Understanding urban land, politics, and planning: A critical appraisal of Kampala's urban sprawl

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A B S T R A C T

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This paper seeks to make a contribution to contemporary urban land insights and political debates in relation to planning in the Ugandan capital, Kampala. It also evaluates how the city authorities engage with communities on land and related urban issues. Scholars have generally ignored the important aspect of community engagement regarding planning in Kampala. Moreover, political power relations seem to influence if not determine social conditions at the grassroots level. In this paper urban land is defined from competing perspectives *vis-à-vis* lived experiences at the grassroots level. This paper seeks to understand the urban land question through the lens of Henri Lefebvre's writings on the production of space and the right to the city. Questions this study seeks to answer include: Why is politics at the centre of land in Kampala? How is community engagement on land and planning understood by city government? After exploratory research and a review of extant literature, this study utilised an interview guide to collect primary empirical data.

1. Introduction

As cities expand, they generate enormous complexities, which include, among others, space for housing and a range of other services. Consequently, in order to create space for such services, city authorities, globally, and particularly in the global south, struggle to obtain land on which to provide such urban services and basic infrastructure such as housing and roads. In the light of this situation, contemporary urban expansion is exposed to land tensions and political intrusions, creating real challenges for planners (Scott, 2013; Jones, Cummings & Nixon, 2014). The importance of this study, therefore, is to advance our understanding about the issues of land, politics, and planning from the community engagement perspective as well as in relation to urban sprawl in cities, especially in the global south where these issues appear to be historical but also problematic (Kaweesa, 2018). This state of affair seems to indicate that urban land, politics and planning issues are not limited to Kampala but are general problems experienced elsewhere (Brazil, China, India, South Africa, Kenya, etc.). See, for example, the works of Brenner et al. (2012) who argue that, since urbanisation is about land, politics will either fail or aid the social economic needs of city dwellers. While the authors speak about politics and land, they ignore the aspect of community engagement in the planning process. Lee (2013) suggests that substantive, and meaningful community engagement is needed since land is an essential component of

urbanisation (Williams, 2007; Williams, 2009b). Lee fails, however, to indicate the significance of community engagement in the process. It is noteworthy that substantive, meaningful community engagement is paramount, without which planning will remain an abstract norm (Williams, 2008b; Williams, 2010).

However, we want to enrich the debates and controversies (land grabbing, land distribution for political gain) about urban land, politics, and planning by forwarding the notion of community engagement to reflect on what we believe is one of the key questions largely ignored by urban planners. By community engagement, we refer to policymakers, housing departments, politicians, the community, and academic institutions which form part of the community engagement (Williams, 2009a; Williams, 2009c).

While community engagement seems important for urban authorities, studies have ignored its importance to politicians and urban governments (De Lange and De Waal, 2017). In so doing, they seem to be excluding themselves from their responsibilities concerning issues of urban land, politics, and planning. Some scholars reject the idea of engagement and argue that it is too idealistic and complex to engage the community in every aspect of urban activities, especially land, which has been problematic ever since the pre and colonial eras (Goodfellow, 2010; Zhu, 2015). For example, historically, the British colonial government (during an agreement in 1900) allocated 9000 mile^2 of land to the Buganda kingdom in exchange for political capital

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without engaging the local communities and the effect of this exchange created political tension with the central government and continues to cause serious ramifications in terms of land acquisition (Kaweesa, 2018). Brenner et al. (2012) point out that issues such as housing, transport and infrastructure development lead to tensions since such elements are profit oriented. Further, land tension in cities like Kampala date back to the colonial era and colonial legacies which seemingly remain and continue to affect community engagement. This could be partly due to the fact that land and planning policies and administrative practices still serve the interests of the elites as they did of the colonialists. Historically for example, Gore and Muwanga (2014) demonstrate that land tensions in some cases exist in the form of encroachment on protected areas, poor record keeping, outdated systems and sometimes family succession. The possible consequences of this include land grabbing, bickering among politicians, disorganised planning, unclear urban policy and conflict among political office bearers (Gore and Muwanga, 2014; Bidandi & Williams, 2018). In this regard, the government seized all the land and abolished the Buganda kingdom after its conflict in 1966 with the central government. Subsequently, Idi Amin's (1975) land reform decree declared all land in Uganda to be public land (Mutabazi, 2018).

