

Satelsiation and Development of Obala Sub-Division in Cameroon: Lessons to Emergent Satellite Towns in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

Satelsiation has become an intermittent phenomenon in sub-Saharan African cities in their quest for development. This article posits that the metamorphosis of Obala Sud-Division has been activated by the Yaounde metropolis. The paper divulges that spatial expansion and development of the Obala satellite town is ill-advisedly more unplanned than planned. A multi-spectral Landsat satellite imagery of 1987, 2004 and 2020 were used to determine the spatial expansion of the town over a period of 33 years. Some 116 questionnaires were administered to households to determine the outcome of expansion to the town. Field observation and interview sessions were done to have information on the proliferation of socio-economic activities to the expansion of the town. An in-depth secondary data collection was done to gather information on the rate of population growth in Obala. The data was processed to generate maps through the ArcGIS 10.4 and MapInfo soft wares and tables through SPSS 17 for results and analyses. Results from findings divulge that there is a 1.02% annual increase in the built-up area of Obala emanating from 7.01% in 1984 to 9.19 in 2004 and 16.31% in 2020. This as well has been triggered by a population upsurge of 68,255 inhabitants in 1987 to 78,929 in 2005 and 133,014 inhabitants in 2020. Infrastructural growth in the area has improved as health and educational facilities are present. The areas proximity to the Yaounde metropolis has paved way for commuting owing to available and cheap land acquisition. Social and economic developmental imprints have transformed the area which unfortunately is experiencing anarchical growth. This paper therefore recommends that stringent control and planning be implemented as lessons to other Sub-Saharan emergent satellite towns.

Keywords

Satellisation, Socio-Economic Development, Lessons, Spatial Expansion, Planning, Obala

1. Introduction

The growth of satellite towns triggered by major neighbouring metropolis has become very recurrent in Sub-Saharan cities nowadays. Such expansions of small towns elicited by the growth in neighbouring metropolis most often have similar characteristics. These small towns are termed satellite cities (Reuel et al., 2013) and their growth nowadays leaves much to be desired. Satellite cities are planned cities, adjacent to a major city (Hasnat & Hoque, 2016). Such cities manage or contain the urban sprawl. They are designed to help a major city extend in all possible ways. Satellite cities could be completely standalone cities, developed outside metros. They are self-containing, independent cities, unlike a suburb or a subdivision.

The purpose of satellite cities is to provide a perfect balance between the population and resources, with respect to environment-friendly development. The aim is to create affordable housing for a large section of the society (Chatterjee & Chattopadhyay, 2020). Unfortunately, most of such cities grow with little or no control leading to unplanned development. Their raison-etre for creation does not stand the test of time owing to the numerous challenges observed. Most often, the satellite towns are almost entirely dependent on the residential settlements connected with the metropolis. People only lived in the satellite towns with basic facilities, for employment and other purposes but were solely reliant on the metropolis.

The recent satellite towns nowadays emerge with entirely all the activities found in metropolis. The dominant residential function is now being incorporated by other urban functions which unfortunately do not occur in an organised manner. Such is the case with the Obala satellite town in Cameroon whose development has become a cause for concern. Satellite town development in Cameroon is as well entirely influenced by the neighbouring metropolis but their mundus operandi aside the normal trend reveals several urbanisation challenges (Fombe & Balgah, 2012). These challenges range from anarchy, land tenure conflicts as well as misappropriation leading to urban disorder.

Satellite town development in Cameroon occurs around the major metropolis of Yaounde and Doula. Their growth and expansion though influenced by these metropolises is later controlled by the local authorities and activities in place (Gaston, 2014). The satellite towns therefore operate within their State administrative and municipal jurisdiction and gradually attract local reality functions which enable them to expand. Such expansion is supposed to follow the rules and regulations of urbanisation in Cameroon and should reflect the growth and

beauty of other neighbouring satellite towns. This growth however is not the case leading to similar urban challenges found in the metropolis added to the local realities. The Obala satellite town triggered by the Yaounde metropolis is faced with such challenges. The growth and expansion of the town is gradually being done in an unplanned manner leading to anarchy and disorder. Unplanned expansion is triggered by the rapid population increase which causes the spatial growth of the town as the population settles in violation of the proposed master plan. This paper thus probes into the development disorder observed in Obala and proposes a solution to salvage the situation locally and beyond.

