

Topic document

Call for applications

for international and Ghanaians



International Urban Planning Workshop

Damongo & Yendi

Strategies for two emerging capitals

The Caravan Workshops
14 - 18 & 21 - 25 January 2027
Damongo & Yendi, Northern Ghana



Funded by
the European Union



EXPERTISE
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Les Ateliers Internationaux de Maîtrise d'Oeuvre Urbaine de Cergy-Pontoise

Immeuble Le Verger, rue de la Gare
95020 Cergy-Pontoise Cedex
Tel: +33134419391

les Ateliers
maîtrise d'œuvre urbaine

Les Ateliers de Cergy is a non-profit association created in 1982 at the initiative of the urban planners of the New Town of Cergy-Pontoise. Today, it is an international network of professionals, academics and decision-makers in urban planning. Focused on the practice of urban project management, the association organises workshops conceived as spaces for collective design and creativity.

In France and abroad, these workshops provide project managers with an international perspective and illustrated proposals for territorial strategies and urban development projects. Through the convergence of different professions and cultures, they also serve to question learning processes and provide exchange opportunities at the highest level.

The Caravan workshops

Pilots of the workshop

Edwin KABUGI *Urban designer, Environmentalist,
and Lecturer*

Horcel SOKENG *Architect, Urban planner, Economist*

Coordination

Véronique VALENZUELA *Director of Les Ateliers*

Simon BROCHARD *Director of projects*

Carole ADENKA *Project coordinator*

Photo credits: Les Ateliers, unless mentioned otherwise

Contact
ghana@ateliers.org

LES ATELIERS DE CERGY IN NORTHERN GHANA

The Sustainable Cities Project - Phase 1 is funded by the European Union and implemented by Expertise France with the Ministry of Local Government, Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs (MLGCRA). Its **Component 2 supports urban planning** in the six target cities of Northern Ghana, helping municipalities **develop or update their urban and sectoral master plans**. Les Ateliers de Cergy contributes through a **series of international urban planning workshops** which started with the Greater Tamale international workshop of June-July 2026.

THE CARAVAN WORKSHOPS: TWO WORKSHOPS, SAME PARTICIPANTS

In January 2027, Les Ateliers is organizing **two consecutive five-day workshops**:

Workshop 1: Damongo, innovating the Savannah Capital.

Workshop 2: Yendi, the peaceful and attractive Dagbon Capital.

The two workshops have different topics and different local partners, but they are closely linked. Applicants must be available for both workshops, one week after the other. Applications for only one of the two cannot be considered. The only exception is for participants who live in Northern Ghana, who may take part in the workshop of their own city (Damongo or Yendi) only.

HOW IT WORKS

Following Les Ateliers de Cergy's methodology, **8 professional volunteers from around the world and from Ghana**, representing a wide range of disciplines (urban planning, geography, economics, landscape design, sociology, art, engineering, environment...), **work together through site visits, collective work and exchanges with local stakeholders**. In each city, the team builds a shared vision that **feeds into the local urban planning documents**.

This document presents the topics of the Damongo and Yendi workshops and serves as the international call for applications.

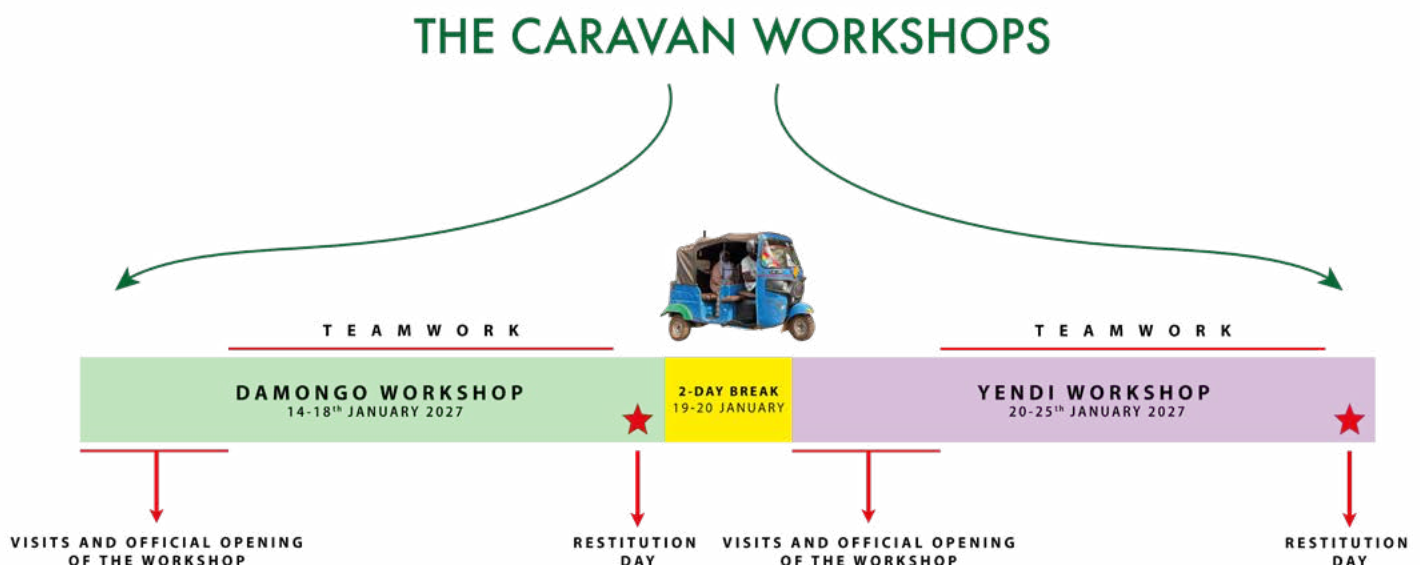


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A black and white photograph of a large, dense tree in a savanna environment. The tree's canopy fills the upper two-thirds of the frame. In the foreground, several plastic chairs are scattered on the ground, some under the tree's shade. A small, light-colored dog is standing in the center of the foreground. In the background, a simple building is partially visible. The overall scene suggests a community gathering or a workshop in a rural setting.

DAMONGO, INNOVATING THE SAVANNAH CAPITAL

FLASH WORKSHOP 14-18 JANUARY, 2027

**TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE TERRITORIES
AND COMMUNITIES**

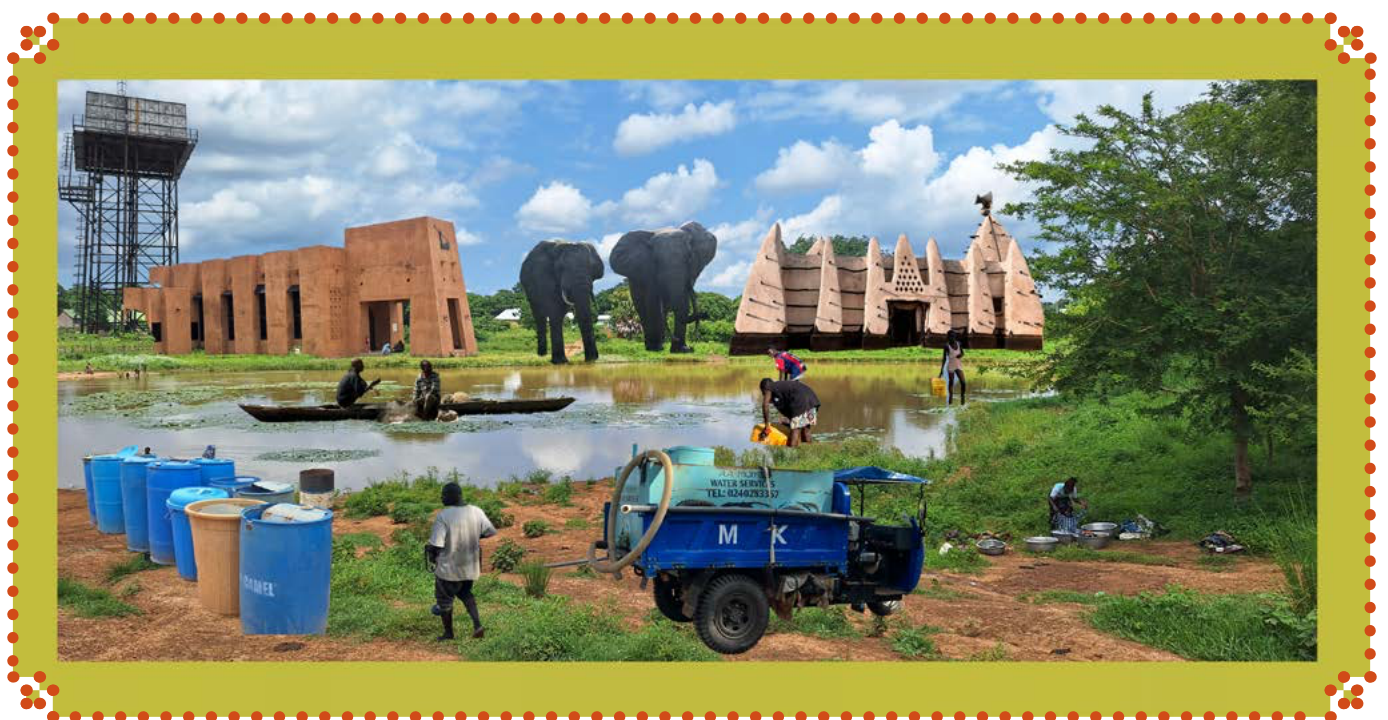
DAMONGO WORKSHOP GENESIS

This document details the topic for the Damongo workshop, the first leg of the caravan. These five-day workshops in each city aim to inform their Local Spatial Plans by translating shared territorial readings into concrete planning priorities and pilot projects.

