

Citizens' involvement key in sustaining the development processes in the new cities

By Walter Akena*

Like most developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Uganda is experiencing rapid urbanization; the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) estimates that 25.7 % of the population of Uganda is urban. The key aspiration of Ugandans under *Vision 2040* has been a Uganda transformed from a peasant to modern and prosperous society. Consequently, three editions of the National Development Plans have since 2010 been successively drafted to guide the nation in delivering the aspirations articulated in *Uganda Vision 2040*. Subsequently, on July 1st 2020, seven cities were officially operationalized; these were part of the 15 that were created by Parliament in a bid to decongest Kampala. The Ministry of Local Governments argues that the regional cities were planned as a response to the high urbanisation growth rate the country is experiencing.

The cities' inaugurals were received with unprecedented celebrations by the citizens; complete with fanfare and merry-making. The euphoria and excitement caused by the regional cities can best be understood by the desire for development in those places. This is hinged on the understanding that the cities provide with them dividends for development opportunities such as growth in infrastructure and social services, and the creation of jobs, among others. The extent to which the cities are going to be sustained will largely depend on how the city managers engage citizens in the policy process.

The increasing rate of urbanisation notwithstanding, there has been a glaring disparity between the rate of urbanisation globally and governments' abilities to support these growths- raising the question

of where the inhibitor could be lying. In trying to answer this question, very minimal success has been made in an attempt to find a solution to the increased inability by governments to support the rising rates of urbanisations (Abbott, 1996). However, there is increasing agreement amongst scholars and development practitioners that involving the community in the planning and management process is the ultimate answer (Abbott, 1996).

Urban planning, especially its economics and management aspects had initially been the major preoccupation of governments and therefore top-bottom in nature. In the case of Uganda, the Local Government Act arrogates the planning powers to the District Councils. However, the onset of the 21st century and especially the growing desires for democracy and human rights, and the development concept of civil societies has significantly changed the outlook, purpose and method of planning (Hamid, 2010).

Whilst, the urban managers are responsible for the necessary policy reforms to improve the level of service delivery and the competitiveness of their economies, they ought to take into consideration issues of good governance, urban environment and poverty. (Van Dijk, 2008). In the recent two decades, many organizations and institutes that intervene urban management and planning at global levels, have emphasized on promoting the participation view for encouraging a kind of management and planning approach "Bottom-up" and enabling the community to monitor development actions and had considered deciding between solving urban problems based on local communities to fulfil the necessary conditions for citizen's welfare. (Mahmudi & Saremi, 2015).

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Legitimacy is critical in the decision-making process. To increase the acceptability of policy and reduce the risk of objections and appeals, citizens have to be involved in the decision-making process; this will increase the visibility and value of planning in the eyes of citizen (Woltjer, 2002). The extent to which citizens participate in the policy processes and outcomes largely determines their reception of the policy. Citizens who participate in policymaking are always positive about the process and the outcome (Michels & Graaf, 2010).

Different studies have shown that there is a relationship between participatory policymaking and support. For instance, (Graaf, 2017) argues that in most cases, a higher level of participatory policymaking leads to a higher level of support among stakeholders. Also, in trying to explain the underpinnings of the alleged brutality of KCCA enforcement officers, journalist Oskar Musoke suggested that a lot of Musisi's work had been directed at the people who have no say in the city even though they may be the mainstay of Kampala in terms of financial contribution (The Observer, March 21, 2016).

Engaging citizens in policy-making allows governments to tap into wider sources of information, perspectives and potential solutions and improves the quality of the decisions reached. It also contributes to building public trust in government, raising the quality of democracy and strengthening civic capacity (OECD, 2001).

Without doubt, the City councils will enact ordinances and or by-laws to regulate waste management, hygiene and sanitation in these cities and invest substantially in enforcing these laws.

However, it will require self-discipline by the citizens more than the laws to keep the cities clean and admirable.

To ensure the development of functional cities, the city managers and policymakers will need to facilitate a high level of coordination between different layers of actions involving public investment in infrastructure, enterprise investment in productive capital, and household investment in housing. Each layer faces its own coordination challenges. For example, within the public sector, successful urbanization will require the coordination of a range of different types of investment, including investment in physical planning for buildings and the provision of transport, housing and social services (The World Bank, 2015).

It is better to anticipate and plan for this at the very early stages of the urbanization process, as it becomes very difficult to correct mistakes retrospectively. The decisions of individual agents are sequential so that in the absence of coordination, it is highly unlikely that the evolution of a city will ensure the provision of good facilities or raise the productivity of workers (The World Bank, 2015).

The city leaders must therefore invest adequate time, resources and commitment in building a robust legal, policy and institutional frameworks to engage the citizens in policymaking. Short of that, the quality, legitimacy and credibility of their policy decisions will be severely undermined.

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