

The City Impetus: Prospects of Urban Growth and Development in Uganda

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Introduction

The 21st century spurs unprecedented global urbanisation trends with hundreds of new cities growing across the globe, with 55% of the world's population living in the cities. The cities are being built from scratch and the emerging city boom raise aspirations of most people and nations for a bright urban future. As the cities massively develop, rays of hope for opportunities such as employment creation, efficient land utilisation, access to better social amenities, resources and facilities, as well as improved standards of living arise. The anticipation of more trade and economic growth as a result of investment, industrialisation, innovation, high technology and resource sharing becomes an optimism for the urban and rural populace (Sitharam & Dhindaw 2016; World Bank, 2020).

Regrettably, over time, urban realities surface. Overcrowding, housing shortage, greenery extinction, pollution, traffic congestion, and solid waste mismanagement set in as a result of extensive migration to tap into city benefits. Contrary to expectations of the public, poor infrastructure and service delivery, high cost of living and increase in urban poverty are witnessed, attributed to poor planning and ill-governance. Poor health, crime and drug abuse, school dropouts, unemployment, food insecurity, and massive slums and informal settlements are habitually inevitable. Incidentally, many countries in Africa are unable to address these challenges and have consequently relegated the development responsibility to the private sector (Noorloos & Kloosterboer, 2018) When urban scholars like Kate Derickson (2015) and Ash Amin & Nigel

Thrift (2016) argue that cities are complex systems of actors, structures and processes, this calls our appreciation of the social, political-economic and institutional dynamic forces responsible for making up and reshaping these cities. It reinforces views of Colin McFarlane (2011) who defines cities beyond the common meaning of dwellings – places to stay/ reside – but rather refer to them as assemblages. Cities as assemblages involve the sites, actors and relationships and networks that shape trajectories of the past, present and future of the urban life. Issues of power relations, rationality and intelligibility amongst actors, as well as agendas, structures and hierarchies of powerful groups per context matter. Such views suggest the existence of social, economic, political and cultural nuances that form strong foundations urban policy, plans, practice and patterns of urban governance.

Urbanisation in Uganda

Urbanisation in Uganda follows a global trend of unprecedented urban growth as a consequence of deficiencies in the rural development relating to government planning, policies and investments in infrastructure and social services. It requires attention to rural-urban linkages, population growth, land tenure legislation, urban agriculture, employment opportunities, international migration patterns, and appropriate mechanisms to provide services and opportunities to the growing numbers of the urban poor (Kasibante 2011; Brown 2013). The 5.2% population increase projected to have increased by about 20% by 2050 (Uganda National Urban Policy 2017) is too fast a rate which raises anxiety about several urban challenges as those specified in subsection 1.2 of the policy that warrants national attention to avert the looming consequences.

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Rather than being a challenge, the government of Uganda considers urbanisation as an opportunity to drive growth (Development strategy xii of NDP III). This strategy is in tandem with Uganda's Vision 2040 for increasing urbanisation from 13% to 60%. Urbanisation thus is one key factor for socio-economic national transformation and a growth opportunity and strategy for achieving Vision 2040 aspirations (Vision 2040, section 4.2.5). These key development strategies are in line with the Global Vision Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 11), the Uganda Constitution 1995, the Local Governments Act (1997), the Uganda National Urbanisation Policy (2017) and other related policy frameworks and legal frameworks documented in section 2.2 and 2.3 of the Uganda National Urbanisation Policy.