The Obala subdivision is situated some 40 km away from Yaounde on the Yaounde-Bafia highway. It is located between longitudes 4°30'00" and 4°14'00" north and 11°24'00" and 11°37'30" east. It is bounded by Sa'a and Monatele to the north, Elig-Mfomo to the west, Okola to the south, and Batshenga, soa and Edzendouan to the east (**Figure 1**).

Obala sub-division covers a surface area of close to 475 km². Some 25% of the surface area is urban while 75% is rural. It has an estimated population of 133,014 in 2022 inhabitants as recent statics (**BUCREP, 2005 & 2010 Projections**).

2. Methodology

Data collection was done through primary and secondary sources for a qualitative and quantitative research. In order to determine the spatial expansion of the city, satellite images for three different periods were used. The Landsat MSS for 1987, Landsat ETM for 2004, and Landsat OLI for 2020 satellite images were used. These images were chosen because of availability and possibility to have better results in the diachronic analyses. Primary data was obtained through field observation, interviews and questionnaire administration. Field observation was done in order to identify the Obala growth spots, capture GSP points for maps as well as take photographs for results presentation. Interviews with the Obala quarter heads were done to confirm the various changes in their neighbourhoods for the past years. Focus group discussions were done to have first-hand opinion on the root causes of unplanned settlement in Obala. Some 116 questionnaires were administered to households of the Obala sub-division to collect information on the causes and consequences of Satelisation to the area. A 2% sample (**Oloyo, 2001**) of the total of 5834 household (**BUCREP, 2005 and 2010 Projections**) was used to arrive at this result. An in-depth secondary data collection was done to have information on the total population. Statistical information on the economic activities and maps of Obala were gotten from the National Institute of Cartography, Yaounde, Cameroon. Consultations at the level of the Obala local council and the Yaounde city council were done to have information on the growth of the city over the years. All these data from primary and secondary sources were treated through the ArcGIS 10.4 and MapInfo software to generate maps for analyses. Furthermore, the SPSS 17 and Excel 2010 were used to treat statistical data used to generate tables and diagrams for analyses.

