

# The informal housing sector in the metropolis of Abidjan, Ivory Coast

**Alphonse Yapi-Diahou**

**SUMMARY:** This paper describes the people who live in informal housing in Abidjan's precarious settlements. This includes details of from where they came, how long they have been in the city, and where they lived before coming to their current home. It also describes why they came to live there (and why they chose that particular neighbourhood), how they gained access to land or rooms and, for owner occupiers, how they built and financed the building. The paper also contrasts the situation of owner occupiers and tenants in each of these descriptions.

*Dr. Alphonse Yapi-Diahou is Professor of Geography at ENS-ORSTOM, Abidjan, Ivory Coast. This paper is drawn from a longer work entitled *Habitants et Constructeurs de Baraques dans la Métropole Abidjanaise* that was commissioned as a background paper for the forthcoming Global Report on Human Settlements, prepared by UNCHS (Habitat) for the 1996 U.N. City Summit. The original paper included far more details on the ethnic, social and demographic characteristics of the inhabitants. The paper was translated by Jean Lubbock.*

*Address: ORSTOM, BP 293, Abidjan 04, Côte d'Ivoire, Fax: (225) 354015; at present, Dr Yapi-Diahou is at 18 rue Jacquard, 11 000 Carcassonne, France, Fax (33) 6847 6305.*

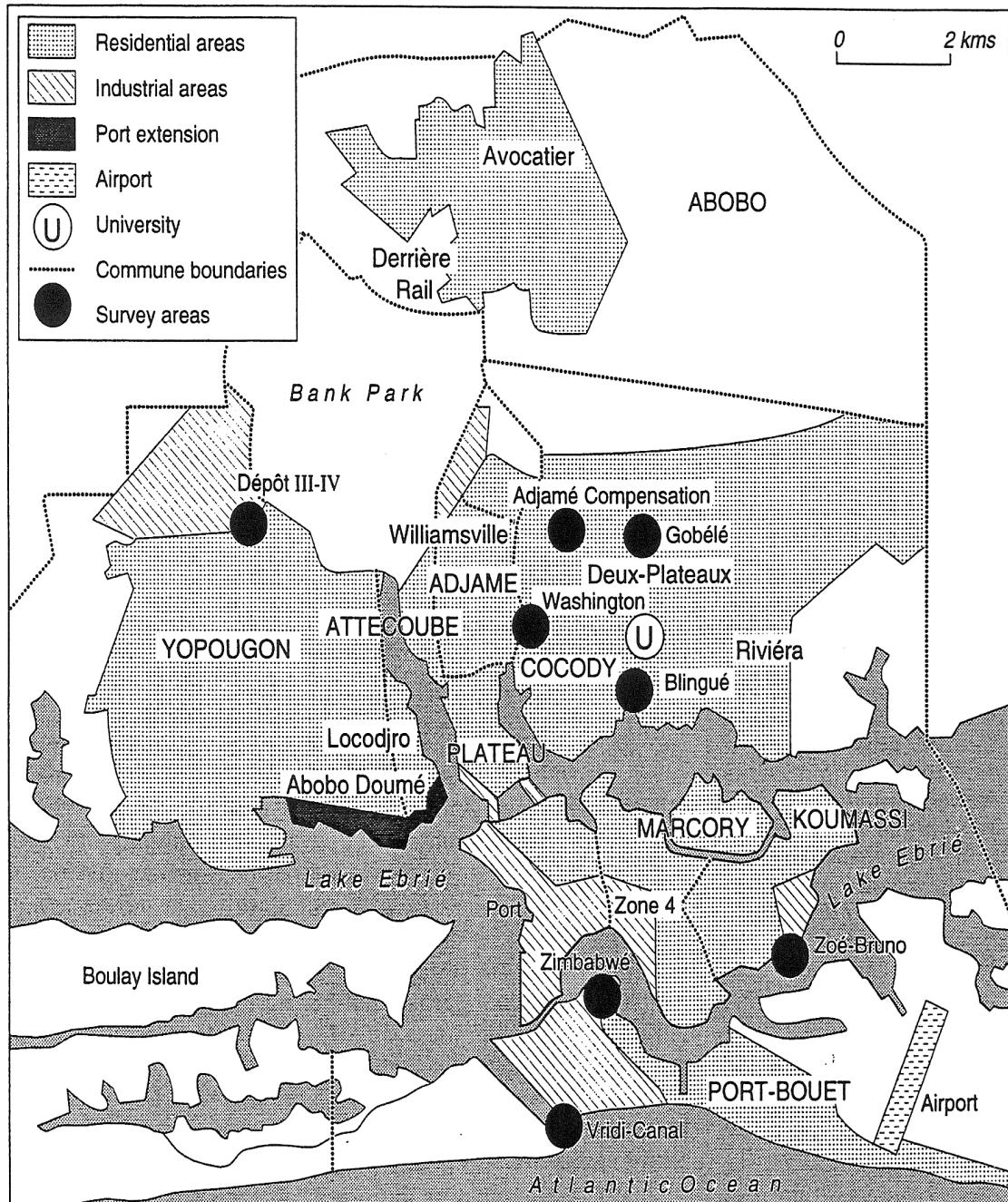
## I. INTRODUCTION

**OF THE TWO** and a half million people currently living in the metropolis of Abidjan, different estimates suggest that between 400,000 to 500,000 (or between 16 to 20 per cent of the population) live in 72 precarious settlements. Contrary to popular belief, the informal housing in such settlements with its makeshift dwellings constructed of planks and other waste materials, put up in contravention of existing land and property regulations, and characterized by a partial or complete absence of infrastructure and services, is still a very open environment. Although informal housing originated long ago in the politics of social and economic exclusion, it is an integral part of the urban social system. It exists not because of the tolerance of the authorities but, more particularly, because of the enterprising spirit of its inhabitants.

The findings presented in this paper are based largely on interviews undertaken with 620 heads of household (including both tenants and owners) in eight precarious settlements. Map 1 shows the location of the precarious settlements where the interviews were made.

