



“Informal Settlements” a Great Threat to Uganda’s Realization of Sustainable Development: A Case Study of Slums in Kampala Capital City/Uganda

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Abstract: The study aimed at investigating the threat slums in Kampala poses to Uganda’s efforts geared towards her realization of Sustainable Development by the year 2030. A qualitative document review method was adopted and used to collect data relating to the cause of sustained slum growth and expansion in Kampala city. Data relating to the threat these slums are posing to Uganda’s efforts geared towards her realization of sustainable development. Newspaper articles, government reports, academic textbooks, private individual, and organization research papers were among the electronic documents reviewed and used as a reference in this paper. To analyze the data, interpretive and analytical methods were applied. Study results revealed that the threat posed by slum growth and expansion in Kampala ranges from environmental degradation, increasing crime rates, and moral decay to worsening groundwater vulnerability to contamination. Without strengthening efforts geared towards addressing the issue of slum settlements growth and expansion, Uganda’s goal of achieving sustainable development by the year, 2030 remains an imaginary dream far away from being realized.

Keywords: *Slums, sustainable development, informal settlements, Kampala, Uganda*

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INTRODUCTION

The growth and expansion of slums is believed to be as a result of the tendency by slum settlers involving their establishing of housing structures on land they are occupying illegally and sometimes with no legal right to it (UN-Habitat, 2014), and also not in line with the prevailing regulations for planning and building (Glossary of Environmental Statistics, 1977).

The most common describing characteristics of slum settlements include having no or few poorly constructed windows, leaky roofs and walls developed from substandard construction materials such as mud, reeds and a lack of access to the necessities of life including water, electricity, properly constructed toilets among others (Habitat for Humanity, n.d.; Kumpetch, Kumpetch, & Kumpetch, 2020). Slum inhabitants are usually low-income rural-urban migrants searching for greener pastures. In the process, they are employed in the informal urban informal sector, which is characterized by unpleasant or low pays. By day, Kampala’s population is estimated to be around 2.5 million people, with commuters coming from neighboring cities such as Wakiso, Mpigi, and Wakiso to the city. However, the city is experiencing an informal settlement of 60% residing in areas such as Bwaise, Nsambya, Katanga, among others.

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The driving pull factors responsible for the surge in the population of Kampala city include the perceived employment opportunities, better social services, and infrastructures. Despite the benefits usually associated with an area's population increase, for Kampala's case, such a phenomenon has resulted in the city's development occurring in a haphazard manner characterized by urban informality in different sectors hence escalating the growth and expansion of informal housings with their associated challenges including encroachment on wetlands, water pollution. This has resulted in a decrease in the ecological services derived from the natural environment of the city (Matagi, 2002; National Environment Management Authority, 2006). To this extent, the study sought to investigate the threat slums in Kampala are posing to Uganda's efforts geared towards her realization of sustainable development by the year 2030.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Despite the policy and institutional undertakings being implemented with the aim of tackling the slum growth problem especially in Uganda's capital Kampala, a literature gap linking the potential threat slum growth and expansion poses to Uganda's efforts geared towards her realization of sustainable development by the year 2030 is still huge. The study, therefore while making its exploratory analysis, adopted a qualitative document review method of data collection. This involved reviewing a number of electronic documents such as the national household survey report 2004, population and housing census report 2014, newspaper articles, private individual and institutional research reports such as the World Bank report on Kampala 2015, among others.

Data were analyzed using analytical and interpretive methods of analysis. This also involved classifying data proportionately as data relating to the cause of sustained slum growth and expansion in Kampala city and how slums are threatening Uganda's activities to help her realize sustainable development being guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). After this, data was analyzed in comparison to the different reports and making relevant observations of what exactly happens in the slum settlements of Kampala capital city.

