



# City governance and poverty: the case of Kumasi

*Nick Devas and David Korboe*

Nick Devas is a senior lecturer in the International Development Department of the School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, specializing in urban development, urban governance, public finance and local government finance. He is coordinating the DFID-ESCOR funded research project on urban governance, partnerships and poverty.

Address: IDD, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK; e-mail: c.n.devas@bham.ac.uk

David Korboe's work is concerned with poverty and social deprivation. He has conducted studies of deprived segments of Ghanaian society, supported the development of an indigenous Ghanaian NGO, the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP), and undertaken assignments for aid agencies. Formerly a research fellow at the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, he is now based in UK as a freelance consultant.

Address: 40 Parkhill Rise, Croydon, Surrey, CR0 5JD, UK; e-mail: davekorboe@aol.com

*SUMMARY: This paper discusses the factors that influence the scale and nature of poverty in Kumasi, with a special focus on the role of city government and other governmental bodies. It reviews critically the impact of city government's policies on the livelihoods of poorer groups and their access to essential services, and notes the limited impact of democratization and decentralization on improving the performance of government agencies, particularly in relation to the urban poor. It also discusses what factors have helped to limit the scale and extent of poverty, including the role of traditional land allocation systems, donor involvement and supportive ethnic networks.*

## I. INTRODUCTION<sup>(1)</sup>

KUMASI, GHANA'S SECOND city, has a long and proud history as the centre of the Asante kingdom.<sup>(2)</sup> Officially, Kumasi has a population of around 700,000 but most estimates put the population at just over one million.<sup>(3)</sup> Kumasi is often regarded as the commercial capital of Ghana, with its Keteja market rivalling Onitsha in Nigeria as West Africa's largest open-air market. Part of Kumasi's relative prosperity derives from the timber forest of the surrounding region but it is also renowned for its local enterprise and artisan skills, particularly in the areas of furniture-making and vehicle engineering, which serve clientele from surrounding countries. As the capital of the Ashanti region, it has been a powerful alternative locus of political power to Accra and often a focus of political opposition. Like the rest of Ghana, Kumasi suffered great economic hardship during the period of government mismanagement and conflict which lasted from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, and during which time the city's infrastructure and services deteriorated markedly. The lengthy period of "structural adjustment" which followed, and which still continues, brought its own hardships, through the progressive withdrawal of subsidies on services such as health, water and electricity, and the retrenchment of public service workers. However, there are signs of economic recovery which, combined with an evolving process of democratization and decentralization, offer opportunities for all to benefit, not least the poor.

In this article, we seek to examine:

- the ways in which the poor in Kumasi may or may not be benefiting from the current economic situation;

- how the present arrangements for the provision of services impact on the poor; and
- whether and how the poor have been able to influence the agenda of the institutions of city governance.

In this analysis, we are concerned with city governance in the widest sense: not just with city government (the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly in this case) but with the whole range of governmental agencies and civil society, including business, NGOs, and community organizations of various sorts.

## II. URBAN POVERTY IN KUMASI

AN OBVIOUS PROBLEM for this research is the paucity of hard data on poverty in Kumasi. The Ghana living standards surveys divide Ghana into three groups: Accra, other urban areas and rural. It is thus not possible to identify the position of Kumasi itself, although figures for “other urban areas” give some indication. In addition, the latest figures available are for 1992 – too long ago to say anything about the current position. What those figures suggest, both for Ghana as a whole and for “other urban areas”, is a slight worsening in poverty between 1988 and 1989, with a modest improvement up to 1992. More recent studies, such as the Ghana Social Assessment,<sup>(4)</sup> suggest some improvement since the mid-1990s. This is confirmed by the preliminary results from the Ghana Living Standards Survey, Round 4.

Table 1:	Poverty Indicators					
	Percentage below upper poverty line <sup>(a)</sup>			Poverty gap indices		
	1988	1989	1992	1988	1989	1992
Accra	8.5	21.9	23.0	1.7	6.2	5.6
Other urban	33.4	35.1	27.7	10.1	10.2	7.1
Rural	41.7	47.1	33.3	13.9	16.0	8.5
Ghana	36.9	41.8	31.4	11.9	13.6	8.1

<sup>(a)</sup> The upper poverty line is defined as two-thirds of 1988 mean expenditures, that is, Cedis 132,230 (around US\$ 55) per person per year.

SOURCE: Government of Ghana, *Ghana Living Standards Surveys*, 1988, 1989, 1995.

However, some commentators have suggested<sup>(5)</sup> that the position of the poor has deteriorated again since 1992, with the proportion below the upper poverty line increasing to 37 per cent in 1997 for Ghana as a whole. One explanation for this worsening position is fiscal mismanagement, influenced by the elections of 1992 and 1996, which resulted in increased inflation and reduced economic growth.<sup>(6)</sup> Another reason is that the earlier gains from structural adjustment were not sustained and they tended not to filter down to the poorest.

