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Social Housing For The Harmonious Integration of Indigenous Populations Into Congolese Society: The Case of the Republic of Congo

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ABSTRACT

Based on the premise that all people are equal before the law, the Republic of Congo Brazzaville has adopted laws and texts prohibiting all forms of discrimination against indigenous peoples. This is an important step towards their integration into Bantu society, instead of remaining victims of marginalisation, discrimination and inhuman and degrading treatment. Despite occupying large equatorial forests and vast territories of very low density, the indigenous population has not yet appropriated its land and natural resources. To this day, housing estates in the Congo's cities obey the principles inherited from the colonial period, including the distribution of populations according to social status and membership of a community or ethnic group; just as the existing housing stock includes dwellings and flats for westernised Bantu populations and foreigners. Having left the forest, indigenous communities now live in precarious and unhealthy villages and neighbourhoods on the outskirts of urban and rural communities. So there is an urgent need to rethink the habitat that will promote harmonious cohabitation between Bantus, indigenous peoples and foreigners. On the basis of demographic data, the study proposes a typical social housing model for indigenous households, with floor areas ranging from 75 m² to 220 m². The use of locally manufactured building materials and the participation of the beneficiaries in terms of labour will enable local people to master construction techniques on the one hand, and to optimise construction costs on the other.

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1. Introduction

The importance of the role of indigenous peoples in the countries of Central Africa in general, and in Congo Brazzaville in particular, from a social, cultural and economic point of view, is well known to everyone and is attracting sustained attention from governments at both international and national level^[1, 2]. According to estimates by the Centre National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (CNSEE), indigenous people make up between 2.29% and 5% of the population of the Congo^[3, 4]. It is therefore acknowledged that it is currently difficult to give an exact figure for their numbers. Indigenous populations are divided into distinct groups, such as the Twas, Akas, Bakas and Mbutis, spread across several Central African countries, including the Central African Republic, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Uganda, Cameroon and Gabon. The 2001 report by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) estimates the number of indigenous peoples at 900,000^[5, 6]. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples form a global normative basis requiring recognition of the freedom, equality, dignity and rights of all human beings, including indigenous peoples^[7, 8]. The right of peoples to equality and non-discrimination is enshrined in the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. It represents a continental instrument for the protection of the individual and collective rights of peoples^[9, 10]. The Republic of Congo was one of the first African countries to adopt a law protecting the rights of indigenous peoples^[2]. Under Congolese law, the administrative territorial organisation divides the national territory into departments, communes, arrondissements, districts, urban communities, rural communities, neighbourhoods and villages^[11]. The State therefore recognises indigenous villages in the process of creating local administrative entities^[2]. At national level, there is therefore a political will to improve the situation of indigenous peoples, despite the fact that they still suffer inequalities in major areas such as access to housing, drinking water, education, health and others. The work or service provided by indigenous people is

not always considered at its fair value^[11]. A large proportion of the indigenous population is still nomadic, moving freely through the forests^[12-14]. These communities still suffer from serious social exclusion. The fundamental rights of the indigenous peoples of the Republic of Congo are regularly violated, both individually and collectively^[15]. Their rights to their traditional territories, to natural resources and to their specific ways of life must be constantly defended and safeguarded. Human rights are those fundamental standards without which human beings cannot survive and develop in dignity. They are non-negotiable, universally accepted standards. Logging, mining and the daily activities of Bantu peoples (hunting, fishing, farming) are forcing indigenous populations to abandon their nomadic tradition and settle in one place^[8, 16]. The aim of this study is to identify the various aspects that cause the indigenous population to be despised. Specifically, the aim is to identify the most common indigenous households and their way of life in order to identify the architectural and urban planning principles for designing living spaces and building decent, sustainable social housing. The data for this study come from documents of the Government of the Republic, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank and the National Institute of Statistics (INS)^[1, 3, 17].

2. Materials and Methods

The mores of a society refer to the behaviour, customs and moral conduct codified by that society and which are specific to it. Understanding a population's living conditions involves examining its population, customs, habits and economic activities^[16].