AN URBAN PLANNING EXERCISE

At its core, this workshop is an urban planning exercise. Damongo has been handed the responsibilities of a regional capital without yet having a strategic vision to grow into them, and the workshop exists to help build that vision: not a statutory document, but the strategic thinking a master plan needs before it can be drawn. Over five days, the workshop will build towards a Local Spatial Plan for Damongo, structured around three outputs:

- 1. A SHARED TERRITORIAL READING:** a concise diagnosis of Damongo's main spatial, environmental, social and economic dynamics and their relationships.
- 2. A STRATEGIC VISION:** a clear proposition for Damongo's role as the Savannah Regional Capital, expressed spatially and territorially.
- 3. PRIORITY SPATIAL MOVES:** a number of strategic interventions such as growth areas, corridors, public-space systems, mobility connections, ecological networks, productive areas, tourism circuits or service infrastructure. These will integrate a portfolio of realistic initiatives with a clear territorial dimension and pathways to implementation.



RATIONALE

Damongo is changing fast. In 2019, this quiet district town, long known mainly as the gateway to Mole National Park, was designated capital of the newly created Savannah Region. A town built at district scale became the seat of a regional administration, drawing civil servants, investment and migrants far faster than roads, water systems or housing could follow.

Yet Damongo is not a blank page. It is the seat of the Yagbonwura, Overlord of the Gonja people, and its growth continues to be shaped as much by chieftaincy, land custom

and the rhythms of farming and trade as by any statutory master plan. Around it lie some of West Africa's most celebrated natural and cultural assets: Mole National Park and the Savannah landscapes, farming communities that have shaped the area for generations, and the Larabanga Mosque.

The challenge is not simply to manage growth, but to decide, through a deliberate urban planning process, what kind of regional capital Damongo wants to become, and to plan for it before growth outpaces the choice.

How can Damongo grow into an intentionally planned, attractive and sustainable Savannah capital rooted in its communities, heritage, culture, and natural environment?

This ambition runs through the rest of this document and rests on five pillars:

COMMUNITIES AS DRIVERS

HERITAGE AND NATURE AS CORE ASSETS

INNOVATION AS CATALYST

LOCAL ECONOMIES AS ENGINE

SUSTAINABLE FUTURES AS THE LONG-TERM OUTCOME



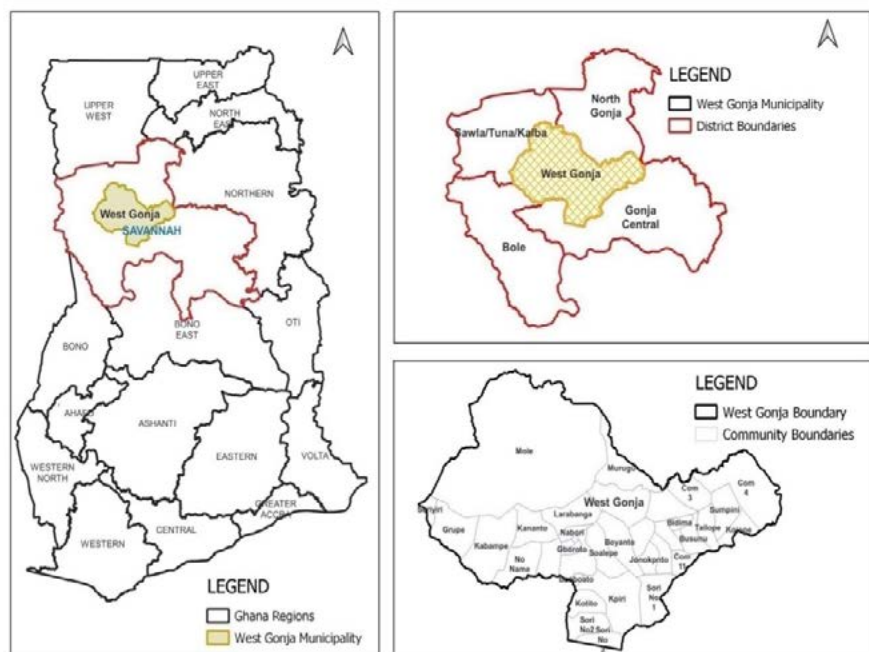
Road to Larabanga
(Source: Les Ateliers, field mission 2026)

1 DAMONGO, AN EMERGING REGIONAL CAPITAL

1.1 Regional and geographical context

Ghana is divided into sixteen administrative regions, each with its own regional capital, which hosts the Regional Coordinating Council, regional ministries, and decentralized agencies (Republic of Ghana, 2016). Carved out of the western half of the Northern Region, the **Savannah Region** was **created in December 2018** and is one of the six newly created regions. It is **Ghana's largest region by area**, covering about 34,790 km² (Ghana Statistical Service [GSS], 2021), and is among the most sparsely populated, with 653,266 residents in the 2021 census, or 2.1% of the national population, roughly 19 people per km² (GSS, 2022). It comprises seven districts and holds **Damongo** as the **capital of both the West Gonja Municipal Assembly and the Savannah Region**. The West Gonja Municipality covers 8,352 km², and had 63,449 residents in 2021, about 62% urban and 38% rural settlers, respectively. This translated to a projection of 70,000 in 2024 (WGMA, 2025) and 74,248 in 2026 (WGMA, 2026), implying a **growth rate of 3.2% per year**. This portrays a small population administering a vast territory. Damongo lies about 130km west of Tamale, the Northern Region's capital, at an elevation of around 217m on the edge of the Damongo Escarpment.

West Gonja Municipality's geography is defined as much by **water and woodland** as by administrative lines. The Mole River runs south from the Escarpment to join the White Volta, which later merges with the Black Volta. **Mole**



Top illustration: Map of Ghana

Source: © mapsofworld.com

Bottom illustration: Location of West Gonja in Ghana

Source: West Gonja MTD

National Park, Ghana's largest protected area at about 4,500 km², occupies a substantial share of the municipality, with its woodland and river systems continuing beyond the park boundary into surrounding forest reserves, including the Damongo Scarp, Kenikeni, and Nyembong.

1.2 From district town to Capital of the Savannah Region

Damongo's elevation to regional capital was abrupt. A town built to the scale of a district capital suddenly had to accommodate regional ministries, agencies, and their staff, along with a **wave of newcomers drawn by opportunity.** Infrastructure such as roads, water, sanitation, and housing has not kept pace. For many residents, this is Damongo's central paradox today: national attention and funding, without the basic services that should come with it.

How can Damongo intentionally grow into a regional capital, serving as a centre for services, knowledge, commerce and culture across the Savannah Region, rather than simply expand?

How can Damongo strengthen its identity as capital of the Savannah while making this new status work for its own residents first?

1.3 Gonja heritage and hybrid governance

Damongo sits at the **heart of Gonja land** and holds the **seat of the Yagbonwura, King of the Gonja Kingdom**, based at the Jakpa Palace. As across Northern Ghana, land is governed through two systems. The first system is a **customary chain running from the Yagbonwura through the Damongowura** (paramount chief of the Damongo Traditional Area) down to sub-chiefs, family heads and tindamba (earth priests) who allocate land

and mediate disputes. The second system is a **statutory chain running from national land-use law through the West Gonja Municipal Assembly**, which regulates land use, issues



permits, and is preparing Damongo's Spatial Development Framework under the Land Use and Spatial Planning Act 2016 (Act 925). The Lands Commission also plays a central role in land administration, including registering land titles. In practice, these two systems overlap rather than align. Much of the peri-urban land now being converted for housing changes hands first through chiefs and families, well before it appears in any official layout.

