

GROWTH IN STUDENTS' HALL OF RESIDENCE AND SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS: INSIGHTS FROM THE BAMBILI-BAMBUI UNIVERSITY CATCHMENT OF THE NORTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON

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<https://doi.org/10.37602/IJSSMR.2026.9216>

ABSTRACT

The growth in students' hall of residence have become a global issue in University Cities today resulting to overcrowding, given the rapid influx of students into the university milieu to seek for accommodation. The situation is more glaring in third world cities as they lack the necessary resources to provide on-campus accommodation for students. The overwhelming student enrollment supplants the available students' halls of residence, triggering increase housing demands in the private rented market with associated socio-environmental implications. Previous studies on student housing have focused mostly on their facilities neglecting its growth. The focus of this study is to examine the trends and socio-environmental implications in the growth of Student' halls residence. The study made use of a descriptive research design. The purposive, cluster and snowball techniques were used to collect data from these halls of residence in the catchment area. Primary data was obtained with the use of Questionnaire, field observation, interviews, focused group discussions as well as the use of satellite images. The SPSS version 20 and Micro soft Excel 2016 were used to analyze the qualitative and quantitative data. Analysis of the trends in the halls of residence showed that there has been an increase in their construction from 2000-2024 at the detriment of family housing representing over 500% growth rate. Environmental decay, uncontrolled urban sprawl, cultural conflicts (local resident & students), high rental rates and social segregations were some of the problems expressed by students/families living in association within their neighborhoods. The study thus recommends that proper environmental management, security, and planning measures implemented to mitigate these problems.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Universities and other higher education institutions are generally considered as valuable contributors to the economy worldwide and have been linked to both national development and human wellbeing. University milieu is currently one of the fastest growing sectors globally, with a growth rate of 160% since 1990 (Sharma, 2012 in Naomi, 2017). The expansion of higher education system in many states had marked seasonal movements of young people often migrating from sub-national and sub-regional institutions to other places or regions to attend other universities of interest and in doing so, reconfiguring local neighbourhoods into studentified areas (He, 2014). The process of studentification imply urban changes which are tied with commodification of single families or the repackaging of existing private rented housing by small scale actors such as private owners, developers and investors to produce and

supply houses in multiple occupations. In tertiary institutions worldwide, the provision of accommodation to the student population takes different models. This includes; non-residential, where students source for their own accommodation. Residential, where the university houses all its students and dual-residential, where the university houses its student population for a period of time only; probably the first and final year, while the students during the remaining period source for their own accommodations (Olabisi, 2011). Cities contain concentration of students, which leads to student enclaves (Allison, 2006). These enclaves or clusters of students create communities that are spatially and temporally linked to the academic calendar and campus lifestyle and that are usually in close proximity to the campus (Munro et al; 2009). Over the past decades, the student housing markets have emerged as the main stream investment category in the world attracting significant interest from investors, developers and private operations. The US stands out as the most matured student housing market followed by UK in which the student housing has undergone a hasty growth during the last two decades giving room for more students housing to be provided off campus (Savills, 2014)

The growth of students' halls of residence has received very little attention in the developing world with expectations of studies in China and growing research interest in South Africa (Donaldson et al., 2014). Developing countries for the past decades have witnessed an upsurge in the rate of higher education to meet up with sustainable development goals. A very strong impetus has since 1999 been given to tertiary education in most developing countries as it has been viewed as a vital tool of bolstering primary and secondary education, promoting economic growth and development as well as poverty reduction (World Bank, 2000). Some African countries have begun responding to the shift from primary and secondary education to tertiary education through their Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and commitments to higher education (Bloom et, al; 2006). Most communities in Africa that are home to university cities report incidence of studentification of near campus neighbourhoods. In South Africa for instance three quarters of residents living around students are reported to be in conflict with students mainly from noise, public drunkenness, house parties and parking infringement (Naomi, 2017).

The creation of a state University Bambili 10km from the regional capital of Bamenda in 2010 as well as other private universities like Oxford created in 2012 have led to an increase in student population in Bambili (Fogwe et al 2018). This increase led to a soaring demand for housing which further induced a drastic increase in the construction of student residential dwellings for simple rooms, self-contained rooms as well as apartments. According to Kemengsi et al, (2015), between 1960 and 2014 more than 50% increase in house rents was recorded in Kumba town South West Region of Cameroon orchestrated by increase in population of the town resulting from the creation of the Higher Technical Teacher Training College (HTTTC).