RESULTS

Kampala, the administrative city of Uganda derives its name from a type of antelope locally known as impala in the Luganda language which lived in a place called Old Kampala. Administratively, the city is divided into five divisions which include Makindye, Rubaga, Kawempe, Nakawa, and central division, and these are governed by an authority called "Kampala Capital City Authority". Slum growth and expansion in Kampala has not only happened in a gradual manner but also sustained for a long period of time. Despite the significant urban and economic growth experienced in Kampala, an estimated 40% of its population lives in slum settlements which are developed predominantly near fragile ecosystems such as wetlands. Being the second fastest growing city in East Africa, Kampala's rapid urbanization is reported by the World Bank (2015) to be a result of its densely populated slums.

Most of Kampala's infrastructure is developed in an informal manner with no direct government support. The institutional loopholes and weaknesses in the administrative structures of Kampala characterized by lengthy and costly bureaucracies have resulted in many infrastructural developers bypassing the planning processes, regulations and standards established to govern infrastructural development. This has as a result led to environmental stress within Kampala's slums (Ismail, 2020; Kampala City Council, 2006). The biggest percentage of the most vulnerable residents contributing to 88% of the slum dwellers in Kampala and Uganda at large are the youth aged between 15-35 years (IOM UN Immigration, 2017).

A combination of factors have contributed to the rapid and sustained growth of slum development in Kampala and Uganda at large among which include;

Kampala's Multiple Land Tenure Systems

These have played a significant role in the city's growth and slum development by supporting planned development in some cases and also in other scenarios sabotaging an orderly city growth. With the abolition of the statutory leases by the 1995 constitution, the then administrative body of Kampala called Kampala City Council lost its 199-year lease resulting into the reverting of land to a new system called customary land tenure system.

This resulted in the majority of the slums in Kampala becoming part of the private mailo land or being owned by customary tenants who took over public land for example Kinnawataka. The fact that private individuals don't appreciate planning has constrained efforts geared towards achieving the city's planned development. Therefore land tenure has greatly influenced most of the existing irregular developments and poor environmental health in Kampala.

Vesting ownership of land in the hands of citizens of Uganda by the current land tenure has perpetuated poor urban land management practices and has also made planning, enforcement, and implementation of any development very hard and complicated.

Rapid Urbanization and Growth of the Urban Population

The transformation of Kampala into Uganda's capital city in 1962 resulted in its experiencing rapid urbanization and growth of the urban population. Despite the slow-paced urbanization, the city has experienced over time since, in the 1990s which could have given the responsible authorities time to plan, little has been done to investigate and develop a holistic plan to address the challenges that arise from such a phenomenon (Kasekende & Atingi-Ego, 2003). With an estimated 31% contribution to Uganda's urban population (Richmond, Myers, & Namuli, 2018), approximately 40% of the population in Kampala lives in slums established without basic infrastructures near fragile ecosystems such as wetlands.

The growth of slums in the city is believed to be an outcome of the city's rapid urbanization that has occurred at a rate much higher than the capacity of the responsible authorities to adequately plan and implement development decisions (World Bank, 2015). The population dynamics and ever-growing rural to urban migration are significantly the key driving forces of urban expansion, although the growth and expansion in Kampala have been happening in a disastrous manner characterized by lack of sustainable infrastructures, social services, poor planning, and environmental problems.

The Vicious Cycles of Poverty and Low Incomes of Kampala's Population

The city has experienced a prolonged rural to urban migration phenomenon characterized by thousands of subsistence farmers abandoning their villages because of a lack of market and technology. These have been attracted by the portrayed potential the city presents in terms of good social services, job opportunities among others. The failure by the city established structures to cope up with and absorb the ever-increasing migrating poor population has pushed many of the migrating poor population into the urban vicious cycles of poverty (Martez, 2014).

The lack of supportive networks by the poor population in Kampala has resulted in many of them remaining unemployed despite being in the city. The true definition of poverty in Kampala has been associated with slum growth and development and these have greatly affected the city's economy (Martez, 2014).

