Productive and Functional Upgrading Stratagems on the Bamenda Commercial Centre for a Sustainable Urban Development of the City

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Abstract. The Bamenda commercial centre does not only act as the city's heartbeat but also as its financial pool. Unfortunately, the commercial centre is neither planned nor developed as expected as traffic congestion, make-shift infrastructure, poor waste disposal, and insecurity are identified. This article divulges that productive and functional strategies are incumbent if development is to be controlled, managed and sustainable in the Bamenda commercial centre. Some 120 questionnaires were administered to stable and unstable traders, bike riders, taxi men, bankers and other business owners who frequent the area on daily basis. ArcGIS 10.0 and AutoCAD Map 3D soft wares were used in the production of maps in this work. In-depth research documentation was done to gather information used for results and analyses. Results from findings propound that the state of housing in the commercial centre is sub-standard and anarchical. Close to 82% of houses are built with temporary materials such as wood, earth blocks and corrugated iron sheets. The commercial centre is reputed for the high tonnage of waste it produces daily especially around the markets but has only six garbage cans. The main and food markets have little or no parking space for buyers and congestion along access streets leads to accidents. The existing infrastructure is poorly maintained and managed with just 50% of roads in the centre tarred. The article recommends that a complete upgrading of the Bamenda commercial centre will not only benefit the municipal council, but will as well render the development of the city sustainable.

Keywords: Urban upgrading, planned commercial centre, sustainable development, urban anarchy, Bamenda city

Introduction

Commercial centres in cities are areas composed of buildings in the form of downtowns, central business districts, financial districts as well as shopping centres (Reuel *et al.* 2013). These centres are catalyst to sustainable levels of development par excellence if the public infrastructure and facilities available are standard. Commercial centres however, cannot be satisfactorily considered as planned if the cities are far from being one. The inadequacy observed in the planning of Cameroonian cities has elicited unorthodox development of commercial centres. This is confirmed by the fact that central neighbourhoods progressively become converted into commercial centres over the years as most economic activities are located in ideal town centres to attract customers. Such areas as time goes on increasingly develop into commercial centres unfortunately without any planning or control to avert and side-step anarchy. The city of Bamenda which is the headquarters of the North West Region in Cameroon has metamorphosed in like manner (Fombe & Balgah, 2012). The section in Bamenda called commercial centre (popularly known as commercial avenue), gained prominence around the 1970s (Ngwa & Nwenfor, 2017) following the concentration of most businesses in the town around the area. This business concentration attracted many other commercial activities leading to congestion and anarchical expansion. The high rate of congestion and urban anarchy warrants a succinct upgrading so as to handle the volume of economic transactions observed on a daily basis. This article therefore proposes productive and functional upgrading stratagems to render the Bamenda commercial centre sustainable.

Bamenda is located between longitude 10º82’19”E and 10º15’19”E and latitude 5º57’40”N and 6º01’62”N (Figure 1a).

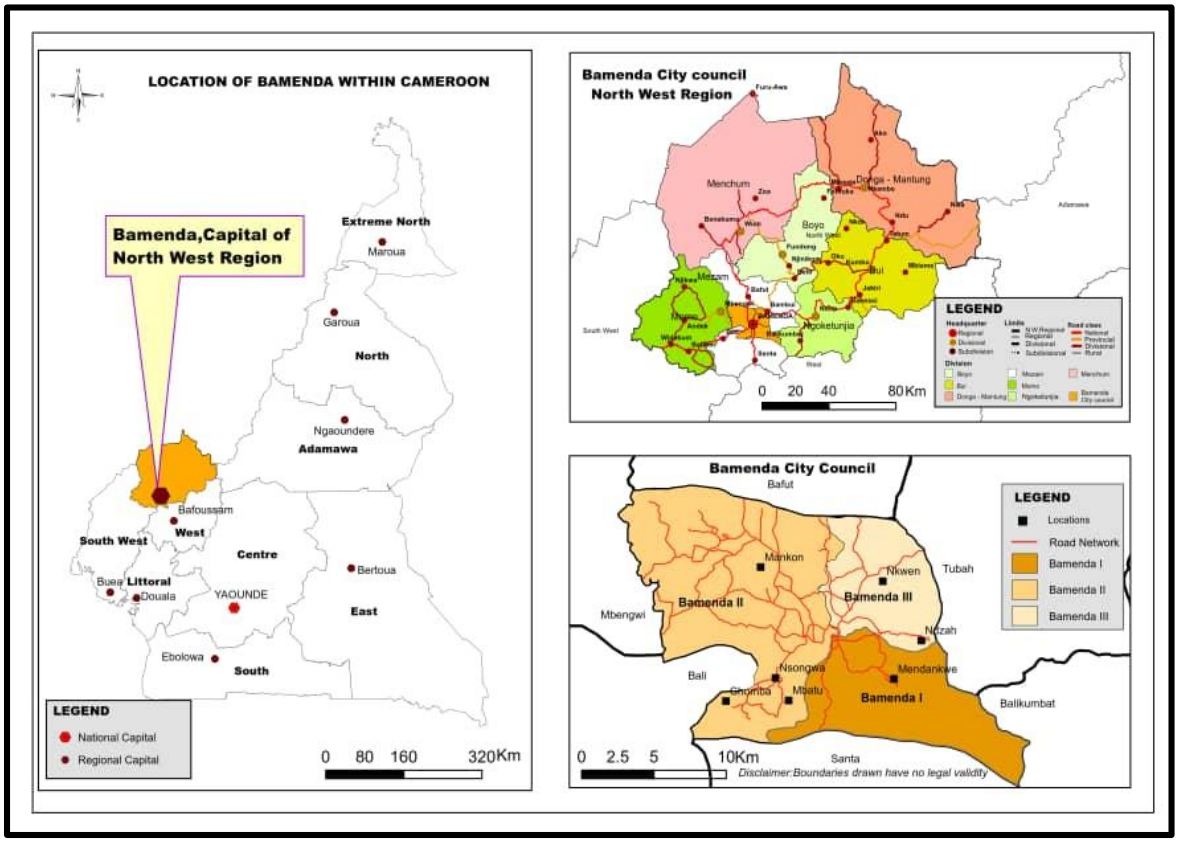

Figure 1a. The location of Bamenda in Cameroon
Source: Modified from NIC by Ngong Shong, 2019

The Bamenda Commercial Centre is under the administrative jurisdiction of the Bamenda City Council and Bamenda II local council and covers a surface area of about 135ha. It is bounded to the north by Ntamulung and Azire, the east by Big Mankon, the south by Atuazire and the West by Nitob neighbourhoods. It is made up of the Fon street, GMI and food market quarters as well as the Main market and Stadium areas. It also includes the Atuazire Street, Old town area up to Sonac streets and Veterinary junction (Figure 1b).