2.0 THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

This study is guided by the model of neighborhood change (Grigsby et al., 1987) and the system theory by Feldt (1986). According to Grigsby, neighbourhood change starts with changes in social and/or economic variables, such as the number of households or the relative cost of housing. These macro-factors cause households, who act directly or indirectly through a system of housing suppliers and market intermediaries to make different maintenance and moving

decisions, which alters the characteristics of dwellings as well as neighbourhoods which is influenced by exogenous and endogenous factors. Apparently, Grigsby and colleagues consider powers behind neighbourhood change to be impersonal; exogenous factors, such as demographic/economic changes, and governmental interventions which are all believed to be of influence on the situation within a neighbourhood. Furthermore, they see obsolescence of dwellings, the site or the location as an influencing factor. The construction of students' halls of residence in the university catchment area is an indicator of its neighborhood change. The physical environment is changing as the students turn out not to pay attention to the maintenance of physical properties and other uncivil practices which degrade the environment.

According to Feldt (1986), a system is defined as a dynamic network of interconnecting elements where a change in only one represent a change in all. When subsystems are arranged in a series, the output of one is the input for another, therefore, process alterations in one requires alterations in other subsystems. The communities neighboring the higher education institutions in Bambui-Bambili represents a system with interacting elements including the local community and off campus students. The qualities and activities of off campus students by way of age, lifestyle, and behavior have the capability of altering the community's way of life. The output of off-campus students' activities is an input for the local community hence leading to variations in the way of life. As such, it is possible to conclude that off-campus students' activities have the potential to directly affect the community's way of life and therefore the livelihood outcomes either positively or negatively.

3.0 STUDY AREA AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 The Study Area

Bambui- Bambili is located in Mezam Division some 10km from the North West regional capital of Bamenda and lies on the highland range of the Bamenda plateau with a population of about 68,173 inhabitants. Bambui and Bambili are flanked by Babanki Tungo extending to the North-East, Awing to the East, Mendankwe to the South-East and Nkwen to the South. Banja, a small settlement in the southeast shares its boundary with both Bambili and Mendankwe. The study area falls between latitude 5°40" and 6°40" north and longitude 10°4"0" and 10°12"0" east (Figure 1).

3.2 Research Methods

The research made use of the descriptive survey and historical research design. Self-reported opinions, and characteristics of past and present state of the students' halls of residence in the university catchment area were obtained through surveys. The design necessitated the use of primary and secondary data tools. Primary data (questionnaire administration, field observation, interviews, focused group discussions and the use of photographs and satellite maps) were collected. The purposive random sampling technique was employed to target respondents with valuable information.???. The study identified three clusters being areas of dense (A), moderate (B), and low student populations. (C) A total of 165 questionnaires were administered in the clusters using the snowball technique. This permitted the acquisition of information on the implications of the growth in students' housing on the environment.

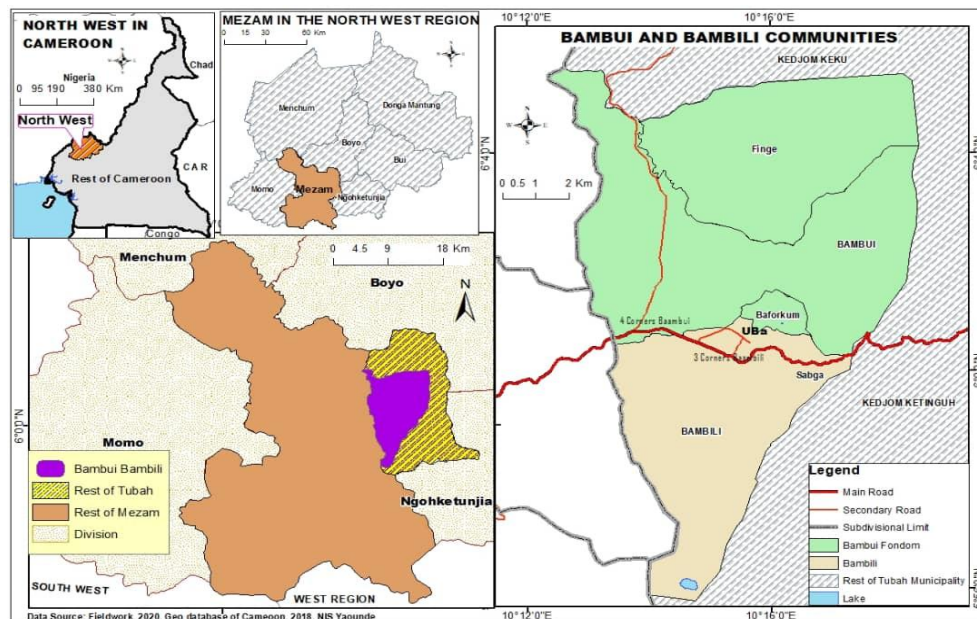


Figure 1: Location of the Bambui-Bambili university catchment area in Mezam Division of the Northwest Region of Cameroon