It is non-coincidental therefore that 2020 comes as a year of compulsive city building in Uganda. The expansive city formation from a half-a-century Kampala capital city of Uganda created since the time of independence in 1962 to 15 new cities as proposed by the Ministry of local government (MOLG 2019) approved by the parliament of Uganda on 28th April 2020 is by no means a mistake. New cities emerge in recognition that over-concentration of development in Kampala Capital City has led to an enormous population explosion and urban challenges in one region exceeding the space, time and plan of the originally estimated area. The creation of New cities follows Uganda Vision plan to establish additional regional cities namely; Gulu, Mbale, Mbarara and Arua and other strategic cities including Hoima (oil), Nakasongola (Industrial), Fort Portal (Tourism), Moroto (Mining) and Jinja (Industrial). Based on other justifications and requisite conditions, additional cities of Wakiso, Kabale, Soroti, Lira, Entebbe, Masaka, have also been approved. Phased-in implementation plan, the first seven cities including Jinja, Mbarara, Fort Portal, Masaka, Mbale, Arua, and Gulu were inaugurated in July 2020, while Hoima, Lira, and Soroti are targeted for July 2021. Entebbe is scheduled for July 2022 and Moroto, Nakasongola, Kabale, and Wakiso for July 2024.

Being at a higher level in the urban area hierarchy, upgrading of the cities take into consideration of several factors including a minimum population of 300,000 residents with specifications of population density per square kilometre. Also, an upgrade to a city necessitates integrated City Development Plan, revenue generation capacity for sustainability, capacity to deliver essential services effectively and efficiently, institutionalized active participation by its residents, infrastructural facilities and a functional and effective waste management system (Uganda National Urbanisation Policy 2017, Annex 1)

Implications of new cities

The creation of 15 new cities has been received with the mixed feeling among Ugandans, some with the enthusiasm of business opportunities, job prospects and infrastructure development dividends. Yet other sections of the populace ragingly refer to this administrative decision as ambitious and unrealistic especially when COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged the national economy. Critical to note is that the new cities are being upgraded from municipalities which are structures of local government system in Uganda currently faced with financial constraints to run the devolved functions (Goobi & Lukwago, 2019). While the phased city implementation plan may be good, the time between phases seems too short to ensure the financial sustainability of these cities.

The prerequisite for creating a city is specified in Annex 1 of the Uganda National Urban policy is evident that as advanced by McFarlane's (2011) cities are beyond a dwelling. The listed requirements signify that proper orchestration of building of sustainable and resilient cities chiefly require comprehensive urban planning, sufficient financing at least from the initial stages so that essential infrastructure is put in place. From McFarlane's conceptual understanding of the city being an assemblage, it becomes evident that defining the local and national actors and their distinctive roles in the newly extended urban spaces is a matter of compulsion. The size and city frontiers, administrative structures, the justification and the process of city formation should be a common knowledge of all stakeholders who should actively be part of the city creation process. This is borne in mind, would lessen the occurrences of stakeholder financial and administrative disputes lemmas as those witnessed in the inauguration of the new cities during July 2020. Because of the mandate on land tenure regimes, patterns and usage guaranteed by the Land Act 1998, the National Landuse policy 2006, and the Uganda National Land Policy 2013, the city government should envisage a continuous scuffle over infrastructural development similar to historical manifestations in municipality structures and Kampala city. Road opening, electricity, water and drainage laying and extension, markets, public leisure and other spaces, require insurmountable negotiation, compensation, and enforcement which the new city administrators and governors must bear if there is to be a holistic sustainable development.

Conclusion

Urbanisation in the current global environment and with the increasing population is not only a necessity but a potential for growth and development. Uganda's only one city, Kampala, created has Uganda during independence is faced with population explosion and common urban challenges such as overcrowding, housing shortage,

crime, drug abuse, pollution, traffic congestion, and solid waste management leading to poor infrastructure and service delivery. The creation of 15 new cities therefore is a grand plan for growth and development but also a solution for the population pressure on Kampala city. However, there is a need for respective policy actors to rethink of the time lag in the schedule given for new city implementation phases, the financing of the new cities during and post-covid-19 era, building capacity to strengthen administrative and governance structures, for

consistent community mobilisation and sensitisation to ensure that the communities embrace change and fully engage in it. As assemblages, new cities need to engage and collaborate with local, national and international partners (private and public) to foster growth and development of respective areas. Uganda's Vision 2040, the NDP III, national policy frameworks, national legal frameworks, and the SDGs and other at the International instruments are our great resources to guide the achievement of the new city agenda.

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