Participatory research in Ghana found that most poor people’s perception was that their position had worsened in the last few years.<sup>(7)</sup> Abugre and Holland identify a number of indicators of increased poverty and vulnerability in Kumasi compared to a decade ago:<sup>(8)</sup>

- visible evidence of growing numbers of working children and homeless;

1. This is a summary of one of nine city case studies prepared as part of a research programme on *Urban Governance, Partnerships and Poverty*, funded by the UK Department for International Development’s ESCOR programme. This involved research teams in each of these cities and a coalition of UK-based research groups from the University of Birmingham, the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), the University of Wales, Cardiff, and the London School of Economics. Summaries of other city case studies also feature in this edition of *Environment and Urbanization*. The full version of this study and other city case studies and also of theme papers may be obtained from the Publications Office, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham B15 2TT, UK; tel: (44) 121 414 5020, fax: (44) 121 414 4969 or e-mail to: u.grant@bham.ac.uk. City case studies cost UK £10 each including postage) but are free to NGOs and teaching institutions in non-OECD countries.

2. The term Asante refers to the people and their culture, while the term Ashanti refers to the land they occupy.

3. Korboe, David, Kofi Diaw and Nick Devas (1999), *Urban Governance, Partnerships and Poverty in Kumasi*, University of Birmingham, International Development Department, page 8.

4. Korboe, David (1998), *Handing Over the Stick*, synthesized report on the Ghana Social Assessment, Accra, World Bank.

5. Abugre, Charles and Jeremy Holland (1998), *Ghana: Water Sector Improvement Project: A Poverty Analysis in Support of Project Preparation in Kumasi*, London, DFID.

6. World Bank (1995), *Ghana Poverty Past, Present and Future*, Population and Human Resources Division, West Central Africa Department, Africa Region, report No.14504-GH, p.v.

7. Korboe, David (1995), *Extended Poverty Study (Participatory Poverty Assessment Phase 3): Access and Utilisation of Basic Social Services by the Poor in Ghana*, Accra, UNICEF.

8. See reference 5, Box 1.

9. See reference 5, page 15.

10. Government of Ghana (1994), *The New Local Government System*, Accra, Ministry of Local Government. Although Kumasi is generally referred to as a district, its boundaries relate to the urban area and the elected assembly is the Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly.

- increased numbers of young people unable to find formal or semi-formal sector employment;
- increased room occupancy rates;
- growing numbers of refugees sleeping in open spaces.

They identify as particularly poor and vulnerable:

- older women without children or husbands;
- teenage girls carrying children and doing strenuous work;
- ethnic Asantes living in old, dilapidated traditional housing.

They also note that the poorest are generally politically and socially excluded. Migrants in temporary settlements, for example, are less likely to register to vote due to their insecurity of tenure.<sup>(9)</sup>

### III. INFLUENCES ON URBAN POVERTY

THERE ARE NUMEROUS factors which bear on urban poverty and which influence whether or not the urban poor benefit from economic change. This section reviews those factors which may be regarded as significant in Kumasi.

#### a. Structural Adjustment and Economic Performance

Ghana's prolonged period of structural adjustment has had mixed results. Without better data on urban poverty it is impossible to say what has been the impact on the urban poor. However, it seems clear that certain groups have benefited while the position of others has worsened, and that the gap between rich and poor has widened. Those who have been in a position to take advantage of liberalized trading conditions (removal of price controls, foreign exchange controls, import controls, etc.) have benefited. Although on the whole such people are not the poor, one could expect at least some of the benefits to "trickle down" to low-income groups through new employment and income-earning opportunities as well as through the redistributive mechanisms of the extended family. Simultaneously, the flood of cheap imports, particularly second-hand clothing, has put many out of work. However, the restructuring and privatization of the telecommunications sector has opened access to business communications for many, including those in the informal sector. Compared to the late 1970s and early 1980s, with astronomical inflation, negative economic growth and general economic collapse, particularly marked in the cities, the relative economic stability of the late 1990s potentially offers benefits to the poor as well as the rich.

#### b. Democratization and Decentralization

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ghana officially underwent twin processes of decentralization and democratization, but both remain incomplete. The local government law PNDCL 207 of 1988 established a system of district assemblies (called metropolitan or municipal assemblies in the main urban centres), together with a hierarchy of lower levels of local government.<sup>(10)</sup> The intention of the legislation was to bring about effective decentralization of government functions by integrating the dualistic colonial system of district administration with local government. According to Crook, the underlying philosophy of the 1988 legislation was that the district assemblies would form a basis for a national system

of indirect elections to regional and national level assemblies, on the socialist “democratic centralism” model.<sup>(11)</sup> Although multi-party democracy was restored in 1992, elections for district assemblies still have to be contested on non-party lines.

The chief executive of the district (or metropolitan or municipal) assembly is appointed by the central government. Since 1994, this is formally subject to approval by the assembly. The chief executive is, in effect, both “district commissioner” – the representative of the central government – and mayor – the head of the local government. Hitherto, as in much of Africa, the division between these two roles had led to endless conflicts over authority within an area. The new arrangement was intended to overcome this conflict. However, in the case of Kumasi, the current chief executive has adopted an autocratic style of management which has alienated public opinion locally. This is all the more so as Kumasi is the centre of opposition politics. The fact that the lower levels of local government established in law (sub-metros, town councils and unit committees) have never really functioned effectively in Kumasi is, in part, the result of the chief executive’s personal view of how the city should be governed.