Lack of Urban Planning and Development Control

Slum growth in Kampala has been largely linked to the failure to progressively plan the development of urban land, corruption, and poor coordination, the inability of the concerned urban authorities to define and create clear boundaries between the management of Kampala from its politics. The other factors that have affected the success of realizing spatial plan implementation in Kampala Capital city have included institutional weaknesses, political interference, financial constraints, and the urban people's lack of appreciation for planning.

Regulating physical development in the various secondary towns of Kampala has also become problematic given the existence of urban laws which are not up to date and also the ineffective development control legislation. For example, the penalties in the 1964 public health Act for erecting illegal structures are too weak and not severe to scare away urban residents from breaking the law. The 1997 local government Act unfair treatment and recognition of urban local councils and rural local governments as regions with similar needs and requirements neglect the fact that urban areas tend to have more people which accounts for their having more problems and as a result different needs.

The failure by the planning laws to achieve success in promoting an orderly urban development coupled with an improved social service delivery has been linked to factors such as inadequate funding, poor enforcement among others (Kiggundu, 2014). High illiteracy levels and the vicious cycles of poverty have also accounted for the citizen's low participation and involvement in the preparation and development of physical development plans in Kampala (Kiggundu, 2014). Urban people have also found it hard to participate in community-based activities given the fact that many times they are trying to overcome the impact caused to them by certain diseases and also their devotion to meeting daily necessities of life (Kiggundu, 2014).

The Effect of Decentralization and Poor Urban Governance

With the coming into use of the 1995 constitution, decentralization with its new era of ratifying local governments was ushered in. This involved transferring administrative powers from the central government to the lower local government units which facilitated good governance. The goal of this decentralization was to facilitate the promotion and encouragement of democratic citizen participation in decision-making processes by acting as a guiding principle at all government levels (Kiggundu, 2014).

However, with decentralization, the central government started acting as if it has absconded from duty paving way for the incapable local governments which have paved the way for haphazard growth of the urban area. Inadequate funding in urban infrastructure and services has resulted in a mismatch between the level and quality of services, and the needs of the urban population. The ineffectiveness of decentralization in Uganda has also been characterized by a lack of clear guidelines that can create a conducive environment that encourages free participation of the urban residents in matters such as physical planning which explains the chaotic and uncontrolled development in the city.

DISCUSSION

The development has sometimes been linked to as an act of granting freedom to the people and according to Sen 1999, in granting freedom to the people, the authorities concerned should focus on increasing citizens' access and opportunities to the things they have reason to value. This however should be done in a sustainable manner such that the freedoms granted to citizens aimed at increasing their opportunities and access to the things they reason to value shouldn't in any way or the other jeopardize the future generation's ability to also have access and opportunities in future times the things that they will have reason to value.

The United Nations member states in 2015 while aiming to achieve a sustainable development model that values both the freedoms of the current and future generations adopted and embraced the 2030 agenda for sustainable development to act as a mechanism for providing a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for the people and planet in the present and future generations to come. In achieving sustainable development, 17 goals were initiated to act as an urgent call by all countries including both developed and developing in a global partnership.

The SDGs aim at eradicating poverty, hunger, improving the health and wellbeing of the people, improving the quality of education, promoting gender equality, increasing access to clean water and improving sanitation, providing affordable and clean energy, promoting decent work and economic growth, promoting industrial growth, innovation, and infrastructural development, reducing inequality, developing sustainable cities and communities, promoting and encouraging responsible consumption and production, acting against climate change, improving and protecting life below water, life on land, establishing peace, justice, and strong institutions and encouraging partnerships with the aim of achieving these goals.