As in the population of Abidjan as a whole, both tenants and owners living in precarious settlements originate from several countries. However, most of those living in precarious settlements are foreigners; only 38 percent of heads of household were found to be nationals in the survey. Amongst those who are not citizens of the Ivory Coast, the most well-established

**Map 1: Abidjan:  
Sector and Commune Boundaries and Location of Precarious Settlements Surveyed**



1. There are also some citizens of Cameroon, Gambia, Liberia and Mauritania, although these are not clearly identified in the statistics. This means that this sector is inhabited by an exclusively African population, most of them citizens of West African countries.

foreign groups come from Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea, Ghana, Senegal, Togo, Benin, Nigeria and Niger.<sup>(1)</sup> The cosmopolitan nature of the population living in precarious settlements is more marked than in the government produced low-cost housing sector, where nationals predominate, making up more than 80 per cent of the inhabitants.

Virtually all the heads of households living in the precarious settlements are migrants, although, as a later section explains, many have been in Abidjan for 20 or more years. More than three quarters of household heads have never been to school and very few of those that did go to school completed primary education. Most heads of household in the formal and informal housing sectors taken together are men, with only 9 per cent of households being headed by women. However, women headed households make up 16 percent of all tenants, compared to only 7 percent of owner occupiers. The women owner-occupiers are relatively more numerous in neighbourhoods with a relatively stable existence, such as Vridi-Canal (established in the 1940s).

## II. OCCUPATIONS

**MORE THAN 70** percent of the active heads of households work in occupations where recruitment criteria give no importance to their educational background. They may be traders, launderers, charcoal burners or woodmen, fishermen or fish smokers, smallholders, labourers, watchmen or houseboys, traders, shopkeepers or waitresses/waiters. A second active group (23 per cent) are engaged in trades requiring prior apprenticeship which includes mechanics, tailors and drivers, as well as construction workers. Finally, a smaller group (6 per cent) are made up of office staff and skilled workers, most of whom have had some degree of schooling. Table 1 gives details of the occupations of household heads by nationality.

Some areas of concentration are hidden within this broad range, such as the large number of traders and domestic staff (mostly watchmen and houseboys), who make up almost 45 per cent of active heads of household. Certain occupations are associated with different ethnic groups or nationalities - for instance most domestic staff originate from Burkina<sup>(2)</sup> while Malian, Guinean or Mauritanian citizens excel in various forms of retail trade, with Ghanaians specializing in fishing. Ivory Coast nationals who are not involved in fishing or charcoal-burning make up most of the senior staff and technicians (74 per cent), as well as mechanics (81 per cent) and other heavy vehicle drivers (67 per cent).

This positive correlation between ethno-cultural origin and occupation has spatial consequences. Unlike commerce, which employs people everywhere, some activities tend to be concentrated in particular parts of the city. For instance, 85 per cent of watchmen and houseboys are found in the neighbourhoods of Cocody, a residential and university commune, while 100 per cent of fishermen and other fish traders and smokers are lo-

2. See for instance Dubresson, A. (1989), *Villes et industries en Côte d'Ivoire: pour une géographie de l'accumulation urbaine*, Karthala, Paris, 845 pages. Also Bernus, E. (1962), "Note sur l'agglomération d'Abidjan et sa population", *Bulletin IFAN*, t. XXXI, séries B., No.1-2, pages 54-85; and Deniel, R. (1968), *De la savane à la ville; Essai sur la migration des mossi vers Abidjan et sa région*, Aubier, Paris, 223 pages.

**Table 1: Occupations of household head in the precarious settlements by Nationality**

<b>Occupations</b>	<b>Ivory Coast citizens</b>	<b>Citizens of Burkina Faso</b>	<b>Other Africans</b>	<b>Total</b>
Domestic Staff	10	115	10	135
Trader	36	39	40	115
Basket maker	0	0	1	1
Waiter or waitress	10	6	0	16
Driver	26	10	3	39
Book-keeper	0	1	2	3
Mason	13	6	8	27
Electrician	3	1	0	4
Fish smoker	0	4	4	8
Fisherman	9	1	13	23
Caterer	7	2	1	10
Woodman -				
Charcoal burner	1	0	6	7
Labourer	16	10	4	30
Mechanic	21	1	4	26
Carpenter	3	4	4	11
Farmer - herder	2	8	8	18
Gardener - flower-seller	3	6	1	10
Tailor	5	8	2	15
Senior staff or technician	7	1	1	9
Repairer	2	1	0	3
Clerk	10	2	2	14
Seaman	0	0	1	1
Workman	4	4	0	8
Healer	4	1	0	5
Unspecified	3	6	4	13
Draughtsman	1	0	0	1
Primary teacher	-	1	0	1
Launderer	-	3	0	3
<b>All</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>556</b>

**SOURCE:** Yapi-Diahou, A. (1994), *Les Politiques Urbaines en Côte d'Ivoire et leurs impacts sur l'habitat non planifié précaire: l'exemple de l'agglomération d'Abidjan*, Doctoral thesis, University of Paris VIII Saint-Denis, 718 pages.

cated in the southern neighbourhoods along the coast and lagoon, mainly in Zimbabwe. Labourers, workmen, office staff and technicians, most of whom are nationals, tend to be attracted to the vicinity of industrial areas (Depot III-IV) or neighbourhoods with good transport facilities (Washington). As Burkina nationals are concentrated in domestic employment, they tend to move into neighbourhoods close to the villas, apartments and public and private establishments in Cocody.

Heads of household are no doubt trying to combine the advantages of living close to their places of work with those of owning their accommodation or, in the case of tenants, of competitive rents. As will be described in more detail, later in the paper, in all cases, household heads seek to combine their oc-

cupational and residential strategies.

### **III. FROM THE VILLAGE TO INFORMAL HOUSING; MIGRATION AND RESIDENTIAL MOVEMENTS IN THE CITY**

#### **a. Access to the City and Length of Settlement**

**MOST OF THOSE** who live in precarious settlements (both owner-occupiers and tenants and both nationals and non-nationals) arrived in Abidjan directly, with no stopping-off points. This is in contrast to the occupants of low-cost public housing, most of whom reached Abidjan after several stop-offs; for 62 percent of those interviewed, this was for educational reasons.<sup>(3)</sup> This reason for stopping-off is practically unknown amongst the inhabitants of informal housing who did migrate in stages (27 per cent). For them, employment was the main reason stated, i.e. related to income.<sup>(4)</sup>