2.1. Demographic Data on Indigenous Populations

According to estimates by the Centre National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (CNSEE) and the Institut National de la Statistique (INS), the indigenous population of the Congo is estimated at 43,378^[4]. They are numerous in the departments of Bouenza, Cuvette-Ouest,

Kouilou, Lékoumou, Likouala, Niari, Sangha, Pool and Plateaux. Their local names vary from department to department: Babongos, Baakas, Mbendjeles, Mikayas, Bagombes, Babis, Batwas and others. **Table 1** below shows their distribution by gender and department^[18].

While around 50% of the Bantu population's lifestyle has been westernised, especially in urban areas, that of the indigenous population has remained in its natural state^[19, 20]. Despite mixing with foreigners, the Congolese have very strong family ties, which explains their desire to live together or not far from each other^[21, 22]. This fosters the conditions for mutual support. The gradual sedentarisation of the indigenous population has had certain effects. In particular, mixed marriages and joint activities between these two peoples, which for the most part remain taboo and hidden.

2.2. Economic and Household Activities of Local People

Any attempt to improve a population's living conditions presupposes knowledge of its customs, habits and beliefs - its way of life - in order to organise the necessary space^[23]. According to the results of the 2007 general census of population and housing, overall 13.8% of people aged 5 and over have no level of education, 12.4% have completed upper secondary education and just 4.4% have completed tertiary education^[24]. The indigenous population is among those with no education at all^[7].

People aged 5 and over with no education, including indigenous people, are often marginalised and despised. Most of them live in villages, rural or urban communes. They live below the poverty line, in very precarious and unhealthy neighbourhoods^[25].

In everyday Congolese life, Bantu and indigenous peoples live together and share the same territory^[18]. They can therefore engage in the same economic activities. What is different is that some of the indigenous populations are still nomads in the forests, while others have left the forest to create villages and neighbourhoods around urban and rural communities. For example, Djambala and Ngo in the Plateaux department, Sibiti in the Lékoumou department, Impfondo in the Likouala department, etc.^[18]. **Figures 1 and 2** illustrate the types of dwellings inhabited by indigenous peoples.

Bantu and indigenous peoples are closely linked

through traditional medicine and agriculture. The natives are recognised as being more gifted than the Bantus in these areas. Inhabiting the great equatorial forest, they know the virtues of trees and plants: the secrets of the forest. The Bantus often stay with the indigenous peoples for consultations and traditional treatments when modern medicine is unable to treat them^[22]. In this way, the two peoples, under the auspices of the State, can revolutionise the Congolese economy for the well-being of all.

There is therefore an urgent need to support and accelerate the sedentarisation of indigenous populations by creating villages and neighbourhoods adapted to their way of life. It is in this context that these people will be able to participate fully in the national economy.



Figure 1. Precarious housing in cassava leaves.



Figure 2. Precarious housing made of palm leaves.

The section of the population that has reached higher education lives in more or less acceptable conditions, like Europeans, and even enjoys a westernised lifestyle. Around 47.9% of the Congolese population make up the middle class. They live in urban areas. In the so-called African neighbourhoods inherited from colonial urban planning, these are mostly precarious, overcrowded neighbourhoods that the State is trying to revitalise^[23].

The indigenous populations, still considered to be the last nomadic hunter-gatherer communities, must now convert to scientific, technical and liberal professions. An awareness-raising campaign will have to be conducted to encourage

Table 1. Volume and distribution of indigenous populations.

Department	Male Sex	Female Sex	Both Sexes
Kouilou	138	104	242
Niari	1,385	1,385	2,770
Lékoumou	5,397	6,059	11,456
Bouenza	273	324	597
Pool	1,276	1,282	2,558
Trays	1,580	1,757	3,337
Bowl	88	76	164
Cuvette Ouest	378	370	748
Sangha	3,789	4,096	7,885
Likouala	6,659	6,817	13,476
Brazzaville	25	46	71
Pointe-Noire	34	40	74
Whole country	21,022	22,356	43,378

Source: *INS estimates, Xavier Bienvenu Kitsimbou 2011.*

them to become sales agents and saleswomen, service workers, farmers, stockbreeders, labourers, etc.). Human settlements should be created not on an ethnic basis, but according to the profile of economic activities.