### c. City Government

The record so far of Kumasi’s Metropolitan Assembly (KMA) is not particularly impressive in relation to either accountable government or poverty reduction. Only 70 per cent of the assembly is elected, the rest being nominated by central government. Voter turnout in the KMA elections of 1998 was only 27 per cent of registered voters, compared to 74 per cent in the 1996 national elections. Assembly members do not seem to be highly regarded by the public, being accused of interest only in their “sitting allowances” and of failing to deliver development in their communities.<sup>(12)</sup> Kumasi’s assembly members for their part are constrained by a system in which they have relatively little say in the decision-making. Executive responsibility lies with a smaller group of assembly members, chaired by the centrally appointed chief executive who completely dominates proceedings.

Many of the problems of KMA can be attributed to the arbitrary and high-handed style of the chief executive, with his disdain for normal procedures. There is a widespread perception that he has been able to control the assembly by rewarding his supporters and penalizing those who oppose him, for example, by withdrawing services from their communities.

### d. Sub-metropolitan Government and Relationships with the Community

The structure of decentralized government in Ghana is elaborate, at least on paper. Under KMA, there are four sub-metro assemblies, 24 town councils and 403 unit committees. The sub-metros exist but have virtually no functions and no resources because KMA (notably the chief executive) is unwilling to share these with them.<sup>(13)</sup> The town councils appear to exist in name only. The unit committees, which were elected only in 1998 after prolonged legal delays, are supposed to be the channel of communication between KMA and local communities but few appear to be operating effectively. Thus, the system is highly centralized on KMA and highly personalized on the chief executive. Communication between

11. Crook, Richard C (1994), “Four years of the Ghana district assemblies in operation: decentralization, democratization and administrative performance”, *Public Administration and Development* Vol 14, page 345.

12. Although sitting allowances are not large, they are attractive enough for most people, especially when combined with the prestige of office and the possible opportunities for unofficial income.

13. In January 1999, the chief executive attempted to dissolve one of the sub-metros; *Pioneer*, 12 January 1999.

KMA and local communities, whether directly, through assembly members, or through unit committees appears to be minimal. This is typified by the process for preparing the city's development plan, which was produced by consultants without consultation with local communities. All in all, the avenues open to poor communities in Kumasi to influence spending patterns or service delivery to their communities appear to be fairly ineffectual.

### e. Service Responsibilities and Performance

Most of the services affecting the urban poor are not, in fact, the responsibility of KMA. Under the decentralization programme in Ghana, it was the intention that major national services such as health and education would come under the district assemblies' authority. To this end, the management of services was devolved to the districts, and their heads of service (e.g. the district medical health officer) officially report to the chief executive. However, central ministries have been reluctant to decentralize any of their budgetary control, so that the line of accountability for district offices remains clearly to the centre. KMA is supposed to share in the maintenance of schools, but rarely does so. Figures are not available for primary school enrolment but the national average is 65 per cent and it is thought that the figure for Kumasi is somewhat higher. Enrolment rates are particularly low among the poor, migrant communities from the north and are significantly lower for females than for males.<sup>(14)</sup> Although the capacity of the school system has been increased, there is widespread dissatisfaction with the quality of education, with insufficient teachers, insufficient books, overcrowding, poorly maintained facilities, etc.

Other major services such as water and electricity are the responsibility of state enterprises (Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation and Electricity Corporation of Ghana), which have minimal contact with KMA. While piped water is available in most parts of the city, most poor households do not have individual connections and so depend on purchasing water from privately owned taps, at prices considerably higher than the cost of Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation water, or obtaining it from polluted streams.<sup>(15)</sup> Water provision is particularly poor on the urban periphery where there is rapid urban growth. According to rules set by its parent ministry, Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation is not supposed to extend the network into unplanned settlements, thereby preventing it from improving services to some of the city's poorest. Even where there is a piped network in the area, water pressure is often inadequate and the service not continuous. These inadequacies impinge particularly on the poor, not just in terms of cost and time spent collecting water, but also in terms of undermining informal sector businesses, such as food-processing, which depend on good supplies of potable water. The impact is felt particularly by women who operate such businesses and who may have to collect water at night, and on girls whose education may be curtailed by the time spent collecting water. Electricity supplies are more widely available, with 90 per cent of Kumasi being covered by the network. But here too, the supply is not reliable, with electricity being available only part of the time and serious voltage drops common in the early evening.

Housing is, effectively, in the private sector, whether through private renting or through individual construction on land obtained through the traditional land allocation system. Public transport is also almost entirely

14. GLSS data for 1992 put the school enrolment rate in "other urban centres" as 72.2 per cent for males and 56.9 per cent of females. See Government of Ghana (1995), *Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 3*, Accra, Ghana Statistical Service, page 14.