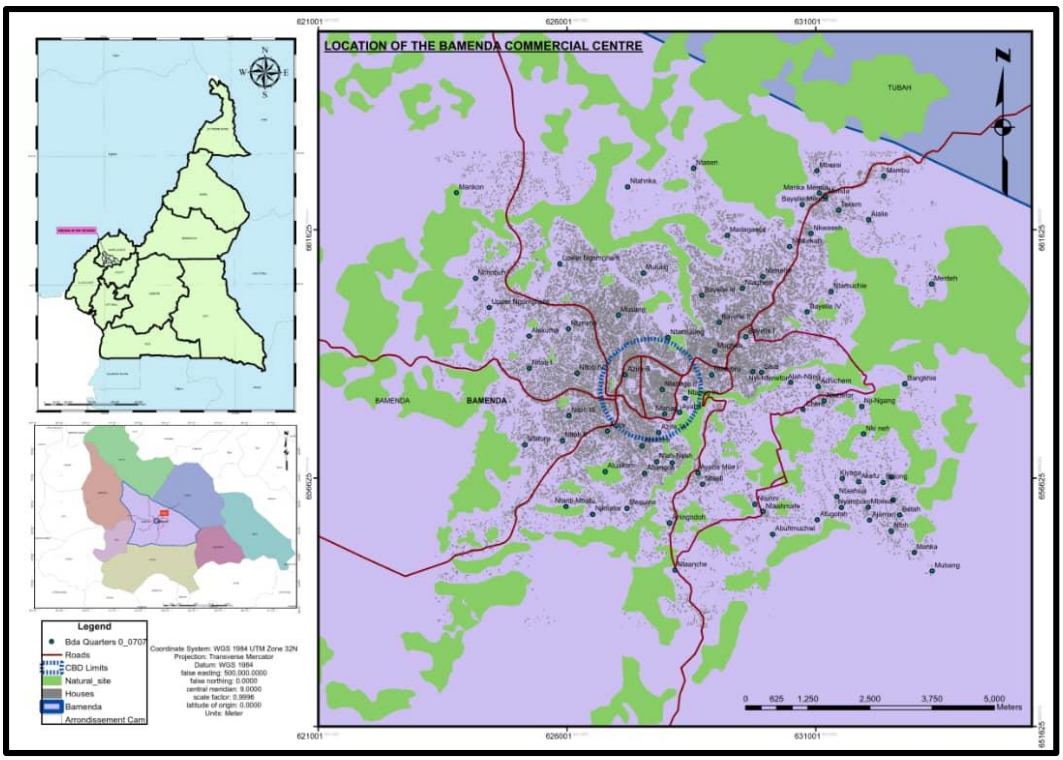

Figure 1b. Location of the Bamenda Commercial Centre
Source: NIC and field work, 2019

Literature Review

This article probes into several scientific literatures on urban upgrading and development with much emphasis on what has been written about Bamenda so far and how this work has some new contribution to offer. Urban upgrading which is the sum of planning measures carried out on poorly built areas with the objective of ameliorating the urban tissue (Reuel *et al*, 2013), is geared towards improving on the living standards and security of the population. The type of infrastructure and nature of roads found in the Bamenda commercial centre requires upgrading for sustainability. The case of Bamenda is not very different from what is observed generally in Cameroon as the urbanisation process found leaves much to be desired (Fombe & Balgah, 2010). The patterns and implications reveal that there is more to be done on the planning of the cities as they develop more in an unplanned manner. Anarchical expansion and settlement has perturbed the development of African cities (Mougoue, 2016), as difficulties of growth are observed in Cameroon as well. The genesis of the Bamenda commercial centre dates as far back as the 1970s (Ngwa & Nwenfor, 2017), where business concentration started gradually and later became the hub spot of trade in the town. The trade pattern which operated in an unplanned nature where traders brought goods on a weekly basis gradually developed into a permanent market of daily sales (Takor, 2011). This activity however, developed more in an unplanned than planned manner with a lot of impact on the development of the Bamenda city.

The conservation of natural urban space as a productive upgrading strategy will not only enhance development of an area, but will as well improve on the urban aesthetics of the town (Mofor, 2019). Such conservation is being done to preserve both the natural and socio-cultural values of Bamenda distinguishing the town from others in the country. Further urban aesthetics is found in the urban green development planning of Bamenda amidst the challenges geared towards a well organised planned city (Kimengsi & Fogwe, 2017). Bamenda is no doubt under perpetual urban renovation for a better face lift and planned urban development. The city is faced with numerous environmental consequences of rapid urbanisation amongst which

unplanned settlement and anarchy are observed (Nyambod, 2010). Spatial expansion has gradually consumed the vegetation as the built-up area increases but unfortunately in an unplanned manner. This unplanned increase or expansion is faced with the non-respect of planning regulations which has triggered environmental management deficiency (Ndi, Kometa, & Lambi, 2017). Bamenda is therefore faced with urban development and planning insufficiency which can as well be observed in the commercial centre.

Cognizance of the development challenges in Bamenda, several productive and upgrading methods can be applied to salvage the situation and improve on the planning of the town. Such methods include wetland management in the course of land use changes that occur in Bamenda (Balgah & Kimengsi, 2016), used as urban development strategies to create space and ameliorate living conditions. Such policy implications are necessary to combat natural hazards such as floods which affect some parts of the city (Fogwe, 2016). Several other challenges aside floods are observed in the town which hinders sustainable development. Projects such as water resource development are faced with contamination difficulties (Fogwe *et al*, 2016), even as garbage disorder poses a challenge to development of the town as well (Ntoban & Fogwe, 2019). These challenges further affect the hydrological and geomorphological state of Bamenda (Kometa & Akoh, 2012) from urbanisation. This paper proposes some productive and functional upgrading strategies to give the Bamenda commercial centre a new face-lift and render development of the town sustainable.

