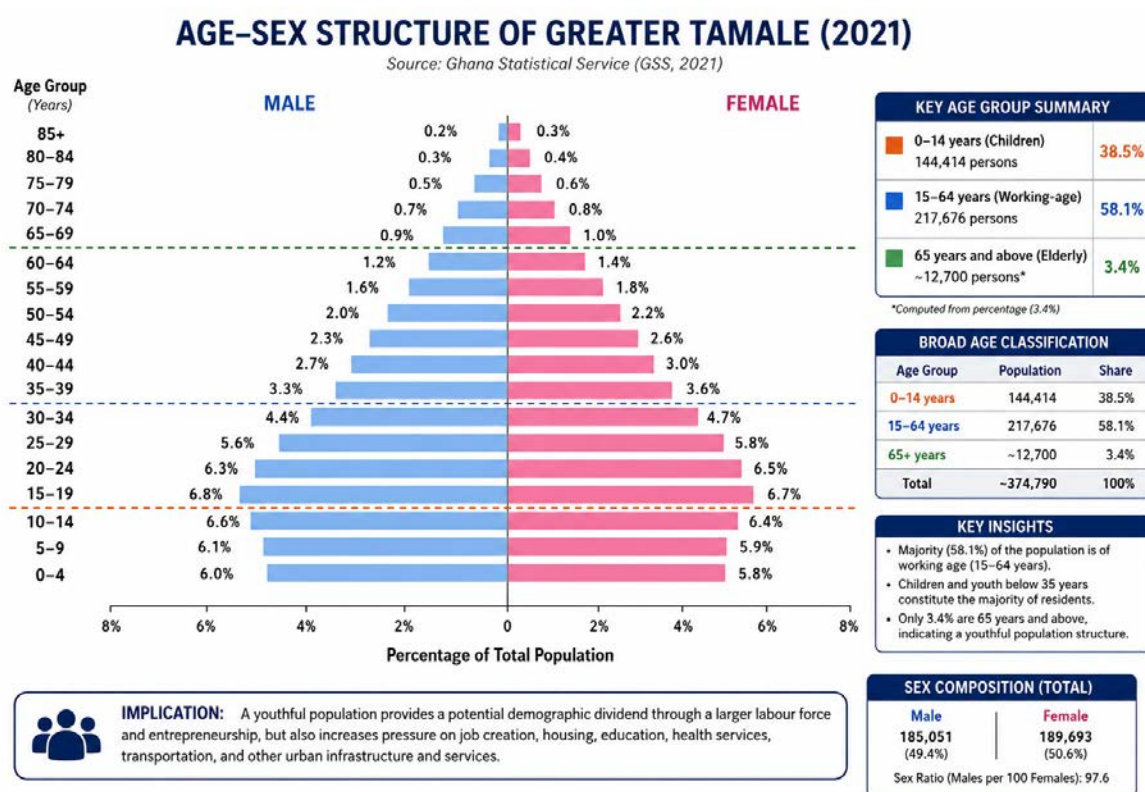


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AGE-SEX DISTRIBUTION

Greater Tamale exhibits a youthful population structure typical of rapidly urbanizing cities in Sub-Saharan Africa. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, approximately 58.2% of Ghana's population is aged 18 years and above, while about 60.4% falls within the economically active age group of 15-64 years (GSS, 2021). In Tamale Metropolitan specifically, about 217,676 persons, representing nearly 58.1% of the population, were within the working-age category (15-64 years), while children aged 0-14 constituted about 144,414 persons (38.5%). Only about 3.4% of the population

was aged 65 years and above, reflecting the predominantly youthful demographic profile of the metropolis. Furthermore, persons below 35 years constitute the majority of residents, consistent with broader urban demographic trends in Ghana and Sub-Saharan Africa. This youthful population structure presents opportunities for labour force expansion, entrepreneurship, and urban economic growth, while simultaneously creating pressure on employment, housing, education, transportation, healthcare, and urban service delivery systems.



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The sex composition of the population shows a relatively balanced distribution, although females slightly outnumber males, consistent with national demographic patterns. In Tamale Metropolitan, the 2021 Census recorded approximately 189,693 females and 185,051 males, representing about 50.6% and 49.4% of the population respectively. Similar trends are observed nationally, where females constitute a slightly larger share of the total population. Gender composition

significantly influences household structures, labour participation, migration dynamics, access to social services, and urban socio-economic organization within the Greater Tamale Metropolitan Area.

ETHNIC & RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION

Greater Tamale is ethnically diverse, although the Dagomba constitute the dominant ethnic group due to the city's location within the Dagbon traditional area. Dagbani is the most widely spoken local language and serves as the principal medium of communication in many households, markets, and public spaces. Other major ethnic groups include Gonja, Mamprusi, Nanumba, Konkomba, Akan, Ewe, and Hausa communities, reflecting Greater Tamale's role as a migration destination and commercial hub (Songsore, 2011).

This ethnic diversity contributes significantly to the multicultural character of Greater Tamale, shaping settlement patterns, cultural practices, economic interactions, and social relations. The city is also characterized by considerable religious diversity. Although Islam is the dominant religion and exerts a strong influence on social norms, traditional authority systems, and community organization, Christianity and African Traditional Religions are also widely practiced. Importantly, the coexistence of these religious traditions has fostered a culture of tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence among different communities. Interfaith interactions, shared participation in community development activities, and respect for cultural and religious festivals have contributed to social cohesion and harmony within the metropolis. Consequently, religious diversity in Greater Tamale represents not only a demographic characteristic but also a key social asset that strengthens community integration, stability, and collective identity in an increasingly urban and multicultural environment.



Anbariya Central Mosque



Mosque in Tamale



Mosque in Kasalgu Community



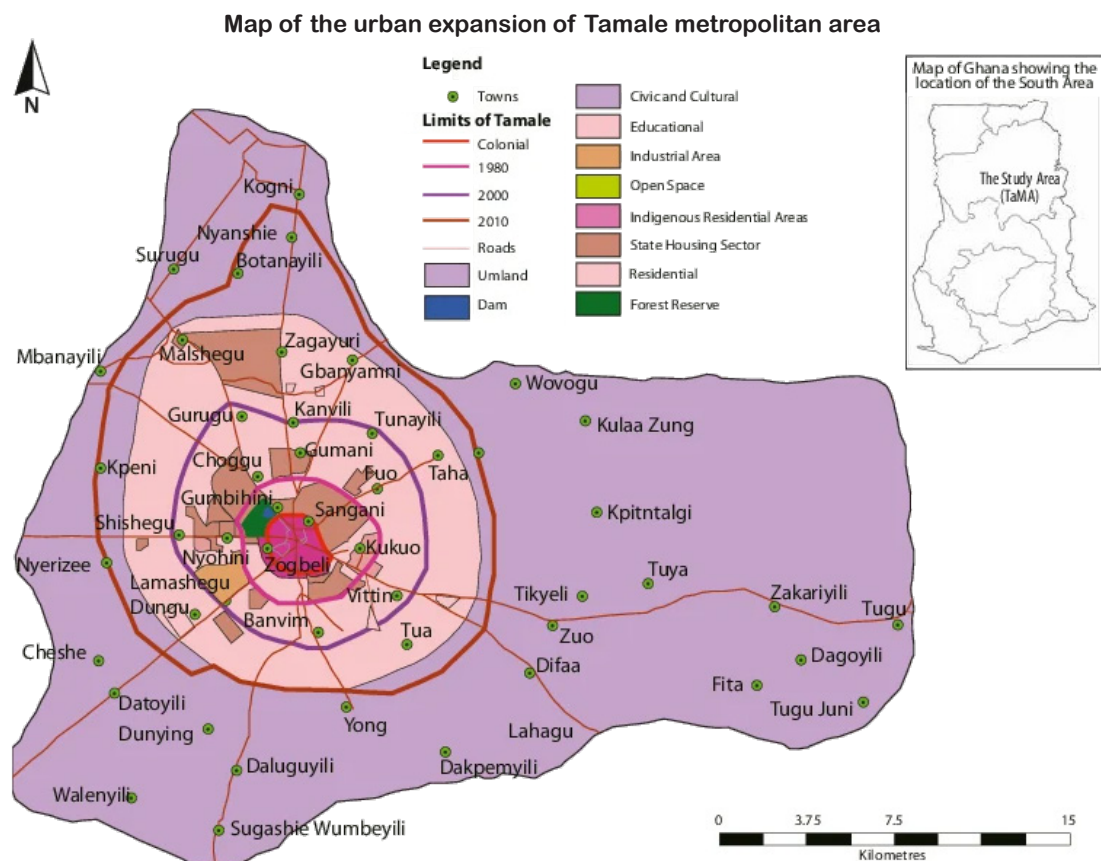
Larabanga mosque in West Gonja district (Savannah Region)

POPULATION DENSITY AND SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION

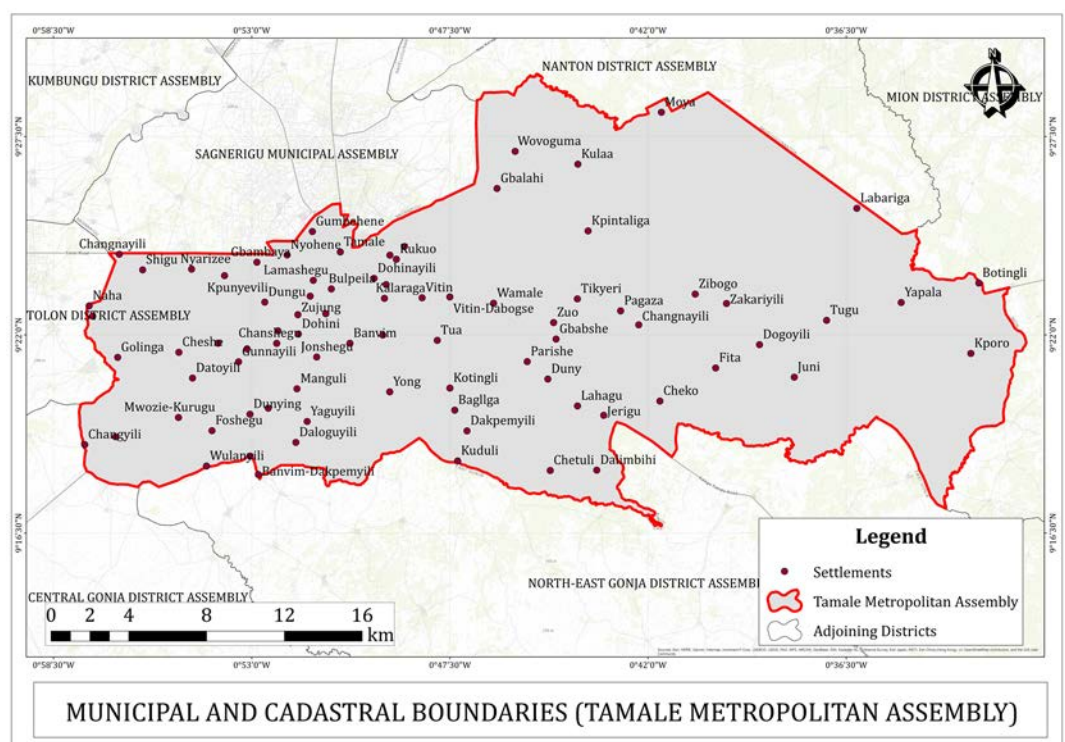
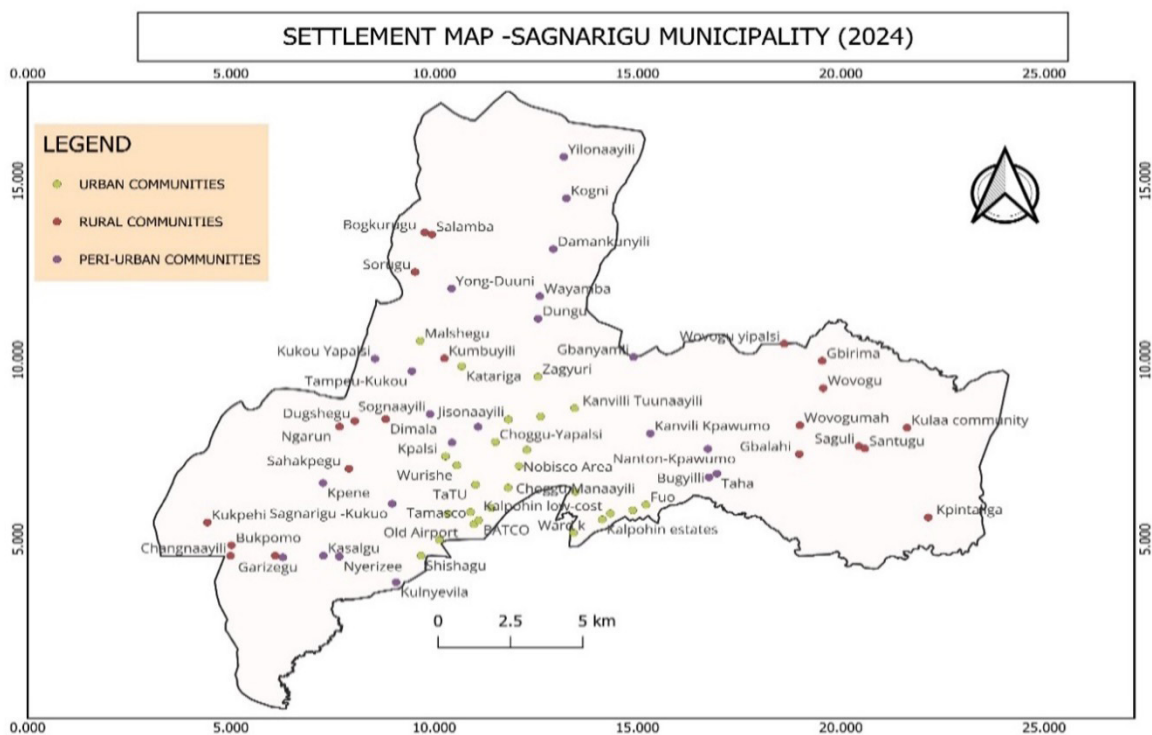
Population density within Greater Tamale varies considerably between the urban core and peripheral areas, reflecting uneven patterns of urban development and land use. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, Tamale Metropolitan covers an estimated land area of about 646.9 km² with a population density of approximately 579 persons per km², although densities within the central urban core are substantially higher due to concentrated residential, commercial, and institutional development (GSS, 2021). High-density settlements such as Tamale Central, Aboabo, Sabon Zongo, Kalpohin, and Lamashegu accommodate large populations within relatively limited spaces and experience intense pressure on housing, transportation, sanitation, drainage, and public infrastructure.

In contrast, peri-urban areas within Sagnarigu Municipal and surrounding fringe communities such as Vittin, Gumbihini, Kumbuyili, Jisonayili, and Sognaayili exhibit comparatively lower population densities but are experiencing some of the fastest rates of spatial expansion in the metropolitan

region. Between 2000 and 2020, the built-up footprint of Greater Tamale expanded by more than 150%, with much of this growth occurring along the northern, western, and eastern urban fringes where peri-urban settlements have rapidly transformed agricultural and open lands into residential and commercial developments. Sagnarigu Municipal, which recorded a population of 260,547 in 2021, has increasingly become a major residential growth corridor due to relatively lower land prices, the availability of undeveloped land, and expanding road connectivity to the Tamale urban core. Recent estimates indicate annual population growth rates in several peri-urban communities exceed 3.0–3.5%, compared to the national urban growth average of approximately 2.1%, reflecting the area's strong attractiveness for migrants and households seeking affordable housing. These peri-urban communities continue to absorb significant proportions of the city's population growth through new residential developments, customary land conversions, and informal settlement expansion (Fuseini, 2016; Ghana Statistical Service, 2021).



Source: Padgham, J. and J. Jabbour



The uneven spatial distribution of population has contributed to significant changes in the urban form of Greater Tamale, characterized by outward urban sprawl, conversion of agricultural land, and increasing demand for peri-urban land resources. This spatial growth pattern has also intensified pressure on infrastructure provision, transportation systems, water supply, sanitation services, and environmental management within rapidly expanding fringe settlements.