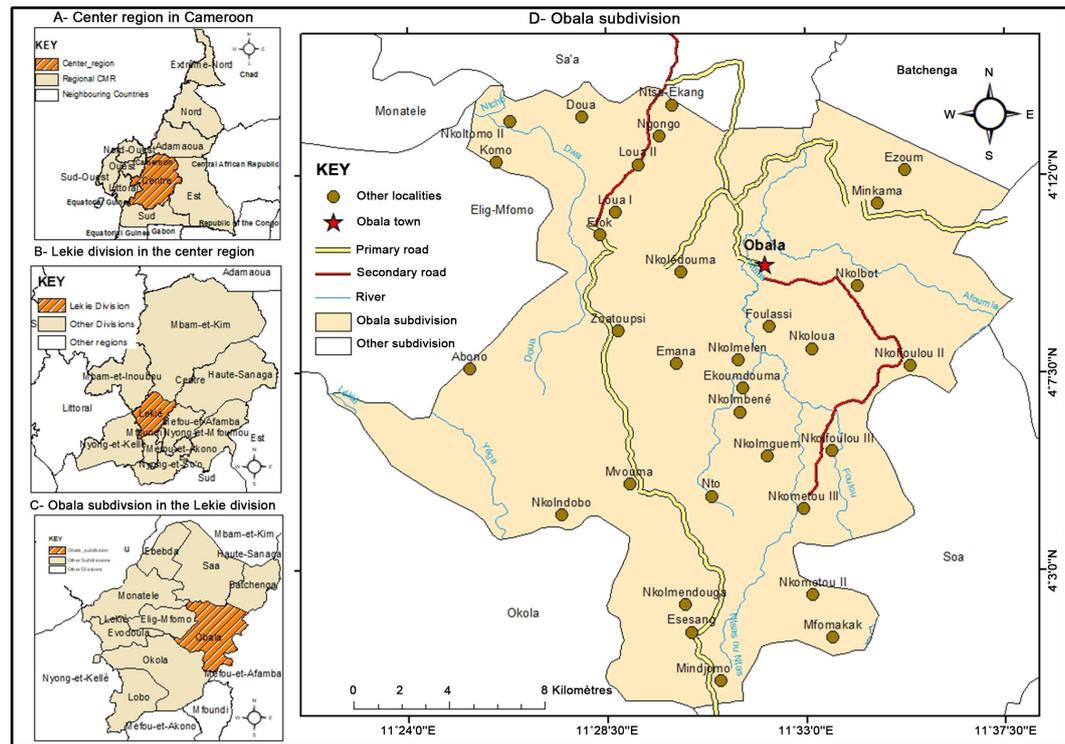


Figure 1. Location of the study area. Source: Modified from NIC by Mbukwe 2021.

3. Results and Analyses

Results from finding revealed that the spatial growth of the town, population upsurge as well as the socio-economic imprints have triggered development of Obala.

3.1. The Obala Sub-Divisional Spatial Expansion Metamorphosis and Master Plan Discrepancy

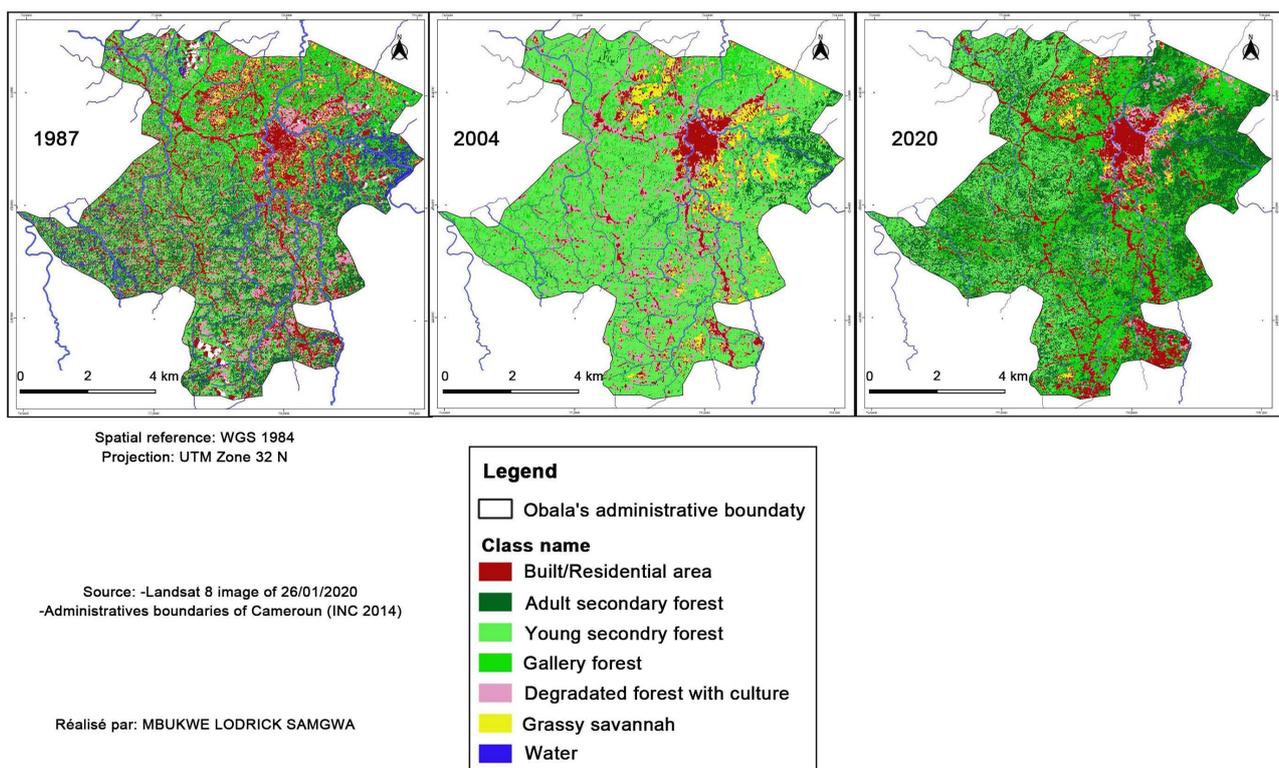
Spatial expansion and the growth of the built-up area constitute one of the major factors of satellite town development of an area (Ananda Krishnan & Sujith, 2021). This is because satellite cities are planned cities, adjacent to a prime city and are cities used to manage and contain the increasing urban sprawl. The Obala satellite town has witnessed a consistent increase in its space and built-up area within a period of thirty three years (Table 1).