Methods

Data collection was done through primary and secondary sources for a qualitative and quantitative research. Within the framework of the primary data collection, some 120 questionnaires were administered randomly to traders (stable and unstable), bike riders, taxi drivers, bankers and other business owners who frequent the commercial centre. The commercial centre was partitioned into two sections to ease the questionnaire administration. Section one is the public markets in the form of food and main markets where indoor and outdoor retailing is done. Section two is the private commercial buildings found in the commercial centre located along the Fon's Street area and Commercial Avenue. Random samplings of 60 respondents were attended to on each of the sections based on the fact that these two sections have an almost equal influence in terms of trade. The choice of the respondents depended on people whose activities are focused around the commercial centre but who are not residents of the area based on the fact that the area is for commercial purposes as traders and buyers operate there in daily. This process was done to collect data on the method of operation in the Bamenda Commercial centre for analysis. Further field data was collected through direct observation and interview sessions. Field observation permitted a better understanding of the terrain and patterns of the given urban phenomena. Photographs were captured during the field observation face as pertinent relationships were created with the commercial actors, stakeholders and quarter heads which facilitated discussions. Interviews were held with the management team of the commercial centre and relevant stakeholders. Theses interviews were held with buyers, sellers, transport operators, Bamenda city council workers, Bamenda II sub divisional council workers, the delegation of housing and urban development for the North West Region and syndicates to have first-hand information on the problems hindering the smooth functioning of the centre.

An in-depth documentary research was done in the form of secondary data collection. Documents on planning on Bamenda and other areas were consulted to understand the stakes involved in planning and what could be done to upgrade and develop the commercial centre. The technical section of the Bamenda II council, the department of urban development of the Bamenda city council and a host of other services were consulted in the course of documentary research. Data collected through primary and secondary sources yielded both qualitative and

quantitative treatment and analysis. The Microsoft Excel Spread sheet was used to treat statistical data and generated tables and charts for analysis. The GPS was used to collect commercial centre points for map realisation. This was done through the digitalisation and superimposition of data collected and updating of existing data for map production and results. ArcGIS 10.0 and AutoCAD Map 3D soft wares were used in the realisation of maps in the research work. The data was treated and analysed and presented as results for discussions.

Results and Discussion

The Bamenda commercial centre can adequately be upgraded for a sustainable development if the following proposals are taken into consideration.

The Genesis and Physical state of the Bamenda Commercial Centre

The genesis of the Bamenda commercial centre is as old as the creation of the town owing to the evolution of the urban economy base since 1902 (SMAUL, 2001). The centre started as a colonial military and administrative headquarters which harboured colonial administrators and soldiers as natives gradually became interested to provide services to the employees. In the course of this exchange of services, trading was introduced between the resident and the population of the hinterland which widened and was extended to the coast, neighbouring Nigeria and the Sub-Saharan region. With a gradual population growth, the surrounding settlements that produced foodstuff started supplying to the urban population. This triggered the cultivation of cash crops such as coffee as time went on and Bamenda become a centre for coffee exportation. These activities encouraged development of the construction industry as well as offices, roads and houses for government officials and inhabitants in the spatial expansion of the town. Considered as one of the oldest parts of the city, the commercial centre remained attractive to business as most people developed theirs to serve the government structures set up by the colonial administration. Population pressure instigated the transfer of government services as Up-station became the new administrative centre of Bamenda. With this transfer, commercial activities therefore took centre stage in the area in the sprawl process of the city in several directions. The inability of the State to plan the commercial centre at the time of transfer of government services to Up-station has led to the urban anarchy observed in the area. It is hoped that the upgrading strategies in this paper will ameliorate the situation and render the city sustainable.

The physical environment of the commercial centre favours urban upgrading. The relief of the urban centre varies from 1235m to the north and 1253m to the south above sea level favourable for drainage. Natural streams flow across the commercial centre zone without any channelling and are exposed to waste disposal from households along the banks. The road infrastructure within and across the commercial centre is old and dilapidated with abandoned tar and little or no gutters for drainage. These disabilities provoke floods and damages to the centre and immediate environment in time of heavy rainfalls. The existing drainage has been occupied by street vendors and urban anarchy has enabled the built-up nature in this centre to be vulnerable to surface runoff and eventually floods. The climatic variation of Bamenda with many months of the wet season and less of the dry one as well affects the smooth functioning of the commercial centre and reduces mobility. The natural vegetation of the centre has gradually been colonised by infrastructural development (Figure 2).