15. GLSS Round 3 suggested that 99.3 per cent of Kumasi is served with piped water (see reference 14, page 51) but this figure is misleading since many do not have access to the network and, for many, the water source is too distant for regular access. See Rakodi, C (1996), "Opinions of health and water service users in Ghana", *The Role of Government in Adjusting Economies*, Paper 10, University of Birmingham, Development Administration Group.

a private sector activity. Although there is competition, public transport is heavily dominated by two rival motor transport unions, the Ghana Private Road Transport Union and the Progressive Transport Owners Association. The central government sets fares and KMA has no role in the regulation of public transport or in fare-setting. On the whole, public transport appears to be accessible to the poor although operators are sometimes able to exploit the great demand for their services (for example, by cutting short journeys and demanding an additional fare to restart the journey).

KMA's responsibilities are limited to waste disposal, sanitation (except water-borne sewerage), drainage, environmental health, and street-trading and markets, and its performance in these areas leaves a lot to be desired. Waste collection is provided door to door only in high-income areas and, although charges are levied, these nowhere near cover costs. Thus, effectively, KMA is providing a large subsidy to the high-income areas. Because of the failure of KMA to provide adequate street-cleaning services in the CBD, this is now effectively being done by an NGO in return for "voluntary contributions" from businesses. The service in low-income housing areas is minimal: a few skips which are emptied only infrequently although, recently, there has been an attempt to provide more skips. It is estimated that two-thirds of the waste generated in residential areas does not reach the landfill.<sup>(16)</sup>

Sanitation and drainage remain totally inadequate, with pollution and flooding being serious problems which KMA has barely begun to address. Only 30 per cent of households have satisfactory sanitation arrangements in their homes while 24 per cent use the very unhygienic system of buckets. Nearly 40 per cent of KMA residents depend on public toilets, for which there are often lengthy queues. In Atonsu, for example, there are only two public toilets, each with 14 squat-holes, to serve 10,000 inhabitants (i.e. more than 300 people per squat-hole). It is not surprising, therefore, that many people relieve themselves in plastic bags which are put into the community refuse skips or disposed of indiscriminately. Disposal of waste from bucket latrines is generally into streams which are elsewhere used as water sources. And, again, the inadequacies of sanitation affect women more than men.

Kumasi does have a network of public toilets, built in the past either by the city government or by community labour. Most of these were privatized a few years ago and, initially, there were improvements in the management and cleanliness of the facilities. Latterly, however, it appeared that the contracts were given to members of the assembly who supported the chief executive. Standards started to decline, charges were increased and children were prevented from using them free of charge, as they had previously been allowed to do.<sup>(17)</sup> Consequently, there has been an increase in defecation on open ground and waste dumps, with resulting increases in pollution and health risks. The main impact of all this is on the poor.

KMA has been active in building markets, mainly because of their revenue potential, but, due to a lack of consultation with possible users, a number have been built in inappropriate locations and remain unused. Because of inadequate financial resources, KMA has often relied on advance contributions from traders to fund construction. This effectively excludes low-income and informal sector traders.

16. Post, Johan (1995), "The problems and potentials of privatising solid waste management in Kumasi, Ghana", *Habitat International*, Vol 23 No 2, page 204.

17. Interestingly, at least one sub-metro has entered into management contracts with the new private operators of public toilets, both as a way of ensuring that services are managed properly and to recover some of the revenue which the sub-metro had previously generated from public toilets.

## f. Mobilization and Use of the City's Financial Resources

It is not surprising to find that KMA has serious financial problems although its position did improve with the introduction of the district assemblies' common fund, which transfers 5 per cent of national tax revenue. In 1997, this represented 36 per cent of KMA revenue. However, poor performance on revenue collection and weak financial management mean that there are far fewer resources available for local services than there should be.<sup>(18)</sup> Overall, actual revenues in 1997 amounted to about Cedis 6,000 per citizen (assuming 1 million population), equivalent to about US\$ 2.50. Apart from the common fund, central government contributed 19 per cent of KMA revenue in staff salaries, leaving 45 per cent to come from local revenue sources. Of these, the largest were market fees (16 per cent), property tax (7.4 per cent) and business licences (6.4 per cent). For the most part, local revenues impact relatively little on the poor, with the exception of business licences imposed on informal sector traders, the fees for which were increased dramatically in 1998. Market fees and business licence fees can be passed on, in part at least, to consumers, many of whom will be poor.

It is not possible to analyze properly the pattern of recurrent expenditure by sector, as the budget separates out the largest component, namely, salaries. But it is clear that waste management is by far the largest sector. Central administration, including assembly members' allowances, absorbs a relatively small proportion of the total. On capital expenditure (KMA's own plus the common fund), again, by far the largest sector was solid waste and sanitation, mainly refuse trucks (45 per cent), with 16 per cent going on improvements to the assembly building and chief executive's house, and only 12 per cent on health and education projects. Given that the waste collection service is aimed mainly at high-income areas, the benefits of KMA expenditure for the poor would appear to be small. Previous studies<sup>(19)</sup> have shown that, while KMA's development priorities have focused almost entirely on infrastructure, the priorities of poor communities are more towards social/economic expenditure.