There are also interesting contrasts between tenants and owner-occupiers within informal housing, as they belong to different generations of migrants who arrived in successive waves in Abidjan following the opening of the Port-Bouet Wharf in 1927 and up to the third decade of independence in the 1980s. Only 6 percent of those interviewed had been in Abidjan less than five years. Thus, more than 90 percent are migrants who had been settled in the city for at least six years when they were interviewed; some 83 percent had been there for more than ten years, 52 per cent for more than 20 years and 23 per cent for more than 30 years. Taking all types of employment status and nationality together, the residents in informal housing are thus far from being rural migrants newly torn from the countryside in which they were born. On the contrary, informal housing in Abidjan is largely occupied by long-standing city dwellers drawn from the different waves of migrants. Their status as long-standing city dwellers puts the inhabitants of informal housing in Abidjan on the same level as those in many similar settlements in other Third World metropolises.<sup>(5)</sup>

Owner-occupiers have generally been in Abidjan much longer than tenants; 73 per cent of tenants had been in Abidjan for less than 16 years, when the survey was done, while 78 per cent of owner-occupiers had resided in the city for more than 15 years (29 per cent of these had been there for more than 30 years). Informal housing thus accommodates a considerable proportion of long-standing city dwellers, especially the owner occupiers.

All informal settlements, whether recent or long-established, accommodate migrants who have spent a long time in the city. Nevertheless, the fact that there are higher proportions of recently-arrived migrants in recently established neighbourhoods suggests that their choice of place of residence must be influenced by opportunities for acquiring property or housing.

In accommodating different generations of migrants, the informal housing sector apparently offers possibilities for social

3. Yapi-Diahou, A. (1981), *Etude de l'urbanisation de la périphérie d'Abidjan: l'urbanisation de Yopougon*, Thèse de Doctorat de 3ème cycle, Université de Toulouse-le-Mirail, 322 pages; also Dubresson (1988), see note 2.

4. Yapi-Diahou (1981), see note 3.

5. Hennion, M. (1989), *L'impact des structures locales de pouvoir sur la mobilité induite par la restructuration des bidonvilles en Inde: les cas de Kanpur et d'Hyderabad*, Doctoral thesis, Université de Paris I, 344 pages; Sachs, C. (1990), *Sao Paulo: Politiques publiques et habitat populaire*. Maison des Sciences de l'homme, Paris, 267 pages.; Osmont, A. (1991), "Un projet de régularisation foncière, Dalifort" in Le Bris, E. and others (editors), *Contribution à la connaissance d'un droit foncier intermédiaire dans les villes d'Afrique de l'ouest*, pages 137-162.

integration. It also has a second, economic, function. The waves of migrants come to "consume accommodation", a product necessary to their reproduction as a labour force. This idea may be corroborated by the housing conditions encountered by the majority of heads of household on arrival in their current neighbourhoods. According to our survey of 500 owner-occupiers, 44 per cent had previously occupied their own accommodation, 23 per cent had been tenants, while the remaining 33 per cent, had been housed by relatives (16 per cent), friends (14 per cent) or their employers (3 per cent). In fact, the informal housing sector only attracts migrants who are integrated or about to become so, i.e. people who are likely to invest in housing or who are able to pay rent. Most heads of household in informal housing, both tenants and owner-occupiers, had migrated from other parts of the urban area.

### **b. An Average of Three Residential Moves in Abidjan**

Indicators of intra-urban residential mobility were sought in terms of length of stay in the current neighbourhood and the number of times the people had moved from one neighbourhood to another. Eighty-five per cent of owner-occupiers and 73 per cent of tenants in the informal settlements had moved there from other parts of Abidjan.

The number of moves from one neighbourhood to another varied from one to four for 94 per cent of heads of household (92 per cent of owner-occupiers and 97 per cent of tenants). Data relating to length of settlement in the neighbourhoods corroborate the scale of residential mobility. In fact, more than half (54 per cent) of owner-occupiers who had moved from another part of the city had been settled in their present neighbourhoods for ten years or so, whereas almost 60 per cent of them claimed to have been in the urban area for longer, over 20 years. All neighbourhoods continually receive new migrants. These come to settlements which have a core of stable residents. Among the household heads that are stable residents, there is great diversity in the number of years in which they have been in Abidjan. Let us consider the major stages in their residential itinerary and the reasons for their mobility.

### **c. Mobility within Communes in Abidjan**

Dealing exclusively with population movements within Abidjan, the assessment of residential mobility considers all the neighbourhoods in which those interviewed have lived, since their arrival in Abidjan. Furthermore, housing conditions at each stage, especially type and status of occupation of the accommodation, are considered. Unless otherwise specified in the text, the scale of mobility relates to the present communes and not the neighbourhoods.

Residential movements relate to all the major neighbourhoods corresponding to the ten present communes. From Abobo in the northern suburbs to Port-Bouet on the south coast via Yopougon to the west and Cocody to the east, all the communes

and their sub-districts have seen groups of varying size come and go in precarious settlements. Having been the first stop on arrival in the city for some, for others these former neighbourhoods have been the hub of complex relationships preceding the "choice" of settling in informal housing areas. Almost half of all migrants, on arrival in Abidjan, passed through Adjame (27 per cent) and Treichville (18 per cent), the two oldest African neighbourhoods in the city. Koumassi, a later extension of Treichville, and Port-Bouet, established at the same time as Treichville, accommodated 13 per cent and 11 per cent respectively in their various sub-districts; Cocody, originally a residential extension of the Plateau neighbourhood, received 9 per cent, while 5 per cent first went to Marcory and 4 per cent to Attiecoube. The outlying areas of Abobo and Yopougon did not escape the "obligation" to provide hospitality: 10 per cent of the future intra-urban migrants were accommodated there on their arrival in the country's economic capital.

The same neighbourhoods show up in other stages of residential mobility but the function of receiving migrants now tends to be fulfilled by Koumassi and Cocody as well as the outlying districts, especially Yopougon, the product of deliberate state policy.<sup>(6)</sup> The oldest neighbourhoods, especially Treichville, are moving away from this function: the proportion of migrants is stagnating at around 20 per cent. This relative "disengagement" of the first "indigenous" neighbourhoods shows up more clearly still when the various stages of mobility are broken down into three geographical sectors: the south, the north and the outlying area.

