



Phenomenon of Uncleanliness in Lomé: What Innovation for Responsible Urban Ecocitizenship?

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ABSTRACT: Sanitation and hygiene management began in Togo with the removal of household waste in 1974 under the responsibility of Lomé City Council. Since then, a host of public and private policies and programs relating to sanitation and public hygiene have been implemented with a view to achieving a healthy and livable environment, especially in cities. Despite these efforts, it appears that in almost all Togolese towns, the problem of uncleanliness is becoming more widespread and worrying. Using a methodological approach that is both qualitative and quantitative, with questionnaires, structured interviews, and field observations, this research presents the various factors that explain the persistence of urban uncleanliness and possible solutions relating to the new system in terms of innovations to be implemented for sustainable urban sanitation. Notable factors include the weak culture of eco-citizenship among city dwellers, the irregularity of household waste collection services, and the high cost of household waste collection services. In terms of the new system to be implemented to solve the problem of unsanitary conditions, it is necessary to focus on ecocitizenship. Decision-makers must recognize the crisis of citizenship by promoting ecocitizen values and practices to ensure the sustainability of urban sanitation.

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental problems, combined with difficulties related to waste management, remain a worrying scourge for urban populations today. It is worth noting here that waste management problems in Africa are more significant than in other continents. We can agree with K. G. Nyassogbo (2005) that the rapid growth of the urban population and the excessive expansion of urban areas, due to uncontrolled and unmanaged urbanization in Africa, are at the root of solid household waste management problems (K. G. Nyassogbo, 2005). Findings reveal that uncleanliness has become a recurring and persistent phenomenon in all Togolese towns, but is even more prevalent in Lomé, the capital city (Y. Lare-Kolani, 2020).

Enabling populations to live in a healthy environment is one of the international requirements to which the leaders of all countries have subscribed. This requires, on the one hand, strengthening sustainable urbanization for all and the capacities for participatory, integrated, and sustainable planning and management of human settlements in all countries (M. Nantob and M. Djore Torouka, 2020) and, on the other hand, reducing the negative environmental impact of cities per capita, including paying particular attention to air quality and waste management, particularly municipal waste management, in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, 2017).

In terms of sanitation and hygiene, prior to independence, Togo was subject to the laws and regulations established for the West African French Colonies (AOF). These texts regulated in particular the construction of buildings, urban planning, hygiene, and public cleanliness in general (Decree No. 595/A.P.A. of August 20, 1947). These texts are still part of the reference texts for the control of sanitation and hygiene (F. Lene, 2006).

The management of sanitation and hygiene obviously began in Togo with the removal of household waste under the responsibility of Lomé City Council. Thus, until 1974, household waste removal was provided by municipal services.

The strong population growth in Lomé led to rapid spatial expansion of the city. This phenomenon challenged the city council's ability to manage household waste throughout the city. As a result, household waste removal was transferred in 1975 to the

Togolese Household Waste Removal and Sanitation Company (SOTOEMA), which was well equipped in terms of equipment and human resources. This company provided excellent services, but was unable to cover the entire growing city. In 1990, economic difficulties and the socio-political crisis in Togo had a considerable impact on the city council's finances, making it unable to pay SOTOEMA's services on a regular basis. This ongoing situation forced it to terminate the contract on December 31, 1997.

In this situation, urban waste in Lomé was no longer being collected, leading to extremely uncleanliness and an increase in the number of illegal dumping grounds in the capital. In response to this concern, waste collection was entrusted to projects and associations such as PEUL (Lomé Urban Environment Plan), PAZOL (Lomé Lagoon Area Development Project), PAUT (Togo Urban Development Project), ENPRO (Clean Natural Ecosystem), and PANSEA (National Action Plan for Water and Sanitation), to name but a few.