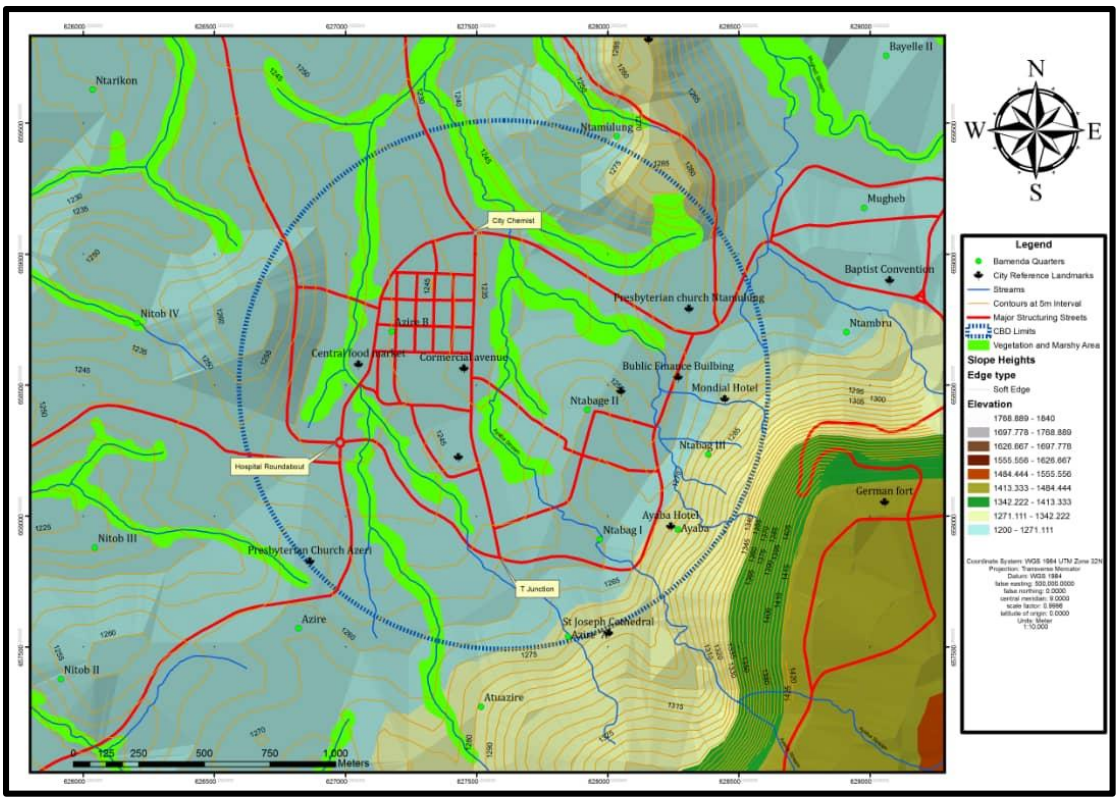

Figure 2. Bamenda commercial centre physical environment
Source: NIC and field work, 2019

The commercial centre is characterised by a low marshy area that stretches across the commercial avenue from Big Mankon hill to Sonac Street. The marshy areas are under constant land reclamation for construction thereby reducing the chances of urban planned green spaces and parks. The urban milieu of the commercial centre is exposed to severe anthropogenic pressure. The soil pollution is observed from poor house constructions, road littering, poor waste disposal and farming practices. Noise pollution from human commercial activities such as music from bars, noise from sawmills and metal workshops are observed in the area. These natural and man-made problems expose the commercial centre to urban chaos.

Anthropogenic pressure on the Bamenda commercial centre has provoked land tenure difficulties. Land occupation in the area is characterised by 11% of unoccupied land, 7% of government owned land and 82% of private owned land (Bamenda City Council, 2012). Results from findings show that 82% of land ownership in the commercial centre belongs to private individuals. However, land tenure laws in Cameroon stipulate that all land belongs to the State (MINDUH, 2014). It is therefore the prerogative of the State to prepare and organise the space occupied by private ownership. The unoccupied land in the Bamenda commercial centre which is supposed to be protected from human activities because of their natural characteristics and environmental status have unfortunately been infiltrated clandestinely. This disorder is reflected in the urban anarchy observed in the commercial centre. The 7% of government owned land is occupied by public structures. Some 31% is occupied by the stadium, 22% by the main market and 16% by the GMI Police. Furthermore, the food market occupies 15% of the government owned land, the congress hall has 10%, the judicial police 4% and schools 2% of total government owned land in the commercial centre (Figure 3). These public structures unfortunately are not supposed to be located around a commercial centre zone since they are attractive areas of the population. Nevertheless, this is the case with the Bamenda

commercial centre which leaves much to be desired. A complete upgrading therefore will salvage the urban disorder situation.

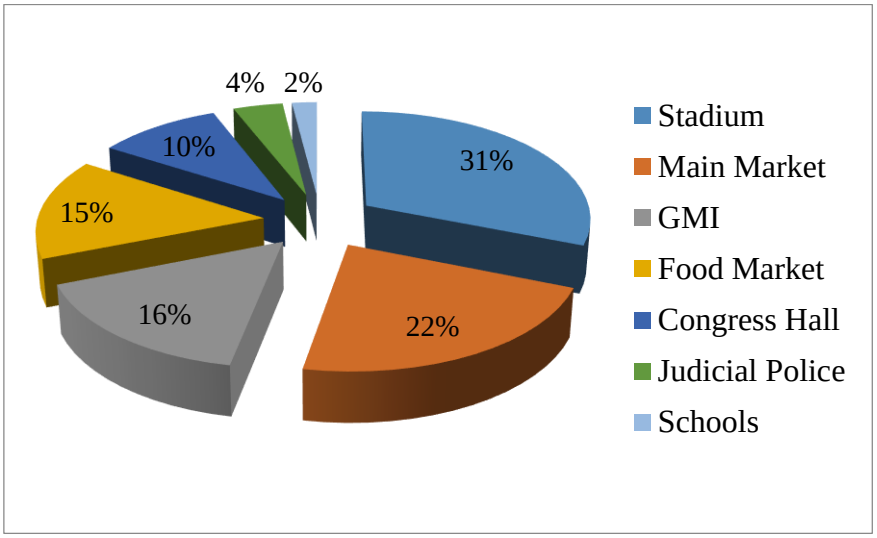

Figure 3. Government occupied land in the Bamenda Commercial Centre
Source: Field work, 2019

The Bamenda commercial centre privately owned land which was supposed to have been prepared, parcelled and leased to individuals did not follow the right channel. Land ownership has remained in the hands of family members and land transactions have been on individual basis. These transactions no doubt are faced with conflicts and disorder which has affected the smooth development of the commercial centre.

The commercial centre is faced with a proliferation of mass waste disposal. This is one of the major challenges of the city council as heaps of wastes are piled-up along the streets of the commercial centre daily. The centre produces a lot of waste per day but unfortunately has only six garbage cans (Figure 4).