This was complemented with secondary data obtained from published and unpublished journals and the internet. The University of Bamenda, Tubah Rural Council, the president of Bambili landlords association as well as the Divisional officer of Tubah Sub Division provided data & documentation that were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Trends in the Growth of Students’ Halls of Residence

4.1.1 State of Growth in Students’ Halls of Residence between 2000 & 2024

By the year 2000, many development activities were taking place in the Bambui-Bambili area which intensified the change in housing construction. The existence of The Higher Teacher Training Colleges (HTTC & HTTTC), Cameroon College of Arts and Technology (CCAST), Technical School of Agriculture Bambili and the creation of National Polytechnic Bambui in 1996 were remarkable developments in this area in the educational sector. This period set in 10years before the creation of the University of Bamenda in Bambili, a period where Bambui-Bambili accommodated higher institutions of learning. The presence of these educational institutions created the need for the provision of students’ halls of residence in the vicinity. There was the conversion of agricultural land for the construction of students’ halls of residence as the area was dominated by agricultural activities. Family residences were Dominant (table 1). Some of the family structures were converted into student housing as shown on figure 2

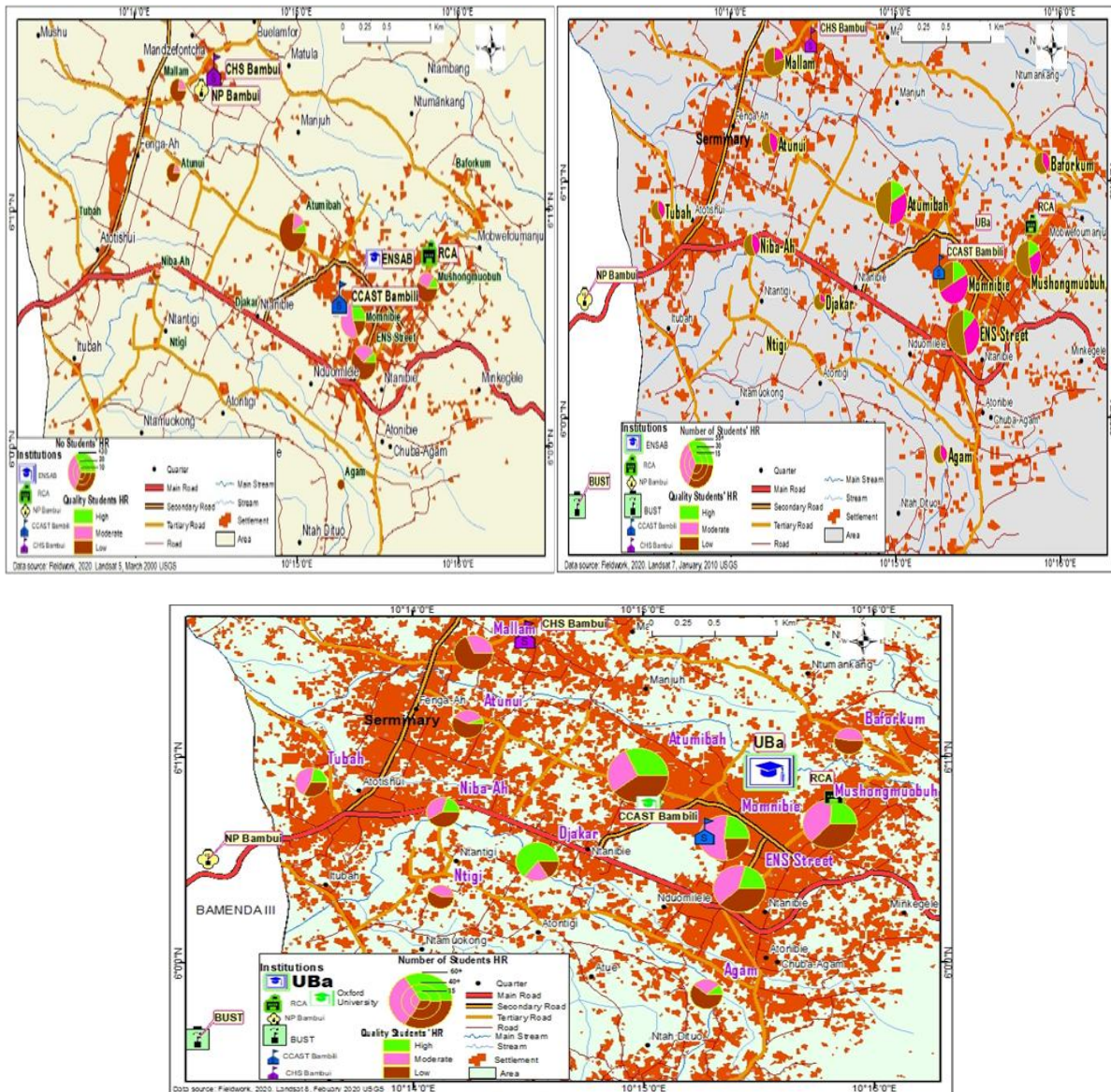


Figure 2: Spatial Nature of Student Housing Development between 2000 & 2024

The period 2010 coincides with the creation of The University of Bamenda by a presidential decree No. 2010/371 of 14th December 2010. Landlords were inspired to provide students’ halls of residence to accommodate the teaming student population in Bambui-Bambili. This led to a drastic increase in students’ halls of residence from 150 in 2000 to over 340 in 2010--(figure 2) renovation of old and dilapidated structures to modern student structures as well as the conversion of family housing structures into homes of multiple occupations. During the period, student housing dominated family residence (table 1).