The industrial/port complex in the south attracts fewer and fewer migrants as the migrants themselves begin to move away from the area to which they first came when arriving in Abidjan. This complex attracted 48 per cent of migrants on arrival in the city, 43 per cent after their first intra-Abidjan move, 36 per cent after their second move but only 18 per cent after their third move before coming to their present neighbourhoods. The "north" (Adjame, Plateau, Cocody and Attecoube) is still attractive, having been spared the disaffection recorded in the "south". Unlike the "south", the outlying areas which have often been deliberately urbanized (Yopougon and the extensions of Cocody to the east, but less so in Abobo) attract ever more intra-urban migrants: 31 per cent of migrants on their fourth move as against only 11 per cent of those who have just arrived in Abidjan. The attraction of Yopougon on the outskirts should be stressed (44 per cent, 46 per cent, 58 per cent and 58 per cent respectively of migrants moving to the outlying area). While all ten city communes have served as stopping-off places for people on the move, their ability to retain them has evolved differently over time. This makes it interesting to discover the direction and destination of these moves and the reasons why these were chosen by migrants.

Migrants tend to move within the geographic area in which they first arrived. Whether they have arrived in a neighbourhood in a residential or non-residential sector, migrants who first live in the north, the outlying areas or the industrial and

6. The old neighbourhoods are gaining ground as the commercial "lungs" of the urban area see AUA (1990), *Abidjan, évolution démographique, 1975-1990*, Abidjan.

port area in the south rarely leave these major geographical units in their subsequent moves. Intra-Abidjan movement almost always occurs within the same geographical unit and generally within the same commune. For instance, interviews with those living in Depot III-IV found that three-quarters of the migrants in this outlying neighbourhood used to live in this geographic area and two-thirds came from the same commune (Yopougon). Similarly, 85 per cent of migrants in the industrial/port complex in the south came from southern neighbourhoods while 62 per cent of migrants recorded in the Zoe-Bruno neighbourhood had never left Koumassi commune. The same is the case for 85 per cent of those interviewed in Vridi-Canal and Zimbabwe in the Port-Bouet commune. Neighbourhoods in the northern sector of the town had drawn 83 per cent of their residents from this geographic area with only 17 per cent arriving from southern neighbourhoods. However, in some cases, transfers were made to adjacent communes: 40 per cent of intra-urban migrants in Cocody came from the neighbouring commune of Adjame.

Geographical mobility is always accompanied by a change in housing conditions. Migrants' status changes from that of rent-free lodgers in the host neighbourhoods (68 per cent) to that of tenant, or occasionally owner-occupier, at the intermediate residential stages. Only 10 per cent are lodgers in the final destination neighbourhoods.

With regard to the quality of the housing occupied, most migrants surveyed stated that they occupied breeze block housing; the proportion of occupants of houses made of *bancos* (local materials) varied from 15 to 20 per cent, as against 20 to 41 per cent living in shacks. These ratios should be considered in relation to occupation status in former accommodation. Those who had been owner-occupiers in their previous neighbourhood, who are less numerous, tended to build shacks or huts, whereas tenants and lodgers were attracted by permanent or semi-permanent housing. This attitude reflects the reasons for migration generally stated in the literature. The attraction of the big city lies in its modern buildings and facilities. So when migrants arrive in town, they try to avoid huts and shacks which, in their eyes, recall not only the countryside but also a certain type of urban poverty. But then, why should they abandon these "modern buildings" for shacks with no creature comforts, in unplanned neighbourhoods in a state of permanent tension?

#### **d. The Multiple Causes of Residential Mobility**

7. Yapi-Diahou, A. (1985), *De la baraque à la maison en dur; Conditions de logement, perspectives de résidence et perception de l'espace*, Enquête auprès de 100 résidents dans les bidonvilles de la zone industrielle de Koumassi, ORSTOM, Centre de Petit-Bassam, 27 pages.

People move for many reasons, ranging from eviction to the desire to acquire their own house or building site. These are themselves the consequence of the situations faced by city dwellers. More than 15 reasons were recorded amongst tenants and owner-occupiers. Most were centred around the notion of need, while strategies to gain land title or a foothold in the rented accommodation market are less frequently cited.<sup>(7)</sup> However, as some reasons overlap in either their basis or effects, these have been brought together under a single heading. This rearrange-

ment produces six major reasons for mobility as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Reasons why owner occupiers and tenants changed their neighbourhood**

Reasons	Original destination no. %		First move no. %		Second move no. %		Third move no. %	
Eviction	99	19.3	81	25.6	35	25.4	8	20.5
Land & property strategy	134	26.1	67	21.1	34	24.6	10	25.6
Proximity to work	86	16.7	54	17.0	19	13.8	4	10.2
Housing conditions	74	14.4	48	15.1	15	10.9	7	18.0
Economic reasons	67	13.0	39	12.3	25	18.1	7	18.0
Family circumstances	54	10.5	28	8.8	10	7.2	3	7.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**SOURCE:** Yapi-Diahou, A. (1994), *Les Politiques Urbaines en Côte d'Ivoire et leurs impacts sur l'habitat non planifié précaire: l'exemple de l'agglomération d'Abidjan*, Doctoral thesis, University of Paris VIII Saint-Denis, 718 pages.

As Table 2 shows, **eviction** remains one of the most common reasons for moving, as in many other African cities. The public authorities who are responsible for evictions justify their actions as a means of defending and imposing town planning principles which could be invalidated by unplanned housing, whether makeshift or not. Eviction is thus a permanent feature in countries where the government has an active intervention policy. Those heads of household most affected by eviction were mostly tenants (62 per cent) or owner-occupiers (29 per cent) in their previous residences. Unlike lodgers paying no rent, who occupied permanent accommodation, owner-occupiers in particular, as well as tenants, used to live in unplanned neighbourhoods. This explains why the majority of those evicted come from Port-Bouet, Koumassi, Marcory, Adjame and Cocody, where state intervention was most active from 1970 to 1985. Incidentally, the fact that evictions figure prominently in the reasons why people moved from their original destination and in each subsequent move shows that this is a permanent feature of state urban policy.

Under **land and property strategy**, we include the wish "for independence" and "to gain property title." Unlike those evicted, these respondents move by choice. Those who change their residence for this reason are seeking to follow their own strategies for social integration. Most of those who moved for reasons within this category (57 per cent) were put up rent free in their previous accommodation; 40 per cent were tenants and 3.3 per cent owner-occupiers. After eviction, a land and property strategy is the most common reason for moving, despite fluctuations in the number of people mentioning it at the different stages of movement towards their present neighbourhoods. These fluctuations probably bear witness to the difficulties migrants encounter in becoming established in the city. In fact, while these

migrants must integrate themselves successfully within the job market or the various social networks in the city to carry through their “land and property strategies”, they also face many other constraints, such as town planning policy, the location of job opportunities, and economic circumstances which drive them to put their plans into practice. Repeated movement is usually associated with migrants who have been in the city for a long time and have had to face the uncertainties of city life but who are just as anxious to have their own house.