It should also be noted that in December 2013, when the Council of Ministers' decree created the National Agency for Sanitation and Public Safety (ANASAP), it was in response to the need to strengthen the sanitation and public safety sector and services. Still, with the aim of encouraging a change in behavior among the Togolese population in general and the inhabitants of Lomé in particular with regard to public hygiene, the competent authorities have adapted sanitation policies (M. Nantob and M. Djore Torouka, 2020). In November 2014, as part of the extension of Civics Month and the citizenship awareness campaign, the government launched Operation "Clean Togo" under the Ministry of Communication, Culture, Arts, and Civic Education, which is responsible for developing communication strategies to ensure that all citizens take ownership of and actively participate in the initiative (Y. Lare-Kolani, 2020). Despite all these efforts, the problem of uncleanliness persists and is getting worse. It is therefore wise to take a scientific look at the phenomenon of urban unsanitary conditions, which is a general concern. This research aims, on the one hand, to determine the various factors involved in explaining and understanding the persistence of uncleanliness in Lomé and, on the other hand, to develop a new system to be implemented in terms of innovation for sustainable urban sanitation. For this research, the approach adopted is to collect and process field data, which is then analyzed using P. Bourdieu's theory of habitus.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In Togo, with the growth of the urban population and its concentration in towns (Lomé, the capital city), consumption levels are skyrocketing, resulting in significant waste production, which is generally poorly managed in towns and particularly poorly managed in households. This is what justifies the various interventions in the field of urban sanitation and hygiene, with a view to breaking with practices, behaviors, and habits that are detrimental to sustainable urban hygiene. But while initiatives are multiplying, urban uncleanliness persists in towns and cities. To understand this phenomenon and identify possible solutions, a scientific study is needed.

In social sciences, the success of a study depends essentially on the methodological and strategic arsenal that guides the researcher in collecting the data used as a basis for analyzing the research problem. Studies and research are conducted within a clearly defined physical framework. The researcher is therefore required to clearly situate the case to be studied in geographical and social space (study area) (E. Amouzou, 2008). To meet this requirement, the city of Grand Lomé has been chosen as the research site. The target population therefore consists of all the inhabitants of the thirteen (13) municipalities (seven (07) municipalities for the Prefecture of Golfe and six (06) municipalities for that of Agoè-Nyivé) of Grand Lomé. As a determining factor in scientific research, sampling was determined through a methodological approach. Given that the sample is a subset of elements or subjects drawn from the population, which are selected to participate in the study (P. N'da, 2006, cited by M. Nantob and M. Djoré Torouka, 2020), the sample was drawn randomly from the population concerned. Out of thirteen (13) municipalities, an initial random selection of twenty-six (26) individuals per municipality was made; then, a second selection of one individual was made in nine (09) of the 13 municipalities, bringing the total number of individuals surveyed to 347, including fifteen (19) resource persons from the urban sanitation and hygiene sector.

In order to collect data, we used data collection techniques. The first was a quantitative approach, which allows for the collection of measurable and comparable data; it was based on a questionnaire sent to the target population, i.e., the sample. We then used a qualitative method to supplement the statistical description. The qualitative approach involved interviews with resource persons as well as a review of the literature and theory. Field data collection took place in February and March 2025.

RESULTS

The subject of this research is perceived differently in Lomé. As such, the opinions of those surveyed on the factors that may explain the phenomenon of uncleanliness in the city are diverse. According to the information gathered from the individuals concerned, the persistence of uncleanliness in the city of Lomé can be explained by the weak culture of eco-citizenship among city dwellers, the irregularity of household waste collection services, and the high cost of these services. Before describing the comments of the respondents in the sample in detail, it is useful to identify them by age and gender. This is to inform readers about the representativeness (of the sample) in terms of gender (male and female) and adulthood in terms of age.