Table 1: Dominant Housing Structures between 2000 & 2024 of the University Catchment Area

Dominant type of housing structures	Frequency 2000	Percent age	Frequency 2010	Percent	Frequency 2024	Percent
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Single family houses	146	91.2	21	13.3	5	3.6
Mini Cite (student hostel)	8	5	108	67.5	118	73.2
Business structures	6	3.8	26	16.2	29	18.1
Business structures and mini cite	0	0	6	3	8	5
Total	160	100	160	100	160	100

Source: Field work August/September (2024)

The year 2024 reflects the current situation of student halls of residence in Bambui-Bambili which has experienced an increase in student population despite the political crisis in the area. Students’ halls of residence continue to be accompanied by business structures while family houses gradually disappeared or transformed (table 1). Students’ halls of residence did not only increase around the campus but extending outwards converting farm lands into construction sites.

4.2 Socio-environmental implications

4.2.1 Negative implications in the growth of students’ hall of residence

4.2.1.1 Social Implications

The unprecedented growth in students’ halls of residence has a direct bearing on the social problems of the university catchment area. These include; social segregation, resentment, conflicts, increased crime rate, Seasonality of small-scale businesses as shown in figure 3. 40% of the population opined that conflicts were the most recurrent social effects resulting from the growth in students' halls of residence.

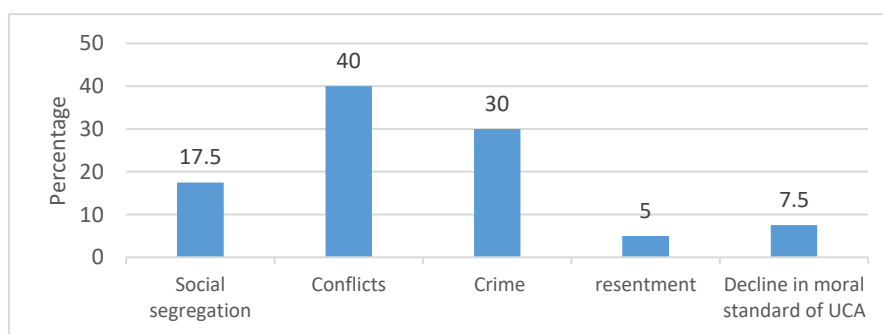


Figure 3. Social problems in the catchment area

Source: Field work August/September 2024.