URBANIZATION TREND (URBAN-RURAL COMPOSITION)

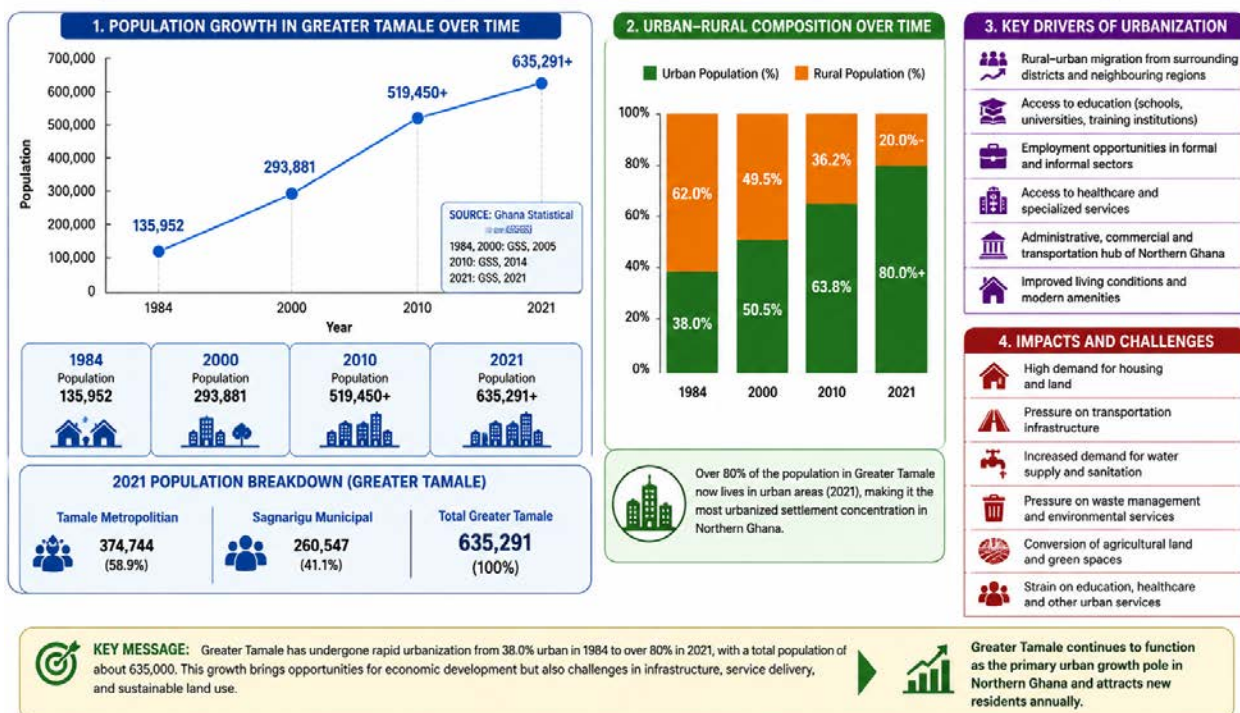
Greater Tamale has experienced rapid urbanization over the past few decades, transforming from a predominantly rural settlement system into a highly urbanized metropolitan area. The population increased from about 135,952 in 1984 to 293,881 in 2000, over 519,000 in 2010, and approximately 635,291 in 2021, comprising 374,744 people in Tamale Metropolitan and 260,547 in Sagnarigu Municipal (GSS, 2021). Over 80% of the population now resides in urban settlements, making Greater Tamale the major urban growth pole in Northern Ghana. This rapid urban growth has largely been driven by rural-urban migration, natural population increase, and the city's role as the administrative, commercial, educational, and transportation hub of Northern Ghana. While urbanization has stimulated economic expansion and infrastructure development, it has also increased pressure on housing, transportation, sanitation, urban services, and land resources, particularly through the conversion of peri-urban agricultural and green spaces into built-up areas.

The formation and evolution of urban settlements in Greater Tamale are closely linked to the historical development of the

Dagbon Kingdom and the establishment of Tamale as a regional administrative and commercial centre. Early settlements emerged as clustered indigenous communities organized around traditional authority structures, family compounds, and agricultural livelihoods. Communities such as Dagbangdabi, Zogbeli, Nyohini, Gumbihini, and Lamashegu developed around chieftaincy institutions, water sources, trading routes, and arable lands. During the colonial period, Tamale gained prominence as an administrative headquarters and transport node, attracting migrants, traders, civil servants, and missionaries from different parts of Ghana and neighbouring countries. Following independence, the concentration of government institutions, educational facilities, health services, and commercial activities accelerated population growth and stimulated the expansion of settlements beyond the traditional urban core. Many formerly rural villages and farming communities were gradually incorporated into the expanding urban landscape, creating a continuous metropolitan settlement system characterized by both planned neighbourhoods and organically developed communities. This historical process explains

URBANIZATION TREND (URBAN-RURAL COMPOSITION) OF GREATER TMALE

Greater Tamale has transformed from a predominantly rural settlement system to a highly urbanized metropolitan region and now serves as the primary urban growth pole in Northern Ghana.

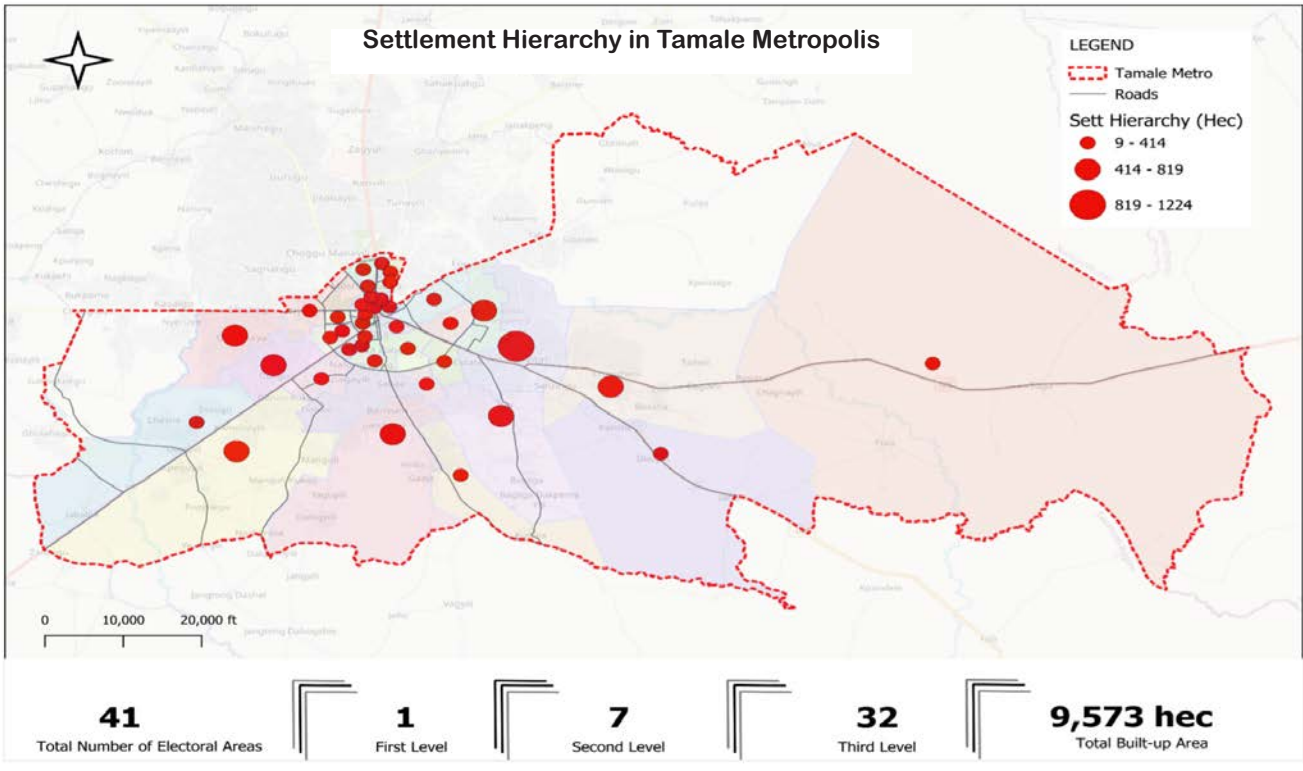


the coexistence of traditional settlement patterns, customary land governance systems, and modern urban development across Greater Tamale.

The physical expansion of Greater Tamale has been characterized by rapid urban sprawl and peri-urbanization. The city has expanded outward from its traditional core into surrounding rural and peri-urban communities, particularly toward areas such as Vittin, Lamashegu, Nyohini, Kumbuyili, Gumbihini, and communities within Sagnarigu Municipality. This outward growth has largely been horizontal rather than vertical, resulting in extensive land conversion from agricultural lands, wetlands, and natural vegetation into residential, commercial, and institutional uses (Fuseini & Kemp, 2016). The spread of low-density residential

development and informal settlements has contributed to urban sprawl, infrastructure deficits, and increased costs of service delivery

Ecologically, rapid urban expansion has significantly affected environmental sustainability through loss of green spaces, declining biodiversity, surface sealing, and increasing urban heat effects. Peri-urbanization has also intensified pressure on customary lands and created tensions between formal planning systems and traditional land administration. These trends highlight the need for integrated urban planning and sustainable land management strategies to balance population growth with ecological conservation in Greater Tamale.



Source: Tamale Municipal Physical Planning Department

ECONOMY

GREATER TAMALE ECONOMY WITHIN THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Greater Tamale occupies a strategic position within Ghana's national urban and regional economy. As the capital of the Northern Region, Tamale functions as the principal gateway linking southern Ghana to Burkina Faso and the wider Sahel region through the Accra-Tamale-Ouagadougou economic corridor, one of the most important north-south transportation and trade axes in West Africa. This corridor connects the Port of Tema and the national capital, Accra, through Kumasi and Tamale to Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, facilitating the movement of agricultural commodities, manufactured goods, livestock, fuel, construction materials, and consumer products between coastal Ghana and the landlocked countries of the Sahel (Songsore, 2011; Yaro et al., 2017). The corridor is therefore critical to Ghana's national economy, regional integration

agenda, export trade, and cross-border commerce under the framework of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Tamale serves as a major logistics, distribution, and commercial centre along this corridor. The city provides warehousing, transport services, wholesale markets, financial services, and business support functions that facilitate trade flows between northern and southern Ghana as well as neighbouring countries. The strategic location of Tamale has attracted significant public and private investments in transport infrastructure, telecommunications, education, healthcare, and commerce, reinforcing its role as the economic hub of Northern Ghana.



Tamale CBD from the flyover



Tamale CBD from the flyover

The area also hosts important national and regional institutions including the University for Development Studies (UDS), the Tamale Teaching Hospital, regional government departments, financial institutions, NGOs, and telecommunications companies. These institutions contribute significantly to formal employment creation, human capital development, innovation, and the expansion of the urban service economy. Tamale's economy is closely linked to surrounding rural districts, which supply food crops, livestock, shea nuts, groundnuts, maize, rice, and other agricultural products

to urban markets. In turn, the city provides markets, educational services, healthcare, transport, finance, and administrative services to the wider northern hinterland. This strong urban-rural economic linkage has positioned Greater Tamale as the dominant regional growth pole in Northern Ghana and a key intermediary node within the broader Accra-Tamale-Ouagadougou corridor. Consequently, the city plays a pivotal role in promoting regional economic integration, facilitating domestic and international trade, and supporting Ghana's long-term spatial and economic development objectives.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Employment within Greater Tamale is characterized by a large concentration of informal sector activities alongside relatively limited formal employment opportunities. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, Ghana's labour force stood at approximately 11.5 million people, with about 9.9 million employed and 1.55 million unemployed.

In Greater Tamale, formal employment is concentrated in public administration, education, healthcare, banking, telecommunications, and organized private businesses. Government institutions remain among the largest employers due to Tamale's administrative role within Northern Ghana. However, the formal labour market is unable

to absorb the rapidly growing urban labour force, especially among youth and recent migrants.

Nationally, about 56.8% of employed persons are self-employed without employees, while only 25.4% work as employees in formalized work arrangements. These patterns are strongly reflected within Greater Tamale, where self-employment and small-scale entrepreneurial activities dominate the urban economy.

Youth unemployment and underemployment remain major urban challenges. Recent economic pressures, rising living costs, and limited formal job creation have increased livelihood insecurity among many urban households, particularly within low-income and peri-urban communities.



Tamale's CBD

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE AND MAIN LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES

Agriculture

Although Greater Tamale is highly urbanized, agriculture remains a critical component of the local economy and an important source of livelihood, particularly in peri-urban and fringe communities. Agricultural activities encompass crop cultivation, livestock production, poultry farming, fisheries, and urban agriculture. The metropolis benefits from its location within Ghana's Guinea Savannah ecological zone, which supports a diverse range of agricultural commodities.

Major crops cultivated include maize, rice, millet, sorghum, yam, cassava, groundnuts, cowpea, soybean, and a variety of vegetables such as tomatoes, onions, pepper, okra, and leafy greens. Livestock production is equally important and includes cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and poultry. This diversity of agricultural production contributes significantly to household food security, income generation, and the supply of agricultural commodities to markets across northern and southern Ghana.

A distinctive feature of Greater Tamale's agricultural economy is its role as the centre of rice production and trade in northern Ghana. The city is increasingly referred to as «Rice City» due to its strategic position within the major rice-producing belt that stretches across the Northern, Savannah, North East, Upper East, and Upper West Regions. Tamale serves as the principal aggregation, processing, storage, and distribution hub for locally produced rice. Large quantities of paddy rice from irrigation schemes and rain-fed farming areas such as the White Volta Basin are transported to Tamale for milling and onward distribution to urban markets throughout Ghana.



Rice field in Kasalgu



Broccoli production



Mango tree



Irrigated vegetable farming, Gumbihini dam

The emergence of the «Rice City» concept has generated important socio-economic outcomes. It has stimulated investments in rice milling facilities, storage infrastructure, transportation services, input supply businesses, and agricultural marketing networks. The rice value chain creates employment opportunities for farmers, transport operators, millers, traders, processors, and retailers. It also contributes to Ghana's food security agenda by promoting domestic rice production and reducing dependence on imported rice. Furthermore, the concentration of rice-processing enterprises around Tamale has strengthened the city's position as the agricultural and commercial capital of northern Ghana.

Urban and peri-urban agriculture continues to provide an important safety net for low-income households through supplementary food production and income diversification. However, rapid urban expansion and the conversion of agricultural land into residential, commercial, and institutional uses have significantly reduced the availability of farmland within the metropolis, creating growing concerns regarding long-term food security and sustainable land management (Fuseini, 2016)

Service and Commerce

The service and commercial sectors constitute the dominant components of the Greater Tamale economy. Tamale serves as the principal commercial and administrative centre of Northern Ghana and functions as a major trading hub linking southern Ghana with the Sahelian countries of Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. The city hosts large markets, transportation terminals, retail businesses, hotels, restaurants, financial institutions, educational facilities, and public administrative offices.

Markets such as the Tamale Central Market and Aboabo Market play critical roles in wholesale and retail trade involving agricultural produce, livestock, textiles, household goods, manufactured products, and imported commodities. Transportation services, including intra-city transport, regional passenger services, and long-distance freight haulage, provide substantial employment opportunities and facilitate regional trade integration.

According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, service and sales occupations account



Young lady carrying straw



View of Tamale's CBD from the flyover



Aliu Mahama Sports Stadium

for a substantial share of employment, while skilled agricultural activities and craft-related occupations remain important components of the labour force. These occupational patterns are reflected in Greater Tamale, where commerce, transportation, public administration, education, and informal service activities dominate urban employment.

Local Industry

Industrial activities within Greater Tamale are predominantly small-scale and closely linked to the processing of agricultural raw materials. Key industries include rice milling, shea butter processing, food processing, tailoring, carpentry, welding, leather works, block manufacturing, and metal fabrication.

Among these industries, the shea butter economy occupies a particularly significant position. Northern Ghana contains one of West Africa's largest concentrations of naturally occurring shea trees, and Greater Tamale serves as an important collection, processing, and marketing centre for shea products. Shea nuts are harvested from parkland agroforestry systems and processed into shea butter for domestic consumption and export markets, particularly in the cosmetics, pharmaceutical, and food industries.

The shea value chain has substantial implications for gender employment and women's economic empowerment. Women dominate virtually every stage of production, including nut collection, drying, storage, processing, packaging, and marketing. For many rural and peri-urban women, shea processing provides a crucial source of seasonal and supplementary income, especially during periods when agricultural activities are limited. Income generated from shea butter production contributes to household welfare through expenditures on food, healthcare, education, and small business investments.



Shea butter cookstove



Women from a shea butter processing group

Women's cooperatives and producer associations operating within and around Tamale have further enhanced the economic significance of the shea sector by improving access to credit, training, market information, and export opportunities. Consequently, the shea industry has become an important vehicle for poverty reduction, financial inclusion, and women's participation in local economic development. Beyond its direct economic contributions, the shea economy also encourages the conservation of shea parklands, which provide important ecosystem services and contribute to environmental sustainability within the savannah landscape.

Despite these opportunities, industrial development within Greater Tamale remains constrained by inadequate infrastructure, limited access to finance, high production costs, unreliable energy supply, and relatively low levels of large-scale industrial investment compared to the major urban centres of southern Ghana. Nevertheless, agro-processing industries, particularly those linked to rice and shea value chains, continue to offer significant potential for employment creation, value addition, and inclusive economic growth.



Traditional Ghanaian Fugu (smock) weaving by local women



Women sewing

INCOME LEVELS

Income levels in Greater Tamale reflect both the city's growing role as Northern Ghana's economic hub and the persistent regional inequalities that characterize the country. While Tamale hosts major commercial, educational, administrative, and transport functions, a significant proportion of the labour force remains concentrated in the informal economy, where earnings are generally low, irregular, and vulnerable to economic shocks.

At the national level, Ghana's GDP per capita reached approximately US\$2,391 in 2024, while the economy grew by 5.6%, demonstrating continued macroeconomic expansion. However, these national averages conceal substantial disparities between northern and southern Ghana. Greater Tamale and the wider Northern Region continue to record lower household incomes and higher poverty levels than more industrialized regions such as Greater Accra and Ashanti.