Table showing the distribution of respondents by age and gender:

Gender Age	Female		Male		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
15-20 years	22	6.3	23	6.6	45	13.0
21-25 years	27	7.8	36	10.4	63	18.2
26-30 years	38	11.0	44	12.7	82	23.6
31-35 years	28	8.1	27	7.8	55	15.9
36-40 years	26	7.5	16	4.6	42	12.1
41-45 years	19	5.5	11	3.2	30	8.6
56-60 years	9	2.6	13	3.7	22	6.3
61 and over	3	0.9	5	1.4	8	2.3
Total	172	49.6	175	50.4	347	100

Source : Field survey, February and March 2025

The male population is slightly more represented in this survey. According to the results collected, the surveyed population is composed of 50.4% men and 49.6% women. The representation of both sexes is acceptable from a gender perspective. This is a relatively young sample, with 69.8% aged between 25 and 40. The majority of respondents are aged between 21 and 45, accounting for 78.4%. The most represented age group is between 26 and 30 years old, accounting for 23.6%; the current population of the country is predominantly young. This population also includes mature individuals aged 40 and over, who represent 29.3% of the total. This lends a certain degree of reliability to the survey results, as older individuals are well placed to recount their experiences (in relation to the research topic), which are based on many years of experience.

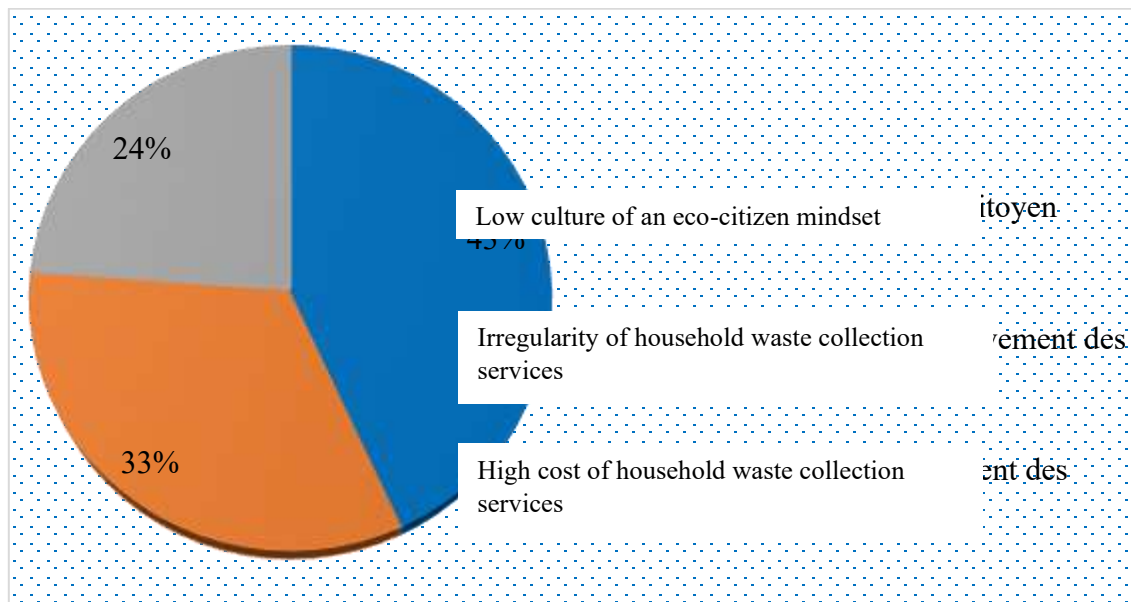


Figure showing the distribution of respondents according to explanatory factors for persistent uncleanness in the city of Lomé, source : Field survey, February and March 2025

The data collected and compiled in this graph show that those who cite the lack of an eco-citizenship culture as a factor contributing to persistent uncleanness in the city of Lomé represent the majority of the sample, accounting for 43% of respondents. Others argue that the phenomenon of uncleanness in the city of Lomé can be explained by the irregularity of

household waste collection services; representing 33% of the sample, as opposed to those who link this phenomenon to the high cost of household waste collection services in the city of Lomé, representing 24% of the sample.