Student lifestyles in their halls of residence (late night drinking, and rowdiness) were some of the most frequently mentioned negative effects. Results show that 17.5% of the population

indicated social segregation as one of the most recurrent problems due to the increase in student numbers. Off campus students living around the University and their demand for housing led to the displacement of the indigenous population. This was because off-campus students near the university created a high demand for proximity to the university campus. Consequently, housing rent increased two to three-fold (from 7,000 to 30,000 FCFA per month for a self-contained room)

Conflicts between students and the local residents were recorded in the university catchment area due to the Cultural differences and deviant social behavior of students. The non-student tenants were questioned on whether they had reported students because of conflicts to the University and the police. Only 10% of them said yes. This was confirmed by the Director of Student Affairs in the University of Bamenda who acknowledged that there has been reported cases of conflicts by landlords and non-student tenants on the poor behavior of students by way of rowdiness and aggression. Students acknowledged that it was difficult for them to fit into the community as expected because of age and lifestyle differences.

Further findings indicate that increase in crime rate was a result of the increase in student population. This was attributed to the fact that the nature of items possessed by students in their halls of residence like laptops, fridges, phones among others were perceived to attract thieves. Most of the residents complained that majority of the students' halls of residence were managed by caretakers who were hardly present for most of the time and often abandoned their job. Some of the landlords did not care about who to lodge in their structures, which made it possible for criminals to live amongst students. According to the president of Landlord Association in Bambui and Bambili, some students are actors of crime. The most common items stolen were phones, mattresses, gas bottles, laptops and refrigerators especially during holidays. University student's lifestyles and activities were found to be adversely affecting the moral standards of the Community. Promiscuity was a major immoral behavior of students in the Bambui-Bambili area as recorded by 79% of the population. Rowdiness, indecent dressing, and drunkenness contributed to the moral decline of the neighborhood.

4.2.1.2 Environmental implications.

The study revealed that the growth in students' halls of residence resulted to environmental problems. Poor waste disposal was perceived by 33.8% of the population as the most common environmental problem (Figure 4).

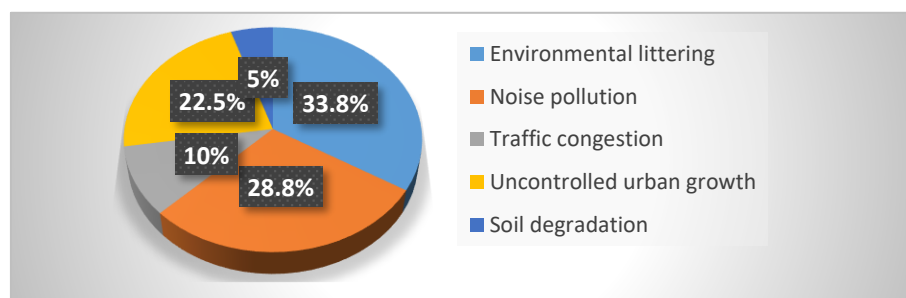


Figure 4. Environmental problems resulting from the growth in students' halls of residence

Source: fieldwork August/September 2024

Poor waste disposal destroys the environment through depletion of resources like air, water and soil. This problem is common in the university catchment area (UCA) of Bambui-Bambili compounded by the fact that students dispose waste haphazardly. Numerous waste dumps were evident in the study area and 33.8% of the sample population argued that poor waste disposal was the most recurrent problem faced in the study area especially in neighbourhoods like Atunibah, Mushonhmabuh, Djakar, Ntemnibie and Momnibie which are highly dominated by students. Some residents expressed concerns about student tenants' failure to comply with the instructions for garbage collection. Most students complained a lot about the limited trashcans provided by their landlords and caretakers.

Uncontrolled Urban sprawl was evident in the university catchment area (UCA) as a result of the growth in students' halls of residence off-campus indicated by 22.5% of the sampled population. The continuous increase (500%) in the construction of students' halls of residence since 2000 in areas near the university campus has led to the outward expansion of building infrastructure in the peripheral areas of Bambui and Bambili like Agam, Baforkum, and Ntigi (3-4km away). Community members in the UCA were motivated to sell their land near the University campuses because of the attractive high cost of land (10,000 FCFA/m²) caused by the high demand of students' halls of residence to make profit and move to the peripheral areas where land was relatively cheaper. The value of land dropped with distance from the university campuses.