How can Damongo's dual governance system become a genuine asset for participatory, locally owned planning, rather than two systems working past each other?

How can chiefs, the Municipal Assembly, communities, youth, traders, and other stakeholders shape and pursue a shared vision for Damongo's growth?



Top picture: Jakpa Palace
Bottom picture: Inside Damongowura Palace
(Source: Les Ateliers, field mission 2026)

1.4 A Territory of Neighbourhoods: Communities as Drivers

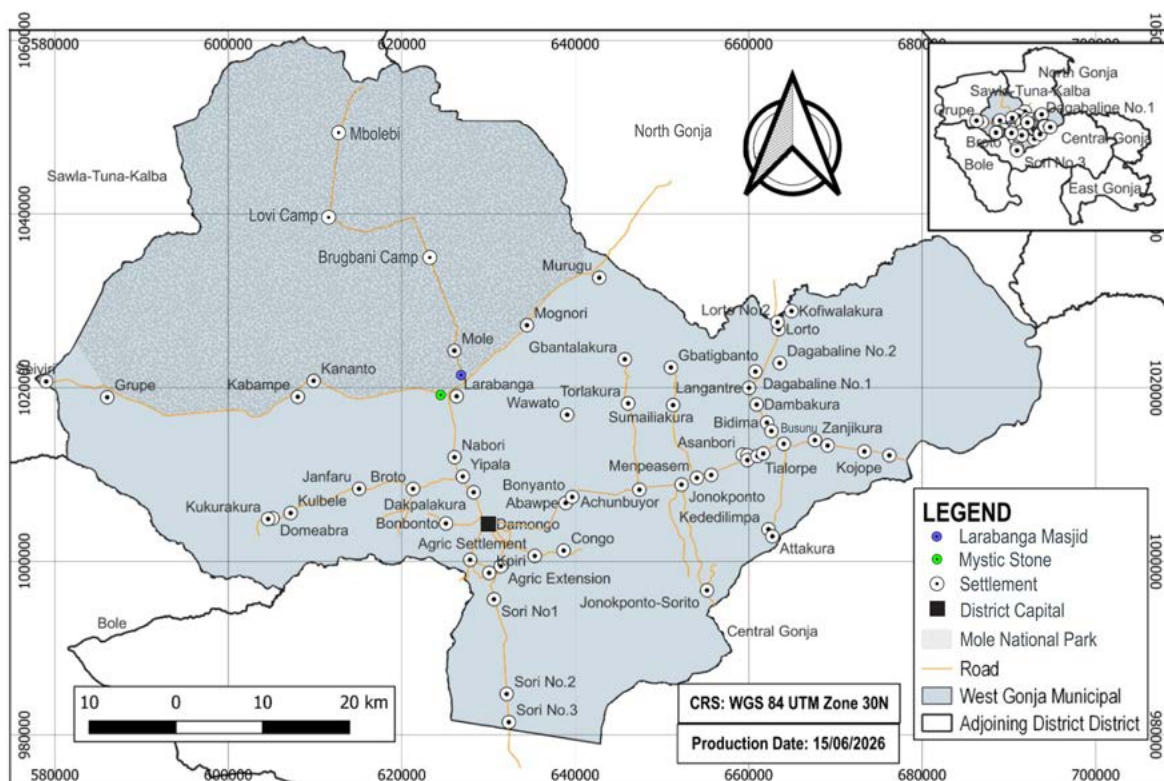
Damongo's identity is best read at the scale of West Gonja District. In Damongo, **Attributo** neighbourhood, close to the transport terminal and the proposed 24-hour market, is an **older, well-connected area shaped by trade flows with Wa and Tamale**. **Langbonto and Hangaline** neighbourhoods, on the opposite side of the Damongo-Wa road, are **home to indigenous families and retain a distinct spatial organization and history**. Around the Agricultural College, the Damongo Dam and the roads leading out of town, farmland, new housing, and institutional land continue to negotiate for space.

Beyond the city and as part of West Gonja District, **Damongo** is **part of a wider settlement constellation** that includes Larabanga, Mognori, Murugu, and other organized communities on the park's edge. **Their relationship to the forest, wildlife and visitors shapes daily life**. In Mognori, women's groups process shea butter, practice apiculture, and welcome visitors through community-based tourism. Elsewhere, seasonal livestock droving and farming continue alongside conservation rules. Busunu is a town located in the West Gonja Municipality in the Savannah Region of Ghana. It is one of the notable settlements in the municipality, notably because Busunu has its own traditional structure, led by a paramount chief known as the Busunuwura, one of the seven Kingmakers of Gonja Kingdom.

Reading these territories together, rather than treating Damongo as a single undifferentiated town, is central to understanding how the capital of the Savannah is being built: plot by plot, chief by chief, household by household.

How can heritage, culture, and nature become development levers towards a sustainable, attractive, and touristic regional capital?

How can Damongo and its neighbouring communities and territories grow as an interconnected West Gonja territory, creating stronger links between places, people, livelihoods, and tourism?



Damongo's location and settlements in West Gonja District
(Source: Les Ateliers)

1.5 Urban Growth and Growing Pains

Since 2019, Damongo's population has **grown faster than the infrastructure meant to serve it**. This gap is better read as a **planning problem** than a simple funding shortfall. New neighbourhoods expand along the Tamale, Wa and Mole roads ahead of piped water, drainage and all-weather access, while land allocation continues to **outpace regularization**. The same pattern repeats across services. Damongo lies between the Black and White Volta rivers yet has no perennial surface source of its own. Most households depend on **groundwater from wells and boreholes**, particularly in Attributo, locally known as "the place of wells", whose yield varies sharply from plot to plot. Many households still lack a private toilet, and with **no integrated sewerage or stormwater network**, wastewater and runoff find their own path, flooding low ground and contaminating the same wells people drink from. **Waste management** is mid-transition. Informal dumpsites, including one on former sand-winning land along the Yipala road, are gradually giving way to the Integrated Recycling and Compost Plant (IRECOP), even as informal collection persists elsewhere. The underlying issue is consistent: growth and services are not being planned together, and the least secure neighbourhoods tend to be the least served.



How can Damongo grow and densify in a spatially ordered manner to accommodate new inhabitants while ensuring water, sanitation, waste, and mobility infrastructure and services keep pace with growth?

What should a Damongo city centre look like, and where should people meet, trade, wait, walk and relax?



Picture from top to bottom: Wood for charcoal production / Storm drainage system in Attributo neighbourhood / Damongo Agric Dam
(Source: Les Ateliers, field mission 2026)

2 A TERRITORIAL IDENTITY: FROM GATEWAY TO DESTINATION

2.1 Nature and Heritage as Assets for Tourism: Mole National Park and the Larabanga Mosque

Founded in 1958, **Mole National Park**, Ghana's largest national park, lies 24 kilometers north from Damongo and is **home to a diversified wildlife** (elephants, antelope, baboons, etc.) in **open savannah woodland**. On the way to Mole Park from Damongo, stands the **Larabanga Mosque**, one of the oldest surviving Sudano-Sahelian earthen mosques in West Africa, as well as **Larabanga Mystic Stone**, site of myths and mystical happenings.

Though it has remarkable tourism potential (Forest Reserve and Damongo Escarpment), as of today, **Damongo** functions mostly as a **gateway**, a stopover for visitors headed to the park, rather than a destination in its own right. Despite its international reputation, tourism revenue, overnight stays, and local enterprise built around these assets remain low. **Ecotourism initiatives** exist in the settlements (Larabanga, Mognori and Murugu) closest to Mole National Park, supported in part by conservation actors, but questions of **community benefit-sharing** and **local commercialization of tourism** remain open. The communities face both the risks and opportunities of Damongo's tourism ambitions. Risk, if growth and commercialization bypass them, and opportunity, if ecotourism and heritage circuits are built around their own knowledge, land and enterprise.

How can Damongo evolve from being just a transit town and gateway to Mole National Park into a destination that attracts visitors, investors, and residents to stay, spend, invest, and return?

How can urban planning shape Damongo's public spaces and daily rhythms (where people meet, trade, celebrate, and relax), thus making people want to stay longer?