Low culture of eco-citizenship and uncleanness in Lomé

The spirit of eco-citizenship refers to a collective and individual awareness of each person's responsibility towards the environment. Being an eco-citizen means adopting environmentally friendly behaviors in everyday life: avoiding littering, reducing, recycling, and reusing, participating in clean-up initiatives, and demanding and supporting public environmental policies. This spirit therefore implies environmental education and civic discipline geared towards the common good.

Though sanitation and hygiene issues aren't new in Togo, the city of Lomé faces a serious problem of unsanitary conditions: household waste dumped in the streets, clogged gutters, markets and beaches flooded with trash. This phenomenon, which has multiple consequences for health and living conditions, can be explained by various factors. Among these, the weak culture of eco-citizenship among the population plays an important role. Indeed, the lack of environmental awareness and ecological civic-mindedness contributes significantly to the degradation of the urban environment.

Low environmental awareness is notorious in the city of Lomé : the majority of Lomé's inhabitants have not yet acquired a true ecological consciousness. Many are unaware of the impact their daily actions have on the environment: throwing trash in the street, burning garbage, or clogging gutters. This lack of awareness can be explained by insufficient environmental education in schools and homes, and by a lack of information in the media. This culture of eco-citizenship remains underdeveloped for several reasons:

Firstly, there is a lack of environmental education: in schools and homes, awareness of eco-friendly practices is still marginal. Many citizens are unaware of the health and environmental consequences of their unsanitary actions.

Next is the absence of civic and eco-friendly habits: many people spontaneously throw their trash on the street, in gutters, or on beaches, without feeling responsible for collective cleanliness. This behavior stems from a lack of social discipline and a low sense of belonging to the urban community.

Finally, there are countless examples of tolerated anti-social behavior: the lack of real sanctions against polluting behavior and the laissez-faire attitude of local authorities contribute to trivializing environmental anti-social behavior. Indeed, "the lack of eco-citizen spirit also translates into anti-social behavior that has become almost habitual. Illegal dumping is tolerated, and the penalties provided for by law are rarely enforced. As a result, citizens feel neither responsible nor concerned about the cleanliness of their environment. This lack of social discipline perpetuates a vicious circle in which everyone expects the state or the local council to do the work for them" (comments collected during individual interviews in February and March 2025). When an act of unsanitary behavior does not result in any disciplinary consequences, it is perceived as the norm.

The low level of eco-citizen culture has serious effects, such as: the accumulation of waste in markets, neighborhoods, and public spaces, making the city unattractive; clogged gutters and recurring flooding during the rainy season; the spread of diseases linked to uncleanness (malaria, cholera, respiratory infections); deterioration of the living environment and a negative impact on tourism and the local economy. One respondent reinforced this assertion, saying: "People forget that when waste accumulates, rainwater stagnates in clogged gutters, leading to the proliferation of harmful insects and diseases. Even the image of the city is damaged, which harms tourism and the quality of life of its inhabitants" (comments gathered during individual interviews in February and March 2025).

The low level of eco-citizenship culture in Lomé is a fundamental factor in urban unsanitary conditions. Without a profound change in attitudes and behavior, material or technical efforts to manage waste will remain insufficient. The development of a genuine eco-citizenship culture therefore appears to be an essential condition for building a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable city.

Irregularity of household waste collection services and urban unsanitary conditions

Lomé, the capital city of Togo and the country's economic center, has been experiencing persistent urban uncleanness for several years. Despite the efforts of local authorities and private organizations to improve waste management, the city's streets, markets, and neighborhoods often appear degraded, marked by the presence of decomposing garbage. Among the causes of this situation, the irregularity of household waste collection services appears to be a determining factor. Indeed, an inefficient collection system undermines any sanitation policy, jeopardizes public health, and impairs the quality of life of residents. It is therefore necessary to analyze in depth how this irregularity contributes to uncleanness in Lomé, highlighting its concrete manifestations, root causes, and multiple consequences.