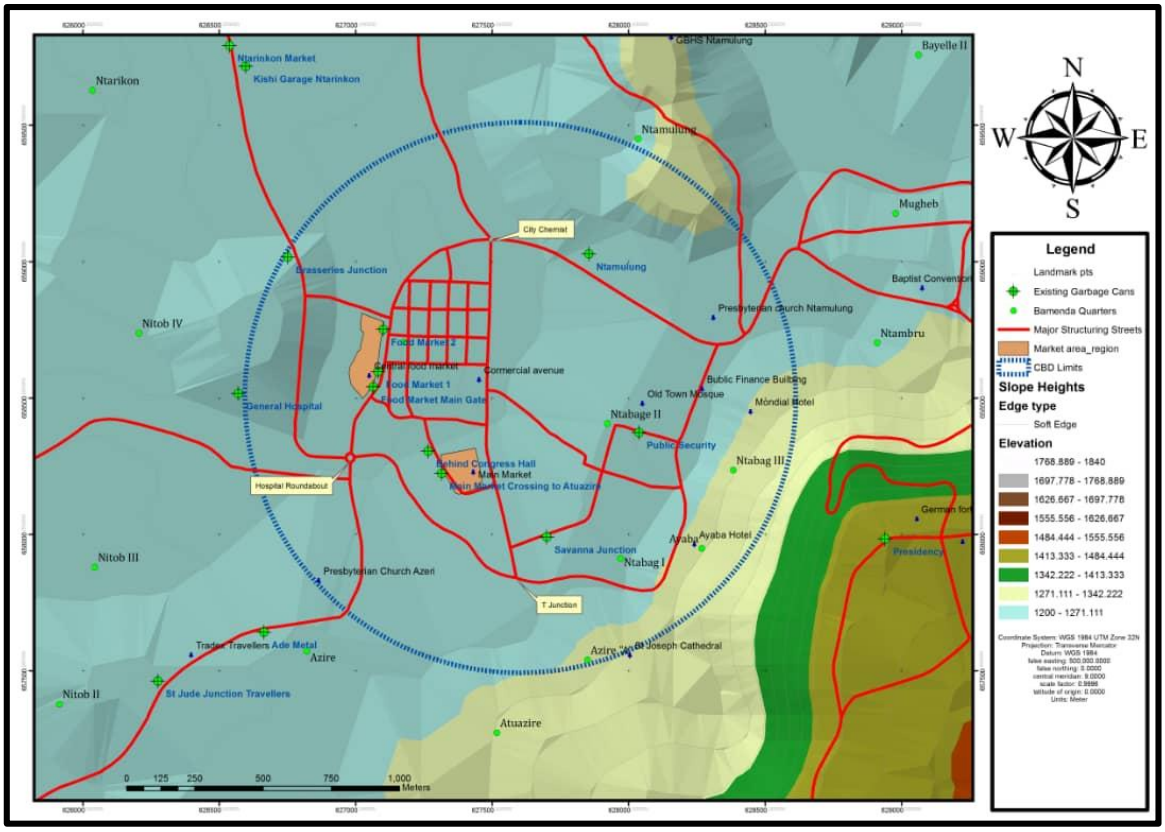

Figure 4. Garbage cans distribution in the Bamenda commercial centre
Source: NIC and field work, 2019

The food market with three waste dumps which are constantly full and rarely emptied increases road littering and traffic congestion around the area. Users have developed other waste dumping options in a bid to ameliorate the situation. However, indiscriminate waste dumping along the streets of the commercial centre remains persistent reducing the chances of it being considered as well developed. An upgrading strategy is incumbent to salvage the situation.

The Bamenda Commercial Centre Development Delima

The anarchical state of the commercial centre is as a result of inertia from administrative and municipal authorities. Town planning in Cameroon is supposed to be executed by several administrative organs from the MINDUH to the city council (Yango, 2014). Since these stakeholders have different roles to play, it is difficult to determine which of them didn't play its role well in the planning of the Bamenda commercial centre. Nevertheless, the Bamenda city council works on a budget which does not facilitate investment and project financing. This explains why planning is done in a gradual manner with no global development plan for the commercial centre. Council arbitrations and interventions are neither coherent nor successive, coupled with limited staffs which promote poor planning.

In another development, space organisation of the Bamenda commercial centre is poor. This is explained by the fact that close to 70% of activities which have been designed and put in place by the city council operate in a disorganised manner. The varied sectors of commercial activities that operate in the centre are controlled by the council. Thus any disorder or misunderstanding is supposed to be handled immediately but, unfortunately it is not the case. Further field research revealed that warehousing activities which help to boost storage in the commercial centre is face with problems of inaccessibility, depreciation, insecurity and limited space. The main and food markets which make up the two commercial centre markets are

characterised by limited parking space for booth traders and purchasers, inadequate waste management facilities, congestion as well as little maintenance of existing infrastructure. Worst still is the occupation of the existing insufficient pedestrian tracks by hawkers and street vendors for diverse activities thereby increasing the disorder in and around the centre.

The Bamenda commercial centre has developed in a disorganised manner as the transport network linking one area to the other is inadequate and inaccessible (Figure 5).

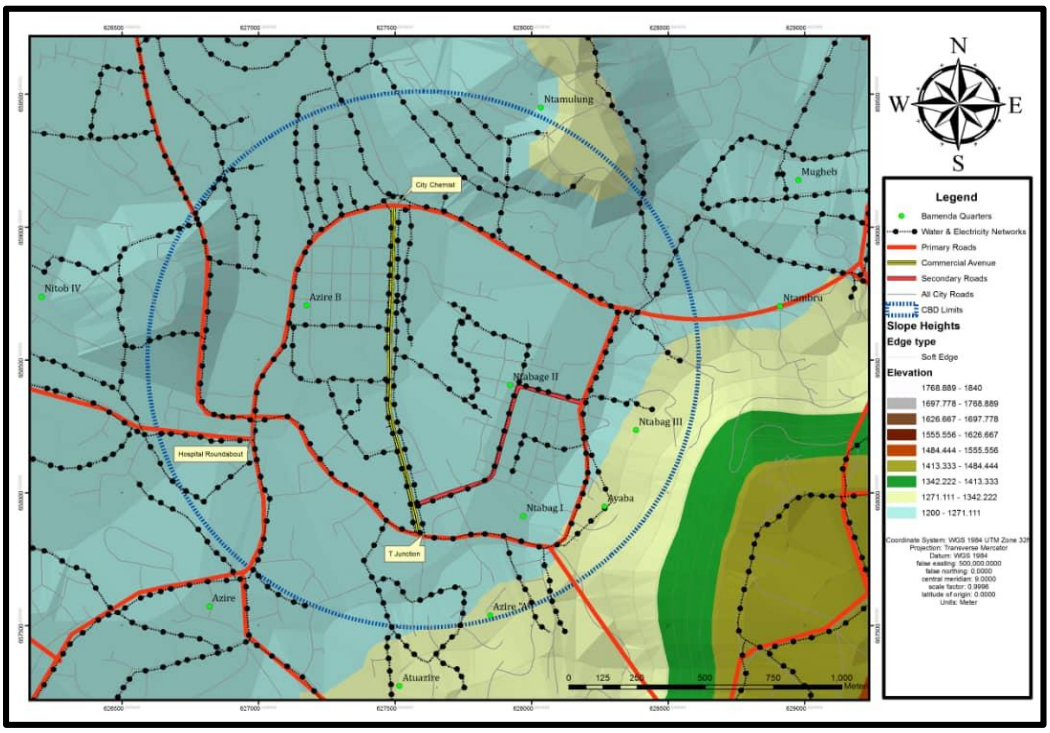

Figure 5. The Bamenda commercial centre transport network
Source: NIC and field work, 2019

Footpaths have been transformed into access roads with little or no prior planning. Over 60% of such footpaths have been transformed in the neighbouring residential buildings for accessibility guarantee. Further disorder is observed from the education, health, hospitality and sports sectors around the commercial centre. Schools located around the commercial centre are faced with noise and street vending pollution difficulties. The existence of the military hospital at the Savanah Street attracts the population and increases the congestion and crowdedness of the centre. The haphazard location of hospitality services such as hotels and restaurants with little or no accessibility worsens the planning state of the commercial centre. Despite the limited space of the commercial centre, urban agriculture is as well observed with intensive subsistence agriculture carried out around the area in the cycle of disorder.