The sub-metro assemblies have virtually no resources. In theory, they are supposed to receive a share of the revenue from KMA but, in practice, they receive only small, ad hoc allocations agreed by the chief executive. In 1996, the budget for sub-metro, serving around 200,000 people, was a mere 13 million Cedis (about US\$ 3,500), which barely covered the immediate costs of operating the assembly. Another sub-metro had to relocate its premises because it could not afford to pay the bills on it.

## g. KMA's Approach to Poverty

It is probably fair to say that KMA does not have an approach to poverty. Certainly, it has no clear policy or strategy for poverty reduction and many of its policies adversely affect the poor. Formally, it is the responsibility of sub-metro assemblies to address poverty but, since they have minimal functions and resources, they are not in a position to do so.

Officially, district assemblies are supposed to allocate 20 per cent of their common fund receipts to pro-poor, income-generating and other community-based, poverty reduction activities but this does not seem to be happening in KMA.

There certainly does not appear to be any clear policy in relation to

18. The speech by the regional minister, Ashanti, in January 1999 was deeply critical of the performance of KMA (quoted in Korboe, Diaw and Devas (1999), Annex 2B, see reference 3).

19. Korboe, David (1996), *Poverty Profile of the Kumasi Metropolis: Report on the Aboabo and Appiadu Communities*, Accra, Save the Children Fund, UK; also see reference 4.

informal settlements. Whilst the chief centred land tenure system prevailing in Kumasi has prevented the development of large-scale squatter settlements common elsewhere in the developing world, most low-income settlements lack infrastructure and even basic services such as the removal of waste. Flooding, stagnant water and pollution of water courses from human and solid waste create major health hazards for the poor yet the city appears to have no strategy for addressing such problems.

Equally worrying is KMA's arbitrary response to the informal sector, which probably represents over 70 per cent of employment in Kumasi. The chief executive has adopted a ruthless approach towards unofficial traders in the central area and regularly leads raiding parties on such premises. The traders, who are often amongst the poorest, regularly lose equipment and stock. Meanwhile, in 1998, KMA dramatically increased licence fees (three-fold on average), provoking a major confrontation with traders. This was exacerbated by the fact that the contract for collecting the licence fees was in the hands of CIBA, a traders' association widely perceived as being associated with the national governing party (NDC).

## h. Charging Policies

Structural adjustment policies have meant the introduction of charges for both health and education services – euphemistically called cost-sharing. Over half of the resources for health services in Kumasi come from patient fees.<sup>(20)</sup> The cost of a consultation at a government clinic is Cedis 500 (about US\$0.20), with “cash and carry” charges for medication.<sup>(21)</sup> Although it is theoretically possible for the poor to be exempt, this rarely happens. Because the fee is perceived as expensive, many do not seek treatment or seek alternatives such as self-medication, herbal remedies, etc.

Fees for primary school education are officially set at Cedis 3,500 per year but the additional costs of unofficial fees, transport, examination fees, textbooks and uniforms greatly increase this. Although less than the fees for private schools (Cedis 60,000 - 130,000 per year), these costs are obviously a problem for the poor. Together with the “opportunity cost” to the family concerned of the time spent by the child in school rather than earning income, this helps to explain the relatively low primary school enrolment rate, particularly in the poor communities. As elsewhere, girls are more likely to be disadvantaged by this than boys.

Fees for the use of public toilets were only introduced in the early 1990s, with the aim of funding improved maintenance. Following privatization, fees were increased from Cedis 30 to Cedis 50 in 1998 but maintenance worsened. For a family, this cost can represent a significant slice of household income (e.g. for a family of five, using the facility only once a day, the cost would represent at least 10 per cent of a basic wage). This, together with the effective ending of free access for children, has resulted in an increase in indiscriminate defecation.

There is a significant difference in the price paid for water by those with house connections and those without. Whilst the block tariff adopted by the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation (set nationally) prices water to residential property at between Cedis 400-1,400 per cubic metre, those purchasing water from a public or private tap usually pay Cedis 50 for a bucket (18 litres).<sup>(22)</sup> This makes purchased water between two and seven times more expensive than water supplied by the Corporation. Actually, such a differential is lower than in many cities in Africa and Asia, probably because the water supply network in Kumasi is fairly extensive,

20. See reference 3, page 52.

21. Cedis 500 is the official charge; it is widely acknowledged that there are unofficial charges as high as Cedis 5,000 levied by government clinics.

22. Officially, those reselling water at a GWSC public tap are supposed to charge Cedis 30 per bucket but there is no effective enforcement. GWSC's policy is not to increase the number of public taps, preferring to install house connections.

leading to a degree of competition. However, those in underserved areas pay more and, for the last few years, the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation has discontinued its provision of public standpipes. Initial connection charges are a major barrier to poor households obtaining their own supply while marginal settlements are not eligible for formal connection. A project funded by the British government's aid agency, the Department for International Development (DFID), is currently examining ways for overcoming this obstacle.