UN-Habitat publications refer to the slum phenomenon as a manifestation of a poorly planned and managed urban sector^[26]. It is also the malfunctioning of the housing sector, which does not take into account the presence and needs of all the living strata of the nation^[27]. Well-designed housing that takes into account the environmental, demographic, social, cultural and economic framework of communities is one of the factors that influence the daily life of household members, their health, safety and well-being. The Congo’s emergence can only be achieved by pooling the efforts of all sections of society.

3. Results and Discussion

The Congolese land tenure system is characterised by a legal and institutional dualism between state land rights and customary land rights inherited from the colonial period^[11]. This dualism is at the root of land speculation and uncontrolled subdivisions, which lead to the creation of precarious and anarchic neighbourhoods^[26].

Sustainable, social and human development is closely linked to the foundations and principles of human settlements. According to United Nations texts, development can claim to be sustainable if it enables the needs of current populations to be met without compromising those of future generations^[28].

The concept of sustainable development is based on

three major principles: solidarity (between peoples and generations), precaution or lucidity (giving oneself the possibility of reconsidering actions when one doubts their consequences), and participation (involving the population in decision-making)^[28].

Consequently, sustainable development means enabling all the peoples of the planet to achieve a satisfactory level of social and economic development and human and cultural fulfilment.

In the Congo, it is clear that there is a lack of principles for the planning and configuration of human settlements^[26]. Urban planning instruments need to be acquired. In a context of democracy, these instruments must take account of the needs of indigenous peoples. Elected representatives and local administrations must now mobilise the resources needed for local development, with full and harmonious integration of indigenous populations. Awareness must be raised of the role of local authorities and those responsible for the design and construction of human settlements. Town planning instruments must be a common reference point for those who govern and those who are governed, transparent and accessible to all citizens, whether Bantu, indigenous or foreign. Consequently, consultation must be at the heart of the development of these instruments. The implementation of this provision will guarantee the equality and dignity of all Congolese citizens.

The government’s ambition is to transform the Congo into an emerging country in the near future^[1, 2]. Whatever activities and strategies are implemented to achieve economic

growth, people must be at the centre of all actions. The first step in transforming a country into an emerging economy will therefore be to adopt a strategy aimed at raising people's standard of living.

3.1. Most Common Household Types among the Indigenous Population

A study of the demographic structure of the Congolese population shows that in the human settlements (towns and villages) of the Congo, extended households have traditionally been formed, caused by births conditioned by early marriages, followed by the birth of several children, the retention in the household of adult children, as well as the presence in a household of several mistresses^[16]. While among the Bantus there are single-parent households and monogamous couples, as well as unofficial polygamy (on the sly), among the natives there are large households (with more than 6 children) and polygamous households (with 2 or more wives) with representatives of the 3^{ème} generation (father/mother)^[16].

Analysis of the structure of the population according to parental ties reveals 3 main types of household, which must be taken into account when configuring housing. These are complex polygamous households with two mistresses, with three mistresses and with four mistresses. Many of these households have 6 or more children.

Because of their nomadic origins, the households of indigenous populations are made up of a head of household, two or more mistresses, children (girls and boys), nieces and nephews, sisters and brothers, and depending on the age of the head of household, the mother and/or father of the husband and wives^[8]. **Table 2** shows household sizes in Bantu and indigenous communities.

According to the **Table 2**, the household size of Bantu populations varies between 1 and 15 people, while that of indigenous peoples varies between 5 and more. Households of 9 to 12 people are in the majority.

As these data are only estimates, the study recommends the household sizes of the natives to be taken into account, those ranging in size from 5 to 18 people.