While the land was declared a public asset, the National Resistance Movement (NRM) government re-established the land tenure system with customary, freehold, leasehold and mailo[1] respectively. The multi-layered land rights seem to be the origin of land challenges experienced in the city today. For example, the registered owner with title and equitable ownership by virtue of occupation is problematic. Here it has to be noted that, since the return of land titles to the Buganda Kingdom, the land has been used as a political tool for its survival. Nonetheless, the current arguments advanced by the NRM government are based on the interpretation of Uganda's brutal post-colonial experience rather than addressing the planning and urban land question in Kampala inherited from previous governments (Bidandi & Williams, 2018).

In this regard, it has to be observed that local grassroots communities in the global south and Kampala in particular seem to be excluded from decision making on matters of planning and the use and ownership of land around the city, possibly due to the multi-layered land rights. What should be understood, though, is that the local urban dwellers should have the mandate to sell whenever necessary what belongs to them to whoever wants land but without questioning the purpose for which it is being bought (Kabengwa, 2018). City authorities thus have had to grapple with accessing land for orderly planning, be it for housing, roads or any other developmental programme. So, it has to be borne in mind that before the advent of the NRM government land was, in fact, a contested issue but the NRM seems to repeat the same narrative for political benefits not in the interest of the people (ibid). As an intervention measure, Uganda created a commission of inquiry in 2017, headed by Justice Bamugemeire, to address land in general but not limited to urban land. Literature shows that most people with issues of land are politically connected (ibid). This indicates that there is a clandestine use of urban land which has had a dynamic effect on Kampala's urban planning (Kaweesa, 2018).

It appears that political interferences and absence or limited community engagement are the biggest nightmares for Kampala planning authorities today. In this regard, Kabengwa (2018) states "the majority of citizens neither have invitation cards nor do harbour political ambitions thus their security of tenure must be handled with care if city government is to see organised planning" (ibid:4). This further indicates that, historically, people at the grassroot level are excluded, hence contributing to tensions, corruption and the rampant land grabbing that is being experienced today. This underscores the fact that historical claims have been used as political capital in terms of government

interventions on land issues. Goodfellow (2010) in his work, 'The bastard child of nobody: Anti-planning and the institutional crisis in contemporary Kampala', elucidates how politics consciously serves to fragment and damage the city's infrastructure and social materiality. This is a sad reality that jeopardises the well-being of the majority of city dwellers. Such scenarios increase tensions and exploitation by local and state elites who, seemingly, "routinely fail to encourage inclusive planning" (ibid:2).

Consequently, it is important to understand that these variables happen at different spatial scales and therefore administrative structures and local traditions of urban decision making should collectively co-operate to realise systematic and goal-centred planning. In the Kampala context, the 'everyday' comprises a range of spatialities through which people experience life in its totality, for example, finding land or space for housing is usually dependent on personal efforts. It is precisely community engagement that provides true meaning to people's everyday lived experiences (Hendriks, 2014; Williams, 2000; Williams, 2009b) Thus, practical consultations with the community or ordinary people should be the paramount principle for city planners (Williams, 2000, 2006, 2007, 2008a, 2008b, 2009a, 2009b, 2010).

Fundamentally, to address the current social-economic and political challenges regarding land, different policy approaches need to be considered. The impact will go beyond legal and institutional matters, however, something which the city government in Kampala can rectify over time (Kandel, 2017). We would like to stress that a new recourse to land in terms of planning is required, and should include both urban planning professionals, city government, national government and communities. Though putting these entities on the same table would seem a difficult task for city authorities, it would serve as an alternative approach for politicians, policymakers and urban communities, especially the significance of land and the current fast-paced urban sprawl (Ngwomoyo, 2018).

Generally, the urban sprawl rates are higher than or equal to urban population growth rates, indicating that urban expansion/development is becoming more spread out than compressed (Seto et al., 2011). Urban sprawl in Kampala, for example, appears to be driven by population growth, industrial development, and employment opportunities, factors which appear to override community engagement in the planning process. This could very well be an indication that obtaining land for housing, industries, roads, schools, hospitals, parks and other amenities remains a challenge. In this regard, it is perhaps apt to suggest that politics of land threatens orderly planning and creates tensions between landowners, urban authorities, private individuals and central government.

