

## Urbanisation and Policy Frameworks: Implications for the New Cities' Planning Process

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The Uganda Vision 2040 aims at transforming Uganda from a predominantly peasant and low-income country to a competitive upper middle-income country through the creation of regional and strategic cities as one of the key drivers for the country's development agenda<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, on 28th April 2020, Parliament of Uganda approved a motion to create 15 new cities of which 10 became operational effective 1st July 2020. These include the four regional cities; Arua, Mbarara, Gulu and Mbale while the three are strategic cities; Fort Portal (tourism), Jinja (industrial), Lira (industrial) and Hoima (oil).<sup>2</sup> Hon. Raphael Magyezi, the Minister for Local Government noted that that the regional cities were planned as a response to the high urbanisation growth rate the country is experiencing.<sup>3</sup>

The World Bank estimated that in 2019, 24.36% of the total population of Uganda was living in cities and urban areas with the urban population growth rate at 25%.<sup>4</sup> Based on current projections, Uganda is among the African countries experiencing exponential urban population growth. Uganda's population is expected to surpass 100 million people by 2050 and is projected to exceed that of Egypt, the second-largest country by population currently in Africa by 2100.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the UNDP, estimated that two-thirds of the world's population will be living in urban areas by 2050. This rapid growth is expected to take place in Africa and Asia since the two continents are still less urbanised than other regions in the world. Africa's urban population is projected to jump from 40 per cent today to 56 per cent by 2050, and Asia's from 48 per cent to 64 per cent.<sup>6</sup> The urban population in Sub-Saharan Africa,

in particular, is expected to increase by more than 400 million residents and double within the next 25 years.<sup>7</sup>

While urbanization is generally regarded as a driver to development, it also brings about both opportunities and challenges. Uganda's process of urbanization is taking place in the context of a broader transformation characterized by a shift from traditional low-productivity economic activities towards more modern, higher productivity economic activities. In particular, this transformation involves an increase in the significance of the manufacturing and service sectors relative to the agricultural sector.<sup>8</sup>

In general, when the proportion of the population living in urban areas increases, per capita incomes also tend to rise. This is particularly the case if the contributions of the industrial and services sector to overall gross domestic product and the proportion of the working force employed in these sectors increases relative to that of the agricultural sector. Overall, the better opportunities available in urban areas act as pull factors that motivate large numbers of poor people to where they have better economic opportunities and access to basic services such as clean drinking water, health care and schools.<sup>9</sup> Further, the process of urbanization is instrumental in improving living conditions in rural areas, as this process creates new employment opportunities in the areas and increases the demand for rural services.

We should not forget Kampala City Council Authority's failure to contain the haphazard manner in which Kampala is urbanising. Moreover, it should be noted that policies being applied to guide the

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planning process are not effective as far as dealing with rapid urbanisation currently taking place. Just like in Kampala, urbanization in parts of the Uganda like Gulu, Jinja, Wakiso, Masaka, Mbarara, Lira, Gulu, Arua, and many other places has translated into rising slum establishments, increased poverty, inequality, insufficient basic infrastructure, and poor service delivery. Therefore, the unprecident urbanization rate that Uganda is experiencing of is higher than the resources the available resources required to meet the demands of the population. This implies that urbanisation impacts negatively on urban service delivery.

In Uganda, urban planning is not yet up to the required standard with poor coordination among government agencies responsible for the same and other stakeholders. Cities and towns are not zoned to allow organized human settlement, economic centres and industrial areas to grow in an orderly fashion.<sup>10</sup> Conflict of interest between politicians and bureaucrats in urban local governments also makes the running of urban affairs difficult. Decentralization has enhanced the process of unplanned growth of urban areas as Local Governments barely have the capacity required to effect orderly urban development and rapid urbanization. The level and quality of services do not match the needs of the population in many urban areas in the country. Environmental conditions in many urban areas in Uganda are appalling. Accessibility to environmental services ranges from total inadequacy to non-existence in most urban areas.