Income insecurity remains a major challenge because much of the city's workforce is employed in informal trade, transport services, small-scale manufacturing, agro-processing, and casual labour. Many households therefore experience fluctuating earnings and limited access to formal social protection. Rising inflation, which averaged 22.8% in 2024, has further reduced purchasing power, particularly among low-

income households. Income constraints also affect food security. Despite Tamale's role as a major agricultural production and marketing centre, many urban households are net food purchasers and remain highly vulnerable to increases in food prices. Low-income families often devote a large share of household expenditure to food, making them particularly susceptible to food insecurity and nutritional deficiencies during periods of economic stress.

International development indicators further highlight these challenges. Ghana's Human Development Index (HDI) stands at 0.628, ranking the country 143rd out of 193 countries in the 2025 Human Development Report and placing it within the medium human development category. Life expectancy is approximately 65.5 years, expected years of schooling are 11.4 years, and Gross National Income per capita is estimated at US\$6,846 (PPP).

Similarly, multidimensional poverty—which measures deprivations in health, education, employment, and living conditions—remains a concern. Ghana's multidimensional poverty rate was estimated at 21.9% in 2025, but northern regions continue to record significantly higher levels than the national average, reflecting persistent inequalities in access to services and economic opportunities.

Despite these challenges, Greater Tamale continues to benefit from expanding regional trade, the rice and shea value chains, educational institutions, and its strategic position along the Accra-Tamale-Ouagadougou corridor. These advantages provide important opportunities for income growth, employment creation, and poverty reduction. However, achieving inclusive economic development will require sustained investments in youth employment, industrialization, skills development, affordable housing, and social protection programmes that improve living standards for vulnerable households.



Vendors underneath Tamale's flyover

POVERTY INCIDENCE

Despite its strategic economic importance and status as the commercial hub of Northern Ghana, poverty remains a significant concern within Greater Tamale, particularly among informal sector workers, low-income households, unemployed youth, women, and residents of peri-urban communities. Poverty manifests in multiple dimensions, including inadequate housing, insecure livelihoods, poor sanitation, limited access to quality healthcare, unreliable water supply, and restricted access to social services. Northern Ghana generally records higher poverty levels than southern Ghana, reflecting longstanding regional disparities in infrastructure investment, industrial development, educational opportunities, and economic growth (Songsore, 2011). Although urbanization and economic expansion have created new employment opportunities in Tamale, a substantial proportion of residents continue to experience economic vulnerability due to irregular incomes, underemployment, rising housing costs, inflation, and increasing costs of urban living.

Poverty has important implications for access to education, particularly among children and youth from low-income households. Financial constraints often limit the ability of parents to meet the indirect costs of schooling, including transportation, uniforms, learning materials, examination fees, and

digital learning resources. Consequently, some children experience irregular school attendance, poor academic performance, delayed progression through the educational system, or premature withdrawal from school. In peri-urban and low-income neighbourhoods, economic hardship may compel children and adolescents to engage in petty trading, casual labour, agricultural work, transport-related activities, or other income-generating ventures to support household livelihoods. Such circumstances can reduce educational attainment and perpetuate cycles of intergenerational poverty.

Youth unemployment and underemployment constitute another major dimension of urban poverty within Greater Tamale. The city hosts a rapidly growing youthful population, including graduates from secondary schools, technical institutions, and tertiary institutions. However, formal employment opportunities have not expanded at the same pace as population growth. Many young people therefore depend on informal sector activities characterized by low earnings, income instability, and limited social protection. This situation contributes to economic insecurity and can increase vulnerability to social problems such as substance abuse, crime, and social exclusion.

Poverty also has significant implications for food security and nutrition. Although Greater Tamale serves as an important agricultural production and marketing centre, many low-income urban households experience periodic food insecurity due to limited purchasing power and fluctuations in food prices. Households with unstable incomes often struggle to access sufficient quantities of nutritious food throughout the year, leading to reduced dietary diversity and increased vulnerability to malnutrition, particularly among children, pregnant women, and the elderly. Seasonal variations in agricultural production, climate-related shocks, and rising food prices can further exacerbate household food insecurity.

Housing conditions provide another visible manifestation of urban poverty. Many low-income households reside in overcrowded compounds and informal settlements characterized by inadequate drainage systems, poor waste management, limited sanitation facilities, and vulnerability to flooding during the rainy season. Rapid population growth and increasing demand for housing have also contributed to rising land and rental prices, making access to

adequate housing increasingly difficult for economically disadvantaged households. Female-headed households, recent migrants, persons with disabilities, casual labourers, and workers in the informal economy are particularly vulnerable to poverty and economic insecurity. Women frequently face additional challenges related to limited access to productive resources, land, credit, and formal employment opportunities, while migrants often lack established social networks and economic assets necessary for livelihood security.

Nevertheless, various coping mechanisms and support systems help mitigate poverty within Greater Tamale. These include urban agriculture, extended family networks, community-based support arrangements, remittances from migrants, women's savings groups, informal credit associations, and government social protection programmes. Despite these interventions, persistent poverty and socio-economic inequalities continue to pose significant challenges to inclusive urban development, human capital formation, and sustainable livelihoods within the Greater Tamale area.

INFORMAL SECTOR PARTICIPATION AND GENDER DIMENSIONS

The informal sector forms the backbone of the Greater Tamale economy and absorbs the majority of the urban labour force. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, approximately 79.7% of employed persons in Ghana work within the private informal sector. This pattern is strongly reflected in Greater Tamale, where informal economic activities dominate employment and livelihood systems.

Informal sector activities include petty trading, street vending, food vending, transportation services, agro-processing, tailoring, artisanal work, repair services, and domestic labour. Informality provides livelihoods for thousands of households but is often associated with low incomes, insecure working conditions, lack of social protection, and limited access to formal credit systems.

Women constitute a significant proportion of informal sector workers within Greater Tamale. Female participation is particularly visible in market trading, shea butter processing, food vending, catering, and petty commerce. Many women depend on informal economic activities as their primary source of household income and family support (Awumbila, 2001).

Despite its vulnerabilities, the informal economy remains central to employment creation, poverty reduction, and urban resilience within Greater Tamale. The continued expansion of informal activities reflects both entrepreneurial adaptation and the limited absorptive capacity of the formal urban labour market.

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND MUNICIPAL SERVICE DELIVERY

Greater Tamale is undergoing one of the fastest urban transformations in West Africa. With a combined population of approximately 635,219 across the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly (TaMA) and the Sagnarigu Municipal Assembly (SMA) (GSS, 2021) and growing at more than 4% per annum (Fuseini & Kemp, 2016). In this context, the city faces a structural deficit between the pace of population growth and the capacity of public institutions to plan and finance services. The sections below present a sector-by-sector assessment of the development challenges confronting Greater Tamale today, drawing on data from recent Medium-Term Development Plans (MTDP) and composite budgets of both assemblies, sector-specific plans, and the broader academic and policy literature.

WATER

Tamale has an acute water shortage particularly during the dry season. Water supply in Greater Tamale is managed through two Ghana Water Company Limited (GWCL) treatment plants at Dalun and Nawuni (both located north of the city on the White Volta system). Together they supply approximately 45,000 cubic metres (m³) of treated water daily while minimum required demand of Tamale is 90,000m³/day thus creating a shortfall of 45,000m³/day (TaMA MTDP, 2025). This situation is compounded by an ageing distribution network, rapid peri-urban expansion, and pronounced seasonal stress.

estimated at around 80%. The access figures turn to mask critical quality and reliability deficits. The distribution system suffers from obsolete pipes, inadequate pressure for high-elevation areas, and frequent power outages that interrupt pumping (TaMA Composite Budget, 2025). In fast-growing peri-urban neighbourhoods (particularly in Sagnarigu) where new settlements form faster than the network can extend, residents rely on mechanised boreholes, hand-dug wells, open dams, and an extensive sachet water market (SMA Composite Budget, 2025).



Women and youth fetching water from Kasalgu dam

Coverage has improved considerably over the past decade. In Sagnarigu, the proportion of the population served by safe water sources rose from 50.4% in 2010 to 67.8% in 2024, with a target of 95% by 2028 (SMA Composite Budget, 2025). In TaMA, which is more urbanized, access rates are higher, with urban connectivity to the pipe network



Women on their way to Kasalgu dam

The supply challenge is also seasonal. The Nawuni and Dalun plants depend on the White and Black Volta rivers, whose flows are significantly reduced during the long dry season (November–April). Rationing intensifies exactly when household demand peaks, driving the poorest residents toward the least safe alternatives. The 2026

MoU establishing the Interjurisdictional Coordination Management Committee (ICMC) explicitly identifies water access as a shared priority requiring coordinated metropolitan-level response. This represents a recognition that the distribution infrastructure does not respect administrative boundaries and can only be rationally planned and maintained at the Greater Tamale scale. An important angle of the water crises in

Tamale is its particularly negative implication for the daily lives of women and girls who traditionally are responsible for household chores like cooking, washing etc. which mostly requires water. In peri-urban communities, dams such as the Kasalgu dam in Sagnarigu serve as the only source of water for everyday life with residents (women and girls especially) walking up to 3km to access the only source of water.



Tankers: the main mean of transport of water in Tamale

SANITATION

Sanitation is among the most acute and visible development challenges in Greater Tamale. Both assemblies have invested significantly in planning instruments: TaMA's CityWide Sanitation Plan (2022) and Sagnarigu's WASH Investment Plan (2025-2030), but implementation has consistently been constrained by inadequate budgetary allocations, weak enforcement, and structural barriers rooted in rapid, unplanned urbanisation.

Liquid waste and open defecation

Access to household toilet facilities remains severely limited. In Sagnarigu, only 46.2% of the population had access to any toilet facility in 2024 with open defecation rates exceeding 20% in the municipality's peri-urban and rural communities (SMA Composite Budget, 2025). The two significant forest reserves within TaMA i.e. Nyohini and Agric are routinely used for open defecation, simultaneously degrading public health and the city's only

urban green assets (TaMA Composite Budget, 2025).

There is no functioning sewage treatment plant in Greater Tamale. Liquid waste is either pit-stored or informally discharged into drainage channels and storm drains, creating direct pathways for faecal contamination of surface water and peri-urban agricultural irrigation (RUAF Foundation, 2015).

Solid waste management

Solid waste management remains one of the most critical challenges facing a rapidly growing Greater Tamale. There remains a gap in waste collection and disposal. Waste collection is dominated by Zoomlion Ghana Limited which until June 2025 was contracted by the government of Ghana to provide waste collection services to MMDAs¹. Zoomlion's coverage is concentrated in the urban core, leaving peri-urban communities

underserved. A growing number of small-scale and informal waste collectors fill this gap mostly using tricycles for door-to-door collection. According to Baffoe et al. (2022), the Motor King tricycle, first deployed for waste collection in Tamale in 2005 and assembled locally from 2007 remains the primary collection vehicle. The Environmental Health Departments of TaMA and SMA are responsible for regulating the operations of Zoomlion and the small scale/informal waste collectors although regulatory oversight has remained weak over the years.

Some of the key challenges of implementing TaMA's CityWide Sanitation Plan are poor budgetary allocation by assemblies in their annual action plans, alongside political and traditional interference. The Sagnarigu MCE has similarly noted that government efforts alone are insufficient and that NGO and private sector partnerships are essential.

¹ Since 2006, Zoomlion (a private company) has been the sole contractor for waste collection for MMDAs through a public supported contract with the Youth Employment Agency (YEA). This contract was discontinued by the Government in June 2025 following allegations that the current system was inefficient and corruption-prone. It is now expected that every MMDA should be able to award its contract

Table 1: Sanitation coverage and service provision in Greater Tamale

INDICATOR	TAMALE	SAGNARIGU
% households with access to basic sanitation (2021)	~15%	28%
% population with toilet access (2024)	~57%	46.2%
Open defecation prevalence	Significant in peri-urban fringe	>20% in rural/peri-urban areas
Sewage treatment plant	None	None
Primary waste operator	Zoomlion Ghana Ltd (+ informal)	Zoomlion Ghana Ltd (+ informal)
Key planning instrument	CityWide Sanitation Plan (2022)	WASH Investment Plan (2025-2030)

Sources: GSS, 2021; TaMA and SMA Composite Budgets 2025; TaMA CityWide Sanitation Plan 2022; SMA WASH IP 2025



Burnt container in Nyohini



Waste dumping site in Nyohini



Waste dumping in the forest reserve



Zoomlion's container in Nyohini

HOUSING

Greater Tamale is experiencing increasing housing pressure driven by rapid urbanisation and demographic growth. In Tamale, housing stock is estimated at 19,387 homes (about 7.5% of all homes in the Northern Region) accommodating 35,408 households, with an average household size of 6.3 persons (TaMA Composite Budget, 2025; GSS, 2021). In Sagnarigu, rapid peri-urban expansion and population growth continue to intensify demand for housing and basic urban services. Nationally, housing supply has not kept pace with urban demand, contributing to rising rental costs, overcrowding, and the proliferation of informal settlements. An estimated one-third

of urban residents in Ghana live in slum-like conditions, reflecting broader structural challenges in urban housing provision and land management (Centre for Affordable Housing Finance in Africa [CAHF], 2024).

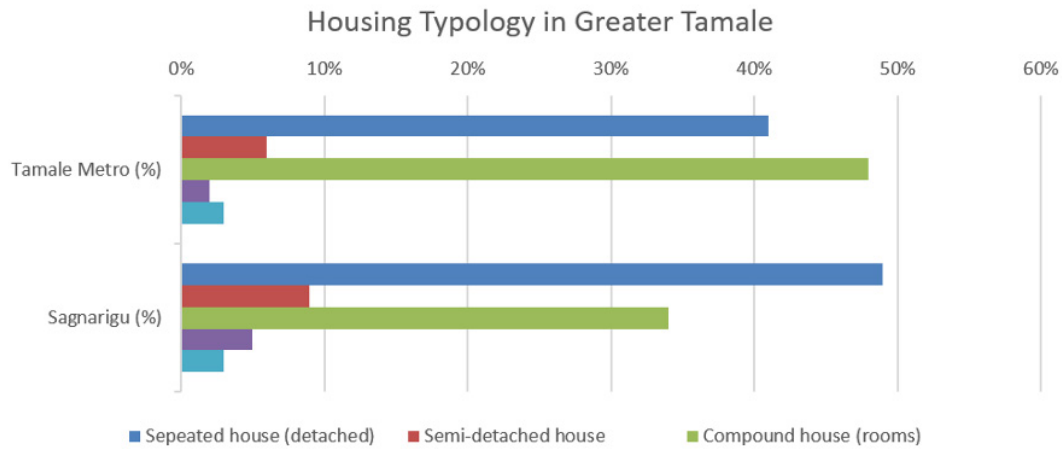
By 2030, Tamale's population is projected to increase by a factor of 2.5 relative to 2021 figures, this is the highest multiplier of any major Ghanaian city (outpacing Accra's $\times 1.7$ and Kumasi's $\times 2.3$ (CAHF, 2024). The dominant housing typology reflects both cultural tradition and economic constraint: compound houses and detached houses with shared toilet, bath, and kitchen facilities are the norm. There are also semi-detached



Traditional housing



New houses style in Tamale



houses, Flat/Apartment and Huts in the housing mix. Central to housing typology and the overall neighbourhood organisation of Greater Tamale are public building and landmark features such as mosques/churches (Tamale Central Mosque, Ambariyya Mosque, OLA Cathedral, among others), Aliu Mahama Sport Stadium, Tamale Teaching Hospital, Government administrative buildings, the main public square Jubilee Park etc.

Informal housing development as a mode of urban expansion in Greater Tamale has consequences for urban form and ecology. Driven by rapid population growth, customary land transactions operating outside statutory planning, and negligible development control enforcement. New residential areas normally start with Chiefs

releasing peri-urban land through Allocation Notes; households build incrementally without planning permission, building permits, or infrastructure connections (Akaateba, 2021). This typical case of developments preceding planning leads to a situation where roads are not well planned, drainage is absent, setback regulations are routinely ignored among other infractions. Wetlands and seasonal flood plains are built upon, increasing flood exposure; green buffers around forest reserves are progressively eroded (Fuseini & Kemp, 2016). There are also areas of the urban core that can be characterised as slums due to the absence of basic services and poor housing conditions, and these generally predate current spatial plans.