The natural environment of the commercial centre is influenced by the human activities accrued. The consequence has been the adoption of a highly artificial environment with little stability and exposure to natural hazards. This natural environment is undergoing rapid degradation which increases the environmental problems. Unplanned and uncoordinated public and private actions have been carried out on the man-made environment exposing the centre to disorder. The markets pose severe security threats both from stealing and other natural hazards. The transport network is under constant dilapidation and depreciation with little or no maintenance. Fire outbreaks from electricity failures constitute potential threats to human and material damage in the centre. Faced with such depreciation and disorganised state of the Bamenda commercial centre, ameliorative strategies can be adopted to upgrade the area. This

is because basic infrastructures have been provided and the area has already created an attractive business climate with united market conditions of demand and supply.

A factor perception in the Bamenda commercial centre revealed that accessibility deficiency happens to be the major drawback to urban disorder in the area (Table 1).

Table 1. Factor perception of urban disorder in the Bamenda commercial centre

Reasons	Respondent	Percentage
Poor waste disposal	20	16.66
Insecurity	22	18.34
Accessibility deficiency	27	22.50
Inadequate infrastructure	14	11.67
Unplanned settlement	18	15
Administrative inertia	19	15.83
Total	120	100

Source: Field work, 2019

The accessibility problem raised in table 1 has created severe traffic congestion in the Bamenda commercial centre which has paralysed movements in and across the area. This traffic congestion is a favourable situation to insecurity. Several pick-pockets and thieves can easily find their way into the crowd and harass both traders and buyers. The insecurity is as well observed in the breaking into shops and stores in the night as little or no checks are rendered. Furthermore, the presence of just six garbage cans has provoked poor waste disposal in the centre. The waste generated within the centre daily is more than the available garbage cans leading to indiscriminate disposal. Other factors such as administrative inertia have as well provoked disorder in the commercial centre. This is because the authorities had an opportunity to plan and restructure the commercial centre when administrative functions were transferred to Up station but it was not done. This made the population to transform the centre to suit their taste opening room for disorder which has created further problems observed. Aside inertia, unplanned settlement is yet another reason. The Bamenda commercial centre has not benefited from any planned settlement. One can observe residential, educational, recreational and industrial functions in and around the commercial centre. These functions have not adequately respected the norms of urban planning and have been implanted by individuals without any control. This explains why the urban spatial setting observed in the centre is disorganised and needs proper upgrading. Further still, inadequate infrastructure in the centre enhances the disorder observed. The unavailability of roads, buildings and shopping malls has greatly handicapped the state of the commercial centre. It is in furtherance to these urban disorder deficiencies that a proper upgrading of the Bamenda commercial centre is imperative.

The Bamenda Commercial Centre Upgrading Strategies for Sustainable Development

Upgrading the Bamneda commercial centre would not only improve on the trade of the city and boost the economy, but will as well render the development sustainable. Upgrading of commercial centres to give them a new face lift had long existed. Several centres such as the Manchester Andale centre in the UK and the Blantyre commercial centre of Malawi have gone through the upgrading stage and stand the test of time. It is the hope of this paper that such upgrading will change the face of the commercial centre in Bamenda as well. This article advances that; urban land pooling can be used to upgrade the Bamenda commercial centre. Urban land pooling is a way of bringing land parcels belonging to different people as well as a single person together and provides it with infrastructure in a planned and organised manner (Peet & Thrift, 2013). Through this, systematic planning and development of priority areas, land ownership and security over land will be enhanced and rapid unplanned urban growth and

disorder will be controlled. Land pooling is a technic that requires the active participation of all concerned stakeholders and the respect of common interest. In the Bamenda commercial centre, land pooling shall be done through the identification of homogenous and continuous extents of land. A total of 55.57 ha of land have been identified for land pooling in the commercial centre (Figure 6).