2. Problem statement

It is important to note that urban problems have a reasonably long history in many cities globally and have varying encounters such as political, land, planning and sprawl among others. Scott (2013) avers that the biggest problems most cities are faced with today are politics, urban sprawl and the growing demand for land which occurs without considering the public and private spaces. So, these spaces need the interaction of political and planning forces which in themselves are not immune to tensions. However, recent literature indicates that urban land typically has tensions due to direct involvement by the state as it would seem to engage in exclusionary planning processes and thus affecting the planning outcomes. For instance, the current land tenure system has produced serious problems around land allocation and land use rights in the Ugandan capital (Blomley, 2004; Omolo-Okalebo et al., 2010; Bidandi and Williams, 2017; Ngabirano, 2018; Williams and Bidandi, 2018). This situation has given rise to unplanned urbanisation and poor zoning of urban activities. Consequently, Kampala's urban sprawl is growing at an abnormal rate; yet, the adjacent areas are not planned to absorb the much-needed infrastructure such as industries and housing to name but two (Ngabirano, 2018). Ngabirano (2018) in

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[1] Mailo land refers to land parcelled to individuals by the colonial government as their personal property.

addition states that politicians and city technocrats seem to work in isolation and therefore give room to people who are politically connected to grab land and develop it without following standardised procedures of urban land management.

As many services compete for land, intervention measures taken by the central government to create parallel institutions (ministry for Kampala, executive director & executive mayor) have produced an unhealthy situation for delivery of basic services. This has, for example, produced land tensions with not only landowners but with city and central governments as well. The question is, whose interests are they working for? The current situation does not warrant or display any sense of effective management of the city, but, instead, creates confusion and mismanagement of urban land, which in essence goes against the decentralisation dogma the country cherished in 1997.

3. Theoretical context

This study is underpinned by critical theory and Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space and right to the city, in which he argues that urbanisation is significantly part of a changing world (Brenner et al., 2012; Williams, 2009b). In Lefebvre's theorization of cities, urban sprawl occurs to make provision for an increasing number of people and their daily needs such as land. This also means the need for direct political intervention to secure the rights of all urban dwellers. Accordingly, as in the case of Kampala, attempts have been made to transform existing urban spaces and activities to ensure sustainable livelihoods of the present and future generations in urban areas. Invariably, as a result, cities grapple with the idea of urban transformation and are faced with land tensions, contradictions, and frequent struggles by ordinary people to eke out an existence within a particular urban area. However, Brenner et al. (2012) argue that struggles have become generalised on the global stage since cities are founded on exploitation of the many by the few. It is these urban problems that influence, if not shape, much of the work of planners in their efforts to serve the basic needs of urban dwellers (Brenner et al., 2012; Goodfellow, 2010). For Williams (2009b), urban transformation is derived from the contradictions, tensions, conflicts, and struggles in society. While Brenner et al. (2012) in their work on critical theory indicate that political struggles about issues of urban sprawl, land and planning are complex, the challenge emanates from the manifestation of capital accumulation which is very much present in many cities globally. In such circumstances, Wacquant (2008) avers that people are pushed onto the periphery where no stable jobs are available. This is not a phenomenon limited to Kampala, but exists for urban communities elsewhere in the world as well, particularly in the "developing world" that, historically, has been cruelly exploited by European colonisers. Thus, for example, in Kampala today the struggle for urban land is against the practice of neoliberal policies such as decentralisation implemented through the structural adjustment programme with the World Bank and IMF playing a significant role (ibid). Henri Lefebvre (1991) posits that planning is the responsibility of the state and it is important that, in this regard, it resolves existing contradictions, tensions, and conflict in society. In simplified terms, according to Williams (2009b), it is about the perceived space of everyday social life and perception that blends community action and outlook which is often ignored in the professional and theoretical conceived space ('*le percu*') of surveyors and urban planners.