The built-up space in Obala changed from 7.01% in 1987 to 16.31% in 2020. This represents a 1% annual rate of evolution. Meanwhile, the forest and grassland experience significant reductions over thirty three years as well. This built-up change indicates a concentration of the Obala urban space around the north eastern part of the town (Figure 2). The urban space has gradually colonised the vegetation in this north eastern area and the direction of sprawl moves towards the south and south eastern parts gradually. In the spatial colonisation process, urban functions emerge as the Obala satellite town harbours a cosmopolitan immigrant population mostly from the Yaounde metropolis. The land use and

Table 1. Land use/Land cover evolution of Obala from 1987 to 2020.

Designation	1987	2004	2020	Total	Annual rate of evolution
Built-up area	7.01	9.19	16.31	30	0.92
Adult secondary forest	16.38	5.51	4.05	25.94	0.78
Young secondary forest	26.92	57.46	1.93	86.31	2.62
Gallery forest	25.61	8.99	20.82	55.42	1.67
Culture	11.64	13.19	33.29	58.12	1.76
savannah	6.56	5.67	23.6	35.83	1.08
Water	5.88			5.88	0.18

Source: Landsat images of 1987, 2004, 2020 of Obala.



November 2021

Figure 2. Land use/Land cover of in 1987, 2004 and 2020. Source: NIC Landsat image of 1987, 2004 and 2020 of Obala.

land cover evolution in the Obala sub-division for 33 years reveals a persistent growth of the satellite town. This is confirmed through the data gotten from **Table 1**, as a rapid increase of urbanization occurs in the Obala sub-division as time goes on.

This satellite town has an area view which reveals a concentration of the built-up in the north eastern part of the town (**Figure 3**). The Obala satellite town area view reveals the successive evolution and eventual concentration of

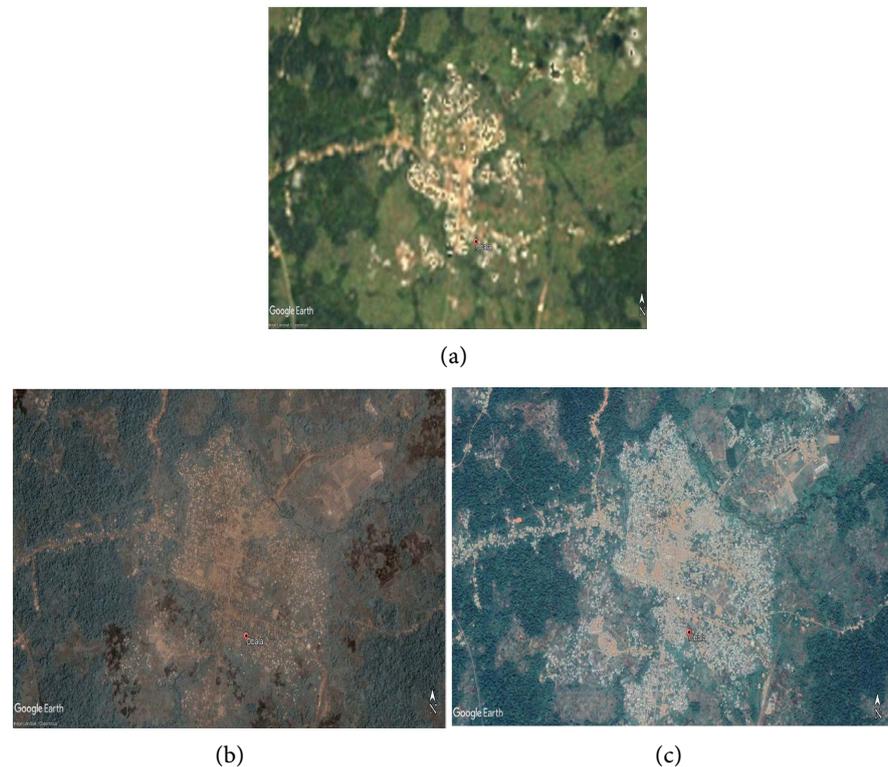


Figure 3. The Obala Satellite town area view. Source: Google earth pro 1987, 2004 and 2020.

the urban space in the spatial expansion of the town. People have moved into the town and in the course of their settlement have increased the urban space which was originally covered by vegetation. **Figure 3** shows the urban space concentration in Obala with a primary settlement in 1987 in A, which has move to a secondary stage in 2004 in B, and is heading to a mature stage in 2020 in C. the Obala urban space has thus changed over the years and is experiencing an unplanned growth that warrants urgent town planning intervention.

