

Urban Growth, Globalization and Access to Housing in Ghana's Largest City, Accra

George Owusu¹

¹University of Ghana, Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research (ISSER), Accra, Ghana

geowusu@yahoo.com

Rapid urbanization and urban growth have made housing one of the critical challenges facing urbanite Ghanaians, most especially in the largest urban centre, Accra. This situation is often attributed to deficiencies and weaknesses of national and city-level policies and strategies on housing development. While these factors are widely acknowledged, a factor often lost in many studies on housing is the strong influence of globalization on housing supply and demand on large Ghanaian cities such as Accra. National and global factors as a cause and consequences of globalization have favoured the concentration of economic activities, capital and people in Accra which inevitably have led to pressure on land resources and shelter within and at the peripheries of the city. Notable actors and agencies in this case include: international non-governmental organisations (NGOs); multi-national corporations (MNCs) and expatriates; West Africans (especially Nigerians, Liberians, and Sierra Leoneans); Ghanaian Diaspora community (non-resident Ghanaians living in Europe, North America and elsewhere) and; international returned migrants – all seeking a foothold in Ghana's largest metropolis, Accra.

The overall challenge is that the housing delivery system (supply) in Accra is unable to meet effective demand resulting in a straining on the existing housing stock and infrastructure in the city. As such, the housing needs of many residents of Accra are increasingly being restricted to areas of the city where much of the housing stock is characterized by overcrowding, declining quality and absence of basic services such as in-house water supply, toilet, bathrooms, etc. Consequently, slums and squatter neighbourhoods are becoming very common in Accra. The presence of slums and squatter settlements in Ghana's largest city is a clear indication of the failure of society and government to provide adequate shelter for human habitation. The paper concludes that unless creative and innovative policies which take into account Accra's contemporary status as a global city are instituted, the problem of inadequate housing is likely to grow worse among the ranks of the city's poor residents.