As a result, the types of indigenous households are as follows:

Type 1: head of household living with his wives (2 or more),
Type 2: Head of household living with wives and children (4 or more),

Type 3: head of household living with his wives, their children (4 or more) and ascendants (father/mother, uncle/aunt).
Other combinations are possible.

3.2. Proposals for New Types of Housing to Help Integrate Local People

In Congolese society, relations between Bantus and natives are still based on discrimination and exploitation, a relationship of those who dominate and those who are dominated. Intimate relations between Bantus and natives are forbidden, but take place in secret^[21].

As long as indigenous communities live in precarious, unhealthy conditions, or as nomads in the forests, they will continue to be victims of exclusion, discrimination and contempt. The emergence of an economy can only be achieved with responsible players who own their land and forests, and who have a culture and an identity. The State can count on such a population to create wealth.

Having determined the most common households and identified the specific nature of the daily lifestyle of indigenous populations, the following spaces and rooms are recommended for the configuration of social housing for the most common households. These are: the space for the head of the household, the wives' and children's bedrooms, an open-air courtyard for family gatherings, showers and toilets, an African kitchen with space for storing household utensils. **Table 3** below shows the number of rooms and the floor space required, depending on the size of the household.

To create privacy for the household and a feeling of being in the forest, a 2 m strip may be created in place of a boundary wall.

Household members spend more than half their day in the home. This is where people are born, educated, receive their first care (preventive and curative), and regain the strength and energy they need to cope with everyday life. **Figures 3–5** show how housing should be for families in an Aboriginal environment.

Table 2. Percentage distribution of households by size.

Household Size (Number of People)	Estimated Household Size (in %)	
	Bantu	Aboriginal
Less than 7	68.80	25
7	7.6	6
8	6.2	9
9	4.9	10
10	4.3	12
11	2.1	15
12	1.9	10
13	1.8	8
14	1.7	6
15 and over	0.7	4
Total	100	100

Table 3. Spaces and rooms required for the configuration of social housing.

Parts	Numbers	Surface Area in m ²	Average Surface Area in m ²
Living room/Reception or head of household's hut	1	20–40	30
Wife's bedroom	2–4	9–12	20
Children's bedroom Girl/Boy	2–4	9–18	30
Shower	2–4	2–3	6
Toilets	2–4	1.5–2	4
Landscaped courtyard	1	100–150	120
Kitchen	2–4	6–9	21
2 m green strip (artificial forest)	1	100–180	140
Total built area		75–220	150

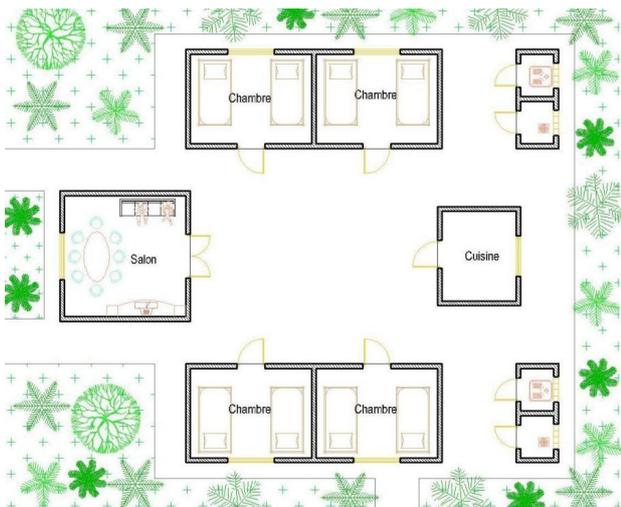


Figure 3. Plan view of the dwelling for a complex household of nine (09) to fifteen (15) people.

3.3. Financing Social Housing for Indigenous Households

Housing is one of the essential social conditions that determine the quality of life and well-being of household members and spaces^[23]. Consequently, particular attention

should be paid to the mechanism for financing and allocating social housing in general, and to spatial planning in particular, with a view to eliminating the social inequalities and discrimination suffered by indigenous populations today.



Figure 4. Aerial view of typical social housing.