The change in the urban space in Obala is as a result of several factors. Results from findings revealed that the closeness of the town to the Yaounde metropolis accounts for 17.24% influence in the growth of Obala. This is because the Obala satellite town is some 40 km away from the Yaounde metropolis and it takes about 45 minutes travel time from Yaounde to Obala (**Kengne, 2003**). This short time movement which is triggered by the good nature of the roads attracts the Yaounde metropolis dwellers that commute to Obala on a daily basis. Business persons and other State and private workers have decided to settle in Obala and do business as well as work in the capital city. This has provoked the expansion of the Obala town coupled with the available unexploited space. The agricultural potential of Obala accounts for 26.72% of the growth as commercial farmers have acquired much space to farm their crops and sell (**Table 2**).

With the nature of the soils which are favourable for agriculture, the commercial farmers harvest their crops in the large farms owned in Obala and

Table 2. The Obala Satellite town perception index.

Reason	Number	Percentage
Closeness to the political capital	20	17.24
Influence of the national road No. 1 highway	17	14.66
Agricultural potential	31	26.72
Cheap land	20	17.24
Infrastructural growth	15	12.93
Physical milieu	13	11.21
Total	116	100

Source: Fieldwork 2021.

sell to large cities with the Yaounde metropolis being the primary market. The influence of the National N° 1 highway road that passes through Obala towards the northern part of Cameroon and beyond has triggered population concentration. Obala is accessible and also serves as a transit town to travellers who gradually develop interest in the area and eventually settle. The area has cheap unexploited land which has pulled speculators and grabbers to buy and transform. The urban spatial growth has provoked infrastructural growth as urban functions emanate in the settlement process of the people.

The Obala satellite town spatial expansion has witnessed an evolution in its neighbourhoods over the years. The neighbourhoods have increased from five in 1978 to eight in 2004 and are more than thirteen in 2020. The area is on a persistent expansion as new neighbourhoods are being created gradually (**Figure 4**). The neighbourhood expansion over the years increases the built-up space and concentration of the urban space. These neighbourhoods have a population concentration which has triggered the urban functions of the town. The urban functions unfortunately are expanding in a more unplanned than planned manner.

The Obala satellite town has increased in space and the population is gradually colonising the vegetation and increasing the built-up.

The spatial expansion and settlement in Cameroonian cities is governed by the 2004 urban development and housing laws revised in 2014. The laws stipulated that the growth and expansion of an area should strictly respect the Master Plans of the area which are further presented in detail through the sector plans (**MINDUH, 2014**). The local councils were therefore mandated to follow-up the realization and execution of these plans taking into consideration local realities. The Obala Master Plan was supposed to be realized from the general plan of the Lekie Division but its draft that was presented in 2018 has not been approved as at date. This explains why the spatial expansion of the town occurred more in an unplanned than planned manner since settlement has preceded planning and the migrant population settles with little or no control from the authorities.

The draft plan of the Obala town envisaged the growth of the area around four neighbourhoods of Zone 1, Zone 2, Elot 1 and Elot 2 (**Figure 6**), which are



Figure 4. The Obala Satellite own neighbourhood sprawl. Source: Field Work from OSM (open street map).

considered the planned areas. The unfortunate scenario is that more unplanned neighbourhoods have emerged from little or no control and severe anthropogenic pressure. This explains why several neighbourhoods have been created to meet-up the rising demand for space by the population upsurge.

3.2. Population Upsurge and Infrastructural Evolution in Obala

Spatial expansion in the Obala satellite town has been triggered by the population growth of the area. The population of Obala has witnessed a rapid increase over the years (**Table 3**).