Clay huts with thatched roof

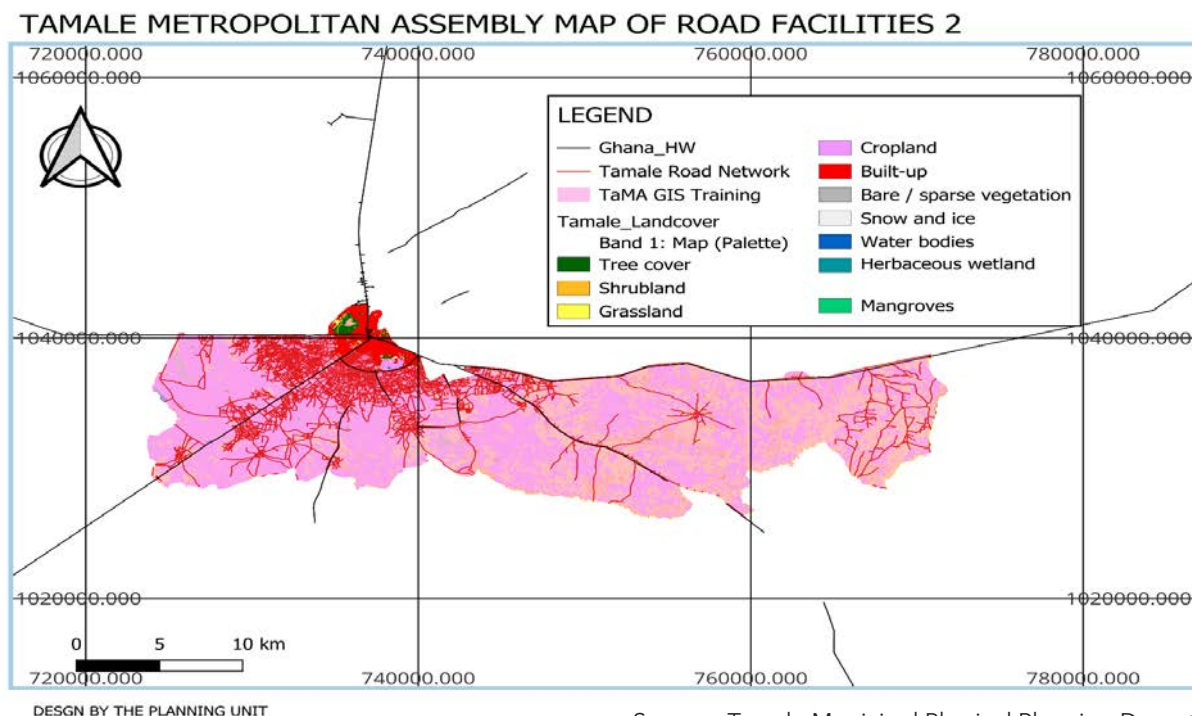


A clustered neighborhood



Traditional house in clay

TRANSPORT & MOBILITY



Source: Tamale Municipal Physical Planning Department

Greater Tamale's transport infrastructure reflects persistent imbalances between investment in major arterial corridors and the poor condition of many secondary and local access roads. In Sagnarigu Municipality, a substantial proportion of the road network remains in poor condition, particularly in rapidly urbanising peri-urban areas, while only about 22.5% of roads are fitted with streetlights. (SMA Composite Budget, 2025) In the TaMA, inadequate and silted drainage infrastructure (including U-drains and culverts) continues to contribute to road deterioration and heightened flood risk during the rainy season (TaMA Composite Budget, 2025).

Lack of suitable roads constrains public transport routes to communities with very poor first- and last-mile connectivity. Paved local roads connecting to the wider network would allow public transport access to neighbourhoods currently cut off, while integrated non-motorised infrastructure can improve both mobility and economic inclusion, particularly for women (World Bank, 2021).

Tamale has a distinctive transport culture rooted in non-motorised modes. According

to the 2017 Ghana Living Standards Survey, bicycle ownership in cities in northern Ghana is significantly higher than in any other region (World Bank, 2021). This cycling culture is under pressure from rapid motorisation driven mostly by motorcycles, rickshaws/ tricycles (locally known as Yellow Yellow) and Motor King (locally assembled motorised tricycles) and to a lesser extent private cars. In terms of modal share, roadside observations on major corridors of Tamale suggest that travel for most daily activities is currently dominated by motorcycles, tricycles and shared taxis (Timpabi, Osei & Adams, 2021) with up to 80% of residents of the Tamale Metropolis reported to own bicycles or motorcycles combined (ASIRT, 2014, cited in Timpabi, Osei & Adams, 2021). A formal transport survey for Tamale (ideally a household travel survey) is a genuine data gap which should be filled in future to better understand how people travel in the metropolitan area.

A significant transport infrastructure moment in Greater Tamale was the construction of a 2-tier interchange in the CBD of Tamale to improve traffic flow. The interchange commissioned in April 2022 is the first of its

kind to be constructed in northern Ghana. It also involved the provision of drainage system, streetlights and the construction of 10km of asphalted overlay around the Interchange. Although the interchange has helped to improve traffic flow by segregating through-traffic from local transit, it has not completely solved the congestion problem, as the city still struggles with inadequate pedestrian facilities and a high number of 2-and 3-wheelers on the road causing localized market chokes. Some experts and local politicians have challenged the necessity of the flyover in terms of technical soundness and development priority, arguing that a simpler functional ringroad and bypass would have been a more cost-effective solution.

Transport inequality in Greater Tamale has some gender dimensions. For instance, women constitute the majority of traders in the Central Market and bear primary

responsibility for household provisioning and health-seeking, and are disproportionately affected by poor transport conditions, more likely to walk, and more dependent on first- and last-mile connectivity (World Bank, 2021). Poor street lighting (only 22.5% of Sagnarigu roads are lit) and the absence of formal public transport routes to peri-urban neighbourhoods compound this disadvantage. Investment in pedestrian infrastructure, cycling lanes, and safe lighting in residential areas would yield asymmetric gender dividends (World Bank, 2021).

The rapid growth of the informal transport fleet is generating significant externalities. Motorcycle accidents are a major source of road traffic fatalities across northern Ghana, with fatality rates compounded by very low helmet usage (Baffoe et al., 2022). Non-adherence to road safety regulations is identified as a key challenge in planning documents of the city.



Pictures of different means of transportation observed in Tamale

AGRICULTURE AND URBAN FOOD SYSTEMS

Agriculture has historically been the economic and cultural foundation of Greater Tamale and remains deeply embedded in urban livelihoods. Yet rapid urban expansion is systematically displacing it, with consequences for food security, household incomes, the ecological balance of the urban region, and the long-term resilience of the city. Research in the Sagnarigu portion (has more peri-urban communities) of Greater Tamale found that arable land declined by

77% between 1996 and 2023, while built-up areas increased by 93% over the same period (Abubakari et al., 2022). As land values rise with urbanisation, chiefs allocate agricultural land for residential and commercial use for higher economic rent, pushing farmers toward smaller, more fragmented plots (most farming less than 0.5 ha – in interstitial urban spaces, open government land and backyards) (Nchanji et al., 2018).



Cattle



Vegetable vendor on the side of the road

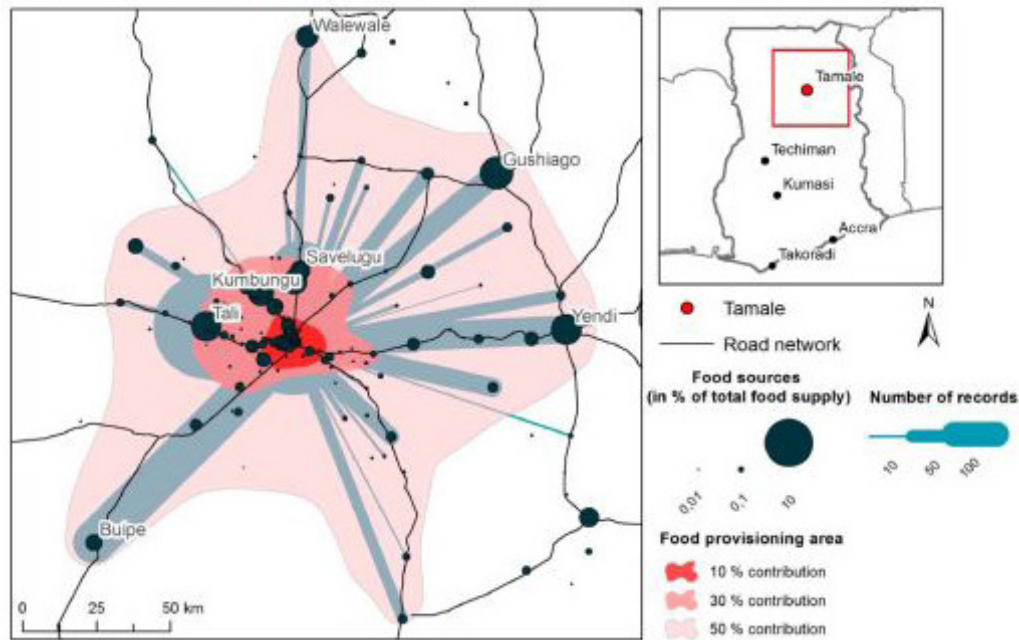


Tankers of water for irrigation



Fruits sold on the side of the road

The Tamale city-region food-system map
showing how the city draws supplies and redistributes them through urban markets



Source: Karg et al. 2016

Despite the pressures, urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) remains a vital component of Greater Tamale's food system. The majority of crops grown on urban farmlands are vegetables (tomatoes, cabbage ayoyo etc), which are important sources of micronutrients and household income (Nchanji et al., 2023). Livestock rearing is widespread across both assemblies, with Sagnarigu for example maintaining 12 agricultural extension sub-stations (SMA Composite Budget, 2025).

Urban agriculture in Tamale functions as a potential node for circular urban metabolism – linking organic waste, wastewater, food production, and green infrastructure. Up to 50% of Tamale's solid waste is said to be biodegradable, representing a resource for urban composting (RUAF Foundation, 2015). Yet this potential is being foreclosed by uncoordinated urban growth that lacks any designation of permanent urban agricultural zones in spatial plans. Pesticide misuse and use of contaminated wastewater for vegetable irrigation create food safety risks that are currently unmonitored (RUAF Foundation, 2015).

COMMERCE AND THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

Services is the largest economic activity sector in Greater Tamale and Markets are the heartbeats of this sector. Markets are not merely transactional spaces but dense social and logistical systems that organise the movement of goods, capital, labour and information across the sub-region and into the wider northern Ghanaian hinterland. TaMA hosts five functional markets: the Tamale Central Market (the largest in northern Ghana), Aboabo, Lamashegu, Kakpagyili, and Kuku. The Central Business District is expanding, with modern retail beginning to emerge alongside traditional market formats.

Sagnarigu presents a striking commercial contrast. The municipality has no major market; small trading centres at Kalpohin, Gurugu, and Choggu serve local needs, but the bulk of the municipality's population shops at TaMA's markets.

Informality is the defining characteristic of commercial life in Greater Tamale. This is consistent with what GSS (2014) found that in Ghanaian metropolitan cities, the informal service sector which is mostly unregulated, is the largest employer and driver of economic activities. Research identifies three

typologies of street traders: permanent, intermittent, and mobile (Atambeogo & Seniwoliba, 2022). Drivers of street trading include lack of capital, lack of employment, difficulties in securing stores, and poverty. Traders are exposed to harassment by city authorities, theft, and health hazards (Atambeogo & Seniwoliba, 2022). Informality seen as an adaptive economic system to be understood and progressively integrated with formal planning through initiatives such as appropriate upgrade of market infrastructure, vendor registration and better spatial organisation will move us from neglect to recognition and policy support, which is in line with the approach in the National Urban Policy.

Gender and power in the market economy is critical to understanding the nature of commerce in Greater Tamale. Women constitute the majority of traders in the Central Market and in satellite markets.

Tamale's market system reflects the historical influence of Muslim trade networks and transregional commercial linkages, which have contributed to comparatively stronger male dominance in market leadership and trading structures than is typical in southern Ghanaian cities (Jennische, 2024). Male traders occupy more powerful positions: they control wholesale trade, command larger stalls, and have better access to credit and storage. Women traders are more likely to operate in the open air, with less secure tenure over their trading spaces.

Aside from serving as a market for produce from adjoining districts, Greater Tamale provides services at various levels in the areas of healthcare, education, inter-city road and air transport and financial services to residents of the surrounding districts and also serves as the administrative center for other regions within the Northern zone (Musah, 2020).



Encroachment along the main forest reserve



Vendors on the side of the road



Local store on the side of the road



Vendors on the side of the road

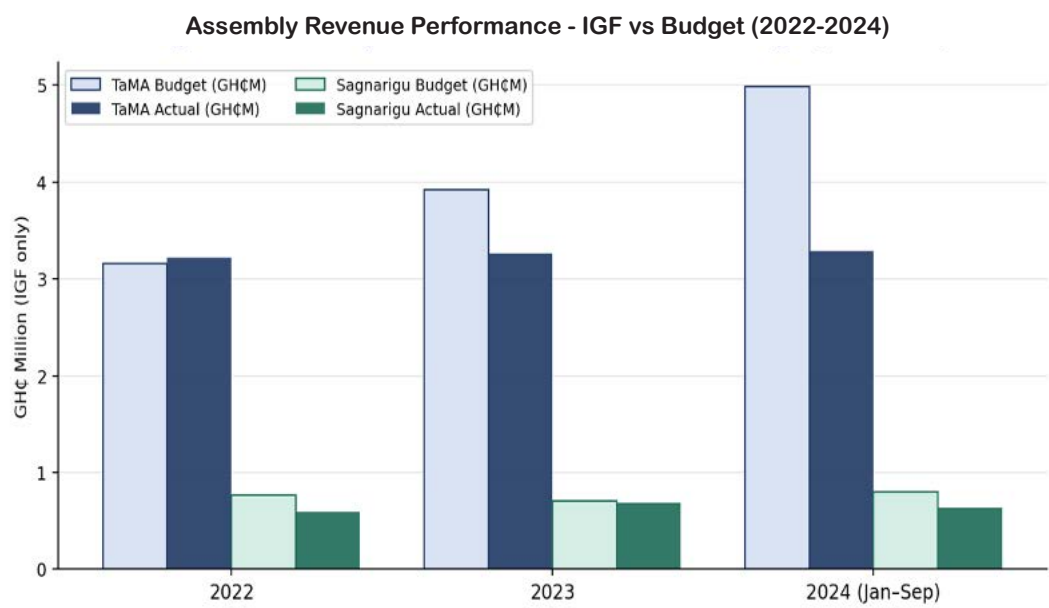
FISCAL CAPACITY AND THE REVENUE CHALLENGE

Underlying all of the sectoral challenges described above is a fundamental fiscal constraint: both assemblies operate with internally generated revenues that are small relative to their development mandates, are chronically under-realised against targets, and are structurally skewed toward TaMA.

In 2024, TaMA’s total IGF outturn was approximately GH¢ 3.29 million against a budget of GH¢ 4.99 million (66% performance), while Sagnarigu’s IGF outturn was approximately GH¢ 0.64 million against a budget of GH¢ 0.80 million (80% performance) (Composite Budget TaMA and SMA, 20225). The differential reflects Sagnarigu’s structural revenue disadvantage: with no major market, a peri-urban economic base of small enterprises, and limited rateable property, its internally generated revenue base is a fraction of TaMA’s. Both

assemblies are heavily dependent on transfers from central government (DACF and compensation) and donor funds, creating fiscal fragility.

This fiscal context matters directly for service delivery. When DACF transfers are delayed or below-target (which is common) assemblies are forced to defer infrastructure maintenance, suspend waste collection contracts, and halt planned projects. The assemblies’ own analysis of key challenges consistently identifies insufficient and delayed release of funds as the primary operational constraint. Therefore, strengthening IGF mobilisation—through better property rate collection, market revenue formalisation, and business licensing is therefore not merely a financial exercise but a prerequisite for improved service delivery.



Note: IGF = Internally Generated Funds only. TaMA IGF significantly larger than Sagnarigu, reflecting the latter's limited market revenue base. Sources: TaMA/SMA Composite Budgets 2025.

Source: TaMA and SMA Composite Budgets

URBAN PLANNING PROCESSES



"GREATER TAMALE": A NECESSARY PLANNING NOMENCLATURE

The term Greater Tamale or Greater Tamale Metropolitan Area has gradually moved from a descriptive spatial shorthand into what appears to be a substantive planning concept, reflecting a growing recognition that the city's functional urban reality has long outgrown the boundaries of any single administrative assembly i.e. The Tamale Metropolitan Assembly.

Tamale's trajectory as a metropolitan centre is well documented. From a population of under 60,000 people in 1960, the city grew to become Ghana's third-largest urban centre by 1984, and its position cemented per the results of the 2021 Population and Housing Census (PHC). Spatially, urban expansion has spilled beyond the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly's administrative jurisdiction into Sagnarigu, Savelugu, and surrounding peri-urban districts, producing a functionally integrated urban region that administrative maps have been slow to acknowledge and adapt, much less than the case of Greater Accra Metropolitan Area and Greater Kumasi which are more established in planning consciousness.

Academic researchers studying land use, peri-urban growth, and governance found it analytically necessary to treat Tamale and its surrounding municipalities as a single integrated system, and the term "Greater Tamale Area" entered the scholarly record to capture this (Abubakari et al., 2022). The underlying problem the term signals is a persistent mismatch between where the city functionally operates and where planning authority formally sits. The administrative separation of Sagnarigu from the original Tamale Metropolitan Assembly may have deepened existing coordination deficits across boundaries that road networks,

drainage systems, and solid waste flows do not respect. The absence of an institutionalized overarching metropolitan planning authority (Fuseini & Kemp, 2016; Akaateba, 2021) in the context of continuous atomization of local administrative units makes it important to adopt a territorial approach in order to maintain coordinated urban growth across this multi-municipal zone and critically ensure ecological balance especially in the peri-urban interface where green space encroachment occurs as built-up areas, infrastructure, and informal settlements progressively occupy ecologically sensitive areas.

The term has recently acquired formal institutional recognition. In April 2026, the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly and the Sagnarigu Municipal Assembly signed a Memorandum of Understanding establishing an Interjurisdictional Coordination Management Committee (ICMC), supported by the EU's Sustainable Cities Project. The ICMC is designed to align planning processes and develop joint responses to shared metropolitan challenges – particularly in spatial planning, solid waste, water, and climate resilience. The Northern Regional Minister called on both assemblies to adopt a shared vision to ensure coordinated development for Greater Tamale, thus elevating the concept from a spatial description to a governance objective. This agreement is firmly rooted in law as the National Development Planning (System) Act, 1994 (Act 480) and Land Use and Spatial Planning Act, 2016 (Act 925) provides for joint planning areas to encourage collective action among municipalities through territorial strategies.