**Proximity to employment opportunities** is the reason for moving mentioned by between 10 and 17 percent of migrants, depending on the stage reached. They include heads of household, tenants or owner-occupiers, nationals or foreigners, men or women who, handicapped by the distance between them and the areas of economic activity, are trying to move closer. They include migrants who fall into three separate categories in employment terms:

- They have a job and travelling back and forth is very costly in time and money because of the length of the journey and transport costs;<sup>(8)</sup>
- They are looking for a job and the financial burden of getting to potential employment areas (industrial areas, wealthy residential areas) is a constraint; or
- For many self-employed craftsmen and petty traders, distance from areas of economic activity prevents them from picking up custom from wage-earners and residents who are drawn to these areas.

“Distance from employment opportunities” as a reason for moving thus reflects the geographic distribution of employment possibilities in the Abidjan urban area. The decision to leave homes which are far from employment areas is always part of a strategy to reduce the financial burden, whether migrants are wage-earners or not (see below). Some workers move “to get closer to their workplace”, others to “have access to existing or developing consumer markets”, and the unemployed “to look for work”.

An analysis of residential moves within the city clearly shows the impact of the location of economic activity on workers’ residential practices. However, the disadvantages of distance from the place of work are not merely economic. Other factors, such as security, which are mentioned less often in the literature can trigger and sometimes precipitate migration, especially amongst wage-earners.<sup>(9)</sup> Many are hounded by robbers on their way to work and some sacrifice the convenience of low-cost public housing in the interests of security - see Box 1 for one example of this.

Many people moved because of the **housing conditions** in their previous accommodation. Under this heading we include all reasons for moving based on the setting (or position) of previous residence. We find people affected by the “never-ending discussions in the communal courtyards”, those fleeing “filth” or “flooding” in their former neighbourhood, residents obliged

8. Moves related to the loss of tied accommodation following a change of employer fall into this category.

9. Dubresson (1989), see note 2; Yapi-Diahou, A. (1994), *Les Politiques Urbaines en Côte d'Ivoire et leurs impacts sur l'habitat non planifié précaire: l'exemple de l'agglomération d'Abidjan*, Doctoral thesis, University of Paris VIII Saint-Denis, 718 pages.

**Box 1: Residential movement because of insecurity; the example of Gueuh**

In 1982, Gueuh, who was employed at Bus Depot III-IV in the Banco industrial area, moved from Koumassi to Niangon in Yopougon Commune. In that neighbourhood, where he had been given a place on a public housing project, Gueuh was attacked by a band of thieves as he was about to take the coach picking up employment contractors in the early hours of the morning. He was on sick leave for four days as a result of his injuries. He was no better off in Niangon than in Koumassi, so Gueuh tried to get accommodation closer to the Bus Depot, preferably at Depot III-IV, a developing neighbourhood. If he could find somewhere, he could be at the wheel of his bus within 3 to 5 minutes. Moreover, he could walk there in the company of his colleagues already settled in the neighbourhood. Gueuh enlisted the help of his workmates and, less than 8 days later, he sub-let his three-room flat and moved into a less comfortable shack in Depot III-IV.

10. Aguia, S. (1979), *Les femmes de Koumassi*, Report, ORSTOM, Centre de Petit Bassam, 13 pages.

11. BCET: Central Office for Technical Studies, a public agency set up in 1978 and dissolved in 1984.

12. BCET (1982), *Suivi du PDU 1. Relevé de cours: situation en novembre 1982*, 125 pages; Manou-Savina, A. (1985), *Politiques et Pratiques Urbaines à Abidjan*, thesis, University of Paris I, Volume 1 and 2, 445 pages.

13. Jouhanneau, A. (1984), *Bâtiment et travaux publics: les effets de la production manufacturière, tâcherons et entreprises industrielles*, ORSTOM, Centre de Petit Bassam, 105 pages.

14. Colombard Prout, M., O. Roland and M. Titecat (1988), *Economie de la construction à Abidjan*, l'Harmattan, Paris, 151 pages.

to move due to "rent increases" or threatened with "expulsion". Among those giving their reasons within this category, 53 percent were tenants, 42 percent were rent-free lodgers and only 5.3 per cent were owner-occupiers. This explains why, in the list of complaints relating to housing, "high rents" and "the attitude of landlords" come at the top of the list of complaints - above evictions or the drawbacks of overcrowding in the communal courtyards or the risks or inconveniences of living in neighbourhoods with no facilities.<sup>(10)</sup> In some instances, the raising of rents was linked to government initiatives to improve infrastructure and services. For example, according to the now defunct BCET<sup>(11)</sup> which was responsible for monitoring urban upgrading programmes, those conducted in the 1980s led to population transfers to the detriment of those earning a low income. Landlords seeking higher profits raised rents, after collective infrastructure and facilities were provided during the restructuring. Fearing an "intolerable" rent hike, tenants decided to leave the newly-upgraded neighbourhoods.<sup>(12)</sup>

Residential movements for **economic reasons** refer to a range of situations in which city dwellers, deprived of natural resources or faced with alterations in the level and/or regularity of their incomes, are obliged to change their place of residence. These "economic reasons" predominate amongst those categories of workers most severely affected by the economic crisis. This includes wage-earners in the building industry who have suddenly become jobbers, day labourers or contract workers<sup>(13)</sup> or for domestic staff. Domestic workers felt the repercussions from staff cut-backs by European technical assistance suppliers, their "natural" employer, while workers in the building industry felt the effects of the crisis in the public buildings and works sector

as the Ivory Coast's economy ran into difficulties.<sup>(14)</sup> Residential movement motivated by economic circumstances does not concern only the unemployed or workers whose status is becoming precarious since it can also be unavoidable for those with jobs, whether secure or not. This is why the impact of economic constraints is more marked at the last two stages, where the majority of migrants achieving the status of tenants or owner-occupiers have to bear in mind their income levels. Tenants have to pay rent, whereas those joining the ranks of owners have to fund their investment. The significance of "economic considerations" in setting people on the move across the city must therefore be analyzed in the light of migrants' activities, employment sectors, the nature of activities performed and income.