In ending poverty and other deprivations, the SDGs put into consideration that this must move hand in hand with other strategies that are aimed at improving health, education, reducing inequality, and encouraging growth. This should also go hand in hand with strategies that focus on tackling climate change and preserving oceans, lakes, and forests. However, despite the global agreements all United Nations member states agreed upon to drive their economics towards the realization of SDGs as a key driver in achieving sustainable development by 2030, for Uganda's case, realizing this great vision lies in jeopardy as slums in its capital city Kampala are presenting a great challenge and acting as a hindrance towards all efforts aimed at realizing sustainable development as discussed below;

Environmental Degradation

The environment which encompasses the surrounding conditions in which a person, animal or plant lives or operates can be categorized into geographical sometimes known as the natural or physical environment which consists of things that are provided by nature and which man has limited and sometimes no control over. The second category which is known as the man-made environment is a result of men need to control the conditions of his life. The degradation of the environment is primarily caused by human disturbance by engaging in activities that deplete natural resources such as water, air, and soil and activities that destroy the fragile ecosystems leading to the extinction of wildlife (Tyagi, Garg, & Paudel, 2014).

In line with achieving SDG 11 which advocates for sustainable cities and communities that are free from environmental hazards which threaten human life, able to stand on their own, and also able to meet the needs that the present occupants have reason to value without being compromised of its ability to meet the needs that the future occupants

have reason to value. The existence of slum settlements in Kampala threatens Uganda's realization of SDG 11 because they are characterized by uncontrolled human dumping, stockpiling, and inefficient solid waste management system which has resulted in the littering of all sorts of solid waste in these areas including plastic materials, waste from foodstuff and metallic materials.

This has largely been brought about by the lack of proper planning resulting in the construction of housing units that are compacted hence lacking space to establish waste dumping sites and motorable trucks to enable city authority garbage collection trucks to access these areas to collect the waste. As a result, the waste has ended up in the small open spaces within the residential areas, river streams, drainage systems, and open spaces along roadsides and wetlands within the slums. This waste disposal problem has also been worsened by the ignorance of the slum dwellers on the best ways to manage the waste as there has been little initiative to take collective action.

The uncontrolled poor waste disposal in these slum settlements has not only put the inhabitants lives at risk of environmental and health-related problems such as causing an outbreak of diseases like cholera, flooding due to blockages in the drainage systems but has also largely damaged the natural environment for example through the air, water, and land pollution hence affecting the ecosystem as seen the photo below;



Figure 1 *Uncontrolled poor garbage disposal*. Source: Ministry of lands, housing and urban development, Uganda 2008

The figure above is a representation of the inhuman or irresponsible disposal of solid waste into the mainstream river in Kawempe slum that flows to Lake Victoria. Despite the fact that around 28000 tons of waste are collected and delivered to the landfill every month, this only represents only 40% of the city's total waste that is generated. The city records reveal that the remaining 60% of the waste that is uncollected waste is either burnt or dumped off in various unauthorized sites resulting in health and environmental problems (Komakech, 2014). This has denied the people living near this damaged environment a chance to live good health and wellbeing due to the outbreak of various diseases related to poor hygiene and sanitation such as cholera.

The 2019 cholera outbreak in the crowded slums of Kampala city resulted in the death of two people. The highest magnitude of the outbreak was much felt in the highly densely populated city suburbs characterized by poor hygiene practices, irresponsible disposal of domestic and human waste, and high consumption of unclean water. Housing units were also characterized by having no toilets with a common practice of people defecating in polythene bags and dumping the contents in open trenches and pools of floodwater (Okiror, 2019).

High Levels of Crime Rates and Moral Decay

Slum settlements within Kampala have become a hub for actions that constitute to offenses and a high level of degradation of moral values among the slum dwellers. This has emanated from the fact that these settlements have been inhabited by different categories of people who migrate from various districts in Uganda and upon arrival, life

becomes so difficult for them because of lack of job opportunities alongside the need to have access and opportunities on the things they have reason to value as their basic needs of life. As a result of this frustration, many have ended up in immoral acts such as drug abuse, robbery, commercial sex as a way of survival resulting in serious health complications and many times leading to death.

According to [Swahn, Culbreth, Salazar, Kasirye, and Seeley \(2016\)](#), HIV-related cases especially among youth between the age bracket of 15-19 was by 2016 estimated to be around 2.4% with the highest rates detected among youths who live in the slum areas. HIV and other sexually transmitted Infections prevalence was estimated to be around 37.2% and this was associated with factors such as engaging in high-risk behaviors including commercial sex, having multiple sex partners, intermittent condom use, and abuse of narcotic drugs especially among the youths who live in slums.