Figure 5. Poorly disposed waste on the surroundings of some Student's Hall of residence at Momnibie (A), Degrading Gutters (B)

Source: Field work August/September (2024)

28.8% of the population revealed that noise pollution was a common phenomenon in the study area. This was attributed to the fact that students keep late nights, playing music at high pitch (94.2 decibel). Noise was common at 3 Corners and ENS Street neighbourhoods where most of the business centers were located. Cases of noise pollution were reported to the Director of Student Affairs of The University of Bamenda mainly due to the uncompromising attitude of students to abide by the rules of the residence where they live. Using the United Nations' environmental impact assessment (1974) acceptable noise standard (70 decibels), High levels of noise were recorded in the afternoon and evening hours of the day.

Table 2: Noise Pollution (Decibels) recorded in selected neighbourhoods of Bambui-Bambili catchment at 9pm

Neighbourhood	Rate of noise in decibel (dB)	Time	Level	Reason
Three corners	107.8dB	3pm & 9pm	Very high	Presence of many bars and night clubs like Miyanui,
ENS street	94.2	3pm & 9pm	High	Presence of snacks bars and restaurants with other business centers like shops
Atunibah	64.5	3pm & 9pm	Low	Absence of the absence of bars in this quarter and the only noise is coming from students from the Campus
Mushongmabuh	79.7	3pm & 9pm	High	Nearer to the campus as students always make noise from the field at mushongmabuh as well as play music with high volumes
Djakar	45.6	3pm & 9pm	Low	Less density of student occupation and no bars
Momnibie	60	3pm & 9pm	Low	Less business activities

Source: Field work August/September (2024)

Table 2 illustrates the rate of noise pollution and the various reasons attributed to it. Noise pollution was very high at 3 Corners with a decibel of 107.8, followed by ENS Street with 94.2dB and Mushongmabuh recording 79.7dB. Neighborhoods like Atunibah with a decibel of 64.5, Djakar 45.6dB and Momnibie 60dB recorded low rate of noise pollution.

4.2.1.2.1 Changes in land use

The University Catchment Area of Bambui-Bambili has experienced a significant change in land use since 2000 due to the continuous expansion in students’ halls of residence. Farmlands and vegetated cover were the dominant type of land use in Bambui-Bambili by the year 2000 with settlement agglomerations at Momnibie, Atunui, ENS Street, Mushongmabuh, Niba-ah, Atunibah and Mallam. During this period, the population density was low and student structures were very minimal. Figure 6 and table 3 illustrates the land use situation in the Bambui Bambili area by 2000.

Figure 6 and Table 3 indicates the dominance of vegetated cover (secondary woodland, woodland, and grassland) occupying a surface area of 76.63km² (66% of the total surface area). This is followed by farm land which constitute 33.62km² (29% of the total surface area). The built- up area including all forms of housing development constitutes 5.68km² (4.9% of the total surface area) while water bodies constitute 0.14km².