The population has moved from 7599 inhabitants in 1976 to 68,255 inhabitants in 1987 with an upsurge of 60,656 inhabitants in eleven years. The population further increased from 78,929 inhabitants in 2005 to 133,014 inhabitants in 2020 with an upsurge of 54,085 inhabitants in fifteen years. This population evolution has triggered the quest for space leading to spatial expansion as the town of Obala grows. The population growth in Obala has provoked socio-economic development in the Satelisation process of the town. Social and economic imprints have emerged as the town increases in space although unfortunately in an unplanned manner.

Available unexploited space and easy land acquisition, coupled with favourable climatic conditions and accessibility have attracted people into Obala. Urban attractions are aspects of an urban space which pulls people and services (**May et al., 2016**). These aspects pull people into a town and enhance expansion. The Obala satellite town has witnessed a change in its population as the social and economic facilities have grown.

Table 3. Population evolution in Obala from 1976 to 2020.

Year	Population
1976	7599
1987	68,255
2005	78,929
2012	95,627
2020	133,014

Source: BUCREP: 2005 and 2010 Projections.

3.2.1. Social Imprints and Development of Obala

The Obala satellite town has grown, thanks to the influence of the social amenities that have emerged. The rapid increase in the population of Obala, coupled with the spatial expansion has triggered the development of social amenities. The local authorities and the State have improved on the energy and water supply to accommodate the population. In the development process of the Obala satellite town, portable water which originally was scarce has been generated from the available water bodies to supply the increasing population. Water institutions such as CAMWATER (Cameroon Water Utilities) and SCAN WATER are providing the utility services which the population demands.

The presence of natural water bodies has as well triggered the supply of hydroelectricity in the area through ENEO Cameroun (energy of Cameroon). The Obala satellite town therefore benefits from the supply of electricity though insufficient to accommodate the increasing population. Faced with this insufficiency of energy, some inhabitants of the area have sought for the solar energy, a source which is serving them in their daily use. As the area expands and people settle, there is the need for more energy supply to accommodate population.

The social imprints in the Obala satellite town are constantly increasing in the developmental process of the area. Health facilities which were almost inexistent in the past have increased overtime. Field revelations propound that the Obala satellite town possesses close to thirteen health units. The area has two district hospitals, four health centres and seven privately owned health units (Figure 5). Associated to the increase in health units is the increase in schools in Obala. The area which had just a single secondary and high school (Lycée d'Obala), can now boast of more than thirty schools which are found all over the town. The increasing population has triggered the construction of educational facilities to accommodate the people (Figure 5).

The growth of the Obala satellite town has provoked the development of recreational centres such as the Luna Park and many other outdoor areas which expand as the urban space develops.

3.2.2. The Economic Imprints and Development of Obala

The economic development of Obala has influenced the growth of the town. Agriculture is the dominant activity in the Obala satellite town. Results from

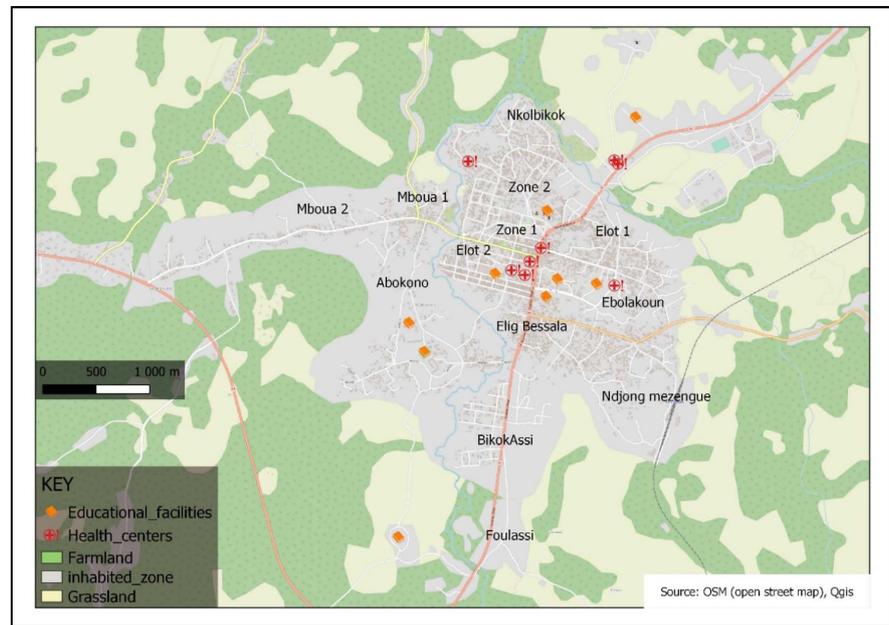


Figure 5. The health and educational facilities of Obala. Source: Modified by Mbukwe form NIC.