One less obvious aspect of the charging policy for water relates to the use of rising block tariffs. These are widely adopted around the world as a mechanism for cross-subsidizing between high volume users – assumed to be mainly high-income – and low volume users – assumed to be low-income. However, the assumed correlation between consumption and income is not always valid. In Kumasi, a large proportion of the population, and particularly the poor, live in compound houses with shared water connections. The consequence is that poor households often find themselves consuming water at the highest marginal rate. This is quite the opposite of the intended redistributive effect and is often made worse where landlords exploit the lack of available alternatives.

The same issue of rising block tariffs applies to electricity, where there is typically one meter per residential compound. Although, in theory, it is possible to obtain a low capacity, unmetered electricity connection for a flat-rate payment of Cedis 4,000/month which is sufficient to run a few bulbs and a couple of appliances, this option is rarely available. In any case, the Electricity Corporation is moving to a system of prepayment meters which will remove that option.

Table 2 provides a very rough indication of how the costs of essential services relate to monthly income.

<b>Table 2:</b>	<b>Indicators of monthly income and costs of services (in Cedis)</b>
Monthly income	70,000 - 250,000
Monthly rent	5,000 - 20,000
Monthly water	In house: 8,000 - 10,000 Purchased: 6 buckets/day = 9,000
Monthly electricity	7,000 - 16,000
Public transport	400 - 600 per day
Health	500 per consultation plus medication
Education	3,500 per year plus transport, books, uniform, exams, etc.

SOURCE: Derived from Korboe, David, Kofi Diaw and Nick Devas (1999), "Urban governance, partnerships and poverty in Kumasi", University of Birmingham International Development Department, Table 3.17, which was based on a small sample of informants ranging from unskilled worker to master artisans. Approximate exchange rate: US\$1 = Cedis 2,500.

### **i. Civil Society**

The ability of poor communities to improve their position and to secure improved services has much to do with the strength and nature of civil society locally. Our comparative study reveals significant differences between countries and cities on this issue. Cebu (Philippines) and Johan-

nesburg have highly developed civil society organizations, borne out of struggle, acting with and on behalf of poor groups. By contrast, civil society in Kumasi appears to be relatively weak. Although Ghana has a long tradition of community organizations involved in development, as Post suggests, these have become less effective over time, particularly in urban areas.<sup>(23)</sup> Whether this is because of past attempts at political incorporation, or for other reasons, remains unclear.

In Kumasi, quite a number of NGOs exist on paper, but few are active. Some, such as the 31st December Women's Movement and the Association of Committees for the Defence of the Revolution, are politically driven and, as a result, unacceptable to many. Of those NGOs working with the poor, several are involved in micro-finance and others in skills-training. Few, if any, work with poor communities on an area basis, seeking to press for improved services and infrastructure.

Occupation and trade associations can be an important aspect of social capital and a vehicle for poor groups to improve their position. There are some good examples in Kumasi, such as the Aboabo Talia Producers' Association. Some, such as the transport unions and associations of those involved in the motor trade, may be able to exert considerable economic and political power on behalf of their members but their membership is unlikely to include the poorest.

Although there is a long tradition of community self-help in Kumasi (clean-up campaigns, road repair, well-digging, public toilet construction, etc.), there appears to be comparatively little in the way of sustained, grassroots organizations within poor communities. In some places, informal town development committees or associations have been operating, with varying degrees of legitimacy, for many years. These were meant to be replaced by the unit committees elected in 1998 but, in some places, they continue to operate in parallel. Unit committees were meant to increase local participation in decision-making but the same people have tended to remain in control and the deferential culture inhibits challenges to established community leaders. In Kumasi, the formal system of unit committees remains very weak and there often appears to be confusion over the respective roles of these unit committees, the former town development committees, ethnicity-based development associations, assembly members and traditional authorities. All in all, there seems to be little in the way of effective avenues for poor communities to influence the agendas of city government. Even religious organizations seem to have little profile in this context, despite the high proportion of the population belonging either to the church or the mosque.

23. See reference 16, page 210.

#### IV. ARE THERE COUNTERVAILING FACTORS?

GIVEN THE PAINFUL economic adjustment that Ghana has been going through, the poor performance of Kumasi city government in relation to poverty, and the relatively weak institutions of civil society at this time, it is perhaps surprising that the urban poverty conditions are not worse. Are there any countervailing factors which mitigate what might otherwise be a dire situation? There are a few, of which probably the main one concerns the role of traditional authorities in land allocation.

24. Kasanga, R K (1991), *Institutional/Legal Arrangements for Land Development*, Urban Management Programme, Land Administration Centre, University of Science and Technology, Kumasi; also Blake, Barry et al. (1997), *Kumasi Natural Resource Management Research Project: Inception Report*, Chatham, Natural Resources Institute and Kumasi, UST.

25. For native Asantes, the tribute is – formally at least – in the form of drink and meat (two bottles of schnapps and a fatted sheep); for non-natives, it is paid as the monetary equivalent.