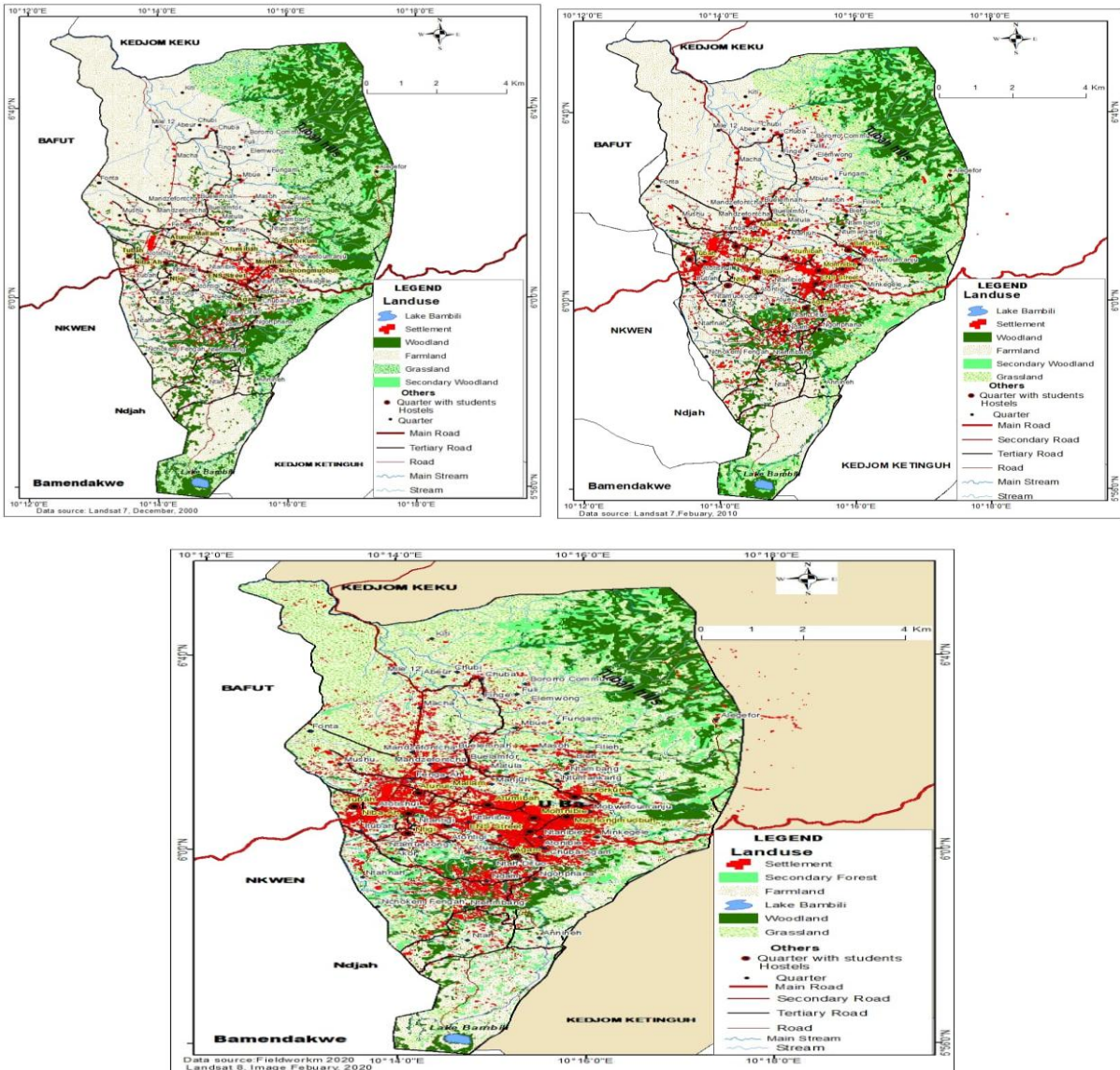


Figure 6: land use maps of Bambui-Bambili from 2000-2024

In 2010, activities had taken place and the rapid growth in students’ halls of residence constituted the highest developments in the study area. There was an increase in the construction of student accommodation and business structures which significantly increased the built-up area leading to a significant change in land use. Land use change was caused by an increase in students’ halls of residence in the same year.

Built-up areas (settlement) had increased from 5.68 to 6.57km² leading to a reduction in vegetal cover from 76.63km² to 66.84km². While farm land increased from 33.62 to 42.52km²

The continuous increase in students’ halls of residence in the University Catchment area from 2010 to 2020 led to the densification of land use.

Table 3: State of land use of the Bambui-Bambili university catchment area (2000-2024)

Land use category	2000 (km ²)	2010	2024	Change in surface	% change
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				(2000-2024) km ²	2000-2024
Settlement	5.68	6.57	11.91	6.45	3.83
Farmland	33.62	42.52	40.02	-48.92	-42.14
Vegetation cover	76.63	66.84	64	-54.21	-46.70
Water body	0.14	0.14	0.14	-	-
Total	116.07	116.07	116.07	0	0

Source: Calculated from Land Use Map of 2000 -2024

Figure 6 and table 3 presents the current situation of land use change in the study area with built-up area being the most dominant change covering a total surface area of 11.91km². This increase in built-up area is dominated by students’ halls of residence and related structures occupying 90%. There is a reduction in Farmland from 42.52 to 40.02km² and vegetal cover also reduced from 65km² to 55km². Water body is the only ecosystem that did not noticed any substantial change having dropped from 0.14k to 0.12km² within same period

4.2.2 Positive implications in the growth of students’ halls of residence

4.2.2.1 Improvement in the Overall Aesthetics of the Area

The growth in students’ halls of residence have led to the physical upgrade of the study area as indicated by 33.8% of the population. This has been evident in the rate of construction of modern halls of residence, renovation of old houses as well as the conversion of family housing structures into homes of multiple occupations (HMOs). The development of these structures have beautified the area rendering it more environmentally attractive.