findings revealed that 70% of the population are involved in one agricultural activity or the other. The agricultural activities are practiced by both the indigenes and in-migrants (**Table 4**).

Results from **Table 4** show that more than 50% of the inhabitants of Obala are involved in farming. Farming is dominated by the production of cocoa which is exported and brings in revenue to the inhabitants of Obala. Other crops such as groundnut, cassava, maize, yams, and tomatoes are cultivated for home consumption and sales. These activities have attracted a good number of people who have settled in Obala in the continuous growth of the town.

Commercial activities in Obala have attracted a good number of traders who have settled and are generating income in the town. The construction of the Obala new market has pulled traders to buy and sell all types of household and industrial items. People come from neighbouring towns and villages to do business in Obala since the market serves as the largest in the Lekie division. The economic activities have attracted people into Obala and thus provoked the development of the satellite town.

Obala due to its proximity to Yaounde the capital city is under constant mutation. The level of development improves daily as the population increase and the standard of living of its inhabitants has increased. The Obala satellite town is gradually changing from being predominantly rural to urban indicative of a transformation that this paper has term “Satelisation”. The transformation process however is observed to be more unplanned than planned and this phenomenon seems to be recurrent in most satellite towns in Cameroon. It is therefore incumbent to correct the mistakes so that other satellite towns will develop with little or no problem.

Table 4. Type of agricultural activities practiced in Obala.

Activity	Frequency	Percentage
Farming	63	54.31
Fishing	8	6.90
Animal rearing	39	33.62
Hunting	6	5.17
Total	116	100

Source: Field work, 2020.

3.3. Lessons from Obala to Emergent Satellite Towns

Satelisation which is the growth of satellite cities is faced with urban disorder in its expansion process. Satellite towns which are supposed to be planned cities, adjacent to a major city are now unfortunately being more unplanned. Such is the case with the Obala satellite town which expands in a more unplanned manner. Field revelations divulge that settlement has preceded planning leading to the urban anarchy observed in the area. The effect is the growth of neighbourhoods with no control leading to an unorthodox development of the area. Settlement in the Obala satellite town occurs in an organic pattern type (Novitasaril et al., 2016), depicting a settlement of life and natural forms which attaches importance to the process rather than the product. Organic settlement patterns are those that develop according to cultural and social values in their society and usually develop over time without planning. This unfortunately is the case with the Obala satellite town which expands without respect of urban planning and housing rules (Figure 6).

Results from Figure 6 shows that two out of the thirteen neighbourhoods in the Obala satellite town are planned as opposed to eleven unplanned. The Obala satellite town is thus exposed to urban anarchy and unplanned development if not checked.

Several factors can be advanced for the unplanned settlement observed in the Obala satellite town. The first of such is the presence of available and cheap space in the area. The Obala town due to its proximity to the capital city of Yaounde and its transit role through the National Highway 1 of Cameroon permits it to be exposed to people who move in and out. In the course of these movements, the population develops interest in settling in a quiet and remote area which as times goes on becomes eventually urban. The early settlers discovered that the space was still virgin and cheap and thus invited friends and relatives who have invaded the area without any control. This has caused the uncontrolled expansion observed in Obala.

Furthermore, rapid urbanisation and population pressure in the Yaounde metropolis has pushed the people to search for settlement elsewhere. Most of the migrants have settled in areas closer to the capital and have thus preferred Obala because of its proximity. The result of such settlements is anarchy since little or



Figure 6. Planned and unplanned neighbourhood expansion in Obala. Source: Modified by Mbukwe from OMS (open street map).

no control is done on the manner of expansion. The Obala satellite town is now experiencing urban anarchy due to unplanned settlement.