Residential movement for **family circumstances** includes marriages, births, marriage breakdowns, deaths and other social or demographic events which drove certain city dwellers to migrate in search of living conditions better suited to their family situation. More than half of residential changes due to "family circumstances" follow a marriage. Young migrants looking for free lodging are the group most affected by such family circumstances in the city. This corresponds to one of the classic signs of urban integration by migrants: they arrive in the city as young single people and then get married after finding a job;<sup>(15)</sup> this leads to a need for residential "autonomy" which is achieved by moving, usually outside the host neighbourhood. If these neighbourhoods are abandoned due to the drawbacks mentioned, what are the comparative advantages of the new ones?

15. Bernus 1962, see note 2.

#### e. "Choosing" One's Neighbourhood

For both owner-occupiers and tenants, housing opportunities, access to areas of economic activity and the presence of relatives are the characteristics which make various neighbourhoods more attractive than others - see Table 3. Described by

**Table 3: Factors attracting owners and tenants to their current neighbourhood**

Attraction	Owners	Tenants	All
Land available	196 (39.2)	-	196 (31.6)
Accommodation available	23 (4.6)	8 (6.7)	31 (5.0)
Presence of relatives	89 (17.8)	37 (30.8)	126 (20.3)
Easy access	78 (15.6)	-	78 (12.6)
Close to employment	107 (21.4)	29 (24.2)	136 (22.0)
Low cost of living	3 (0.6)	44 (36.7)	47 (7.6)
Community lifestyle	4 (0.8)	2 (1.7)	6 (1.0)
<b>All</b>	<b>500 (100.0)</b>	<b>120 (100.0)</b>	<b>620 (100.0)</b>

**SOURCE:** Yapi-Diahou, A. (1994), *Les Politiques Urbaines en Côte d'Ivoire et leurs impacts sur l'habitat non planifié précaire: l'exemple de l'agglomération d'Abidjan*, Doctoral thesis, University of Paris VIII Saint-Denis, 718

those surveyed in terms of "land or accommodation available" and "low cost of living", the conditions of access to housing were the determining factor in choosing a neighbourhood for 44 per cent of migrants.

Proximity to one's job, the main attraction for 22 per cent, is slightly more important than the presence of relatives (20 per cent). However, it is logical that owners should be more attracted by the availability of land (39 per cent), whereas tenants are more likely to look for neighbourhoods with a low cost of living (37 per cent) or where their relatives live or close to areas of economic activity.

These factors also attract owner-occupiers; 16 per cent of owner-occupiers find that ease of access to the neighbourhood is the main attraction. We should remember that 32 per cent of heads of household work in their neighbourhoods. Those who work outside their neighbourhoods (68 per cent) travel to all communes in the urban area but most work in their residential commune.

Living close to their places of work may reduce the high cost of transport but it does not remove it. According to various studies, transport represents 6 to 12 per cent of the irreducible expenses of heads of household in the informal housing sector.<sup>(16)</sup> The priority given to the seven factors listed in Table 3 varies considerably, depending on the neighbourhood. Easy access and proximity to employment were important for residents of central neighbourhoods (Washington) or those located along the routes of the public transport network (Blingue). According to 54 per cent of those who moved to Depot III-IV, this neighbourhood was attractive because of the availability of land. Others such as Zimbabwe provide the twin advantages of proximity to places of work and the existence of family networks. In some others (Zoe-Bruno), land availability and competitive rents were the advantages appreciated by almost 63 per cent of respondents.

Whether transport and proximity to places of work, or competitive rents and property opportunities, appear amongst criteria for choosing neighbourhoods, these elements show that low-income groups' residential strategy cannot be reduced to a simple equation. Choice is generally based on a combination of several inter-acting factors. There are many illustrations of this, in the life-histories of city dwellers that have been recorded in various neighbourhoods of Abidjan.<sup>(17)</sup>

Thus, informal housing within precarious settlements is not the environment of a destitute population nor a simple "hiding place" for poor people. Ending up or choosing to live in informal housing is the result of a voluntary or involuntary intra-urban migratory journey. Settlement comes about on the basis of locally available opportunities, facilitating access to land or accommodation.

#### **IV. GAINING ACCESS TO LAND AND BUILDING**

**IN THE INFORMAL** housing sector, the notion of sites or "places"

16. AUA-DCGTx (1989), *Enquête socio-économique sur les marchés de détail d'Abidjan*, Abidjan, 63 pages

17. Kouakou, N.F. (1970), *Etude d'une famille de bidonville à Marcory 3*, Mémoire de maîtrise de sociologie, Université d'Abidjan, 61 pages; Bonnassieux, A. (1982), *De Dendraka à Vridi-canal, chronique de la précarité à Abidjan*, Doctoral thesis, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 202 pages.

has replaced that of plots of land. Here, a site may be a piece of bare ground or one on which buildings already stand.

### **a. The Continuous Process of Gaining Access to "Places"**

Acquiring "places" has been an uninterrupted process since the 1930s, according to our surveys. However, more than 90 per cent of owner-occupiers acquired their "places" after 1960. Twice as many acquisitions are recorded between 1971-1980 (45 per cent) and during the period 1980-88 as there were in the first decade of independence (20 per cent). The means employed by the public authorities to discourage unplanned operations neither halted the trend nor stopped it from spreading.

The sites are acquired in several competing ways, similar to those observed in other Third World cities. The first of the five access modes is "free settlement" or "individual invasion" which characterizes all land occupations which are carried out with no negotiating procedures being observed. This is mentioned by 15 per cent of those surveyed. The other 85 percent were acquired through "gifts", purchase, leasing and inheritance (according to the terms used by those who acquired the place). Much the most important way in which owner occupiers obtained their place was through "gifts" (61 per cent). Fourteen per cent of owner-occupiers acquired their "places" through purchase, seven per cent through leasing and three per cent through inheritance. These four modes of acquiring a place are distinguished from the first by the fact that they involve several different actors - for instance donors, sellers, lessors and intermediaries. The idea that there "can be no property without a master" continues to hold sway.<sup>(18)</sup>

These modes of acquisition all have a long history, except leasing/renting which only began to develop in the 1980s. Purchasing goes back to the 1960s but only began to expand after 1975; 70 per cent of the purchases were made after 1970, including 31 per cent effected after 1980. This situation has arisen through the development of the sale and purchase of buildings, as shown by Bodina from Burkina Faso and ten of his neighbours. In 1969, Bodina bought a courtyard in Vridi-Canal that belonged to a compatriot who was returning to his country for good. Such direct access to property is becoming increasingly common and this expansion shows the commercial importance of constructions within the informal housing sector.