Figure 7: Modern Structures at Mushongmabuh Bambili, Symbolising Beautification of the Environment

Source: Field work August/September (2024)

4.2.2.2 Growth in Commercial Activities

The presence of students in the UCA has brought about the growth of commercial activities. Given the increase in population, dwellers in the area have witnessed a dramatic change in sources of livelihood as they amalgamate into the increasing economic opportunities

(businesses) that accompany city growth. The local businesses which directly benefit from student spending include; transport especially biking, retail and entertainment. Students are available for part time employment in the local economy dominated by a strong service sector. Students act as a catalyst for more economic growth by attracting retailers and investors to serve their needs. Results from field investigations shows that 21.3% of the population opined to the fact that, the growth in students' halls of residence has enhanced businesses in the study area especially around the university campuses. 20% of the population indicate an increase in investment of commercial activities like snacks, documentations, and fashion shops as a consequence of the presence of students in this area.

4.2.2.3 STUDENT INDEPENDENCE.

The study revealed that the growth in students' halls of residence off campus gives students a chance of attaining independence towards their personal development in the area under investigation. This is because, they are not under the control of their parents or institution's rules and regulations. Off-campus students' halls of residence orients and shape students' behavior that can be tailored towards responsible leadership, citizenship and intellectually sound for better adulthood. Most of the off-campus students in the study area have attained a level of independence as they learn to live alone and operate their activities according to how they wish and are responsible for their actions. Equally off-campus students in the area under investigation have increased the level of student performances by living near the campuses and attain their academic objectives without any distractions from their parents.

5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDING

Results indicate that in 2000, family residential structures were the dominant type of settlement in Bambui-Bambili while 2010 was a period of a massive increase in students' hall of residence (80%) due to the creation of the University of Bamenda and Oxford University. 2024 demonstrated a continues increase in student structures due to the expansion of study programs in the universities and the increase in student population from 6669 to 222,292. Findings show that the growth in students' halls of residence from 2000-2020 was manifested in three ways; (1) the construction of new and modern students' halls of residence, (2) renovation of old housing structures into student accommodation and (3) the conversion of family housing into homes of multiple occupations at the detriment of family residence. This supports the findings of Dewi (2019) in South Africa who noted that from 2010-2017, a rapid wave of studentification started with the emergence of purpose-built student accommodation which provided complete housing facilities for the students in Tembalang.

As regard environmental implications, findings reveal that there has been environmental decay, noise pollution, urban sprawl and traffic congestion. Among the negative environmental effects, environmental decay was the most pressing problem faced within the UCA especially within the core areas (high density student areas) which constituted 33.8% of the problems as perceived by the population. The main reason responsible for environmental decay in the study area was poor waste disposal by students due to the inadequate provision of trashcans by landlords and the unprecedented increase in the population. This corroborates with the findings of Gumprecht (2006) and Hubbard (2008) who noted that environmental decay in studentified

areas is brought about by over population, insufficient trashcans, gardens that are not maintained and uncontrolled dumping of refuse.

Social segregation, high rental charges, conflicts, increased crime waves were some of the social implications in the growth of student halls of residence. Conflict among students, landlords and non-student tenants was the most recurrent social problem in the UCA which was identified by 40% of the respondents. Conflicts stemmed from the noise and rowdy nature (high noise pitch) of students in the neighbourhood. Benn (2010) shared the same idea that students living in established neighbourhoods near university campuses have brought about cultural differences and anti-social behaviors which leads to unavoidable conflicts between the students, landlords and non-student tenants. 50% of the local residents in the core area have moved out because of the frequent conflicts they were having with students especially the non-student tenant residents. This was common among families with young children who were scared of their children copying the bad behavior of university students. According to Kenyons (1997), if student housing developments are undertaken without considering the consequences upon the local community, then it is reasonable to expect numerous local-level problems.

6.0 CONCLUSION

Growth in Students' halls of residence has become one of the most noticeable features in the university catchment area (UCA) of Bambui-Bambili. The influx of students into the area has become rapid since 2010 when The University of Bamenda was established as the only state university in the Northwest Region, necessitating the need for the private sector to supply students' halls of residence off-campus. An analysis of the trends in the growth of these halls of residence from 2000-2024 indicates a significant negative and positive change in the environment with a decline in family houses and a drastic increase in student accommodation and business structures. Proactive planning measures are necessary to address the problems linked to overcrowding, crime and social segregation. The unprecedented developments and population increase comes along not only with positive but far-reaching consequences for which the local planning proponents and university administrations have to grapple with to ensure harmony and co-existence between the indigenous and growing youthful populations especially in a semi urban setting.

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