While cities often attempt to transform themselves by encouraging investment, it should be no surprise that contemporary Kampala, in this regard, is faced with struggles in relation to land, political interference and lack of community engagement to enable the desired transformation *vis-a-vis* employment creation for the increasing number of urban dwellers. Based on a logical extrapolation of Lefebvre's (2009) work, urban transformation requires urban spaces for a range of socio-economic activities such as recreation, transport, sanitation, solid waste management and others to take place (Goodfellow, 2010). Thus

extrapolated, Lefebvre's work provides useful indicators on how to approach contemporary problems in urban areas and the need for sustained community engagement to ensure liveable urban spaces in the future. Moreover, Lefebvre's idea of the right to the city appears to present the general problems experienced in Kampala today. There is a deep concern about urban conditions and the everyday life people go through on a daily basis. Thus the urgency to view conditions such as land grabbing, poor planning, mushrooming of slums, and politics as problematic as they complicate orderly planning in contemporary Kampala.

It is suggested in this study that the urban problem in Kampala can be traced back to privatization, market-driven, capitalist processes seemingly facilitated by the state - an obvious neoliberal agenda (meaning, if citizens cannot pay for services they have to stay without them, with all the dire consequences that follow from such an approach to urban life in particular). To understand the notion of Lefebvre's work, we need to understand how urban inhabitants engage with the authorities in their everyday lives. David Harvey's texts with regard to the right to the city focuses on neoliberalism, a type of exclusionary right to urban areas, as most poor people are alienated from the city while capitalists embed their presence in such areas. Harvey (2012) argues that the right to the city is about resistance and social justice, especially in relation to services such as housing, health, employment, and so forth. This provides a theoretical understanding of why land grabs in cities like Kampala are common. Therefore, the contradictions of neoliberalism or capitalism regarding modernity, for example, should be adopted with caution, especially in Kampala city where citizens, historically, have suffered various forms of deprivation.

According to Harvey (ibid), capitalism is about expansion or endless growth which has no measure! Capitalism has to grow for one reason, which is profit! This presents a reflection of Max Weber's means of capital accumulation and production of profit which are hinged on power (politics), an element very much present in Kampala. In this light, there must be more new spaces where capital is reproduced in order to make cities enjoyable. Lefebvre decries the extent to which urban society is subjected to the economy, the extent to which the state dominates urban space often violently, the extent to which space is primarily valued for exchange and shaped accordingly, and the extent to which the state, city authorities and the market occasionally become reductionist, leading to the production of a skewed and detached habitation. Literature shows that reductionism leads to the unfortunate skewing of effort and funding towards city planning, and this is remarkably applicable to all complex urban problems (Bhat and Salingaros, 2013; Brenner et al., 2012; Fainstein, 2014; Sandercock and Bridgman, 1999). For example, zoning rules which are applied today are in some way illegal but we see instead the neglect in physical urban spaces and structures developed to enrich the few (Goodfellow, 2010).

Capitalist planners seem to argue that only investments either by local or foreign investors can determine the conditions of urban dwellers' livelihoods (Brenner et al., 2012; Harvey, 2003). For example, the right to land for housing has in some spaces been produced solely within a context of discrimination, meaning that people in urban areas are classified into categories determined necessarily by political power (Butler, 2012; Harvey, 2003; Harvey and Cities, 2012). In spite of these powers and power itself, is it possible to engage urban communities or dwellers at the grassroots level for the realisation of their rights to land? Harvey and Lefebvre encourage grassroots communities to effect change but both scholars fail to provide a detailed account of community engagement. Neoliberal policies appear to have affected the access to land at local level as community members are excluded from the process of loss of land as a resource and the planning of land distribution.

4. Contextual analysis

4.1. Urban land conceptualised

Urban land is an urban area designated within a certain geographical or administrative boundary (Liu et al., 2014). Most dwellers in urban areas have non-agricultural professions (Liu et al., 2014). Urban areas are very developed, meaning there is a density of human structures such as houses, commercial buildings, roads, bridges, and railways. It can refer to town, cities, and suburbs (Liu et al., 2014). Urban areas can be defined in three dimensions that is, population size, population density and build structure (McIntyre, 2011; Wu, 2014). For the purpose of this study, we focus on understanding urban land, politics, and planning in relation to Kampala's urban sprawl.