The violation of town planning rules and regulations, coupled with inertia from the authorities have triggered unplanned settlement in Obala. Early settlers have invaded the area and settled with no control. These immigrants in their unplanned settlement manner have as well violated the recommendations of the draft master plan of Obala and triggered anarchy in the area. Unfortunately, the situation was not addressed on time leading to more settlements in an unorthodox manner. Settlement has thus preceded planning which is taking an uncontrollable manner. Municipal and government authorities have neglected their duty in assuring proper control leading to the anarchy observed in the area.

As a result of the unplanned settlement observed in the Obala satellite town, other urban vices have accrued. The town faces problems of land tenure conflicts as the old and new inhabitants are engaging in land disputes every day from double sales to misappropriation. The area which was originally rural and calm is now facing insecurity and high crime wave from in-migrants who render life unbearable to the inhabitants. Peripheral expansion and slum settlement has begun in the area as the cycle of disorder increases. Population pressure and spatial expansion has provoked pollution in the area which is gradually diminishing the envisaged urban growth and beauty of the Obala satellite town. This emanates from indiscriminate waste disposal which has increased the urban vices of the area (Figure 7).

Figure 7 reveals some unhallowed waste disposal practices observed in the Ebolakoum neighbourhood in A and the Elot 2 neighbourhood in B of the Obala



Figure 7. Indiscriminate waste disposal in Obala. Source: Photos captured by Mbukwe, January 2021.

satellite town. Satelisation which is supposed to be a method of expansion and growth of a satellite town to decongest a metropolis is unfortunately occurring in an unplanned manner in Obala. The urban anarchy is typical of the satellite towns in Cameroon and most Sub-Saharan countries which warrant stringent measures to curb the situation.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Satelisation which is the expansion of small towns elicited by the growth in neighbouring metropolis is aimed at decongesting the major cities. It is expected that the satellite towns develop in an organised manner as a result of the neighbouring influence of the metropolis. Unfortunately, this is not the case observed in most satellite towns in Sub-Saharan Africa with that of Obala being a major cause for concern. This article which was aimed at divulging the development of the Obala satellite town and its consequence found out that the town grows in a more unplanned than planned manner. The results from findings revealed that spatial expansion, population upsurge and socio-economic imprints have triggered the development of Obala. These triggers emanated from the proximity of Obala to the Yaounde metropolis which is the political capital of Cameroon and the influence of the National highway No. 1 that permits the movement of goods and services to other regions as well as neighbouring countries to Cameroon. The availability of cheap unexploited land and arable agricultural space attracted people who settled in Obala. The population settlement resulted into the colonisation of space and the development of urban functions which unfortunately expands in a disorganised manner. Satelisation in the Obala sub-division has no doubt provoked the development of the town but its sustainability might be jeopardised if not checked.

This paper adheres to the fact that several aspects need to be taken into con-

sideration so that other satellite towns in emergence will develop as planned cities. This paper recommends that town planning and housing regulations with regards to the Obala Master Plan should be respected. The rationale stipulates that planning precedes settlement (Yango, 2014), but the reverse is observed in Obala. Settlement has come before planning leading to anarchical development of the Obala satellite town. The absence or laxity in implementing settlement controls has triggered the rapid expansion of the town which might provoke a social problem if strict rules are not in place. State and local authorities should implement stringent planning rules and proceed to demolition in order to re-organise the growth of the town.

Furthermore, a participatory management approach is recommended in the planning and development process of the town and any other cities in emergence. In this way, the local population and the authorities will work in a synergy and preserve the development of the town. The local population will understand the necessity to advocate for a planned city and will act as first had control officers to any disorder in the area. This will avoid any anarchical growth of the area and expose defaulters to State laws when violated.

Satellite town development should not be an issue of the migrant population who are in search of space to settle, but must be handled by the State as a solution to decongest neighbouring metropolis. In this way, the entire planning of the town will be the prerogative of government action and most likely planning will come before settlement. Urban functions will be put in place and the population will have no choice than to respect the rules in place. This will serve as a guarantee to planned development and enable satellite towns to develop as a veritable Eldorado for living. This article serves as a lesson to emergent satellite towns within and beyond Sub-Saharan Africa in order to trigger a futurist satellite town planned development.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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