The offer of "places" comes from various categories of land providers. Alongside neighbourhood leaders, various social networks, and the family, who are the three main suppliers (61 per cent of all land providers), we find the Ebrie ethnic group indigenous to Abidjan (13 per cent), and sometimes employers, who also offer "places". Various public bodies (12 per cent), ministries or state agencies, and municipal authorities also play a part. These various providers put together their "domain" and part with plots on land whose legal status and degree of development are extremely varied: private or state property, of-

18. This idea was defended by certain African political leaders in the colonial era. They posed as guardians of customary land rights, which they were later to denounce after independence.

ficially allotted private plots and, occasionally, land in the village "customary" domain. The sites are very small: 78 per cent of plots are no more than 100 square metres in size and only 13 per cent are over 200 square metres.

### **b. Intermediaries are Always Present**

In most instances, the person acquiring the "place" is in constant touch with networks of intermediaries through whom they gain access to the providers. Both the providers and the intermediaries may be individuals or legal entities and are found mainly within networks of workmates or friends and in family or ethnic circles. Senior staff and representatives of public and/or political bodies have also been active in this role since the 1950s. Such intervention, especially by the municipal authorities, intensified after independence, as eviction operations were stepped up and linked with major real estate and infrastructure developments. Since 1980, aided by decentralization and multiple candidature at the various elections, mayors have regained their former influence in this field. They deal mainly with neighbourhood leaders to whom they recommend clients seeking a "place".

Many of those who acquire "places" describe "gifts" as being the practice of neighbourhood leaders, kinship networks and public or private agencies. On the other hand, leasing and sale are said to be the domain of the Ebrie group, which tends to lease out "places" on plots which the state has allocated to them. Nevertheless, available studies indicate that no practice is specific to any given category where "places" with nothing built on them are being allocated. All social groups in the neighbourhood or outside have some to sell or "give away". Those generous neighbourhood leaders, for instance, seem to be becoming increasingly active in sales. What does it cost the person seeking land to obtain a bit of urban land under the above-mentioned conditions?

### **c. The myth of free land**

As the majority of owner-occupiers say they obtained their place in the form of a gift, in the first instance they did not have to pay for it. Yet, not one of them failed to make "a small gesture of thanks and recognition" towards those from whom they obtained the place. Whether in the form of a gift in kind or an offer of services or, more frequently, money, all gave "presents" to their allies. Cash gifts are known as "tips" (to buy drinks or kola); in some cases the term "price of pulling-up (crops)" is used.

Officially, the nature of the gift and thus its amount, is left to the discretion of the person acquiring the place, except where the price of "pulling-up" is concerned. However, while anything from tens to several hundred thousand francs were enough in the 1960s, tips have been ten to 20 times more expensive over the last 15 years. They can sometimes even reach a level comparable to that of the official market price or that of "village"

plots. The practice of tipping is, therefore, a way of camouflaging commercial practices, even though these prices may seem very low to some beneficiaries.

When applied to cultivated land, the "pulling-up" price amounts to compensation for crop destruction. The amount may be set by the farmer or suggested by the person seeking the site. Amounts have been found to vary in a similar way to that of tips, although in these cases, the price of sites is negotiated and usually with considerable bargaining.

Costs may approach or exceed half a million FCFA when purchasing compounds, even when buildings are falling down and will require renovation. This phenomenon is particularly visible in the old neighbourhoods and sometimes in those which are to have their situation regularized and be supplied with facilities. In these cases, sellers are often foreigners and purchasers are nationals.<sup>(19)</sup>

In this way, access to land is not free, even in the informal housing sector, so that many city dwellers are excluded: "the price of a drink" and the "price of pulling-up" crops have lost their symbolic value. Having become obligations, no-one seeking a place can escape them or be exempt from paying them. Furthermore, even where "places" are acquired for nothing or by "free settlement", the nature of the land, especially in marshy areas, makes them inaccessible to any would-be settler without resources. Filling a low-lying site that is waterlogged or subject to flooding represents a very heavy cost, but no building work is possible without it, especially in areas subject to flooding. For example, in 1970 at Marcory Poto-Poto, three lorry loads of coffee grounds which then have to be covered with earth would be needed as backfill for two three-room shacks; this would cost about FCFA 2,500.<sup>(20)</sup>

Land transactions are a source of tension in some neighbourhoods as they are conducted for land whose ownership is uncertain. Many inhabitants, especially owner-occupiers, complain about this development. Discontent also comes from the administration and local authorities. The Ministry for Construction accuses the municipalities of complicity with neighbourhood leaders whom it condemns as "illicit sellers of land". According to the Town Planning Department, "mayors encourage the development of clandestine neighbourhoods. They tell the people who come to see them to put down boundary markers (...), take money from the latter on the pretext that they will be there for five years....." For their part, the municipalities hold the state responsible for clandestine land transactions, since the state persists in monopolizing control over land access procedures. They reply to their accusers on the basis of what some call "field realities": "...when people have land problems, they go to the Mayor's office and not to the Ministry of Construction. It even happens that our accusers are the first to recommend people seeking places to us. So the Mayor manages as best he can".<sup>(21)</sup>

Because of the tension they generate, these land practices are seen as a factor aggravating an already precarious situation. The fears they cause reflect the divergent interests which cry-

19. Yapi-Diahou 1994, see note 9.

20. Fadeuilhe, J.J. (1970), *Opération d'habitat économique en pays en voie de développement: un exemple à Abidjan*, University of Bordeaux, 159 pages.

21. Interview with Mr. Grelet, staff member of the Urban Planning Directorate, Abidjan, August 1992.

tallize in the informal sector on the one hand, and the differences in appreciation of the means of getting out of their precarious situation on the other. For a majority, illicit land sales are an act of provocation, a challenge to the authorities and, in the final analysis, a threat to their future, while others see them as a salutary "opening" to the outside. In this context of tension and permanent fear, what mechanisms govern the development of sites? What are the general characteristics of the buildings?