Elephants in Mole National Park



Larabanga Mosque



Inside Mole National Park



Mole National Park gate

2.2 Local economies as engine: Agriculture, agribusiness and agro-processing

Agriculture anchors West Gonja's economy, with **shea butter, cereals, grains, yams, cassava, beekeeping, and livestock rearing** as key activities. The Damongo Agricultural College, women's groups, youth organizations, and community enterprises provide **technical expertise and training in agribusiness and agronomy**, while small agro-processing units, such as local gari factories, add value to agricultural produce. **Shea butter processing**, led largely by women's groups, is one of West Gonja's most visible economic and cultural activities. It is a year-round livelihood that anchors many households' income. Despite these strengths, Damongo's potential to build a stronger local economic ecosystem remains only partially realized. Farmers face **limited market access, storage and accommodation challenges, and weak scaling mechanisms**, while young entrepreneurs face gaps in job creation, financing, and mentorship needed to turn agricultural knowledge into viable businesses. This **informal economy** is resilient and **deeply woven into daily life**, but it also concentrates the risk of debt, insecure space, and limited bargaining power for the traders and producers who depend on it.



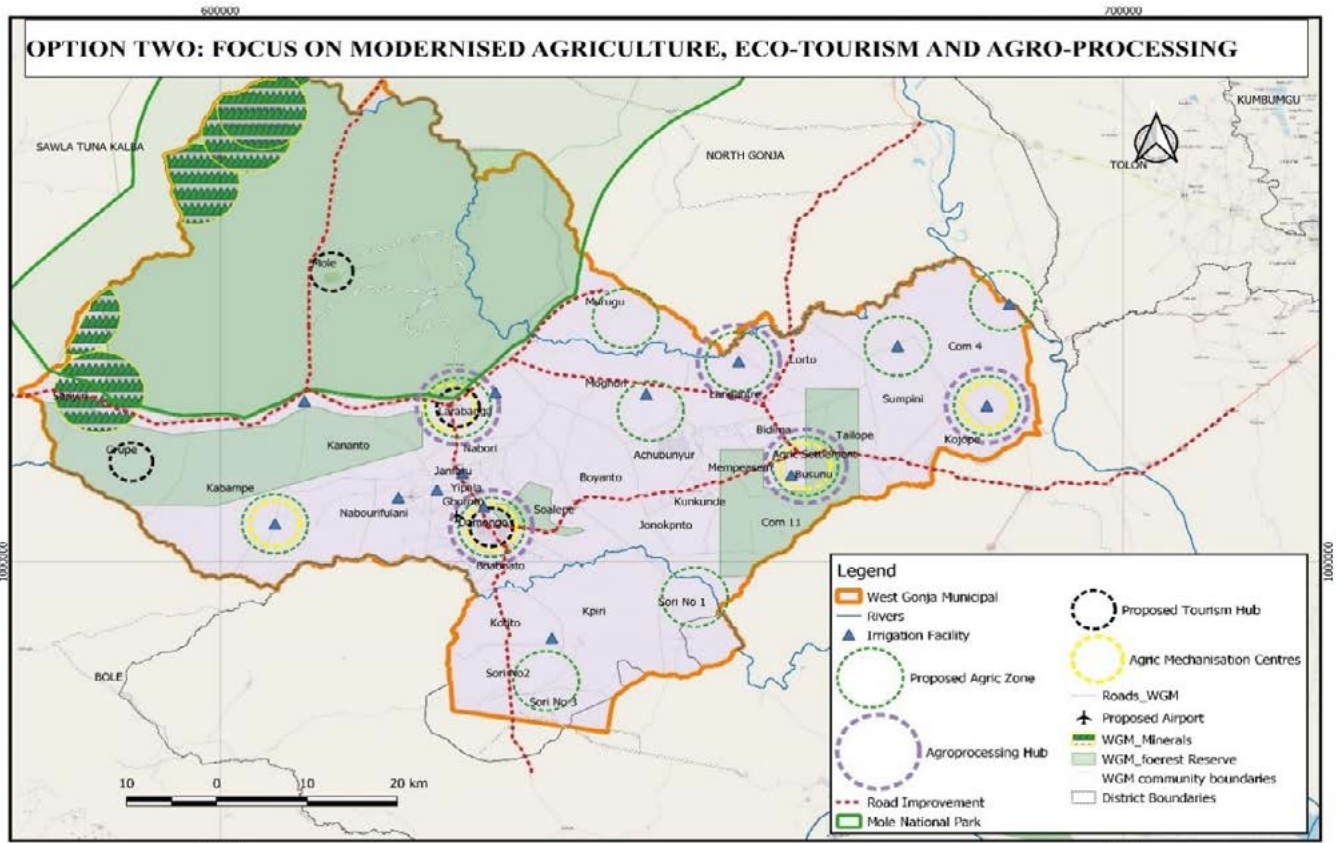
How can agriculture, agro-processing, and local agricultural knowledge, craft, and innovation be valued, developed, and scaled into stronger and more resilient local livelihoods?

How can Damongo's market and caravan economy be supported through planning, rather than left to develop informally at the margins?



Picture from top to bottom: Local gari factory / Packed charcoal to sell / Woman sorting shea nuts for shea butter production
(Source: Les Ateliers, field mission 2026)

3 ONGOING PROJECTS AND PRIORITIES



Visualisation map of Scenario Two: Modernized Agriculture, Eco-Tourism and Agro -processing. Source: WGMA MTDP 2026-2029

The **preferred development scenario and strategic option** for West Gonja Municipality is **sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism and agro-processing oriented**. The scenario seeks to *"consolidate the agriculture-led economy of the Municipality and aims to strengthen it by engaging in climate smart agriculture, developing the vibrant tourism sector and protecting the existing natural resources such as the forest reserves and other ecologically sensitive areas from further degradation in the next 20 years"*. In this scenario, Damongo becomes a **major commercial and services centre**, and an **eco-tourism, leisure and hospitality hub** thanks to priority investments in road infrastructure, markets, health facilities or education. A few projects to illustrate this development scenario:

24-hour Economy Model Market: Development of a market infrastructure adjacent to the existing transport terminal in Damongo city centre. This market would benefit traders and consumers from neighbouring settlements such as Larabanga, as well as from the wider Northern Ghana. Unlike the existing Damongo Saturday market, this new market

will operate throughout the week to support continuous commercial activity.

Tourism enhancement: the Lands Commission started a project to add value to 12 acres of land to the west of Agric Dam for recreational services. Additionally, Damongo aims to build a tourist information centre on a 3-acre plot of land east of Agric Dam to grow its tourism potential and promote its own assets.

Agriculture as a key pillar of the municipality's economy: Designated agricultural zones, introduction of an agroprocessing hub and agric mechanization centres in Damongo

Ghana Secondary Support Programme (financed by the World Bank): Storm drainage system, shopping centre ...

How can these initiatives be woven into a long-term spatial strategy that supports Damongo's role as a commercial, agricultural and eco-tourism hub?

CONCLUSION

Damongo emerges from this reading as a territory being asked to become a regional capital faster than it has planned for. Its governance is genuinely hybrid, its economy still largely informal, its natural and cultural assets under-leveraged, and its basic services structurally behind its growth. None of these are separate problems. They are facets of a single planning challenge: giving Damongo a strategic, spatial vision of what kind of capital it wants to be, before growth forecloses the choice.



WORKSHOP QUESTIONS

Identity and Governance

How can Damongo intentionally grow into a regional capital, serving as a centre for services, knowledge, commerce and culture across the Savannah Region, rather than simply expand?

Heritage, Nature, and Tourism

How can Damongo evolve from being just a transit town and gateway to Mole National Park and other attractions into a destination that attracts visitors, investors, and residents to stay, spend, invest, and return?

Growth, Infrastructure and Services

How can Damongo grow and densify in a spatially ordered manner to accommodate new inhabitants while ensuring water, sanitation, waste, and mobility infrastructure and services keep pace?

Local economies

How can agriculture, agro-processing, and local agricultural knowledge, craft, and innovation be valued, developed, and scaled into stronger and more resilient local livelihoods?

YENDI: THE PEACEFUL AND ATTRACTIVE DAGBON CAPITAL



FLASH WORKSHOP 21-25 JANUARY, 2027

**TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE TERRITORIES
AND COMMUNITIES**

YENDI WORKSHOP GENESIS

This document details the topic for the Yendi workshop, the second leg of the caravan. These five-day workshops in each city aim to inform their Local Spatial Plans by translating shared territorial readings into concrete planning priorities and pilot projects.

The Yendi Municipal Assembly, together with traditional authorities and their partners, wished to bring international perspectives to bear on this moment. Les Ateliers conducted an exploratory mission in Yendi, meeting with the Municipal Assembly, technical departments, and business, civil, and youth organizations to understand the city's main challenges and define together the most relevant purpose for this international urban workshop.