URBAN GOVERNANCE: LAND SYSTEMS AND PLANNING FRAMEWORKS

Urban governance in Greater Tamale operates through a layered and often fragmented set of institutions, legal frameworks, and land systems that together shape (and frequently constrain) the city's built environment and service provision. Understanding this governance landscape is essential context for the workshop: the proposals that emerge from the three expert teams will need to navigate and be situated within the existing institutional actors, and planning and policy frameworks. This section outlines the principal elements of that landscape including how land is held and transacted, how national policy frames local planning, how two "competing" formal planning regimes function and interact, and where systemic gaps may emerge.

NAVIGATING THE CUSTOMARY AND STATUTORY LAND TENURE SYSTEMS

Understanding who owns lands, how it can and should be accessed and utilized, and how it is transferred/transacted in Greater Tamale is fundamental to understanding why planning works the way it does and why it so often falls short. Land is thus a highly negotiated planning reality.

In the national context, about 78% of land in Ghana is customarily owned by stools, families, and clans (Akaateba, 2021). In northern Ghana, the main symbol of authority per custom that holds allodial title to land is the skin¹. Land in Tamale is dominantly under customary ownership, vested in paramount skins, with chiefs acting as custodians holding the land in trust for their community members (Akaateba, 2021). Customary tenure is said to hold more than 50% of land in Greater Tamale.

Alongside this customary tenure sits a statutory system, managed by the Ghana Lands Commission, the Survey Department, and the Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority (LUSPA). Both the Local Governance Act, 2016 (Act 936) and the Land Use and Spatial Planning Act, 2016 (Act 925) mandate District Planning Authorities to ensure that physical developments within their respective jurisdictions are carried out in accordance with these Acts (Government of Ghana, 2016).

In practice, neither system operates

independently, they are complementary and coexist. An Allocation Note, evidence of a land transaction between a chief and a grantee (the one being granted right or access to the land) is the initial step towards acquiring full legal rights. Following this step, the grantee must then register at the Lands Commission to perfect their title (Akaateba, Huang & Adumpong, 2018). This two-step process creates a long and often incomplete chain of tenure, during which land can be sold multiple times or disputed. Tenure insecurity in peri-urban areas emanates primarily from limited stakeholder participation, land commodification, re-interpretation of customary tenure, and weak institutional capacities of local planning agencies (Akaateba, 2023). Although reforms to close this gap through the customary land secretariat and Land Act, 2020 (Act 1036) harmonization (improving records keeping, digitisation, earlier registration and stronger customary-state coordination), the challenge remains: still often sequential rather than integrated process.

In Greater Tamale specifically, a weak development control system over skin lands has created land use management problems such as low compliance to building permits acquisition, low uptake in formal land registrations, land conflicts because of multiple sale, difficulty in acquiring and use of land for infrastructure projects among others. The

¹ A ceremonial animal hide upon which a chief is installed – is the equivalent of the "stool" in southern Ghana. Chiefs hold skin land in trust for their communities, not as personal property, a custodial role formally recognised under Article 267 of Ghana's 1992 Constitution.

current regime also seems to have created a window for traditional authorities to rezone road reservations for sale to informal housing

developers (Akaateba, Huang & Adumpon, 2018), directly undermining the spatial plans that statutory agencies have prepared.

THE NATIONAL URBAN POLICY FRAMEWORK

Ghana's overarching policy context for urban development is the National Urban Policy Framework (NUPF), launched in 2012 to guide the initiation and implementation of appropriate policies for comprehensive urban development (Government of Ghana, 2012). The NUPF established twelve specific objectives including: balancing urban population growth, integrating the hierarchy of urban centres, planning and managing urban sprawl, and ensuring urban economic development (Government of Ghana, 2012). Building on the lessons of the NUPF of 2012, a Revised National Urban Policy (NUP) (2025–2034) has now been validated and will guide Ghana's urban development strategy in the coming decade. The Revised NUP focuses on eight core objectives: promoting spatially balanced and sustainable urban population growth; ensuring effective land use planning and management; promoting climate resilience and environmental quality of life; enhancing urban economic development and city competitiveness; promoting diversified financing for urban infrastructure and services; investing in affordable social housing; promoting urban safety and security; and expanding access to urban infrastructure and services. Closely aligned with the NUP is the revised National Slum Upgrading and Prevention Strategy (NSUPS 2025–2034). These 2 critical policy frames

which are now being reviewed and validated aim to align national frameworks with global policy priorities, particularly the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the New Urban Agenda.

Tamale features prominently in national urban policy as a city requiring targeted intervention. Policy recognises secondary cities like Tamale as catalysts for balanced national development, manage rapid urbanization and reduce pressure on the national capital. Over the years, projects such as the Ghana Urban Management Pilot Project (GUMPP) have been implemented to provide urban infrastructure and improve management capacity in Tamale (Government of Ghana, 2016). More recently, the Ghana Sustainable Cities Strategy (GSCS) identifies Tamale among rapidly growing cities to be targeted for curbing unsustainable growth, prioritising investment in solid waste management, urban mobility, land administration, and affordable housing (Government of Ghana & World Bank, 2025). The NUP and GSCS provide the national frame within which Greater Tamale's planning processes are expected to operate, though translating national ambitions into local spatial outcomes has proved persistently difficult.

THE DEVELOPMENT PLANNING FRAMEWORK

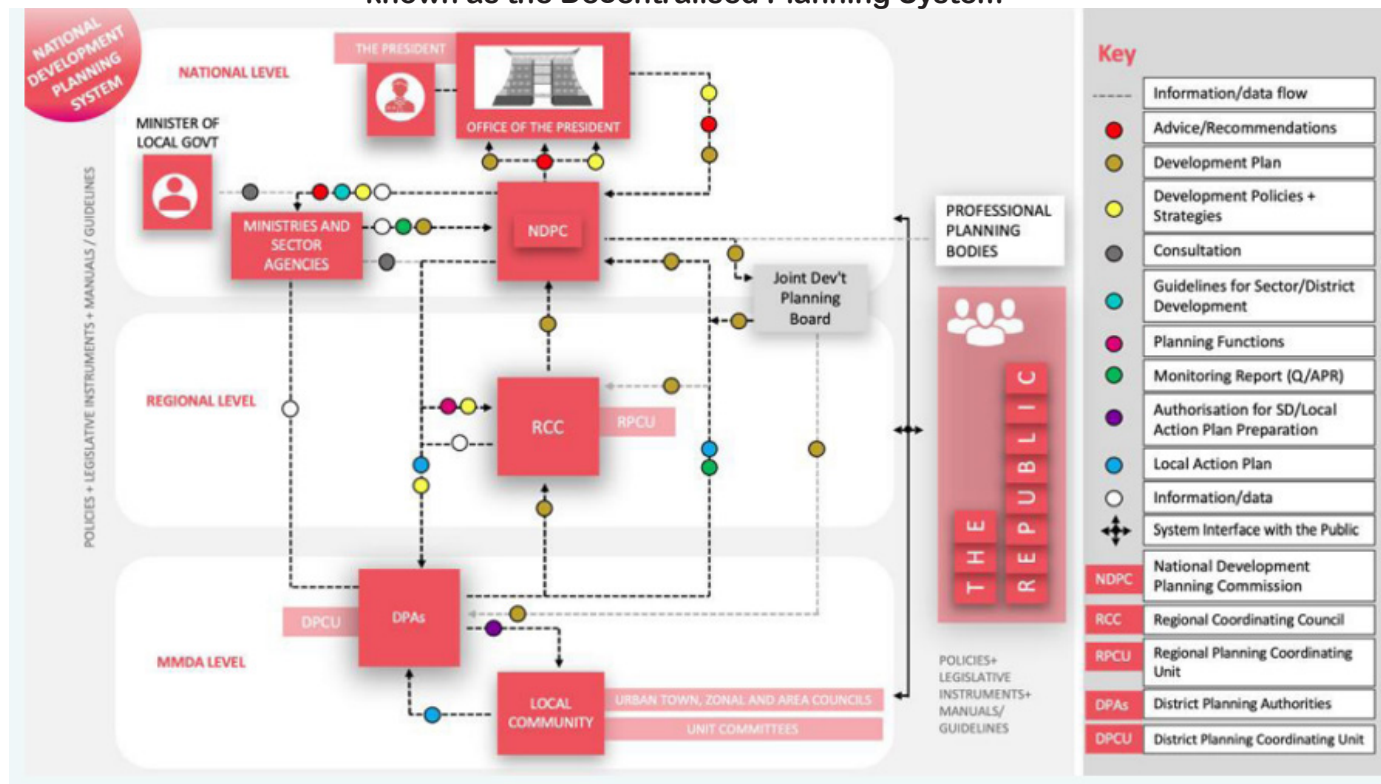
Ghana's development planning system operates under the National Development Planning (System) Act, 1994 (Act 480), which established the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) and mandated it to guide district-level planning. The NDPC issues Medium-Term Development Plan preparation guidelines for District Assemblies; District Assemblies are required to prepare and implement development plans to ensure the overall development of their respective areas (NDPC, 2024).

The key product of this process at local level is the District Medium-Term Development Plan (DMTDP), a four-year comprehensive plan covering socio-economic development, infrastructure, service delivery, and resource allocation. The DMTDP is prepared along NDPC guidelines in accordance with Act 480, the National Development Planning (System) Regulations 2016 (LI 2232), and the Local Governance Act 2016 (Act 936) (NDPC, 2024). The process requires community action plans and at least two public hearings in the district.

For Greater Tamale, both the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly (TaMA) and the Sagnarigu Municipal Assembly each produce their own DMTDP independently but governed by the same national guidelines but with no

strict formal obligation to align their plans with each other. This is a central structural weakness that the recently established Interjurisdictional Coordination Management Committee (ICMC) is designed to address.

National Development Planning System of Ghana; also known as the Decentralised Planning System



Source: NDPC, 2024

THE SPATIAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Running parallel to the development planning system is Ghana's spatial planning framework, which specifically governs land use, physical development, and the preparation of spatial plans. The legislative foundation is the Land Use and Spatial Planning Act, 2016 (Act 925), which replaced the outdated 1945 Town and Country Planning Ordinance and created LUSPA as the national regulatory body for settlements. LUSPA is responsible for ensuring the sustainable development of land and human settlements through a decentralised planning system, and for creating an enabling environment for District Assemblies to better perform spatial planning and human settlement management functions. The Land Use and Spatial Planning Regulations 2019 (L.I. 2384) complements Act 925.

Act 925 establishes a three-level hierarchy of plans known as the "Three Tier Planning System". This establishes a direct link between national development priorities/strategies and their spatial manifestation at regional and local levels, using a principle of 'chain of conformity' i.e. a higher level plan serves as the basis for the preparation of the next level of plan. Therefore, each lower level plan must also conform to the higher level of plan.

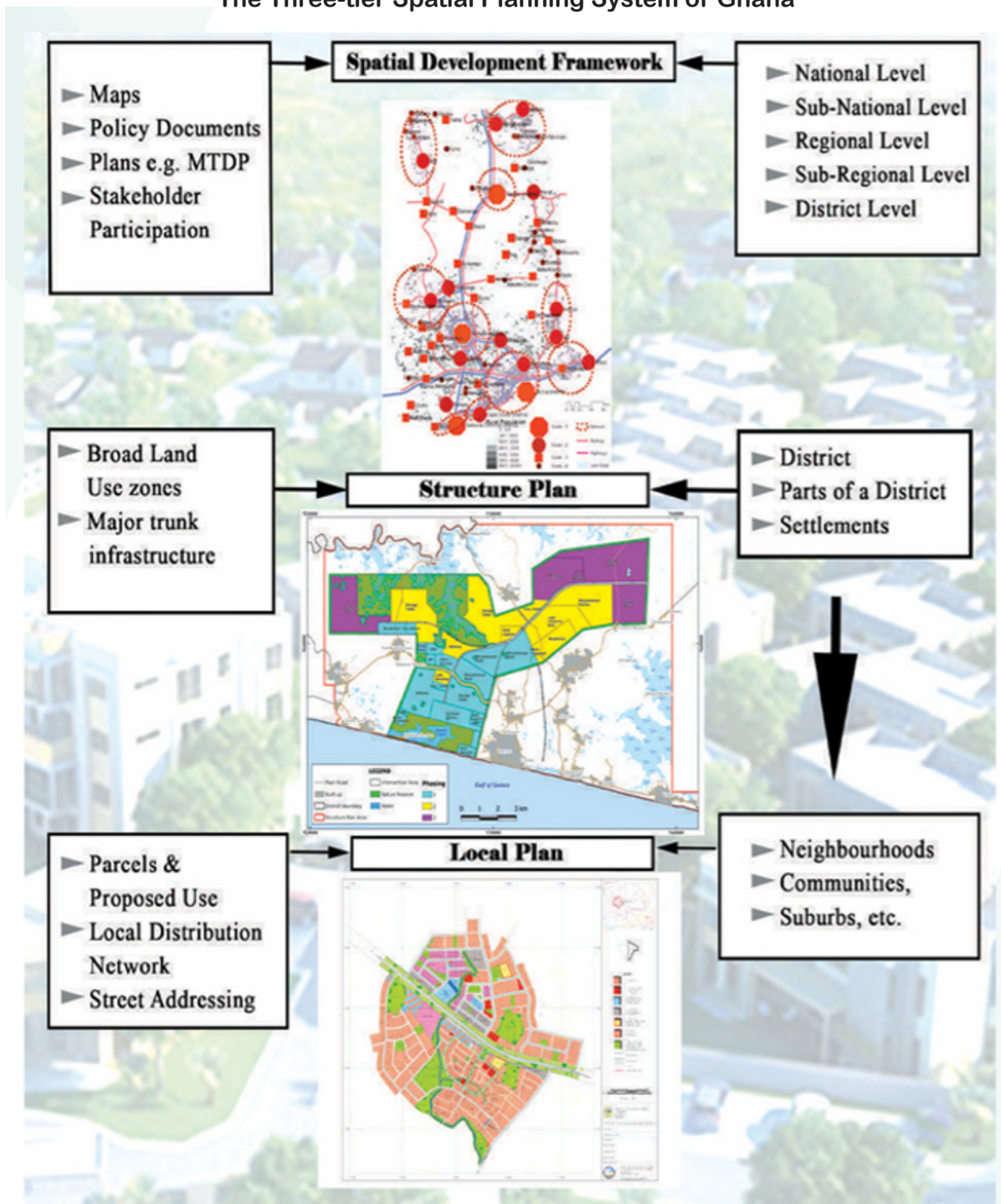
Greater Tamale and potentially more adjoining Districts present an opportunity to concretize a sub-regional SDF from which Structure and Local Plans can be further elaborated to better coordinate urban growth and expansion. The revised Spatial Planning Manual and Zoning Guidelines and Planning Standards documents launched in November 2025 provides renewed practical tools with

clear step-by-step process for preparing spatial plans that better align with Act 925, L.I. 2384 and the Local Governance Act 2016 (Act 936).