Though Uganda has put in place a number of Policy, Legal and Institutional Frameworks for urbanisation, there are challenges such as lack of funds to implement Urban Development Plans, weak legal normative frameworks, weakness in administration, institutions and overall capacity, lack of financial strategy to sustain the urbanisation process.<sup>11</sup> The key policy challenge is to ensure that the next phase of urbanization is well managed, with appropriate urban planning policies and enforcement, accompanied by the appropriate provision of public services, reliable transport and affordable housing.<sup>12</sup>

Urbanising in an unplanned manner without a clear picture of the underlying dynamics such a population growth, spatial quality and unemployment, among others would later create immense challenges that would be difficult to correct. Kampala City's experience has shown that Uganda's urbanisation process is characterised by lack of proper zoning of economic activities and construction of informal and formal physical infrastructure without regard to the subsequent spatial quality and environmental conservation.<sup>13</sup> This is an undesirable scenario for the new cities.

All urban policy planners and implementers in

the newly created cities ought to understand the urban dynamics in order to design (and implement) innovative, inclusive and sustainable urban policies within the context of socio-economic development characterised by increasing urban population, demand for social services, unemployment, crime and better was of improving the quality of life of urban citizens. The urbanisation phenomenon in Uganda requires an integrated policy framework that can be used to effectively prevent or halt unplanned urbanisation in the new cities while promoting planned urbanisation. A comprehensive understanding of urban dynamics is crucial, especially on matters related to urban policy development since policies can effectively assist in addressing negative urban consequences and also ensure that further urban changes occur in a systematic and satisfactory manner. Like many other cities in the world in their infancy, the new cities in Uganda will be growing at a slow pace and such a pace gives them an opportunity and time to properly plan, particularly on issues related to provision of public services needed for this slowly increasing urban population.

Bidandi, F. et al (2018) citing scholars like Hailu (2012), Seto et al. (2012), Storeygard (2012), Netto (2011), Henderson (2005), and Katz and Coleman (2001) among others observes that planned urbanisation results in the development of cities and towns that not only serve as mere spaces for habitation, production and services but also as vital centres and shapers of socio-economic development, spatial planning, and residential quality. Bidandi citing Brown (2012, 2013) observes the National Urban Policy for Uganda (UNUP) does not pay attention to full participation of the different key stakeholders, including NGOs, CBOs, the academic community, the private sector, and the different levels of government. These are vital dynamics that must be considered and understood in order to ensure the development of the new cities in a systematic manner.

Scholars like Brown (2013) argue that the Uganda National Urban Policy (UNUP) does not pay attention to dynamics such as urban food security, the gender dimension, inequalities of power and the subsequent gradations of poverty within urban communities. Brown maintains that UNUP's focus on economic opportunities, better administration and slum upgrading would not meet the larger urban challenges such as urban food security and poverty and unemployment. Thus, failure to pay attention to these dynamics demonstrate the existing lack of a thorough understanding of urban dynamics and their policy implications.<sup>14</sup>

City planning should intend to ultimately make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe,

resilient, and sustainable.” City leaders must move quickly to plan for growth and provide the basic services, infrastructure, and affordable housing their expanding populations need.<sup>15</sup> The broad goals of urban governance should address issues of equity, liveability and sustainability in cities of the future and provide for organized human settlement, economic centres and industrial areas to grow in an orderly fashion.<sup>16</sup> Intergovernmental relationships are also key to successful urbanisation. National, regional and city governments need to be connected and share a similar vision. Local governments will need technical and managerial

skills, the ability to engage with the public and strengthen capacities to design, implement, monitor and evaluate local public policies and services. There is an urgent need to enhance urban planning to coordinate public and private investment. The implementation of urban planning laws is very critical in Uganda’s urbanization agenda. Also, the government must ensure that the land markets function well, to improve the efficiency of land use and spatial planning. Incentives need to encourage the development of existing underused urban land to prevent sprawl and take advantage of increased economic density.

## Endnotes

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