AN URBAN PLANNING EXERCISE

By the end of the five-day workshop, Yendi city track is expected to produce:

- **A CO-PRODUCED URBAN DIAGNOSIS:** a spatialised reading of morphology, land use, mobility and ecological assets, triangulating the multidisciplinary expert teams' analysis with the situated knowledge of traditional authorities and residents;
- **A STRUCTURING SPATIAL VISION:** a settlement-scale concept plan that positions strategic nodes, connective corridors and public-realm sequences for Yendi, organised around the Eastern Corridor spine and the Gbewaa Palace precinct as its symbolic and functional anchor;
- **A SET OF PRIORITY DESIGN PROPOSALS** concrete, site-specific interventions developed by each team, translating the vision into actionable urban design ideas;
- **AN IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP** with indicative next steps, partners and funding pathways that the Municipal Assembly and its partners can carry forward after the workshop closes.



RATIONALE

Yendi, the traditional capital of the Dagbon Kingdom, is at a turning point. After seven decades (1948-2019) of chieftaincy conflict that stalled investment and urban development, peace has held for more than seven years, and the city is ready to turn that peace into a development trajectory. What Yendi still lacks is a shared, spatial expression of that trajectory: a strategic urban vision that translates renewed stability, cultural capital, and ongoing public investment into a coherent plan for the city's future form.

Underlying that vision is the question of land: as in Damongo, land in Yendi is held under customary authority by the Ya-Naa and his chiefs, while the Municipal Assembly regulates its use and the Lands Commission records its rights. How these two systems come together will largely decide where, and how well, the city grows.

At its core, this is an urban planning exercise. Its purpose is not to catalog problems but to help Yendi articulate the strategic vision it currently lacks, one that gives spatial and programmatic shape to the city's peace, heritage and economic ambitions. It aims to give Yendi the strategic, spatial vision that seven years of peace and a growing pipeline of public investment have made possible, but that the city does not yet have on paper.

The workshop is structured around four interlinked challenge themes, each opening with a narrative framing and a hierarchy of guiding questions and with a single ambition: converting cultural identity and hard-won peace into a shared, livable and economically vibrant capital.

How can Yendi turn its strategic position as a nodal city and its status as traditional capital of Dagbon into a driver of resilience and sustainable growth?



One of Yendi's main road
(Source: Les Ateliers, field mission 2026)

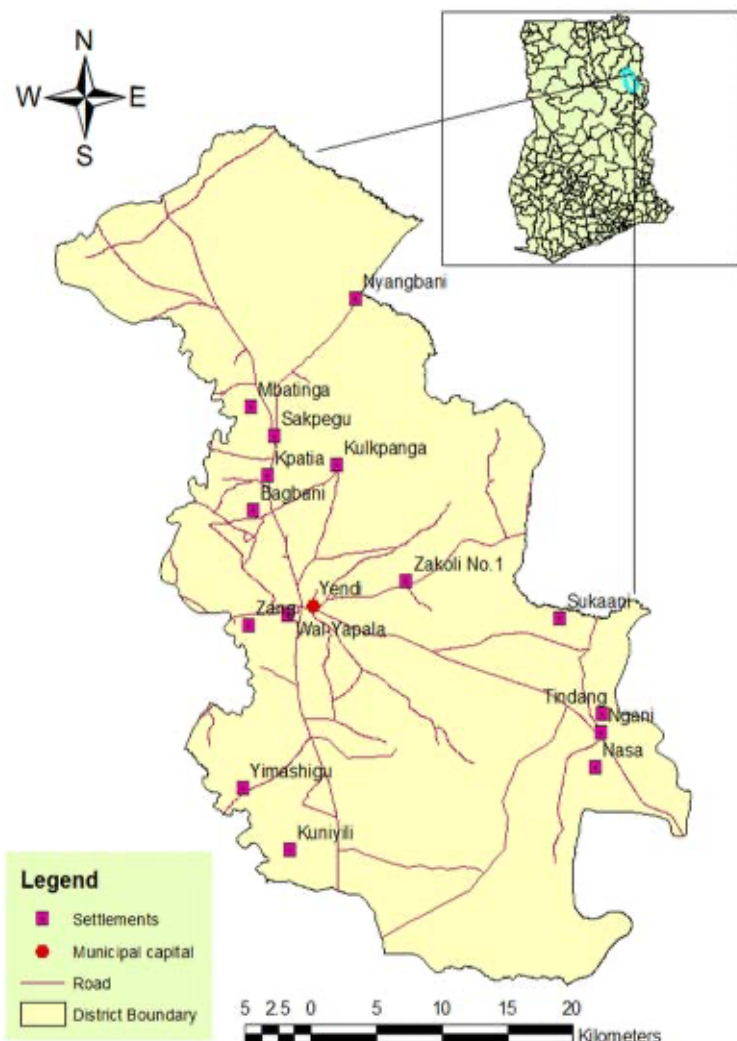
1 YENDI, TRADITIONAL CAPITAL OF DAGBON KINGDOM

1.1 A strategic and nodal position on the Eastern Corridor

Yendi is the **capital of the Dagbon Kingdom** and the **seat of the Ya-Na**, the King of the Dagomba people. The **Dagbon Kingdom** was the **dominant power in Northern Ghana** for nearly 500 years before colonial rule. Yendi lies in the Eastern Corridor of the Northern Region of Ghana, about 90km east of its regional capital, Tamale. The Yendi Municipality covers 1,446.3 km² [9]. and includes 268 communities. The municipality's principal urban settlement is **Yendi Township**, which functions as the **administrative, commercial, and traditional capital**. The urban area is characterized by a **compact central business district, expanding residential neighborhoods, institutional land uses**, and ribbon development along the major transportation corridors.

The Yendi Municipal Assembly was established in 1988 and was elevated to municipal status in 2007 [9]. Its position

at the centre of the Eastern Corridor makes it a **natural link between Tamale, the Oti and Upper East regions**, and Togo, a neighbouring country. By the late 18th century, Yendi had grown into **one of West Africa's major trading centers**, described in contemporary European accounts as larger than Kumasi. Its location let it channel **trans-Saharan trade of salt, kola nuts, gold, textiles, and livestock** between the Sahelian kingdoms to the north and the Akan states to the south. Hausa and Dyula merchant communities settled permanently and shaped the city's governance and scholarly life. This history persists today in Yendi's ethnic composition, which, alongside the Dagomba majority, includes Hausa, Chokosi, Moshie, Akan, Ewe, and other communities.



Location of Yendi in Ghana. Source: Yendi MTDP

1.2 Natural and Environmental Context

Yendi's climate is markedly seasonal, with **implications for how the city should be planned and built**. Mean annual rainfall is around 1,125 mm, almost entirely concentrated in the wet season (April–October), against a dry season (November–March). Temperatures range from 21°C to 36°C. The **Greenwich Meridian** passes through Yendi itself and through several other settlements of the municipality, a geographical singularity that remains largely unexploited. The natural vegetation is tree savannah, degraded to **open grassland** around settlements and **heavily farmed areas**; recurrent, largely uncontrolled bush burning is measurably affecting both vegetation cover and local climate. **Economic trees** such as shea, dawadawa, mango, and cashew are widespread and already support livelihoods, alongside a municipal reforestation program that planted over 61,000 trees in 2024 alone [9].

Yendi is located within the **Volta Basin** and is largely **shaped by the watershed of main rivers**. The city is characterized by numerous small valleys found across the city. Although no major rivers flow through Yendi, tributaries and sub-tributaries of the **Daka River** cross the municipality during the wet season. Water is simultaneously the **city's principal natural asset** and its **principal environmental risk**. As an example, Balogu area was identified as a severely water-locked neighbourhood [6], with recurrent flooding directly affecting homes, a concrete illustration of the drainage and stormwater challenges.

*Top pictures: Left picture: Mango tree in the middle of compound / Right picture: Yendi's valley
Bottom pictures: Yendi crossed by streams of water during rainy season (pictures taken in July)*



1.3 A young, largely agrarian population

With its 154,421 inhabitants (2021 Population and Housing Census), and projected at about 175,000 in 2026 (Author's Projection), Yendi is **one of the largest and most prominent settlements in the Northern Region**. If the municipality's population remains largely rural (56% live in rural areas and 44% in urban communities) [9], Yendi stands out as a **rapidly growing urban center** (annual urban growth rate of 2.5%) characterized by **spatial expansion occurring mainly on the peri-urban fringes and along major transport corridors**, converting agricultural land for residential and commercial uses. The population is young, with over 56% of the municipal population aged 25 years or younger. Therefore, **training and employment** are key to Yendi's development.