The first direct consequence of irregular waste collection is the accumulation of household waste in neighborhoods: in the streets, on sidewalks, around homes, etc. One respondent stated the following: "When the garbage trucks don't come regularly, sometimes several days or weeks late, the garbage bins overflow and spill out; city dwellers end up dumping their waste in unauthorized places" (comments collected during individual interviews in February and March 2025). This situation contributes to the deterioration of the living environment and gives the city a visually degraded image, coupled with foul odors and directly contributing to urban unsanitary conditions. In Lomé, this reality is particularly visible in neighborhoods, markets, sewer systems, etc., where household waste, both plastic and organic, piles up for several days.

It is clear that this accumulation of waste leads to a proliferation of insects and rodents such as flies, mosquitoes, cockroaches, rats, etc., which find in this garbage an environment conducive to their reproduction. These animals become vectors of diseases such as malaria, typhoid fever, and cholera. Irregular waste collection is therefore not just an aesthetic or environmental problem: it poses a major health threat to urban populations.

Furthermore, in the absence of regular collection, some household waste often ends up in gutters and sewers, either deliberately or through runoff. This causes clogging, preventing the normal flow of rainwater. In Lomé, where the drainage network is already limited, this situation exacerbates urban flooding, especially during the rainy season. This stagnant water then becomes a source of pollution.

The irregularity of household waste collection services is a key factor contributing to the uncleanness in Lomé. It leads to waste accumulation, deterioration of public health, and flooding. It promotes the proliferation of disease vectors and degrades the urban environment. It leads to a loss of confidence in local public or private authorities and in the individuals or companies that provide pre-collection services. Its causes are material, organizational, and behavioral, reflecting the limitations of a waste management system that is still fragile.

To break this cycle, it is essential to strengthen the logistical resources of collection structures, establish better institutional coordination, and involve citizens more in promoting urban cleanliness. Only a concerted, continuous, and inclusive approach will enable Lomé to meet the challenge of sanitation in a sustainable manner.

The high cost of household waste collection services, a catalyst for urban uncleanness

The persistent problem of urban uncleanness is an empirical fact that no longer needs to be demonstrated. Despite the establishment of public and private waste collection structures, many neighborhoods continue to face, as we have discussed above, the accumulation of waste in the streets, gutters, and vacant plots of land. This recurring phenomenon stems from various economic, social, and institutional factors, among which the high cost of household waste collection services appears to be one of the determining factors.

In a context marked by the high cost of living and declining purchasing power, many households struggle to pay the fees required for regular waste collection, thereby contributing to the worsening of unsanitary conditions. “Waste collection services in Lomé rely heavily on private operators contracted by local authorities. However, the costs they incur are considerable: purchase and maintenance of trucks, fuel, staff salaries, taxes, and administrative costs” (comments collected during individual interviews in February and March 2025). In a context where the price of fuel, spare parts, and imported materials continues to rise, collection companies pass these costs on to users. As a result, some households opt out or cancel their subscriptions when they find these services too expensive. One respondent stated the following: “No, we can't subscribe because of the high cost” (comments collected during individual interviews in February and March 2025). As a result, without a subscription, there is no regular collection; waste accumulates in front of homes, at collection points, on public roads, etc.

Lomé, like many African capitals, is experiencing a steady rise in the cost of living: rents, transportation, food, and basic services are all increasing sharply. This general inflation is eroding purchasing power, particularly for households with low or irregular incomes. In this context, many consider paying for waste collection services to be a secondary expense, not a priority compared to basic necessities (food, education, health, transportation, housing, etc.). In other words, when a household's budget is tight, so-called “non-essential” or “less visible” expenses such as waste collection subscriptions may be sacrificed. Thus, the relative cost of the service lies not only in its absolute cost, but in the disproportion between this cost and disposable income.