Local plan preparation in Greater Tamale is where the day-to-day manifestation of the intermediation of the customary tenure system within this hybrid system is most observed. Land use planning projects in

peri-urban communities typically begin when custodian chiefs request the services of the Physical Planning Departments of their respective Assemblies, a reflection of the constitutional recognition of chiefs as custodians of skin lands under Article 267 of the 1992 Constitution (Akaateba, 2021). Because of the logistical constraints (tied to the lack of dedicated funding) of the

The Three-tier Spatial Planning System of Ghana

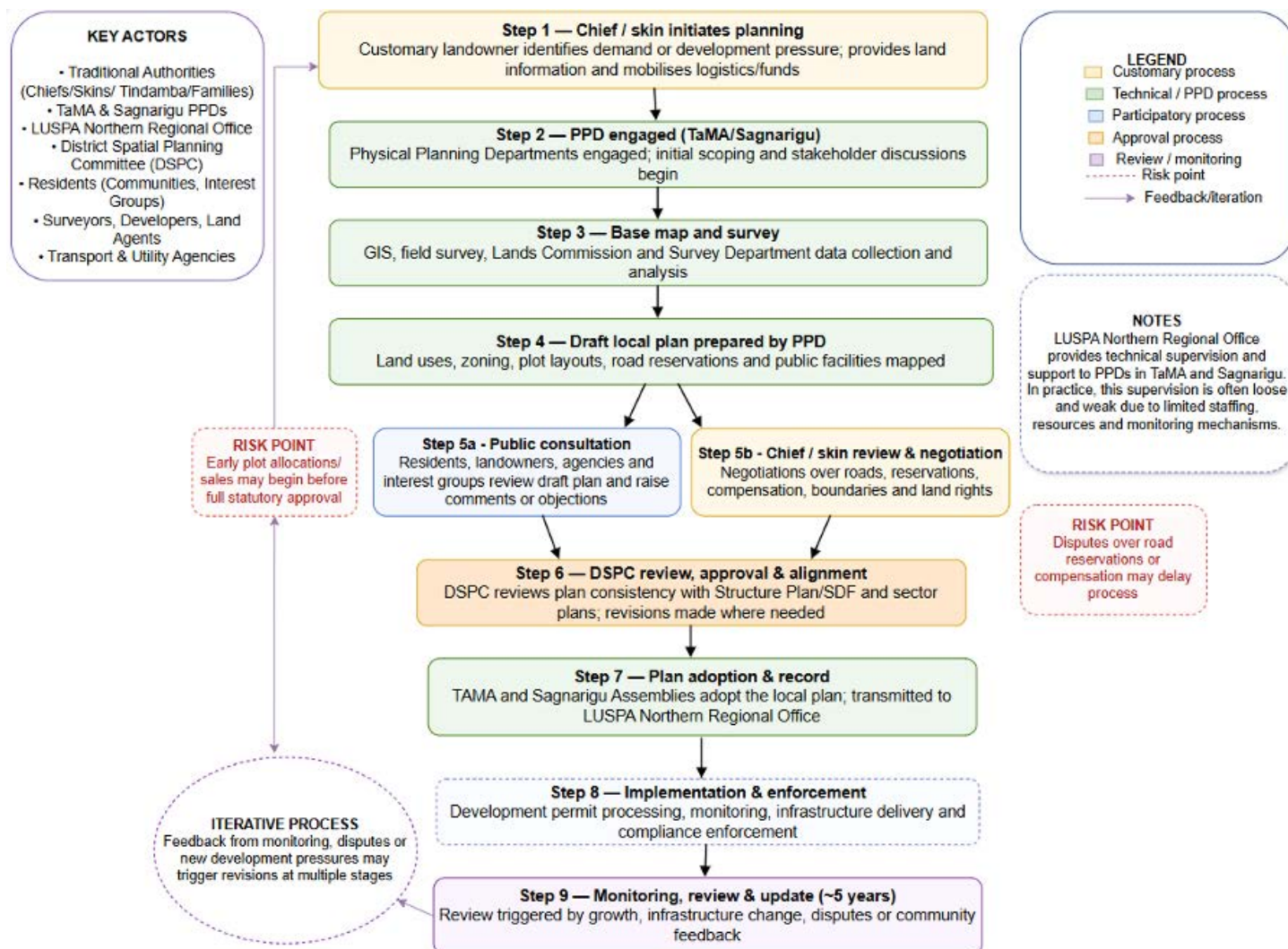


Source: LUSPA, 2025

Physical Planning Department, planners negotiate with chiefs to provide funds to acquire the logistics needed for the plan. This chief-financed planning model has become structurally entrenched across Greater Tamale's peri-urban areas (Akaateba, 2021) and has significant implications: it shifts bargaining power toward traditional

authorities, compromises the regulatory independence of the planning agency, and opens the door to the rezoning of road reservations and public open spaces for private sale (Akaateba, Huang & Adumpo, 2018).

Local plan preparation process in Greater Tamale in practice — hybrid, iterative and negotiated



Generated with grow.io, Sources: Author's construct using references: Land Use and Spatial Planning Act, 2016 (Act 925); The Land Use and Spatial Planning Regulations 2019 (L.I. 2384); Abdul-Hamid et al. (2023); TaMA MTDP (2025); Akaateba (2021)

TWO PLANNING REGIMES, ONE CITY: INTERACTIONS AND TENSIONS

Greater Tamale is governed by two formally distinct planning regimes that operate in parallel, serve overlapping purposes, and are anchored in different legislation, administered by different agencies, and operating on different timelines. The District Planning Coordinating Unit (DPCU) and the Physical Planning Department sit within the same district assembly but are

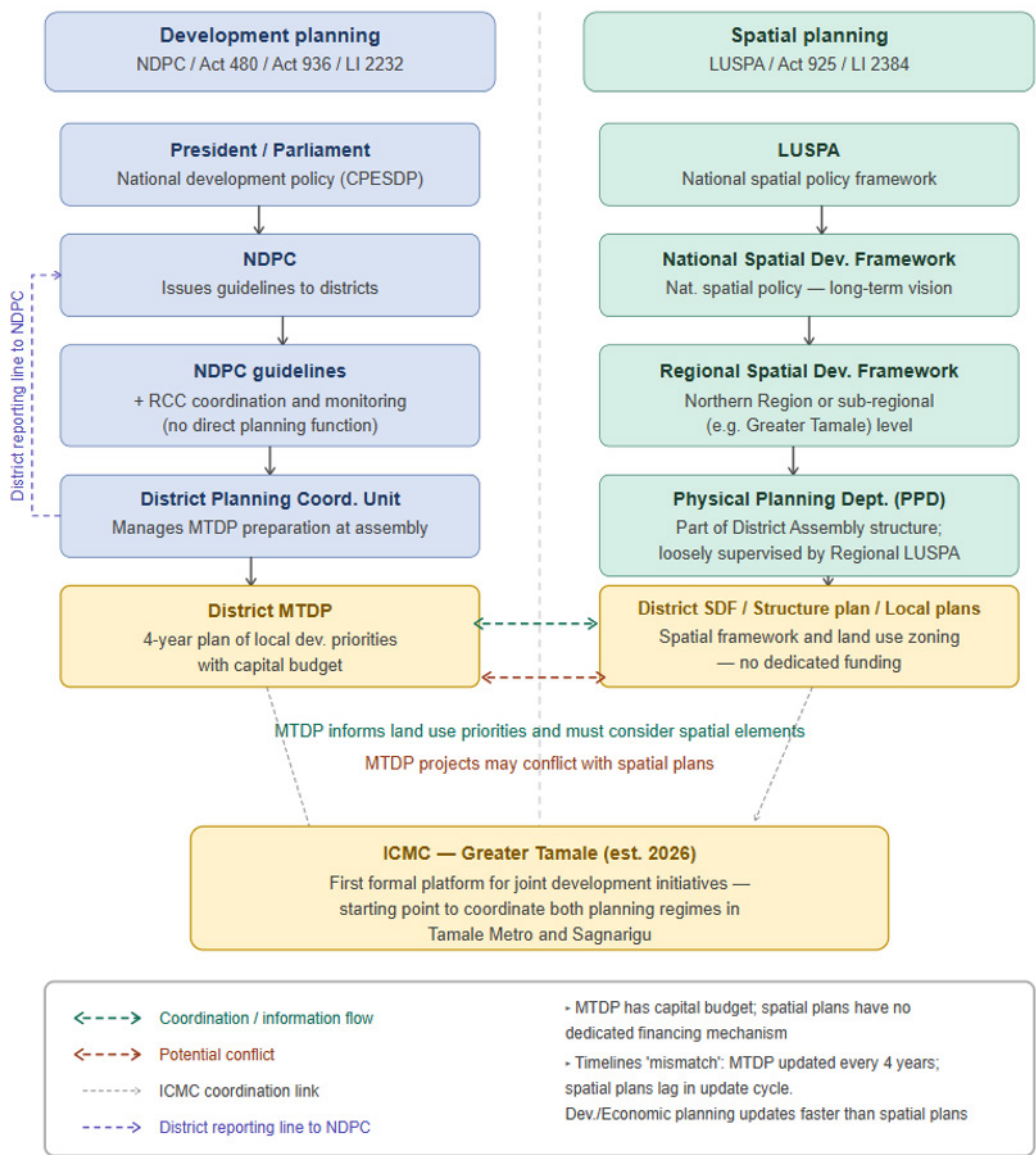
not consistently integrated. In practice, a District MTDP may identify roads, markets, or drainage projects in locations that conflict with approved spatial plans (or vice versa). Budgets flow through the MTDP process; spatial plans have no dedicated financing mechanism of their own. This creates a situation in which spatial plans are prepared but not well funded, and MTDPs are

funded but not always spatially grounded, although Section 2 (1a) of the National Development Planning (System) Act, 1994 (Act 480) requires that every development plan integrate spatial components. Post-independence planning has not been successfully implemented due to rapid urban growth, inadequate staffing, low capacity, lack of institutional coordination, political interference in planning, and complex land tenure and evolving land markets (Fuseini, 2016). According to Acheampong and Ibrahim (2015), since Independence, Ghana has established a strong history of ‘development’ (soft) planning which has received more attention than ‘spatial’(physical) though both have a long history in Ghanaian planning consciousness. This seems to have effectively created two

competing planning systems (Acheampong, 2019).

As of December 2024, only 13% of District Assemblies nationally have prepared SDFs while only 9% of urban settlements have Structure Plans (NDPC, 2024). This signals very poor preparedness to meaningful manifestation of development priorities in space. While TaMA has an urban master plan prepared in 2020 spatial planning authorities believe requires an update to better reflect the evolving dynamics of the city, Sagnarigu currently has no District Spatial Development Framework under Act 925.

Interaction between Ghana’s two planning regimes in Greater Tamale



Generated with Claude. Source: Author’s construct using references: National Development Planning (System) Act, 1994 (Act 480); Land Use and Spatial Planning Act, 2016 (Act 925); LUSPA, 2025; Acheampong (2019); Acheampong & Ibrahim (2016); Fuseini (2016)

KEY CHALLENGES IN THE URBAN PLANNING PROCESS

The governance challenges confronting Greater Tamale are well documented in the literature. They form the problem context that this workshop is convened to engage with.

INSTITUTIONAL FRAGMENTATION AND SILO WORKING

Planning authority is distributed across multiple agencies and government tiers sometimes with insufficient mechanisms for coordination. Conflicting interests of key actors, an unequal balance of power, and the near absence of strong civil society organisations in support of urban planning are identified as underlying causes of planning dysfunction in Tamale (Asaaga, 2023). In practice, these institutions tend to operate in silos: the Physical Planning Department prepares spatial plans with insufficient reference to the DPCU's development planning process; the Lands Commission processes transactions without consistent communication with planning authorities; and infrastructure ministries (roads, water, energy) implement projects that are not coordinated with local plans or with each other (Fuseini, 2016; Asaaga, 2023). This siloed working produces a fragmented built environment in which roads end abruptly at administrative boundaries, drainage systems are not connected across jurisdictions, and infrastructure investments duplicate or undermine each other. The ICMC represents a first institutional attempt to break these silos at the inter-assembly level, but deeper intra-agency fragmentation within each assembly remains largely unaddressed.

CUSTOMARY AUTHORITY IN THE PLANNING PROCESS

A dual land administration system in Ghana necessitates the adoption of hybrid and locally adaptive planning practices. However, hybrid planning in peri-urban areas is dominated by land-owning chiefs who essentially finance land use planning activities, leading to a negotiated planning and land delivery system (Akaateba, 2021). This engenders urban sustainability challenges including tenure insecurities, land speculation, and urban sprawl, and hinders the realisation of Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Akaateba, 2021).

WEAK DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

Urban governance in Tamale struggles to meet infrastructure demands due to rapid population growth. Stakeholder engagement in spatial planning is limited, leading to encroachment on public land uses and road reservations by traditional authorities (Fuseini, 2016). Physical development routinely proceeds without planning permission, and enforcement capacity is severely constrained by a lack of staff, vehicles, and legal backing at the assembly level.

INADEQUATE DATA AND PLANNING EVIDENCE BASE

Effective urban planning depends on reliable, up-to-date data on population dynamics, land use, infrastructure, and environmental conditions. In Greater Tamale, this evidence base is severely underdeveloped. Land use maps are yet to be digitized which can create confusion in the use of base maps and other maps. Outside of the national census (conducted every 10 years), the Assemblies lack quality disaggregated data to inform decision-making. The absence of a shared, interoperable spatial data infrastructure between TaMA and Sagnarigu further compounds this: each assembly holds fragmented records that are not systematically shared or reconciled. This data deficit undermines the quality of both DMTDPs and spatial plans and limits the capacity of planners to make evidence-based decisions or monitor planning outcomes.

RESOURCE AND CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS

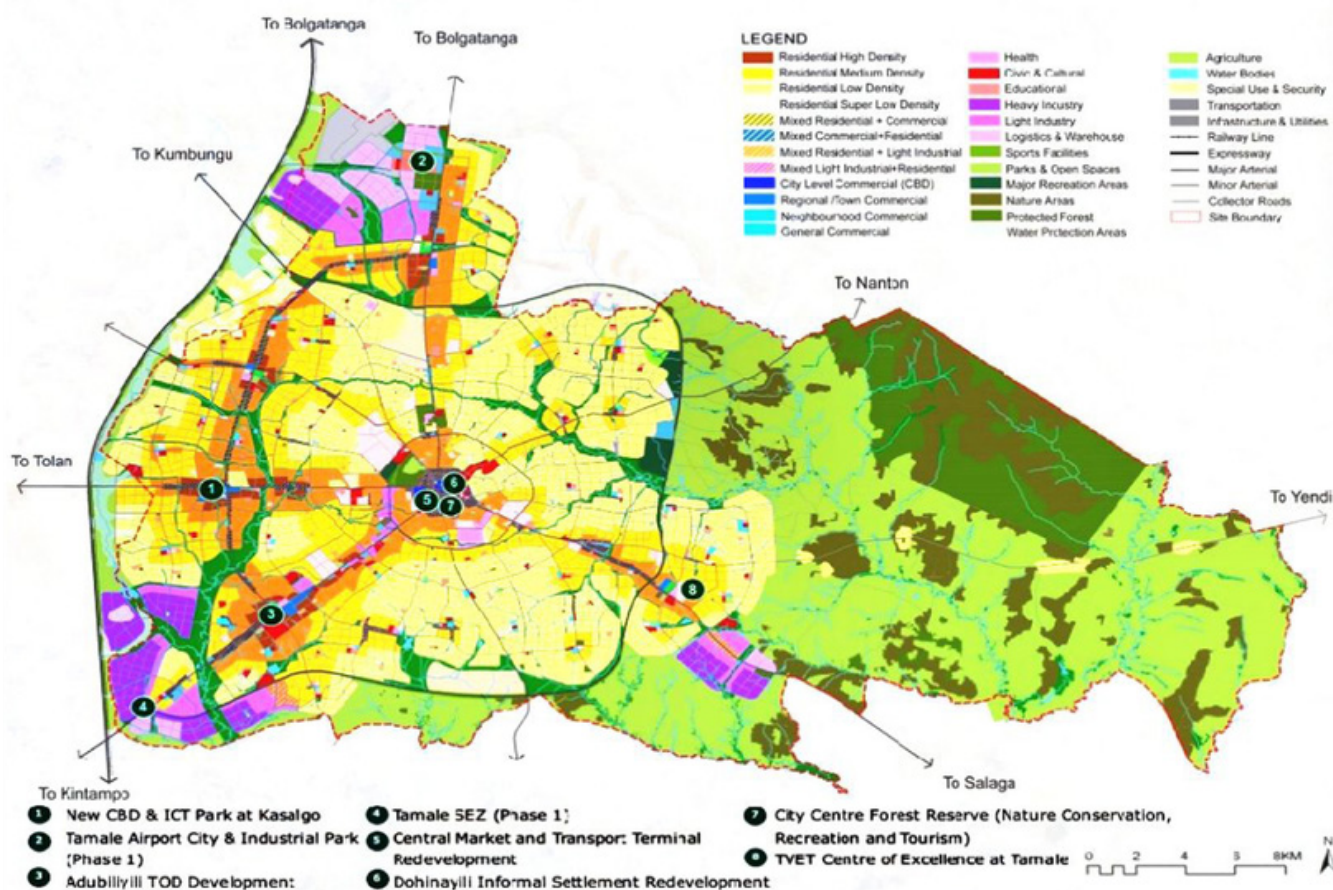
Planning departments lack stationery, transport, and qualified staff, making it structurally difficult to fulfil their statutory mandate (Akaateba, 2021). This has reinforced dependence on chief-

funded planning, which compromises regulatory independence and creates perverse incentives in the land planning process. Because direct central government funds are usually not sufficient to support the full range of planning activities, especially spatial planning, MMDAs like TaMA and Sagnarigu leverage donor-funded projects to fill this gap. Following appeals for dedicated funding for land use planning, the Minister for Local Government announced in 2025 that starting 2026, 5% of the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF) will be allocated to support crucial spatial and land-use planning at the Metropolitan, Municipal, and District Assembly (MMDA) level, aiming to tackle local urban growth, infrastructure, and environmental issues. It remains to be seen if this pledge by the Minister is currently being implemented.

INTER-JURISDICTIONAL COORDINATION GAP

Until the 2026 MoU, no strict formal mechanism required the constituent units of Greater Tamale (TaMA and Sagnarigu) to align their plans although this is expected if Districts followed the guidelines correctly. Infrastructure corridors, drainage catchments, and land markets operate across the boundary, but plans and budgets do not. The ICMC is a significant institutional step toward resolving this (and following the guidance of planning laws to create joint development boards), but it remains a new and untested coordination.