26. For non-Asantes, the cost of acquiring land is higher and they do not have the same access to a rent-free “family house” or the same opportunity to build an extension in the family compound, as do native Asantes. Thus, they are more likely to end up renting.

27. Korboe, David (1993), *The Low-income Housing System in Kumasi: An Empirical Examination of Two Neighbourhoods*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

28. See reference 27.

### a. Traditional Authorities and Land Allocation

Traditional authorities remain strong in Kumasi, which is the seat of the Asantehene - effectively the king of the Asante. In practical terms, the main lever of power which the Asantehene possesses is that of land allocation, a process which is exercised through a network of local chiefs. With the exception of certain state lands, all land in the Ashanti region is held in trust for the Asante people by the Asantehene. Anyone wishing to obtain land must have his approval. Land is not sold but, rather, a use-right is allocated. The process of land acquisition involves applications being made through the local chief but requiring the formal approval of, and payment of a supplementary tribute to, the Asantehene.<sup>(24)</sup>

The official cost of obtaining land is relatively modest (“drink money” for the ancestors)<sup>(25)</sup> although the amount demanded varies and the process has become increasingly commercialized. The money is supposed to be divided between the local chief, the Asantehene and the local government, and is not a purchase price but, rather, represents the cost of consulting the ancestors. This means that if an application is refused, the money is not refundable. In practice, the cost of acquiring land by non-natives is considerably higher, effectively approximating the market price. Even so, at least for native Asantes, land acquisition in Kumasi still tends to be cheaper than it would be in many other cities where the land market is fully commercialized.<sup>(26)</sup>

The land allocation system also tends to discourage large-scale land speculation. Native Asante are unlikely to sell the land rights allocated to them since it would be difficult for them to obtain another plot through the traditional process. Since titles are not transferable, anyone wishing to acquire a plot from another has to go back to the local chief for the land to be reallocated. Without a formal allocation note from the local chief, endorsed by the Asantehene, the title will not be registered by the Lands Commission and so will not be valid. Furthermore, an allocatee is required to start building within one year of allocation, otherwise the allocation can be rescinded. Such rescinding is unusual, with the result that there is much petty speculation in the sense that people acquire a plot well in advance of intended development as a hedge against inflation. But the potential is there for allocations to be rescinded and some chiefs issue second leases on plots, sometimes within months of the initial allocation, if they think the plot may not be developed within the required time.<sup>(27)</sup> Thus, the system is characterized by uncertainty, which discourages large-scale, commercial development and speculation.

In recent years, the land allocation system has become increasingly commercialized and subject to exploitation by the local chiefs. Yet, it does still bring about a somewhat greater degree of equity in land ownership and use than applies in many other countries.<sup>(28)</sup> At least in the case of native Asantes, it increases the opportunity for the poor to obtain access to land, although there are also unscrupulous local chiefs who demand more than they are supposed to and who make multiple allocations of the same plot, causing confusion and hardship. Nevertheless, the traditional land allocation system does appear to have prevented the development of large-scale squatter areas with uncertain tenure so common in other parts of the developing world and the subsequent forced relocation of the residents of such settlements. In Kumasi, this is also helped by the comparatively low density and availability of land in the urban periphery which means that the land market is not as constrained as in some cities.

## b. Resident Landlords

Another factor which may have a positive influence is that much of the housing in Kumasi is in the form of communal tenement blocks. In most cases, the landlord is resident and so has a vested interest in ensuring that services are available and the building is maintained. Of course, this does not guarantee that services will be available to tenants nor that tenants will not be overcharged for use of services. Nevertheless, the position of poor tenants may be better than where the landlord is absent.

## c. Donor Involvement

Most improvements in infrastructure and services have come about through donor intervention. Where KMA has contributed to improvements, it has often been as a counterpart contribution to a donor funded project. Donor funded projects have included:

- road reconstruction, which has improved access for businesses and residential areas, and which has benefited the poor through employing large numbers of unskilled workers during construction;
- improvements to electricity supplies essential for businesses, both formal and informal;
- improvements in urban sanitation funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, UNDP and the World Bank, with the construction of private and public latrines, the provision of sewage treatment facilities, and carrying out health education programmes, etc. Although these programmes have only begun to tackle the problems, the fact that they are mostly targeted towards low-income areas has had some impact; and
- increases in the capacity of the water supply system, funded by DFID; and the current programme to improve access to water for low-income settlements.

## d. Tolerating Informal Access and Regulation Contravention

Some of the poor do benefit from illegal water and electricity connections. Others benefit from being able to build houses or operate informal sector activities which do not conform to regulations, often in return for a payment to those charged with enforcement. This is hardly an ideal way in which to assist the poor, since the benefits are arbitrary and unequal, the risks uncertain (e.g., the chief executive's frequent raiding parties on "undesirables" in the city centre) and usually dependent on repeated payments, and the environmental consequences damaging. Much better would be to adopt appropriate (which probably means lower) regulatory standards and enforce them, and to adopt pricing policies which facilitate legitimate access by the poor. Nevertheless, given that such reforms are not about to happen, some of the poor may gain to some degree through these illegal or corrupt arrangements.