The cost of construction essentially comprises the price of the land, building materials and labour, which includes wages and various transport and handling costs. The cost

of the land will be borne by the people themselves. This will be the first step by governments to recognise the right of ownership of indigenous populations over their common heritage.

The new types of housing should be built using local materials. Here, local beneficiaries will have to be involved. Congolese architects and engineers are invited to show their ingenuity and awaken their creativity. The local population is invited to help find solutions for choosing appropriate building materials for the construction of social housing for local households.

The State and its development partners will be responsible for coordinating all operations relating to design and construction, with a view to promoting the participation of the nation’s driving forces, including the indigenous population, in solving problems themselves without recourse to external input. **Table 4** shows the different costs per m² of

social housing.

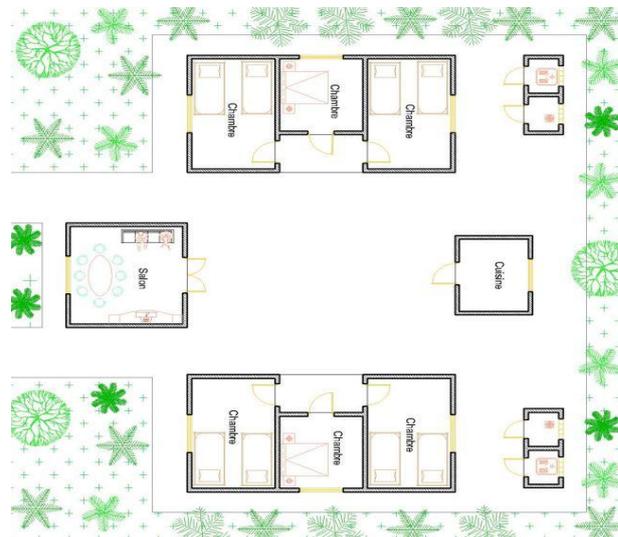


Figure 5. Plan view of a typical dwelling for a complex household of eleven (11) people eighteen (18) people.

Table 4. Cost per m² of social housing.

Type of Social Housing	Surface Area in m ²	Price per m ²	Total Price
Type 1 dwelling	75	100,000 (150\$)	7,500,000/11,450
	100		10,000,000/15,300
Type 2 dwelling	130	100,000 (150\$)	13,000,000/19,450
	150		15,000,000/22,900
Type 3 dwelling	180	100,000 (150\$)	18,000,000/27,480
	220		22,000,000/33,600

4. Conclusion

Analysis of the existing housing stock shows that indigenous populations with specific household sizes and lifestyles will not be able to live in the existing housing stock.

The study identified three (03) main types of indigenous households to be taken into account in the configuration of social housing. These are polygamous households with 2 to 4 mistresses, children, ascendants and other members of the extended family (brother, sister, uncle, aunt). The size of these households varies between 5 and 18 people. The study set out to determine the particularities of the lifestyle traditions of indigenous households. These include communal living, a strong attachment to tradition, respect for rituals linked to belief, and the consumption of specific dishes with particular cooking methods.

To ensure the harmonious integration of indigenous peoples, the study led to the development of a housing model comprising a reception building or hut for the head of household; 2 to 4 dormitory buildings with bedrooms depending on the size of the household (number of wives and children); a building housing the kitchen and ancillary buildings housing showers and toilets.

These dwellings should be assembled to create an internal courtyard of around 100–180 m² depending on the size of the household. These buildings should be set in a natural environment giving the image of a forest. To achieve this, a strip of trees at least 2 m wide should be provided.

The study determined the dimensions of housing for households of 5 to 18 people, requiring a plot 15 to 20 m wide and 20 to 30 m deep, i.e., a plot 15 m by 20 m (300 m²) to 20 m by 30 m (600 m²).

Author Contributions

There are mainly two authors who worked separately and then together to produce this manuscript. It's a real team effort. The authors are from the same university research team.

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Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest. The work produced in this manuscript is original research. The research team needed some information from the local statistical services to avoid giving contradictory figures.

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