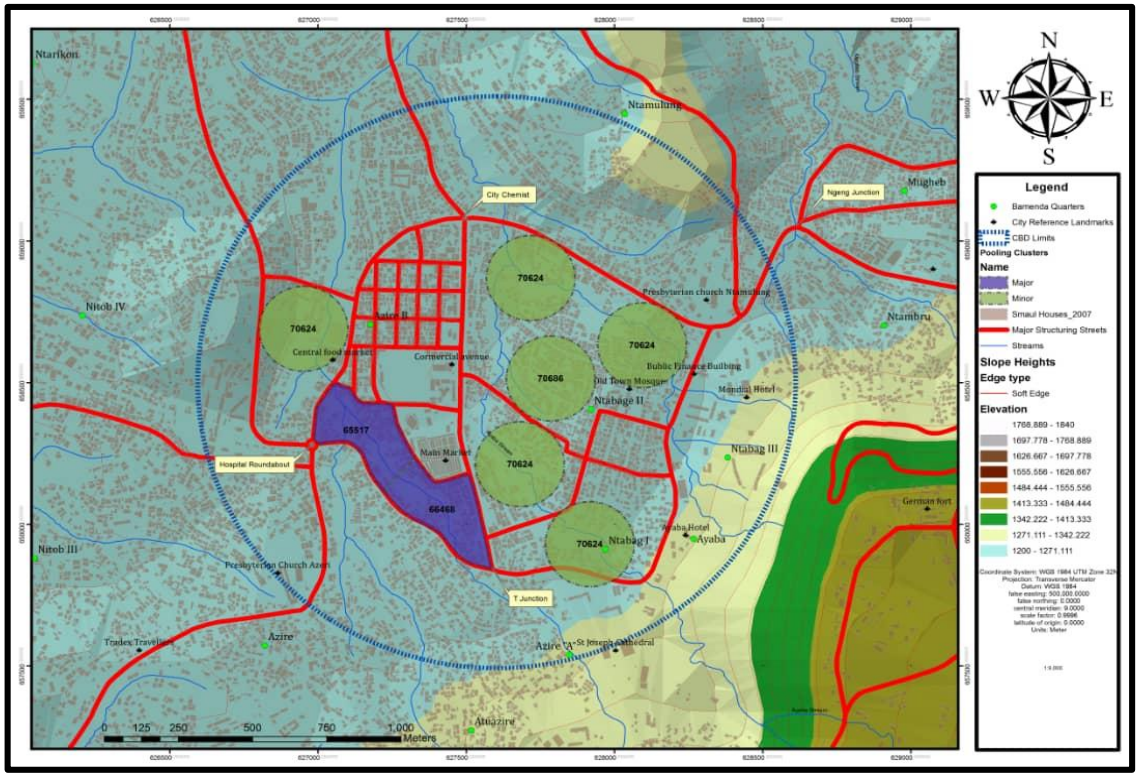

Figure 6. Land pooling clusters in the Bamenda commercial centre
Source: NIC and field work, 2019

The commercial centre will be attributed a building code to ensure that buildings set-up are commercially oriented and respect the laws in place. This upgrading will however be done under the strict respect of the eleven land use zones of the Bamenda city (Master Plan, 2011).

Upgrading and developing the Bamenda commercial centre will require the rehabilitation of existing roads and creation of new ones. Results from field work revealed that total distances of 3.75km of roads are to be created within the commercial centre (Figure 7). The creation of new roads will reduce road accidents, time and cost of movements, decongestion of the present commercial avenue as well as increase in local tax through the creation of new commercial land uses. The rehabilitated and newly created roads will make room for pedestrian and cycling movements with a minimum of two metres and strict respect of rules by all users. This will increase connections from one place to the other, increase coordination in the centre and reduce traffic congestion at best. Furthermore, public parking lots will be created at three areas of the commercial centre for permanent parking, demarcated on marshy and unoccupied land in order to minimise cost of construction. These parking lots shall be designed to ensure safety, security and accessibility to all road users. Parking for vehicles shall adopt both the angle and perpendicular methods to maximise space along the centre. Owing to the absence of pick-up and drop-off points at the commercial centre, severe traffic congestion is observed daily. The upgrading proposal provides opportunity for 23 pick-up and drop-off points within the commercial centre to reduce any congestion.

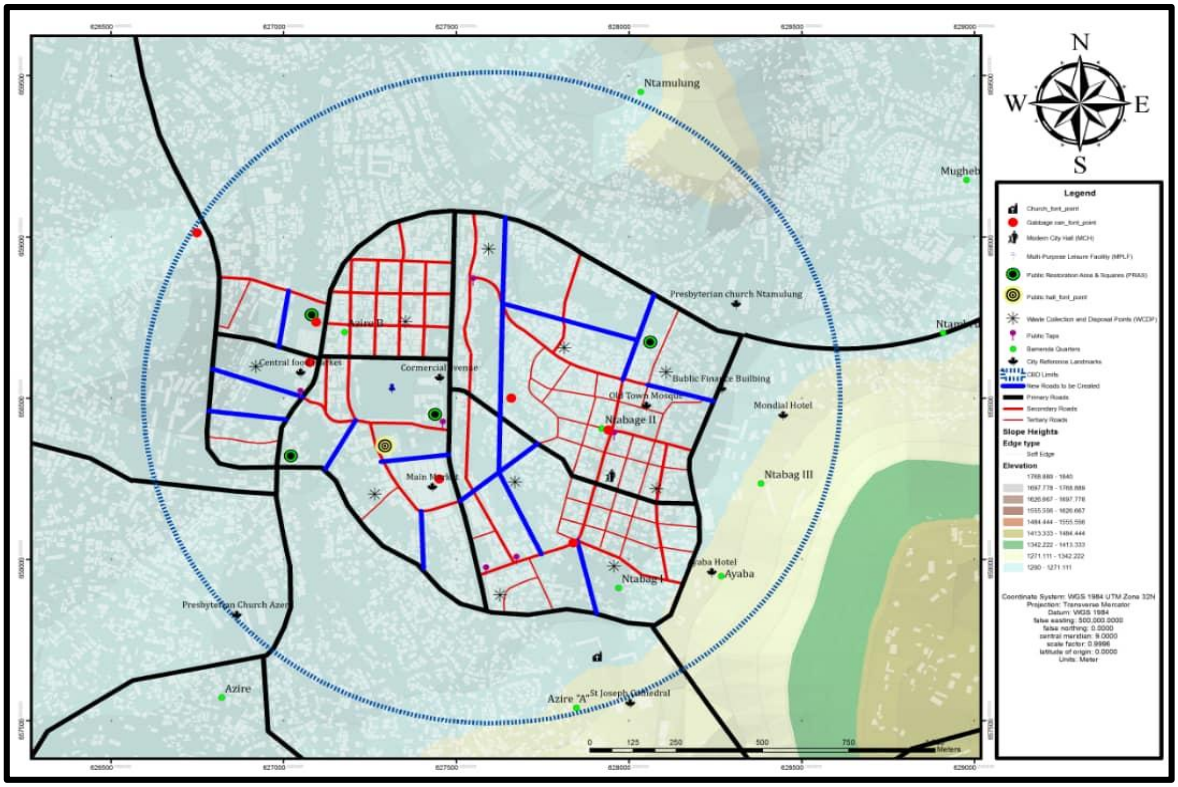

Figure 7. Upgraded communication network in the Bamenda commercial centre
Source: NIC and field work, 2019

Loading and off-loading points as well will be created within the centre to ease the exercise. It will be in the form of an indoor warehouse facility with all utilities provided and accessibility ensured. In this form of control, smaller vehicles will transport goods from the warehouse to the shopping centres and movements will be made easy. The Bamenda city council will have to control the movements of goods and services by creating one way street channel to reduce over crowdedness and unnecessary traffic congestion.