Structure Plan of Tamale Metropolis 2019-2040



Source: Physical Planning Department TaMA

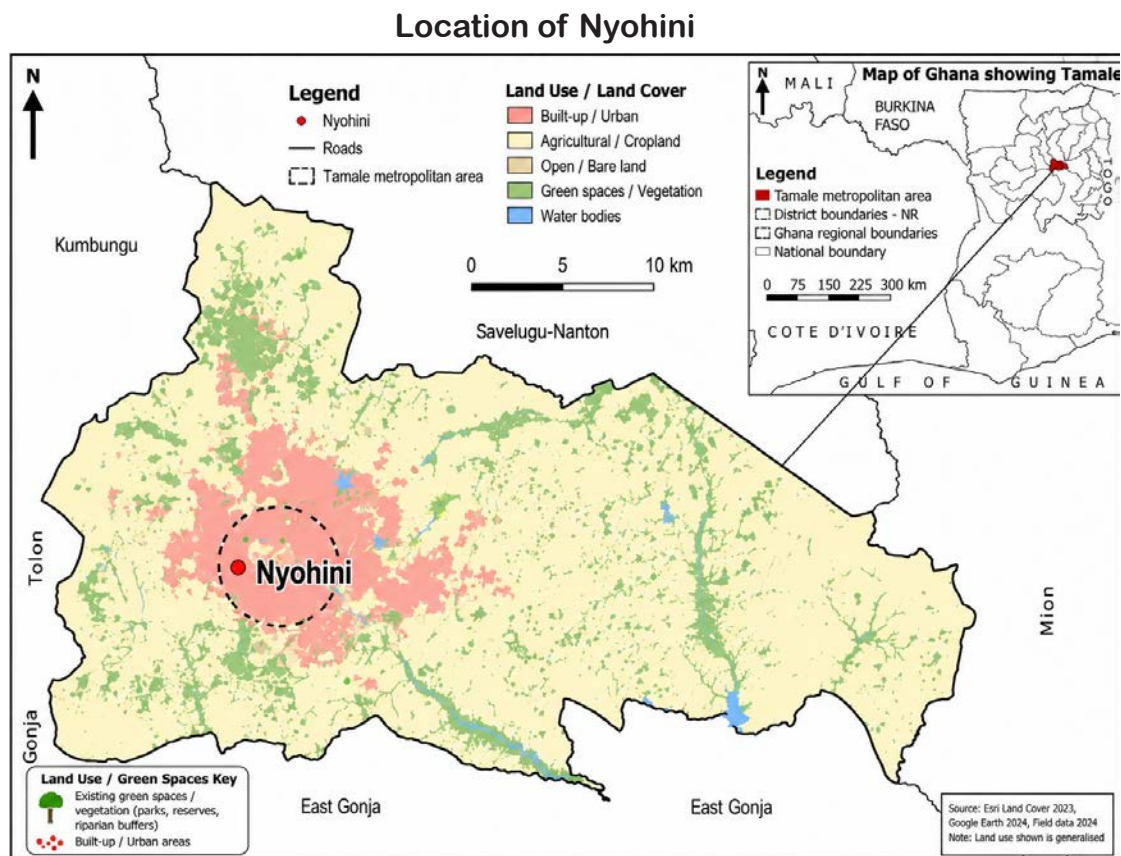
In February 2018, Surbana Jurong, a Singaporean consultancy firm produced a Structure Plan for Greater Tamale Metropolitan Area in a report title "Growing Ghana Together: A Long-Term Plan for the Economic Transformation of Northern Ghana: Tamale Greater Metropolitan Area Structure Plan Report - Vol". The map above shows a proposed structure plan with key proposals: planning districts, a network of trunk roads and arterial roads, a new city centre, regional centres and industrial zones. The Greater Tamale Metropolitan Area (GTMA) Structure Plan serves as a the key reference document for the metropolis.



FOCUS AREA:
NYOHINI

Nyohini is one of the oldest indigenous settlements within the Greater Tamale Metropolitan Area (GTMA) and occupies a strategic location on the western flank of Tamale. Historically, the community functioned as a traditional Dagomba settlement characterized by customary land tenure arrangements, dispersed compounds, and agricultural lands. Over time, rapid urbanization, population growth, and infrastructural expansion have transformed Nyohini into a densely populated urban neighborhood that reflects the broader spatial and governance challenges facing Greater Tamale.

Today, Nyohini serves as an important residential, commercial, and transportation corridor linking the central areas of Tamale to western and northwestern parts of the metropolis. The community presents a unique blend of traditional governance institutions, colonial-era infrastructure legacies, and contemporary urban development pressures.



HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE NYOHINI AIRFIELD

A significant historical landmark within Nyohini is the abandoned Nyohini Airfield, which dates back to the colonial period and the Second World War era. The airstrip was originally developed as part of the British colonial aviation network in Northern Ghana and served as an emergency landing and military logistics facility.

Following the establishment and expansion of the modern Tamale Airport, the Nyohini Airfield gradually lost its strategic importance and ceased operations. Today, remnants of the former runway and associated facilities remain visible in some sections of the community. Although no longer functional, the airfield occupies an important place in the historical landscape of Tamale and constitutes one of the few surviving colonial infrastructure relics within the metropolis. The former airfield area has increasingly become subject to urban encroachment, informal development, and competing land claims, reflecting broader challenges associated with land management and urban expansion in Greater Tamale.

Nyohini proposed focus area



Source: H. Msallak, C. Kensley, from satellite images from 2026

SETTLEMENT PATTERN AND PRECINCT LAYOUT

Unlike some of the newer residential neighborhoods developed through formal planning schemes, Nyohini largely evolved through a combination of indigenous settlement growth and incremental urban expansion.

The original Nyohini settlement exhibits characteristics of a spontaneous or organic settlement pattern typical of many indigenous Dagomba communities. Features include:

- Irregular road networks;
- Clustered compound housing arrangements;
- Narrow access routes and footpaths;
- Family-based residential clusters;
- Mixed residential and livelihood activities.

The traditional core developed gradually through customary land allocation processes under the authority of chiefs, tendambas, and family heads rather than through formal planning mechanisms.

As Tamale expanded westward, some peripheral sections of Nyohini experienced varying degrees of formal planning and layout design. These newer precincts contain:

- Wider road corridors;
- More regular plot configurations;
- Institutional land uses;
- Commercial frontage developments;
- Mixed-income residential developments.

Consequently, Nyohini today exhibits a hybrid spatial structure where organically developed traditional precincts coexist with relatively planned urban extensions.

Close-up on Nyohini proposed focus area



Source: Bing Satellite, approx. 2024

TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Nyohini remains deeply embedded within the customary governance framework of the Dagbon Kingdom. The Nyohini Chief serves as the principal traditional authority responsible for community leadership, customary land administration, conflict mediation, and representation within the wider Dagbon traditional hierarchy under the Ya-Na (the Overlord of Dagbon kingdom).

The Tendamba (earth priests and original land custodians) continue to exercise significant influence over customary land matters. Their authority is particularly important in:

- Boundary disputes;
- Land ownership claims;
- Traditional land allocation;
- Performance of customary rites associated with land.

Family heads and elders regulate inheritance matters, resolve domestic disputes, and preserve customary norms and values. Their role remains critical in maintaining social cohesion amidst rapid urban transformation.

WASTE MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS

Waste management constitutes one of the major urban environmental challenges confronting Nyohini. Like many rapidly urbanizing communities in Tamale, Nyohini experiences challenges relating to: Inadequate waste collection coverage; Illegal dumping of refuse; Disposal of waste in open spaces and drains; Accumulation of plastic waste, etc.

Several undeveloped plots and open spaces have become informal dumping grounds, particularly in areas where municipal waste collection services are limited or irregular.



SIC Lands Turned to Waste site



Zoomlion's container in Nyohini

Poor drainage infrastructure in some parts of the community contributes to: Localized flooding during the rainy season; Blockage of drains by solid waste; Soil erosion and environmental degradation.

The decline of open spaces and the increasing conversion of vacant lands into residential uses have reduced opportunities for natural waste absorption, stormwater infiltration, and urban cooling. Consequently, environmental quality has deteriorated in some precincts of the community.



Nyohini Dam



Artesian Water Well built by Islamic Relief USA



Waste site close to the Children's Home

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPEN SPACES

Green infrastructure and open spaces are vital components of Nyohini's environmental sustainability, urban resilience, and quality of life. They provide ecological, social, and economic benefits, including climate regulation, biodiversity conservation, recreation, food production, and flood mitigation. Key green assets within the community include remnant vegetation, institutional green spaces, open lands around the former airstrip, areas surrounding the Nyohini Dam, and urban agricultural spaces.

Urban tree cover plays an important role in reducing heat, improving air quality, and enhancing neighbourhood aesthetics. However, increasing urbanization has led to the gradual loss of vegetation as land is converted for residential, commercial, and infrastructure development. Community parks and recreational spaces, though limited, remain important for social interaction, youth activities, and community well-being. Institutional lands such as schools, religious facilities, and public institutions also contribute significantly to local green infrastructure.

Ecological corridors, including drainage channels, wetlands, roadside vegetation, and open spaces, help maintain environmental connectivity and support ecosystem services. Urban agriculture further contributes to livelihoods, food security, and environmental sustainability while preserving vegetative cover within the urban landscape.

Despite these benefits, Nyohini faces growing challenges of green space decline due to rapid urban expansion, land speculation, infrastructure development, and weak enforcement of planning regulations. Encroachment on open spaces, particularly around the dam, airstrip, and drainage corridors, threatens ecological functions and reduces opportunities for recreation and environmental protection.

Nevertheless, significant opportunities exist for restoring and enhancing green infrastructure. Strategic interventions could include the development of a greenbelt around the Nyohini Dam, ecological restoration of the former airstrip, roadside tree planting, community parks, urban gardens, and integrated blue-green infrastructure networks. Such initiatives can strengthen climate resilience, improve environmental quality, and support sustainable urban development. For the Tamale international workshop, green infrastructure should be viewed as a strategic asset capable of linking environmental conservation, public space development, urban resilience, and community well-being within Nyohini's future growth trajectory.



Nyohini Astro Turf



Encroachment on SIC Lands



Road by Nyohini Astro Turf



Nyohini children's home



Nyohini Children's home



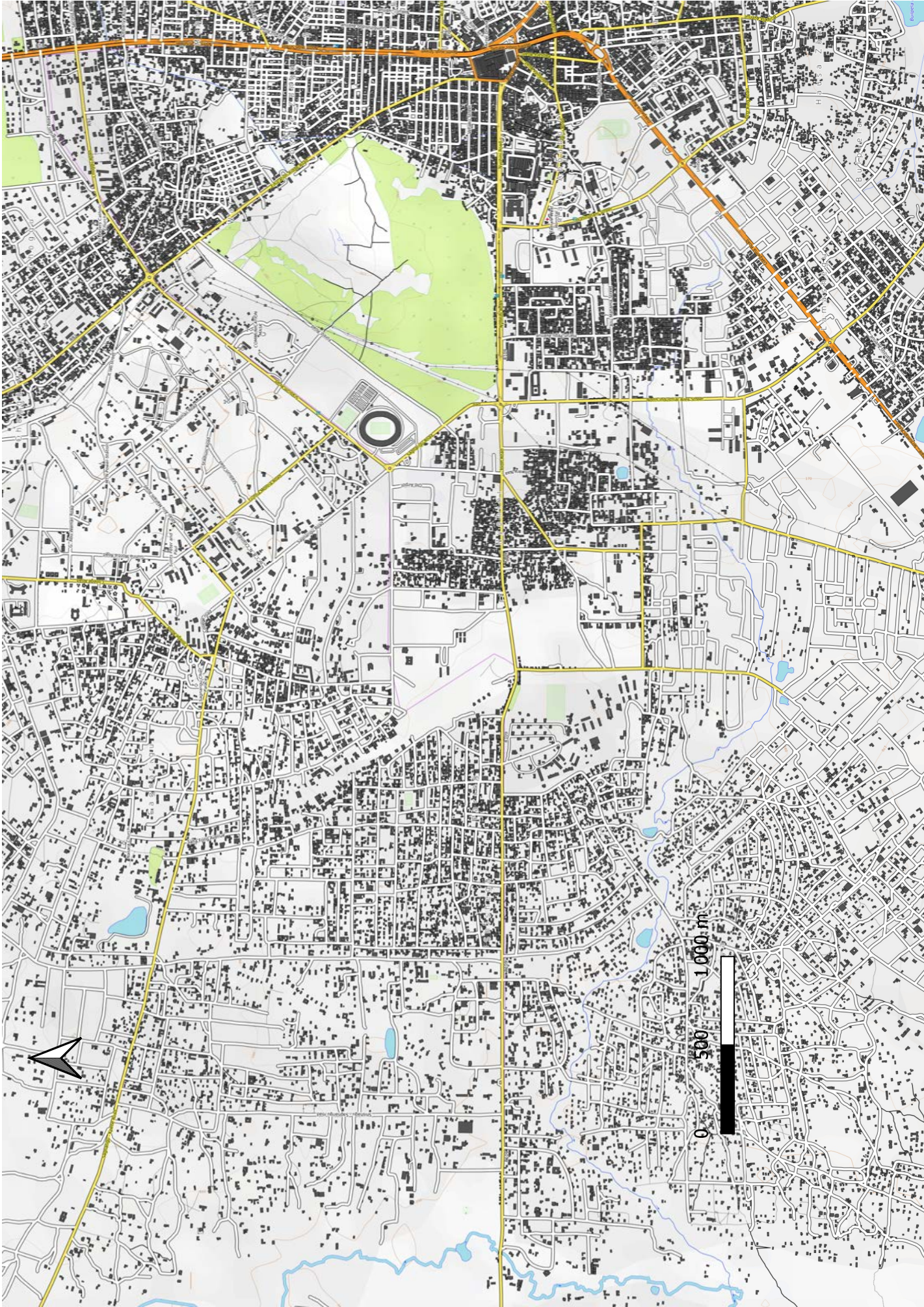
Public restrooms in Nyohini



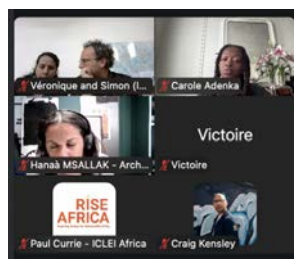
Avenue Trees on the Nyohini road



Exchange in Nyohini Community on waste challenges



OVERVIEW OF THE ONLINE PREPARATORY ROUNDTABLE



Thursday 11 June 2026 - Zoom meeting

Speakers:

Hanaà Msallak, architect and urban designer, workshop pilot

Craig Kensley, social investment specialist, workshop pilot

Paul Currie, Associate Director of the Urban Systems Unit at ICLEI Africa

Prof. Owusu Amponsah, Associate Professor in Urban Planning at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Sustainable Cities Project Component 2 Lead.

This roundtable explored two closely related questions for Greater Tamale: how to analyse and anticipate its multi-scaled urban metabolism, and how to organise its skills ecosystem, so that the city can concretely realise its ambitions.

It examined how water, waste and sanitation can be structured at a regional scale in a sustainable manner, while remaining grounded in Tamale's informal realities. It also interrogated how the city's skills ecosystem, encompassing customary and indigenous knowledge, informal and semi-formal workers, as well as professionals trained in Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions and universities, can be aligned and strengthened to build and sustain the city we are planning for.

Together, these perspectives aimed to shift the conversation from abstract planning towards the concrete systems and capabilities required to deliver a sustainable Greater Tamale, and beyond.

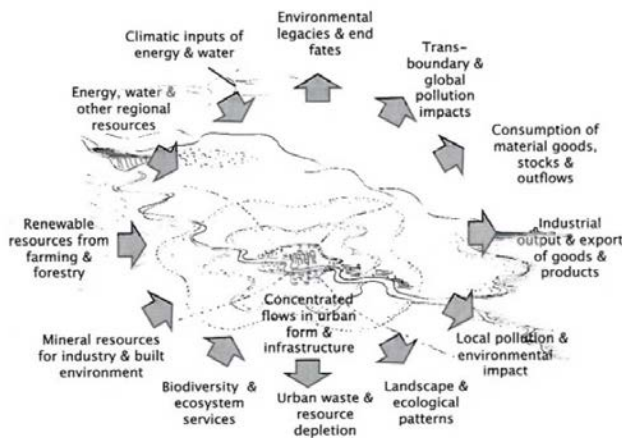
URBAN METABOLISM AS A PLANNING LENS

Paul Currie – ICLEI Africa

Opening food for thought: 300,000 motorcycle taxis move people daily across Dar es Salaam (Tanzania) yet appear in no official plan. What are Tamale's equivalent invisible flows? Urban metabolism – the flows of water, food, energy, materials and waste sustaining a city does offer a lens centred on what cities need to function rather than on administrative categories. Applied to Tamale: piped water meets ~39% of demand; electricity distribution losses reach ~70%; firewood and charcoal go unaccounted. These gaps reflect a planning culture driven by political intuition rather than systematic observation.

Key insight from ICLEI's Hidden Flows project: in African cities, people are infrastructure – physically carrying water, food and waste daily. This social metabolism sustains urban life but burdens women disproportionately. Viewing metabolism as a «boundary object» means it is neutral enough for chiefs, assemblies and residents to engage around without first resolving disputes over authority. The most useful planning output may be not a spatial plan but a coordination framework built on shared metabolic commitments.

A LENS URBAN METABOLISM



Extract from Paul Currie's presentation



Extract from Owusu Amponsah's presentation

INFORMALITY AS AN ECOSYSTEM: TENSIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Prof. Owusu Amponsah – KNUST

Informality is the structural norm to be mediated: 81%+ of labour is informal; 80%+ of land under customary tenure; 85%+ of housing self-built. The tricycle taxis, known as Yello Yellow in Tamale, dominate intra-city mobility yet barely feature in transport policy. Informal actors are not marginal – they are the urban economy.