The unprecedented rise in risk-taking behaviors became the daily mode of living among young people in slum areas of Kampala and it has been linked to the nature and wealth of households, increase in population in the unplanned housing units among others ([Uganda Development Link, 2011](#)). The annual crime and traffic safety report indicated that Kampala metropolitan area had the highest number of murder cases, thefts, and assaults and this according to the then police spokesperson was linked to the increase in the population of the slum housings. This has greatly discouraged investments in these areas keeping slum dwellers unemployed hence the vicious cycles of poverty accompanied by societal moral decay.

In achieving sustainable development goal 3, the focus is put on promoting healthy lives and wellbeing for all ages of people through gearing up efforts to end epidemics such as AIDs, tuberculosis, water-borne diseases, and also other communicable diseases by the year 2030. This should also go hand in hand with strengthening the treatment of substance abuse including narcotic drug abuse including alcohol. Achieving this goal with its targets, however, remains an unachievable dream for Uganda especially in the slum areas of Kampala given the surge in the crime rate and moral decay among the inhabitants of the slums.

Groundwater Vulnerability to Contamination

This usually happens because water contaminants sometimes tend to reach and get into contact with groundwater when they are introduced at an upper aquifer in the slums of Kampala. The underlying causes for this phenomenon include poor sanitation, lack of access to clean water, improper garbage disposal. The Sustainable Development agenda 2030 calls for various efforts geared towards achieving goal 6 among which include providing access to clean, safe water for all, and improved sanitation by the year 2030. This is to be achieved through carrying out various activities such as reducing pollution, eliminating irresponsible dumping of hazardous chemicals and materials. Despite the benefits associated with achieving this goal, in Uganda however realizing such a goal still remains a mystery especially in its slum areas that are characterized by poor or a complete lack of basic infrastructures such as sanitation facilities, drainage systems, roads and electricity. These have hindered the provision of essential social services to these areas such as clean water.

Additionally, Poverty among the slum dwellers has denied them a chance to afford the key determinants to accessing piped clean piped water which is landownership and connection fees. As a result, many of them have been forced to use open springs which are always prone to contamination with for example pit latrines nearby causing numerous health disasters that sometimes lead to death as it was the case in 2019 when Kampala slums experienced a cholera outbreak leading to the death of two people ([Okiror, 2019](#)).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The aim of this paper was to investigate how slums in Kampala the capital city are deterring Uganda from achieving Sustainable development. The study adopted a qualitative document review method to collect data relating to the reasons for the formation of slums in Kampala city and data relating to how slums are threatening Uganda's efforts geared towards her realization of sustainable development in Uganda. The electronic documents reviewed comprised of newspaper articles, government reports, and private individual and organization research papers.

The results from the study investigations indicated that the emergency of slums in Kampala city has occurred in a gradual manner however sustained over a long period of time. The study findings also revealed that a combination of factors have contributed to the growth of slums in Kampala city among which include: Land tenure in Kampala city, rapid urbanization, and growth of the urban population, poverty and low incomes, lack of urban planning and

development control and; effect of decentralization and poor urban growth. The findings from this research revealed that the growth of slums in Kampala Capital city has presented numerous obstacles that stand in Uganda's way towards its realizing sustainable development among these include Environmental degradation, high levels of crime rates and moral decay; and groundwater vulnerability to contamination in Kampala's slum settlements.

In conclusion, based on these key findings as stated in this study, Uganda in this 21st century is still faced with major challenges of curbing down the sustained growth and expansion of slum settlements in its urban areas especially Kampala as one of the initiatives that can drive her economy towards achieving sustainable development by the year 2030. However, the government seems to show no sense of urgency to fight the issue of slums. Without strengthening efforts geared towards addressing the issue of slum settlements growth and expansion, Uganda's goal of achieving sustainable development by the year 2030 remains an imaginary dream far away from being realized.

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