1.4 From conflict to peace: Yendi's awakening

As capital of the Dagbon kingdom, Yendi experienced decades of stalled development due to a **succession dispute between Dagbon's two royal gates**, Abudu and Andani, which culminated in a violent crisis in 2002 and left the **traditional kingship vacant** for the following seventeen years [10]. The conflict discouraged investment, weakened economic growth, delayed urban development and left a durable imprint on how the city is perceived from outside. A **mediated reconciliation**, sealed by the enskinment of a new Ya-Naa in January 2019 [11], **restored peace** and opened a new chapter for the city. This peace should be viewed as an enabling infrastructure for sustainable

development, and as a narrative to be built into the city's spatial and collective identity.



Cover of the Ya-Naa development plan for Dagbon Kingdom

1.5 Land governance: customary and statutory systems

As in Damongo, land in Yendi is governed through **two systems that operate side by side**. The first is **customary**: the Ya-Naa holds land in trust for the Dagbon people, and allocation is **exercised through divisional chiefs, sub-chiefs and family heads**, who also mediate disputes, with the Yendi Customary Land Secretariat supporting the documentation of transactions. The second is **statutory**: the Yendi Municipal



Gbewaa Palace (Credit: Shahadusadik, 2021)

Assembly regulates land use and issues development permits under the Land Use and Spatial Planning Act 2016 (Act 925), the Lands Commission registers and documents land rights, and the Office of the Administrator of Stool Lands collects and distributes land revenues and royalties.

The **seventeen-year vacancy of the skin weakened the customary chain**; the 2019 reconciliation restored it at the very moment

urban growth is accelerating. Ribbon development along the main corridors and on the peri-urban fringe is converting farmland into residential and commercial plots faster than planning schemes are prepared and transactions regularised. **Bringing the two systems together** around a shared spatial framework is therefore one of the **conditions for turning peace into ordered growth**.

2 DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR YENDI

2.1 Agriculture Beyond Production

With over 80% of the **labour force depending on agriculture** for their livelihood (Yendi Municipal Composite Budget 2025), agriculture remains **Yendi's economic backbone**. Yet only a small share of the municipality's arable land, about 15% according to the Composite Budget 2025, is currently under cultivation. This gap reflects factors that go beyond farming itself and touch on **land governance and land administration** (see section 1.5): tenure insecurity and the largely informal customary allocation of land, **limited access to mechanization, credit and irrigation, poor feeder roads**, and the steady conversion of farmland into building plots at the urban edge. Existing agro-processing activity such as shea-butter production, groundnut oil, and meat processing remains **small-scale and undercapitalized**. In terms of conveyance, roughly 285 km of feeder roads (the municipality's entire feeder road network, Composite Budget 2025) are largely untarred and often become unmotorable in the wet season. This **limits farmers' ability** to reach the municipality's

seven markets and regional buyers beyond them. The challenge is not production alone, but creating value through processing, branding, logistics, and regional markets.

How can agriculture move from production to processing, branding, logistics and regional markets?

How can Yendi become an agro-processing and agribusiness hub for Northern Ghana?



Yendi's market (Source: Les Ateliers, field mission 2026)

2.2 Infrastructure, natural resources and renewable potential

Basic infrastructure gaps remain significant and cut across every sector. According to the Yendi Municipal Composite Budget 2025, only about 39.4 km of the **municipality's roads** are tarred, while roughly 285 km of feeder roads are largely untarred and often difficult to use in the wet season. **Sanitation** access stands at just 44%, and open defecation remains prevalent. **Electricity** reaches only 55% of communities, concentrated in the municipality's larger urban areas. [9].

The scale of the challenge is concrete. Only 54% of the population has sustainable **access to safe drinking water**, just 34% in rural areas, despite 357 boreholes already installed across 170 communities and two small-town water systems. Water access is therefore a **planning issue in its own right**, not only a risk to be managed: the same natural resource that floods Balogu neighbourhood is the one large part of the municipality still lacks reliable access to [9].

Yendi has significant **natural assets** that could shape both infrastructure and urban form, **from water management to solar energy potential**, but water is as much a risk as it is an asset, as the recurrent flooding observed during the heavy rainfall season shows.

Longer term, the Municipality sits within the **Volta Basin enclave** and Ghana's Strategic Environmental Assessment has identified it as one of 32 districts with **potential oil and gas resources** [9]. However, any exploration activity remains a distant and uncertain prospect.

How can Yendi unlock the potential of its strategic location while becoming a more renewable, resource-efficient city?

How can water, a major natural asset and risk, shape the city's drainage system and broader urban fabric?

2.3 Attractiveness and Competitiveness: Traditional and Cultural Capital as a Driver

Yendi's rich history is part of the city's traditional heritage and could be a valuable economic asset. This includes its traditional governance system as the **capital of the Dagbon Kingdom**, its **smock weaving craftsmanship**, and its **cultural festivals** (Bugum and Damba festivals), among others. The municipality's own **inventory of heritage sites**, including the Babatu grave, the Adibo Dale battle site, the German cemetery, and the Greenwich Meridian marker, gives this narrative physical, mappable anchors that could grow into tourism potential sites. [9].

This cultural economy already has real, if under-organized, weight. Yendi has seven major markets distributed across the municipality which draw traders from across the region, with the Yendi market the largest of all. **Smock weaving, shea-butter production and other small-scale cultural industries** already provide livelihoods for a meaningful share of households.

None of these markets, heritage sites, or craft production is currently mapped, signed, or connected into a coherent visitor or investment circuit, which is precisely the planning gap this theme should close.



Women weaving Fugu fabric, used for the production of Ghanaian smock (Source: Les Ateliers, field mission 2026)

How can Yendi leverage its unique cultural heritage and status as traditional capital of Dagbon to strengthen identity, attract investment, and improve quality of life for residents?

How can Yendi reclaim its historic role as a crossroads city, once a larger trading centre than Kumasi, now that renewed investment in the Eastern Corridor is restoring its connectivity to Tema's port in the south and the Sahel in the north?

What can Yendi learn from other post-conflict cities in West Africa, such as Bouaké in Côte d'Ivoire or Freetown in Sierra Leone, about converting a peace dividend into prioritised spatial investment?

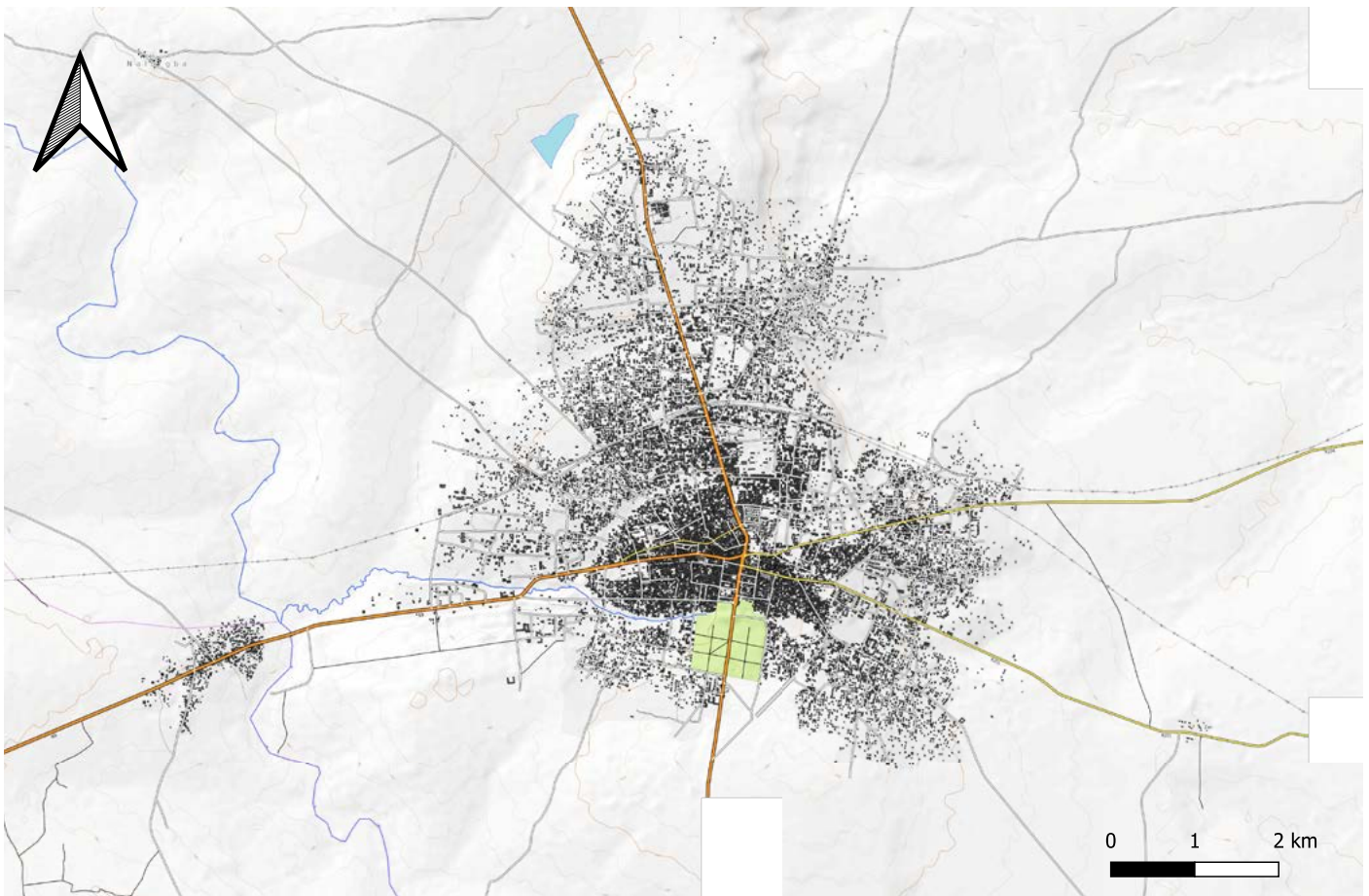
2.4 Peace and Rebound: From a Conflict to a Shared Vision