The inability of many residents to subscribe to waste collection services has led to a gradual decline in public engagement with collective hygiene practices. Uncollected waste is then dumped in gutters, vacant plots of land, or on roadsides. This illegal dumping, which can be seen in several neighborhoods such as Agoè, Adidogomé, Bè-Klikamé, Gbadago, Gbossimé, Doumasséssé, etc., degrades the environment, causes nuisances, visual pollution, odors, etc., and undermines the quality of urban life.

It would be appropriate to introduce differentiated pricing according to the socio-economic categories of households in order to ensure equitable access to the service. Municipalities, with the support of the state and international partners, could partially subsidize subscriptions for low-income households. This would increase service coverage while reducing anarchic dumping.

The uncleanness in Lomé is not only the result of a lack of technical or organizational resources, but also of an economic imbalance between the cost of the service and the financial capacity of households. In a context of high living costs, the cost of waste collection is driving part of the population away from official collection systems, leading to an accumulation of waste and serious social, health, environmental, and other impacts.

What innovation for a sustainable urban sanitation ?

In the humanities and social sciences, innovation refers to a social and collective process of creating something new, in which actors transform practices, representations, or organizations in order to respond to new societal needs, values, or challenges. The sociologist R. Guy approaches innovation from a sociological perspective, as a phenomenon of social change. According to him, innovation is the introduction of a new element into a social system that changes the structure or functioning of that system in a more or less lasting way (R. Guy, 1968). For the author, innovation is not only technical; it can be social, cultural, political, or

organizational. It always involves change (disruption, adaptation, or transformation in a given social system). He argues that this change can be planned by public policies or spontaneous, i.e., emerging from social practices, and that innovation has an impact on social structures, behaviors, values, and institutions.

It is quite clear, according to R. Guy (1968) that innovation is the achievement of three (03) types of change, namely : political change, economic change, and social change. Thus, sustainable urban sanitation and eco-citizenship innovation can be constituted as follows :

Political change : political will on the one hand, with decisions to integrate eco-citizenship into the national education system, starting in preschool ; into policies/programs and structures/infrastructures/institutions (create them if they are lacking or insufficient) for sanitation and public health with programs, associations and media for ongoing training, information, awareness-raising and consciousness-building on eco-citizenship; and, on the other hand, dissuasive sanctions against unsanitary and excessive acts to establish genuine environmental discipline;

Economic change : support for vulnerable households with subsidies for household waste collection services and for local authorities with adequate equipment and infrastructure for better urban waste management in general;

Social change, a transformation that can be observed over time, produces sustainable effects, and affects all or a significant part of society. It can concern the productive system, work organization, lifestyle, family organization, and value systems: acceptance by the population. When the eco-citizen mindset/culture is embedded in everyday life, the habits, behaviors, attitudes, and practices (HAB) of city dwellers, thanks to the transformation brought about by political and economic change, will ultimately adhere to eco-citizen practices and values. This will reduce or even eradicate unhealthy habits and behaviors. This will lead to sustainable urban sanitation with the help of conscious, committed, and responsible eco-citizens.

Indeed, raising awareness and promoting eco-citizen responsibility are crucial. No sanitation policy can succeed without the support of the population. Environmental education campaigns in schools, the media, and local communities must emphasize the consequences of uncleanness and the benefits of a clean-living environment. Community initiatives for pre-collection, sorting, and recycling can also reduce the amount of waste to be disposed of and directly involve citizens in managing their environment.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the persistence of uncleanness refers to the theory of habitus (P. Bourdieu, 1972); through this theory, P. Bourdieu (1972) stipulates that habitus is a system of sustainable dispositions acquired by individuals during their socialization (family, school, neighborhood, church, etc.). It guides practices without us being fully aware of it. It is shaped by the social environment (economic conditions, level of education, life experiences, etc.). Behaviors are therefore neither completely free nor entirely constrained: they are produced within a space of possibilities linked to our social position. In Lomé, unhealthy habits and behaviors, so ingrained in the habits of city dwellers that they seem normal, make sanitation and hygiene “an illusion.”