## e. Ward-Based Elected Assembly Members

In principle, the fact that assembly members are elected on a ward basis, and supposedly on a non-party political basis, should make them more accountable to local residents than if they were elected from a party list. While the counterfactual cannot be tested, the Kumasi case does not give

great encouragement. However, the weak performance of assembly members has a lot to do with the institutional setup, particularly the dominant position of the present chief executive.

#### f. Supportive Ethnic Networks

Ethnicity is important in Kumasi, as in so many places. It is commonly perceived as a negative factor, leading to discrimination and conflict. However, ethnic networks can offer support and avenues of influence for poor communities. Various ethnic groups in Kumasi organize themselves into development associations in order to mobilize resources for the development of their communities, and into kinship based groups for mutual self-help.<sup>(29)</sup> It seems that immigrant communities from northern Ghana, generally some of the poorest in Kumasi, have been able to make use of support networks, often revolving around the mosque.

29. See reference 5, Section 4.3.1.2.

### V. CONCLUSION

THE AVAILABLE DATA does not enable us to say for sure what has happened to the position of the poor in Kumasi. However, available evidence suggests that, despite some improvement in the national economy, the position of the poor has not really been bettered and may have worsened in recent years. In this, Kumasi's city government, KMA, must share part of the blame.

The process of decentralization in Ghana, begun a decade ago, remains incomplete. Central ministries have been reluctant to decentralize sectoral programmes and many of the services on which the poor depend are outside the control of local government. Cost recovery policies for some of these services have made access for the poor more difficult. Those essential services for which KMA is responsible – sanitation, waste disposal, drainage, environmental health – remain woefully inadequate. In terms of accountability to the consumers of services, and particularly to the urban poor who are often not served at all, the lines of political accountability are weak. This is not only the case for those services for which KMA is responsible but all the more so for those services which are outside the purview of KMA. KMA appears to have no strategy for dealing with the situation and no coherent policy in relation to poverty. A significant factor in the weak performance of KMA is the autocratic and arbitrary management style of the present chief executive, who wields enormous power and discourages participation by others.

Nor, despite a well-established tradition of mutual self-help, have civil society organizations yet developed in ways which would enable the poor to bring effective influence to bear on the institutions of city government to improve services for them. However, there do appear to be some countervailing factors which prevent the poor from being crushed. Notable among these are the traditional land allocation system which, although undermined by commercial pressures, does provide access to land for at least some of the poor, and supportive networks of ethnic loyalty.

At this stage, these are only tentative conclusions which require more rigorous testing during the next phase of our research.



## MSc Environmental Issues in Latin America

The MSc Environmental Issues in Latin America provides students with a detailed understanding of the key questions in the natural, rural and urban environment in the region. The degree may be taken over one year full-time or two years part-time. The range of courses, and the dissertation in which students pursue their chosen topic in depth, provide an excellent foundation for professional work or for academic research.

**Environment and Society (core course)** - focuses on political ecology, environmental history and critical approaches to environmental policy. The course also covers issues of deforestation, agroforestry, cultural survival, the sustainability debate and indigenous environmental knowledge.

**City and the Environment** - examines the scale and nature of environmental problems in cities of Latin America and how they affect human health, local ecosystems and global cycles. The course also considers rural-urban interactions that influence urban and rural environments, especially how city-based demands for goods and city-generated wastes influence the environment of their region.

**Food and Agriculture** - provides students with a theoretical framework to consider various aspects of farming, peasants, land

tenure and agrarian change. Case studies include conceptions of the peasantry; gender and rural development; the colonial hacienda; rural labour; indigenous knowledge and alternative agricultural development; and agrarian reform.

**Indian and Peasant Politics** - examines the emergence of new forms of Indian and peasant identity and politics in the Andes, in Guatemala and in Brazilian Amazonia.

**Economic Development of Brazil** - covers the economic development of Brazil from colonial times, with special emphasis on the economic policy issues of the contemporary period.

**Economics of Latin America** - examines the main economic features and trends of Latin American countries.

**The Institute of Latin American Studies is an internationally recognised centre of research excellence. It offers the largest and most varied postgraduate programmes on Latin America in the UK, supported by its own library of research materials and the extensive library collections of the University of London. The Institute offers a number of Master's degree bursaries, and funds to support fieldwork for Master's and research students.**

### Master's and MPhil/PhD programmes

- MSc Environmental Issues in Latin America
- MA Latin American Area Studies
- MA Brazilian Studies
- MSc Latin American Politics
- MPhil/PhD in Latin America Environmental Studies, Economics, History, Politics and Sociology

### Further Information:

Postgraduate Administrator,  
Institute of Latin American Studies,  
31 Tavistock Square, London, WC1H 9HA, UK  
Fax: +44 20 7862 8886  
Tel: +44 20 7862 8873  
Email: [ilas@sas.ac.uk](mailto:ilas@sas.ac.uk)  
ILAS Home Page: <http://www.sas.ac.uk/ilas>