#### **d. The World of Shacks and Bedsits**

Of the "places" acquired in this way, 89 per cent of buildings are made of planks, 10 per cent of local materials (for instance clay-straw mixtures), 4 per cent of sheet metal, 2 per cent of *adobe* and 4 per cent of cement breeze blocks. Roofs are made of corrugated sheeting in 95 per cent of structures, whilst 5 per cent have roofs made of fibrocement, *papo*, plywood or even cardboard. *Papo*, an assembly of raffia palm leaves, is mainly used for structures made of local materials. The sides and roofs are made watertight with the aid of plastic sheeting, as the materials used are rarely new. The floor is made of cement in more than 63 per cent of structures and of hard-packed earth in 22 per cent of cases, whilst 15 per cent of buildings stand directly on the ground.

Housing in the informal sector tends to be of the single storey, multi-occupancy type. Shacks divided into individual accommodation are built around the edge of the plot with facilities such as toilets, showers and kitchens shifted to the inner corners. Everything is built around a courtyard and it is here that most domestic activities take place. However, property developers here rarely see facilities as a priority and they put off building them, sometimes for several years.<sup>(22)</sup>

The typical accommodation is a sort of bedsit. Seventy-eight per cent of a sample of 500 owner-occupiers had such accommodation, consisting of a single room which provided 9-12 square metres of living space, with no anteroom. Twenty-two per cent had larger accommodation but none had more than four rooms. Why are people keen on shacks and bedsits?

People who distribute places in the informal housing sector do not enjoy the same legitimacy as indigenous or "para-indigenous" customary owners. They often admit that the "place" does not belong to them so that, while their activities may be tolerated by the public authorities, they are aware that they must not overstep the mark. Public bodies in particular, as well as neighbourhood leaders, recommend that their clients do not use permanent materials, as this would expose them to the threat of action by the authorities. These orders amount to regulations, as can be seen by the predominance of wooden buildings or indeed the following analysis by Kabore, shared by a majority of property developers:

"Wooden houses are more expensive than permanent houses but the land does not belong to us; we have no papers from the Town Hall or government, so we cannot use permanent

22. These points should be taken into account amongst the numerous criteria for classifying accommodation according to defined standards, as was done by SEMA (1963-1967), *Etude socio-économique de la zone urbaine d'Abidjan* (17 reports), *Rapport No. 4, L'habitat en 1963*, and BCEOM-BNETD (1973-4), *Projet de développement urbain à Abidjan, politique d'habitat et de promotion foncière* (four reports), *Rapport No.2, aspects juridiques institutionnels et financiers de la politique de l'habitat*, 48 pages.

materials, we build in wood (.....). If we are thrown out of here, I can take my wood and go and set up somewhere else, which I could not do with a brick house: you lose a lot, apart from the metal sheeting and wood which you can pick up to take elsewhere."

It is risky to build permanent structures under such circumstances. Among those who do, most are hoping for a subsequent regularization of their land titles. Many of these owners are encouraged by the housing crisis that followed the withdrawal of the state from its role as a direct funder of housing provision. Once developers have acquired their "place" from a "holder" of land, they buy prefabricated sections, wood, breeze blocks, sheeting, earth, cement, sand and other materials from manufacturers or specialized dealers. All owner-occupiers are dependent on traders who produce or deal in materials. They also have to rely on carters to transport the materials, since there are no roads, and on the carpenter or mason to assemble them: this extreme division of labour in the construction effort can justifiably be described as "self-reliance".<sup>(23)</sup> The process involves people from different trades and with various skills: 65 per cent of owners resorted to paid craftsmen and jobbers, 13 per cent called on relatives or friends and 22 per cent used family labour and paid professionals.

23. Canel, P. and C. Girard (1988), "Un paradigme à l'épreuve des faits: l'autoconstruction en ville Africaine", *Revue Tiers-Monde* t. XXIX, No.116, pages 1121-1133.

#### e. Funding Housing through Mobilization of Household Savings

More than half the owner-occupiers covered their costs from personal savings, without resorting to other sources. In other cases, funding came from the mobilization of resources from various sources: assistance from kinship networks or employers in the form of loans. These can usefully supplement, but never replace, the developers' savings.

When considering the origin of these personal resources, made up of income from rent, it should be noted that the informal housing sector is self-financing - they rely neither on governments nor on donor agencies. It is this capacity for self-financing which no doubt explains the persistence and dynamism of the informal housing sector. This capacity cannot be defined without reference to the purpose of the buildings which, in many cases, constitute profitable investments.

Both wooden and other accommodation is increasingly intended for rent. A bedsit attracts a rent of FCFA 3,500-4,200 and two rooms cost from FCFA 7,000-8,000. Larger accommodation attracts higher rentals which may sometimes be as much as FCFA 15,000. Rent levels of FCFA 2,500-3,000, which could still be found at the beginning of the 1980s, are increasingly rare. Rent levels depend on the size of the accommodation but especially on the types of materials from which it is constructed: a bedsit rented for FCFA 5,000-6,000 in a cabin made of local materials would cost FCFA 6,000-7,000 in a permanent construction. Various other factors can also influence the rent level including the length of time in the accommodation, quality of

the relationship with the owner and the financial position of the tenants.

The builders of the shacks have a very considerable role in providing the accommodation essential for reproducing the workforce. This social function of the informal housing sector, in which 15 to 20 per cent of the residents of Abidjan live, as well as the fact that it is self-financing, explains both the tolerance of the public authorities for such housing and its persistence in the urban area.

## V. CONCLUSION

**THE INHABITANTS OF** informal housing within precarious settlements in Abidjan are very diverse - Africans from different generations of migrants drawn to the city, include wage-earners as well as those who are self-employed and making crafts, traders, unemployed and retired people. However, with little schooling, most active residents are engaged in unskilled jobs in public or private establishments which ensure relatively low incomes. They may be tenants or owner-occupiers but both demonstrate an astonishing capacity to adapt and respond in the face of the exclusion which is inherent in the town planning and investment options favoured by decision makers - especially in terms of land and real estate. The inhabitants are clearly sensitive to these official options, that are characterized by a functionalist organization of the environment, which they are able to turn to their advantage. Whilst it would be inappropriate to describe these people as recent migrants, finding ways to improve their living conditions and thus halting the development of the informal housing sector is dependent on a detailed knowledge of the complexity and complementarity of its social and economic functions.