It must be recognized that certain actions and behaviors (throwing waste into gutters, streets, private spaces, etc.) can contribute to the difficulty of embedding eco-citizen practices and values in the daily lives of Lomé residents. Indeed, the impunity of these acts and unhealthy behaviors can easily and unconsciously encourage other individuals to develop and multiply habits that are detrimental to urban cleanliness. Thus, the absence of eco-citizen behavior and the disregard for the living environment do not facilitate everyone's active participation in the fight against urban uncleanness, especially since it is evident that the sanitation problem arises with sewers and streets flooded by household wastewater and rainwater. Furthermore, efforts to keep certain public spaces clean and healthy are often undermined by the slightest wind or rain, which blows garbage from various sources into them. When gutters fill with household waste mixed with wastewater, foul odors arise and pathogens such as mosquitoes, bacteria, and protozoa proliferate. It should be noted that dumps are created without any regulatory measures being taken (M. Nantob and M. Djore Torouka, 2020). All this complicates and exacerbates the problem of urban insanitation.

It should be noted that the irregularity of the service is often due to a lack of dump trucks, fuel, personnel, or adequate infrastructure (transfer centers, controlled landfills, etc.). Sometimes, collection companies lack coordination with local authorities, which leads to delays or overlooked areas. This structural weakness results in uneven coverage of the territory and a collection frequency that is too low for the volume of waste produced daily in Lomé. The irregularities observed in waste collection in Lomé can be explained by organizational and logistical weaknesses. The structures responsible for collection, whether public or private, often lack material and financial resources: broken-down trucks, fuel shortages, insufficient staff, and the absence of effective transfer centers. This lack of resources prevents the establishment of a stable and reliable collection schedule.

Added to this is a problem of governance and coordination among the actors involved. Responsibilities are often shared between the municipality, waste collection companies, and local communities, without any real synergy of action. The absence of integrated urban planning makes it difficult to cover the entire city, especially in undeveloped areas where access roads are limited. When waste removal services are unreliable, residents lose confidence in the institutions responsible for urban cleanliness. Some stop paying collection fees or depositing their waste at official collection points, believing that the service is not being provided. This citizen disengagement makes waste management even more difficult, creating a vicious cycle: less collection, more uncleanness, less participation, and even more disorder.

Finally, the behavior of citizens indirectly contributes to this irregularity. Faced with a service perceived as deficient, many residents stop paying collection fees or prefer to dispose of their waste informally. This lack of cooperation increases the burden on existing collection points and discourages service providers.

CONCLUSION

The issue of uncleanliness is becoming increasingly concerning over the years. To break this cycle, it is essential to adopt an integrated approach that combines social justice, economic efficiency, and civic responsibility. Urban cleanliness, far more than an aesthetic concern, is an indicator of a society's level of development, governance, and solidarity.

The repercussions of this situation are numerous. On an environmental level, the decomposition of waste in the open-air releases greenhouse gases and toxic substances that pollute the air, soil, and groundwater. Plastic waste, for its part, frequently ends up on beaches and in the lagoon, harming aquatic wildlife and the coastal ecosystem. On a health level, hygiene-related diseases are multiplying, putting pressure on public health structures. The poorest populations, often living in areas most neglected by waste collection services, suffer the most severe consequences, which exacerbates social inequalities. Beyond the degradation of the living environment, this situation contributes to air, soil, and water pollution (especially in the lagoon and the beach of Lomé). Urban uncleanliness also reinforces social inequalities, as working-class neighborhoods are often the most neglected by the collection services.

Finally, the uncleanliness affects the socio-economic and symbolic aspects of the city. It harms the image of Lomé, discourages tourists and investors, and creates a sense of resignation among citizens, who end up seeing filth as an inevitability rather than a collective problem to be solved.

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