With **renewed peace** held for seven years, Yendi has an opportunity to redefine its future. Peace should be viewed as **enabling infrastructure** for sustainable development, and its narrative acknowledging the conflict and its resolution should be **built into the city's spatial and collective identity**.

How can urban planning leverage Yendi's renewed peace to foster inclusive governance, long-term investment, and sustainable development?

How can a shared vision across stakeholders help anchor and consolidate the peace?

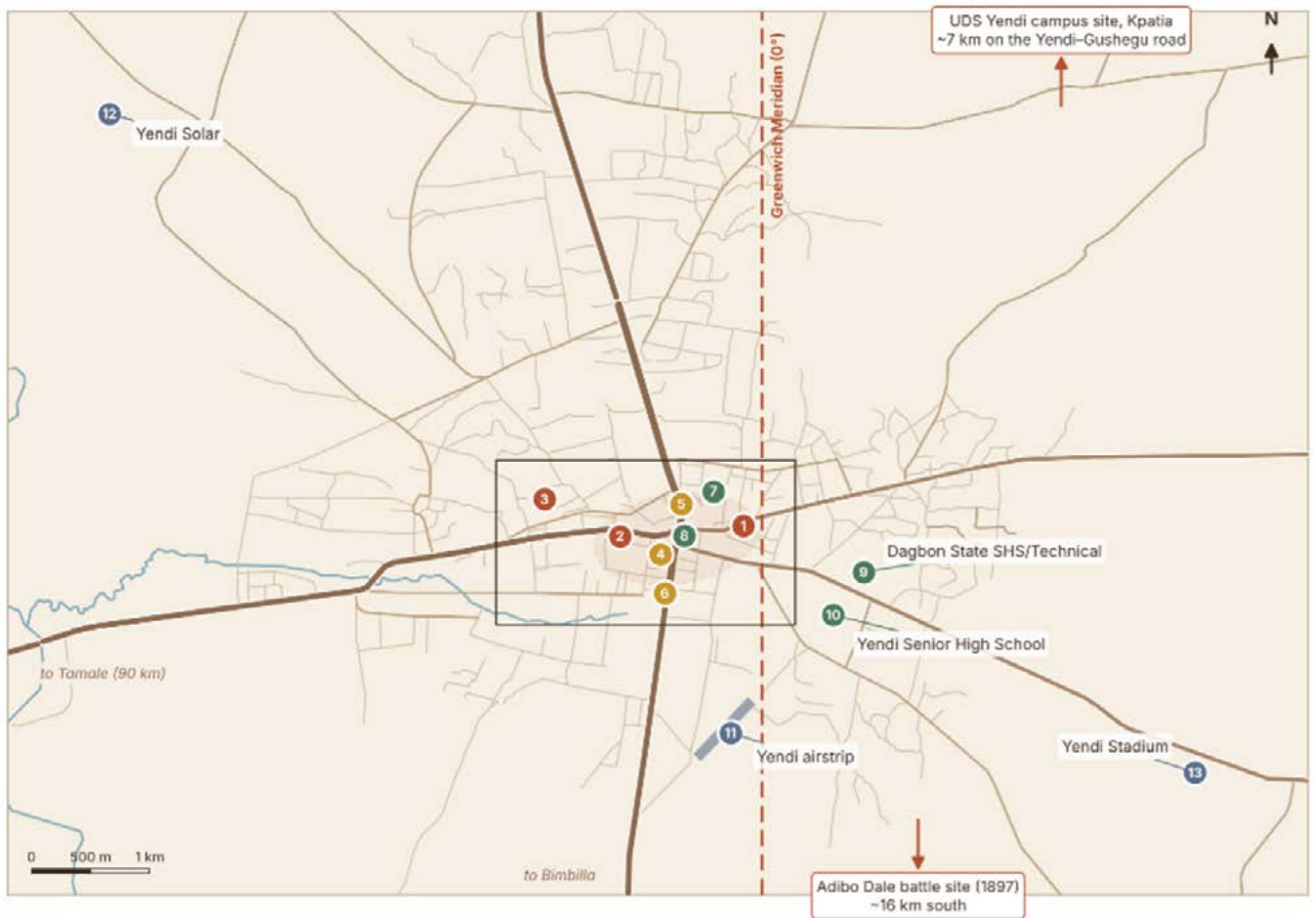
Where should new facilities and amenities for a developing capital be located, and how should their emergence be supported?



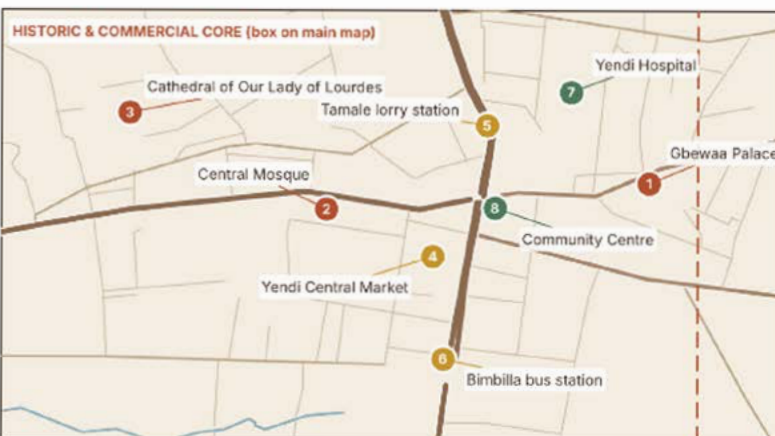
Topographic map of Yendi. Source: Opentopomap

Yendi — main points of attraction

Traditional capital of Dagbon · Yendi Municipality, Northern Region, Ghana



Sources: road network and point locations © OpenStreetMap contributors (ODbL), extracted October 2026; heritage sites from Yendi Municipal Assembly, Composite Budget 2025–2028. Les Ateliers de Cergy · Caravan Workshops, Yendi, November 2026. Off-map sites shown by arrows; distances approximate.



Legend

HERITAGE & CULTURE

- 1 Gbewaa Palace
- 2 Central Mosque
- 3 Cathedral of Our Lady of Lourdes

MARKETS & MOBILITY

- 4 Yendi Central Market
- 5 Tamale lorry station
- 6 Bimbilla bus station

OTHER FEATURES

- Greenwich Meridian
- National road
- Regional road
- Local road
- Seasonal stream

PUBLIC SERVICES & EDUCATION

- 7 Yendi Hospital
- 8 Community Centre
- 9 Dagbon State SHS/Technical
- 10 Yendi Senior High School

INFRASTRUCTURE & ENERGY

- 11 Yendi airstrip
- 12 Yendi Solar
- 13 Yendi Stadium

Also listed in the Municipality's heritage inventory, in Yendi town (to be positioned after field verification):

- Babatu's grave
- German cemetery ("German grave")



Greenwich Meridian stone



German Cemetery



Naa Dataa Tua (King's rival tree) site

3 ONGOING PROJECTS AND PRIORITIES

The four challenges above are not starting from a blank page: a number of investments are already underway or recently completed, mainly financed through the Government of Ghana and the District Assemblies Common Fund (DACF), but also, for example, the World Bank Trust Fund supporting the Social Cohesion (SOCO) and Ghana Secondary Cities Support (GSCSP) programmes. [9][13][14].