Three structural tensions:

- **Dual authority:** chiefs' allocation notes precede and routinely override formal planning decisions; surveyors bypass assemblies entirely.
- **Environmental pressure:** 77% of farmland lost 1996–2023; urban heat island temperatures exceeding 39°C; drainage chronically choked, intensifying flooding.
- **Revenue deficits:** informal economy lies outside the formal tax base, leaving assemblies under-resourced to address the challenges informal growth creates.

Opportunities exist: agri-business base (shea, rice, livestock); resident willingness to invest incrementally in self-build; mobile finance as a formalisation pathway; growing creative economy.

THEMES FOR THE WORKSHOP TO CARRY FORWARD

- **Formal-informal articulation.** Not rejection of one system for the other, but creative institutional bridging between traditional authority, civic knowledge, and formal planning framework. Truly finding mechanisms for alignment around shared metabolic goals beyond acknowledging the need to bridge the two realities.
- **Invisible flows.** Water, waste, mobility, energy and labour that sustain the city yet are absent from or insufficiently captured in planning data. Metabolism must be read through people as much as through infrastructure.
- **Boundary-crossing coordination.** The TaMA/Sagnarigu jurisdictional fragmentation calls for a shared metabolic frame as a neutral entry point for coordination – one that transcends administrative boundaries before underlying disputes over authority are resolved. Opportunities exist for this in the form of existing planning guidance for joint planning and territorial strategies.
- **Planning culture shift.** Away from static document production and towards the nurturing of continuous, inclusive, and evidence-sensitive processes of urban reflection. Imagination itself as infrastructure.



INTERVIEW #1

**FUSEINI MUSAH,
SPEAKER FOR THE SAGNERIGU YOUTH PARLIAMENT**

"We are the backbone of tomorrow and we should be acknowledged for that"

YOUTH AND EMPLOYEMENT

What do you think are the biggest challenges facing young people in Greater Tamale today?

The biggest challenge facing the young people of Greater Tamale is unemployment, and this particular issue, from my own personal observation stems from them not being able to offer value to the marketplace, you know, limited skills. (...) They don't have the required skills needed for the marketplace. And due to that, there's a high rate of unemployment in our communities.

How does unemployment affect youth participation in community development?

For instance, if there is a certain activity in the community that we need to partake in, to develop our community, it will be very hard for me as a youth to involve myself fully, wholeheartedly, if I'm operating from a place of lack. If I'm not employed, I don't have a source of income to take out of my basic needs. I will not be willing to wholeheartedly participate in any activity that is going to contribute to community development because when I get into the activity, I'll be having the mindset of the community compensating me for doing anything that will enhance our standard of living.

Which sectors offer the greatest opportunity for youth employment?

So I would say 2 sectors, I would choose: the agricultural sector and then logistics, like movements, day in day, people are moving into the communities and then move out.

GOVERNANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Do you feel young people are represented in municipal planning and governance?

From a personal point, I would say they do not consult the young people because if you look at Greater Tamale, majority of the population here is illiterate. So, though we have assembly members representing us at the municipal level, after taking their decisions, there should be something like a community forum where assembly members can share the decisions taken during their assembly's meetings to the youth. (...) I don't feel like we are represented well at the decision making tables.

What mechanisms exist for youth engagement and decision making?

The assembly and municipal involve us in some of their activities but not the major ones. And I will not put the blame so much on the assembly or our community leaders for not involving the youth so much because like I said earlier, there's a skill mismatch in the marketplace. So if I'm going to involve you in decision making, and then maybe during previous engagements, you've proven not to have the required skill set needed to take effective decisions, then there wouldn't be the need to involve you in key matters.

URBAN SERVICES

When it comes to urban services. What service delivery challenges affect young people most? Is it healthcare? Is it education? Is it transport or anything?

We have to change in tune with the times. The kind of formal education that we use today does not match the times that we

live in. So you might see someone highly educated in the traditional sense but when it comes to the real world, the person has no value. So, and if I don't have value to offer to their marketplace, how do I contribute to urban development? I don't, because the contribution that I'll be given would be things that are obsolete, like you'll be thinking anti-clockwise, you have nothing of value to contribute, and you need the right knowledge to have a positive influence.

INNOVATION AND DEVELOPEMENT

If these are challenges that we face, are there any innovative solutions that we young people can contribute to urban challenges?

Yes, there are so many innovative solutions. Kodu technology, they are using banana waste to produce biodegradable sanitary pads. These are innovative solutions. They are bringing onboard to reduce wastage of bananas and plantain stem. There are other startups using plastic waste to also come up with innovative solutions in our communities, and there's one Tomavi Wine, they are using tomato waste to produce wine. And these are people that need funding to take up their startups to their next level. But nothing of that sort is being provided, so because of that, we don't even hear of such solutions in our communities.

How can technology improve governance and service delivery?

Today, we are transitioning into AI revolution. So if we as young people, try to tap into this particular technology, it will help in making us more valuable to our economies. We want our nation to be one of high economic power, and then we have to adopt technology as early as possible, because otherwise we'll be lacking behind.

FUTURE VISION

What kind of city do you young people want Greater Tamale to become?

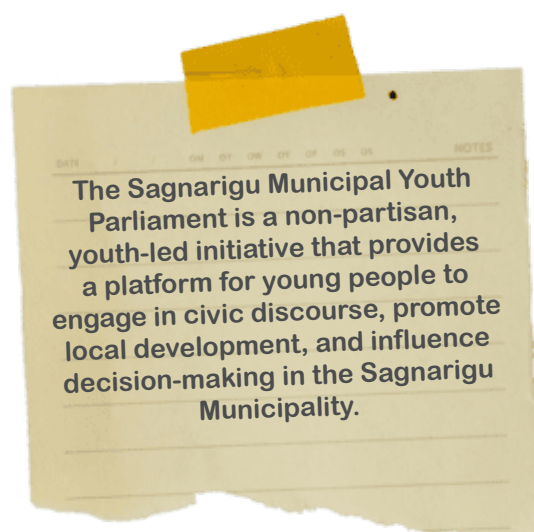
I want Greater Tamale to become an economic city: a city that is filled with a lot of opportunities in all sectors of the economy, so there won't be the need for people from Tamale to go abroad searching for jobs, or to go abroad seeking their highest quality education, or seeking medical attention.

What kind of investment should be prioritized for youth development?

Developing our minds and towards entrepreneurship. Developing more entrepreneurs in our communities. Because entrepreneurs are those who change the world.

So what do you say about investing into those agribusiness and eco-friendly status?

When you look at some of us, the young people, we are from less privileged homes. So you don't have someone in your community or from your family who has done something remarkable before. So in your own thoughts, when an idea strikes you, even if you try, even if you believe it and you try to share to people around you, they will see you to be crazy to do something that is impossible. So if we prioritize those who are already doing something, who have started something already, these agribusinesses, the eco-friendly businesses who focus on making their businesses successful, it could be an inspiration to scale up, to see that, okay "someone from my community or from Greater Tamale has been able to come up with an idea that solves a societal problem, waste problem, or solving a certain problem in our community, and the business has become successful and the person is just like me, coming from similar background like me". So if he or she can do it, I too can do it, that will be an inspiration to those coming up.





INTERVIEW #2

**MAHAMA IDDRISU,
LAMASHEGU NAA (CHIEF)**

"Being the ruler or a land owner, doesn't guarantee that you could do certain things without consulting."

LAND AND GOVERNANCE

How has urban growth changed the way land is allocated and managed within your traditional area?

Urban growth and development has been a challenge due to overpopulation. Besides that, they believe doing business is more convenient in the urban areas than the outskirts. So you find many people wanting to use every space available for their business, for their shops or offices. In short, it creates a lot of inconvenience. There's that congestion, that rush for every piece of land within the urban area, especially that of Lamashegu.

What challenges do chiefs face in balancing development needs with preserving land for future generations?

As we speak now, I don't think there's any space available for us in Lamashegu to think of any development, regarding health or even educational facility. There is no land, as we speak, within the Lamashegu jurisdiction apart from the old one. Land has become a scarce thing within the urban area, within my jurisdiction. So when you arrange or you want to talk of development, you can't even tell the people that you want to move them and put something new over there. So you have that challenge with the people. The understanding is not there because they are already congested and to move them out is also a problem.

What are the major causes of land disputes in your area?

Multiple sales of land is one. You sell land to one person, and then maybe due to delay, in developing that, another person goes to sell

that land. I have those cases here. How can a chief, give out letters to 2 or more people for one piece of land? Some of these issues sometimes emanates from the chiefs. People take advantage of the illiterates, the very old ones. It is the young ones who are with the chief, who do these kind of allocations, they take money and deceive the chief to thumb print without even knowing that it is the same land. Ignorance has been part of this kind of land conflicts but we are working towards resolving some of this issue.

How can customary land administration be strengthened to support sustainable urban growth?

The need to collaborate well with the land owners I.e the chiefs, Customary lands, and others. And chiefs may also be conscientized, educated. Being the ruler or a land owner, doesn't guarantee that you could do certain things without consulting. As a chief, there is a need to collaborate with the physical planning officer of the assembly, because when you sell the land, the people go to the physical planning, to incorporate that into the planning of the metropolis. You are not the only one working on land.

URBAN EXPANSION

Which communities have experienced the fastest expansion in recent years?

I have not toured around, but as Tamale being the fastest growing city in West Africa, the leftover areas that were seen to be having some few developments like the Zujung area and the Accra-Kumasi highway within the Tamale metropolis are all congested now. There's no idle land and so you find people

putting up, factories, warehouses, and houses. I can say they are all enjoying the fast development of the area. I am still touring. I've not finished my tour yet.

What impacts has urbanization had on farmland, forest, wetlands, and sacred places?

Overpopulation due to the sale of lands for building and setting up factories. It also forces the people practicing subsistence farming to move in the city. Today, one can travel over 20-30 kilometers, and you will not even get people working on farms because these lands have been used for either residential or non residential purposes. It is highly difficult to spot the kind of lands you mentioned within Greater Tamale. If you take a tour from Tamale to Nanton, Tampium, etc.: You can't find a free land. All the free lands are mounted with pillars which could have been perfect agricultural lands.

GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATION

How effective is the collaboration between chiefs, assemblies, land commission, and their planning authorities?

Many of our chiefs don't even know that they have to collaborate with the government that is the land commission. The illiterates will say "Tayihisi mbala", meaning they are thieves. But you can't do without them. Those of us who are blessed to have touched education still see the need to collaborate and get a proper understanding to be able to give protection.

What roles should the traditional leaders play in the future governance of Greater Tamale?

There must be some kind of collaboration. Those stakeholders must engage them. If you want us to do this, we can do that. But if you allow the chief to sit in their homes, because of pressure, they can do anything. So if you don't have source of income, you are forced to go into every little, small space of land within your jurisdiction to sustain your livelihood.

When you look at many other cities in Southern Ghana and Accra, chiefs lease lands.

Wouldn't it have been advisable that our chiefs, lease lands, instead of selling, so that chiefs can also benefit from the land?

Northerners didn't even know that leasing of land exist. It is only the Paramount chiefs such as the Yaa Naa that knows about that. It's now

that within the local tradition are picking up into it. For instance, lands within my jurisdiction I'm putting a search on whether lands are leased to owners or not. If they have not been leased, we will lease them. Even if they were taken for 100 years, we would take it back and lease it to them.

VISIONING TAMALE IN 20 YEARS

How would you vision Tamale in the next 20 years ?

Tamale cannot move on well if we don't collaborate because the understanding is not there. Already the place is congested. We need to collaborate very well.

I'm giving you a typical example: Buffer-stock operates within my jurisdiction. That's where they store food but the place has been an old structure. World Food Program decided that, if you want to reduce hunger, we must equip the buffer-stock by giving them a very big warehouse, so that they can store enough. But, the entire area has been encroached by sellers, mosque, shops etc. Now, Bufferstock wants to demolish the entire area. So I had to engage the media. The people were proven difficult. I did every explanation, I went there, I engaged with the people but they were still forcing to stay. I told them that with all this engagement, my last resource is force. Whether they like it or not, they will have to move. They are now demolishing the place. If there was fresh land, they would have gone to do it there but there is no fresh land. If they had not collaborated with me, it wouldn't have been possible for them.

What's the biggest concern if urban growth rate continues at its current pace?

Disaster: That is the sanitation problem that we are facing, the filth and the indiscipline. Congestion brings indiscipline, the indiscipline conflict, rough sanitation and we don't even come out to do cleanup exercises.

Building inspectors, if you come and you see a rough building or unauthorized building and mark it, go and demolish it. You don't mark and don't go back and take some 100 or 1000GHS and come back and say "Nyini ngunna ku fo ma tin naa gi taba" meaning keep shut we will settle each other. These are the issues not only in Tamale, even in Accra.



INTERVIEW #3

**ABUBAKAR ADAM,
SECRETARY TO SAGNARIGU NAA**

“Tamale lies at a strategic location calling for participation and collaboration”

LAND AND GOVERNANCE

How has urban growth changed the way land is allocated and managed within your traditional area?

If you don't put infrastructure, it won't attract people. Electricity, water, good roads are three key factors to attract people to come and build there home. No one will buy in an area where you don't have any, unless you want to farm. Land management goes with infrastructure.

What challenges do chiefs face in balancing development needs with preserving land for future generations?

When you carve out an area to make layouts for residential purposes, normally, you don't just give out all the plots or the land which you have in your possession. You reserve some for future and you even reserve some key infrastructures like markets, education plots, sanitation areas, open places for playground. Also, the growth of the population plays a role in land reservation. If the population growth is low, there won't be a rush for land. But if there is high population, the demand for land is very high.

How do traditional authorities work with planning authorities when allocating lands?

Before you demarcate or make a layout, you have to lay out with Land Use and Spatial Planning Authority (LUSPA). It is key to collaborate with these institutions as well as the District Assembly physical planners. In Sagnarigu, there is an effective collaboration between the traditional authorities and the planning authorities.

What are the major causes of land disputes in your area?

In Northern region, Sagnarigu is the place with the least dispute, because our land administration is very effective. Before you buy a land, you have to make sure you come with your National Identification Card to be registered. This makes you eligible to be given an allocation letter. You shall file a copy to indicate that you have purchased a land from the Sagnarigu authority. So, the way we plan our land management, land dispute is very minimum.

How can customary land administration be strengthened to support sustainable urban growth?

Us, customary land administration, we are ready to do the right thing. We work hand in hand with government agencies like survey department and LUSPA. They plan for urban plan to go effectively.

URBAN EXPANSION

Which communities have experienced the fastest expansion in recent years?

In our observation, places where there are the right infrastructures, water flowing 24/7, frequent supply of electricity and good roads, those areas grow bigger and people rush for those places to build. Communities within Sagnarigu are growing at a rate that it is very difficult to pinpoint.

What impacts has urbanization had on familyland, forest, wetlands, and sacred places?

We have urban agriculture but population keeps growing at a higher rate, we are likely

to break some of these farmlands and forests for settlement and industrial set up. There is a community in Sagnarigu called “Shihu” where we have preserved lands purposely for urban irrigational farming but the people are encroaching the land. Due to the high rise in population growth, preservation of these lands has become a difficulty for the Sagnarigu municipality.

Are there areas that you think must be protected for future development?

We reserve some areas for future development and it is protected till date. Few months ago, an NGO called the Zango Development Fund brought a proposal on the building of a model Senior High Schools in Ghana. They wanted to build in 3 cities; in the North (Tamale), middle belt (Kumasi) and the coastal belt (Accra/Cape Town) and needed about 30 to 35 acres of land from the traditional authorities. But none of these could provide the said land except Sagnarigu that could provide 33 acres and today the project is under construction because Sagnarigu protects and preserves land.

GOVERNANCE AND COLLABORATION

How effective is the collaboration between chiefs, assemblies, land commission, and their planning authorities?

The collaboration between us is very smooth. Depending on how the traditional ruler wants his traditional area to develop. When you are ready to cooperate with them, administration on land will be good in your area. In some areas they don’t collaborate, communication is very poor. So here in Sagnarigu, we don’t have that problem: our collaboration with government agencies, is very smooth.

What roles should the traditional leaders play in the future governance of Greater Tamale?

When the chiefs are ready to collaborate with the government, there will be development. Because taxes are paid to the central government which are normally used to carry out developmental project. If traditional rulers won’t collaborate, there can’t be development. Here in Sagnarigu, we are

ready to collaborate on any development aspects.

VISIONING TAMALE IN 20 YEARS

What are the biggest concern if the urban growth rate should continue at its pace?

As you said, Tamale is fastest growing city in West Africa. Growth comes with so many problems. Where there is a fastest urban growth, job opportunities should come for the youth. Every growth comes with its disadvantages and advantages, if this rate should continue or increase, Tamale will play on both sides of the coin with a greater disadvantage looking at the attitudes of the natives. All forms of vices will be on a rise, demand for lands for proper settlement and if possible, slums which trigger disease outbreak. The demand for proper waste management and water cannot be overlooked. In short, if the development rate cannot be shouldered by the government, there will be disaster.

How would you vision Tamale in the next 20 years ?

The way Tamale is growing fast, in the next 20 years, I envision a city with a growth rate comparable to Accra and Kumasi. Tamale grew from a municipal into a metropolitan. If we plan it well, there won’t be as much traffic as in Accra. In 20 years time, Tamale will be a big city. Tamale lies within the center of the five northern regions and also closer to the Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali) and they can participate in that growth. Tamale lies at a strategic location.

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