Other productive and functional upgrading of the Bamenda commercial centre will be the creation of a gallery network plan. Field revelations showed that the distribution of basic urban utilities like electricity and water are not only rudimentary but done haphazardly. In order to salvage this situation, utility channels or gallery network will be constructed for easy and safe transportation and distribution of utilities. This will be done in such a way that a main trunk utility corridor (MTUC) will be created around the centre and across the Commercial Avenue and Ntambag road. This trunk line shall link the tunnels of the commercial centre to the rest of the city and shall as well serve as a collection and distribution centre. These corridors shall ensure the proper distribution of electricity, water and optic fibre within the commercial centre. Fire hydrants and public water points shall be placed at specific intervals at all intersections to guarantee safety and prompt intervention if need arises. Control chambers with access to the entire network shall be at road junctions to facilitate maintenance and control. Such a gallery plan will improve on the state of the commercial centre and assure its sustainability (Figure 8).

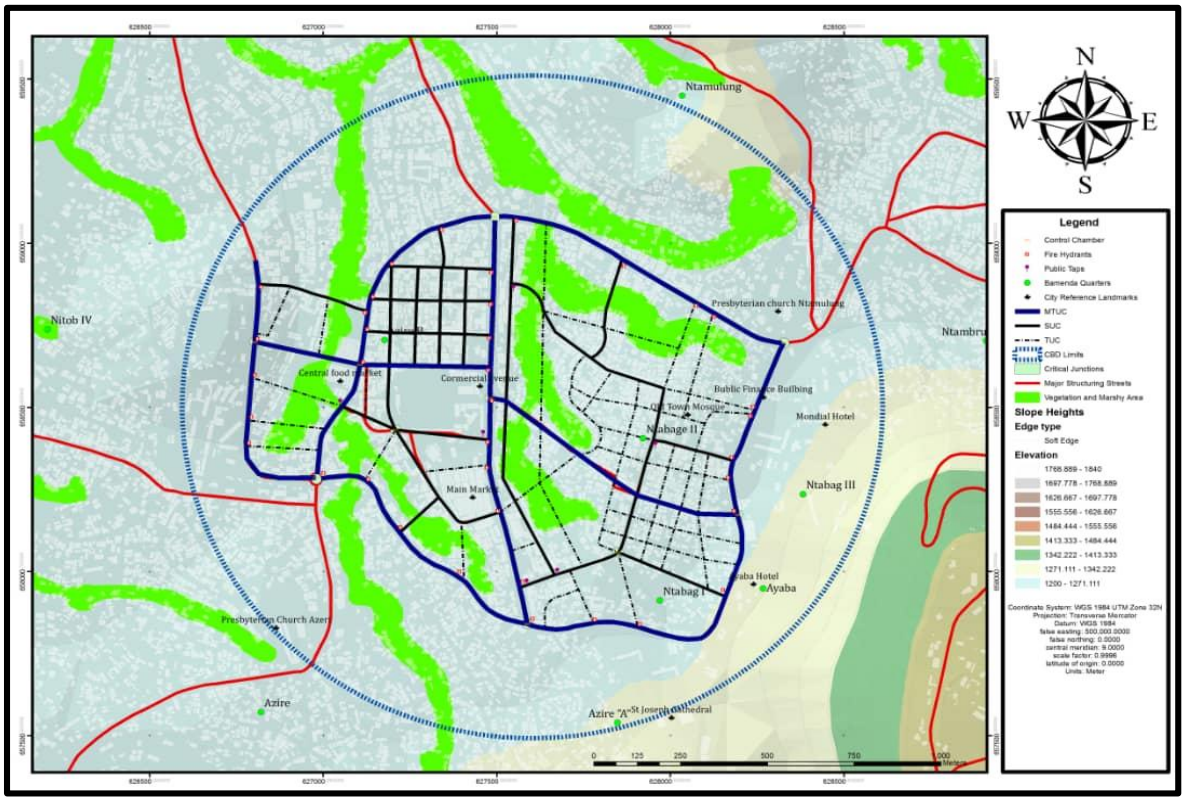

Figure 8. Gallery and socio-recreational facilities of the Bamenda commercial centre

Source: NIC and field work, 2019

The Bamenda commercial centre as replicate of the entire city is handicapped with social and recreational facilities. The upgrading proposal will introduce such facilities to improve on the aesthetics of the city planning and generate revenue to the council. Pubic leisure facilities such as swimming pools, large sports hall, and aerobic studios outdoor pitches for soccer as well as steam rooms will be constructed for such activities. Public restoration areas and squares will be constructed under the strict supervision of the city council and regulated so as to control the hygienic and economic returns of the services. Public squares will be constructed to sell the cities identity and cultural background and boosting the coexistence of the people in the area. Furthermore, other cultural halls will be constructed to accommodate public events and the lone existing congress hall will be upgraded into a modern and multipurpose ceremonial complex. Urban public green spaces will be created at the marshy areas of the commercial centre will be created to conserve the natural environment and improve on the urban aesthetics of the city. Waste management plans will be designed to educate and sensitise the population on good waste management practices to curb indiscriminate dumping and encourage recycling at best. All these strategies if duly adopted and put into use will transform the Bamenda commercial centre into a hub trading centre in the country and beyond. It is the hope of this paper that such research works is valorised so as to improve on the sustainable development of the Bamenda city as a whole.

Conclusion

Productive and functional upgrading stratagems of the Bamenda commercial centre cannot adequately be done without finance. An estimated budget of close to 15 billion Francs CFA is envisaged to carry-out this upgrading project. This paper which sought to propose

upgrading stratagems to the Bamenda commercial centre as a result of the urban disorder in the area discovered that a four to five face project realisation could be done. The Bamenda commercial centre therefore can be upgraded by instituting a five year development plan with succinct results each year. Cameroon in the wake of emergence by 2035 is expected to have well planned and attractive cities with advanced and standard infrastructure and transport network. Such metamorphoses are not only for the commercial centre but the entire city. The upgrading no doubt will improve on the transport network of the area, increase the urban infrastructure and expand the centre into a veritable Eldorado of national and international trade. This transformation will trigger a complete overhauling of the entire city affected by urban disorder. A realisation of this project will include the Bamenda commercial centre in the likes of the Manchester Andale centre in the UK and Blantyre commercial centre of Malawi. A journey of a thousand miles begins by a step. It is the hope of this paper that the bold step of the upgrading journey be considered and adopted by the authority in order to give the Bamenda commercial centre a new face lift and render the city sustainable.

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