Education facilities: In 2020, the Ya-Na allocated a 500-hectare parcel of land for the establishment of the Yendi campus of the University for Development Studies (UDS) [15]. The long-awaited establishment of the UDS satellite campus in Yendi is set to take off in 2026. The UDS Yendi campus is expected to boost economic activity, enhance educational infrastructure, and strengthen human capital development across Dagbon and the Northern Region at large. [9].

Roads and drainage: construction of the Kabila link road and associated U-drains in Yendi; completion of a 0.6 km outfall drain in the Kumfong area; rehabilitation of 2.7 km of roads in the Gbewaa residential area; and a pedestrian-lane and link-road project in Kumfong, already 95% complete. [9].

Water and sanitation: continued drilling and mechanization of boreholes (20 targeted for 2025) alongside investment in small-town water systems, addressing a municipality where only 54% of residents currently have access to safe drinking water. [9].

Green economy and land restoration: a municipal reforestation and land-recovery programme (tree planting, greenhouse cultivation, organic practice) delivered with the Ghana Forestry Commission and the Ghana Shea Landscape Emission Reduction Project. [9].

Institutional priorities: the Assembly's own Medium-Term Development Policy Framework foregrounds decentralized planning, climate resilience, integrated human settlement development and improved road transport priorities that align closely with the four themes above and should inform, not compete with, participants' proposals.

How do these ongoing and planned projects actually come together on the ground, and how can they be woven into a long-term spatial strategy for Yendi?



Construction of the new Gbewaa Palace (Source: Les Ateliers, field mission February 2026)

CONCLUSION

Yendi embraces its role as a traditional capital and a nodal city. After years of conflict, peace and stability have been restored in the Dagbon Kingdom, creating a favourable environment for business and investment. Yet, Yendi's development still remains stalled. Climate resilience, controlled expansion, and quality services all lag behind a strong desire to revive its economy. These are two facets of the same coin. A structured spatial vision for Yendi will turn this desire into a shared roadmap, matching traditional authority, peace, and economic drive with resilient infrastructure, planned growth, and services that keep pace.



WORKSHOP

Build a resilient Yendi

How can Yendi unlock the potential of its strategic location while becoming a more renewable, resource-efficient city?

Tradition and Culture

How can Yendi leverage its unique cultural heritage and status as traditional capital of Dagbon to strengthen identity, attract investment, and improve quality of life for residents?

QUESTIONS

Agriculture beyond Production

How can agriculture move from production to processing, branding, logistics and regional markets?

Peace for Yendi

How can urban planning leverage Yendi's renewed peace to foster inclusive governance, long-term investment, and sustainable development?

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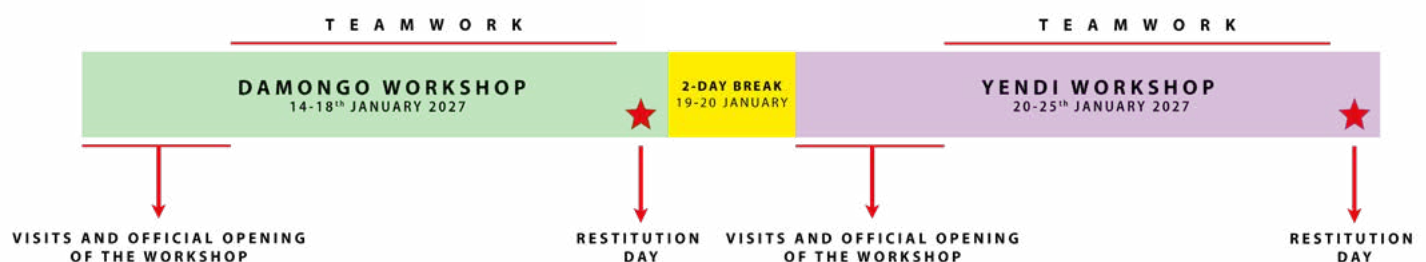
WORKSHOPS FORMAT

Two consecutive international workshops in Northern Ghana

The Caravan Workshops will take place in Damongo and then Yendi, with five days dedicated to each city. Following the collaborative methodology of Les Ateliers, the initiative will combine field visits, exchanges with local stakeholders and intensive collective work.

Working in multidisciplinary teams, participants will contribute to a shared understanding of each city's challenges and opportunities, develop strategic spatial visions, and propose concrete planning priorities and potential projects. Their work will help inform ongoing local spatial planning processes and support municipal authorities and their partners in shaping the future of both cities.

The two workshops offer an opportunity to explore different urban and territorial contexts within Northern Ghana, learn from local knowledge and contribute practical ideas to cities undergoing significant challenges.



Format of the Caravan workshops

The two consecutive workshop are set to be held from 14-18 January in Damongo and from 20-25 January in Yendi. The actual workshop is a culmination of several preliminary stages involving an international roundtable building up to the main event.

Research and preparation prior to the workshop

An international preparatory roundtable will be held online with participation from international and local experts as well as relevant stakeholders. Podcast of the roundtable will be made available, and a context document gathering all the main information on the topic of the workshop and challenges will be shared with the participants prior to the workshop.

Immersion

Organised visits of the cities with inputs from

local stakeholders, combined with thematic conferences and meetings with experts and civil society.

Teamwork and discussions

The participants will be divided in 2 different teams, with support from Les Ateliers and the local actors. An "exchange forum" allows for an open exchange with local actors and workshop partners on the progress of the teams' proposals at the half-way point of the workshop duration.

Presentation of proposals

The workshop will conclude with the presentation of the teams' proposals to a panel of decision-makers, consisting of West Gonja Municipal District and Yendi Municipal District representatives, as well as Ghanaian and international experts.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

This workshop is open to professionals of all ages, disciplines and nationalities, having an interest in the topic of the workshop. Town planners, designers, architects, geographers, engineers, hydrologists, artists, environmentalists, landscape designers, agronomists, entrepreneurs, journalists, etc. are welcome to apply.

Place and Dates

Workshop 1: Damongo (Savannah Region), 14-18 January 2027

Break, 19-20 January: free time + group transfer from Damongo to Yendi (about 2h30 by road), organised and paid by Les Ateliers

Workshop 2: Yendi (Northern Region), 21-25 January 2027

Participants should arrive on 13 January and leave from 26 January.

Conditions and requirements

- Proficiency in English to effectively collaborate with international teams. Only local participants may take part in the workshop of their own city alone.
- Applicants must be available for the full duration of the caravan, from 14 to 25 January 2027 (two workshops).
- Participants will be accommodated and will work in the premises provided. All participation costs are covered, including travel to Northern Ghana, accommodation, regional transportation, organised visits, group meals, lectures, and drawing materials. The participation is not paid.
- Working conditions: Expect full days, outdoor site visits in the dry season and simple accommodation.

The selection of the 8 participants will be made by the workshop's committee based on the candidates' professional capacities, experiences with similar themes, ability to communicate (language, graphic skills) and motivation.

How to apply

To apply, complete the online application form and add your CV (one or two pages) and a motivation letter outlining your interest in the workshop and the skills and experiences you bring.

www.ateliers.org/l/application-form-caravan

If you have any issues with the online application form, fill the following form and send us your documents to ghana@ateliers.org

Deadline and results

Deadline: November 8th, 2026

The results of the selection process will be announced mid-November 2026. Selected participants must then quickly send their passport details for visa procedures and plane tickets booking.

Find all the links and information on the workshop page:

<https://ateliers.org/en/workshops/250/>

Do not hesitate to contact our team if you have any questions via e-mail

ghana@ateliers.org



Application form - Participant Caravan Workshops International Urban Planning Workshop

Photo (optional)

Family name : _____

First name: _____

Date of birth : _____ Nationality : _____

Postal address : _____

E-mail : _____

Mobile phone: _____

Somebody to contact in case of problem: _____ Tél.: _____

Degrees: _____

Current situation: _____

Participation to other collective works: _____

How did you hear about Les Ateliers?

Former participation	
Friend/colleague	
University/professors	
Internet	
Other (please specify)	

SKILLS (FROM 0: NUL TO 4 : MASTERY)

LANGUAGES	0	1	2	3	4
English					
French					
Other (please specify)					

EXPRESSION	0	1	2	3	4
Hand drawing					
Computer drawing					

Indesign software					
Oral / written presentations					
Team work					

SPECIFIC.SKILLS	0	1	2	3	4
Urban Planning					
Design					
Economy					
Rural development					
Engineering					
Landscape design					
Sociology					
Other (please specify) :					

Describe yourself in 80 words (in English)