Mbembé and Nuttall (2004) postulate that most African cities, including Kampala, are developing in a fragmented manner due to challenges associated with politics, planning, and land. In context, urban land has been known to be a vital aspect of human habitation since many urban dwellers depend on it for their existence (ibid). In other words, the land is what describes urban dwellers as a community, gives them a sense of livelihood and is a centre of commerce, including food consumption, manufacturing and a vital market for imported goods and the countryside, thus generating income for other purposes of development. Essentially, many cities globally, and Kampala in particular, today grapple with urban expansion due to difficulties with accessing land that enables urban expansion in an orderly manner. Urban land appears to be contested, however, and produces tensions due to competing services. Land tensions, according to Blomley (2004), Kandel (2017), Mutabazi (2018) and Kaweesa (2018), seem to stem from politics, economics, culture and problems of sprawl which essentially are colonial developments. While tensions around urban land are believed to originate from colonial or pre-colonial developments, they are often distinctively demonstrated within the political encounters.

Blomley (2004) postulates that urban land is often associated with politics whether driven by capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy or monarchy. Important to note, Kampala is no exception to the aforementioned key issues as politics and scramble by the elites for space to put up structures has become some of the major factors influencing urban land grabs, especially for housing projects largely executed outside the city's planning norms. It has been argued that some politicians and people linked to high ranking government officials attempt to access land either through grabbing or coercion to establish property for housing, office space or any other form of commercial property development (Kaweesa (2018)). Yet, according to Mutabazi (2018) property can also serve as a site for creative activities such as planned housing, water, sanitation, transport, recreation amenities, parks, markets, and leisure among others; Kampala's planning falls short of such arrangements, an issue blamed on colonialism.

In more concrete terms, the community at large could benefit most from the development. If they are to realise this purpose they must ensure: equitable and balanced spatial distribution of development; orderly, efficient and coordinated spatial socio-economic development; facilitating equitable distribution of services; integration of the functions of rural and urban settlements; and optimum use of land for agriculture, forestry, industry, human settlements, infrastructure, and other competing land uses.

In light of the earlier narrative, the proliferation of tensions over land habitually unfolds in Kampala and between lineages, clans, and families (Bidandi and Williams, 2017; Kaweesa, 2018). Common narratives about urban land in Kampala revolve around grabbing and inheritances by clans vying for authority over it, especially around Kampala. This seems to suggest that urban land issues remain too fractured to manage key issues such as land for housing, infrastructure and financial relations between authorities. On a different note, Ngabirano (2018) points out that technical and political tensions are

the reasons for Kampala's planning problems. Moreover, city authorities and political office-bearers seem to work in isolation, making the planning process ever more difficult and also not being mindful of the city's growing population (ibid).

Though urban authorities seem to understand sprawl and demand for services, they fail to recognize that land is a key determinant of issues such as roads, water, housing, parks and amenities. In cases where the availability of land is problematic, it is quite difficult to have a well-planned city, the politics of urbanisation notwithstanding (Brenner et al., 2012; Mutabazi, 2018; Williams & Bidandi, 2018).

Land in Kampala is largely owned by the local people and seems a challenge to current urban sprawl; therefore, it poses a challenge to any approach by KCCA to use land innovatively. This refers to what Brenner et al. (2012) called land that belongs to the people so they should be given a chance to make objections or have their ideas taken into account. It is precisely the community engagement approach that can have a dramatic and beneficial impact on costs and the efficiency of other resources utilisation such as sanitation and water. Important to state here is that, as long as the city and central governments fail to effectively utilise the public land at their disposal and opt to compensate private land (Buganda land), development will, unfortunately, jeopardise urban dwellers' dream of experiencing a transformed city that works for all who live in it. Giddings (2009) points out that land in Kampala is a constraint to development, especially for housing. What we are trying to imply here is that the city government has pockets of land which it seems unable to utilise effectively. This inability could point to corrupt officials selling it to themselves or compensating those living on it under the pretext of development. The case in point is the Nakawa/Naguru land. In this way, it would require a comprehensive policy framework developed exclusively by all concerned parties. As of now, there is a lack of coherent policy on urban land and no clear outline of responsibilities for the identification, planning, and release of land for housing infrastructural development (Bidandi, 2007; Williams, 2000).

Based on the researchers' observations, urban land in Kampala is largely driven by a lack of community engagement and politics under the pretext of investment. Moreover, we look at some key factors to qualify our argument; the central government's take over the management of the city and the creation of a ministry for Kampala seem too problematic and do not address the intended purpose. Though the focus could have been to address the institutional crisis, the question is, for whose interest are they working? The creation of two entities does not, in fact, make sense, but rather makes the city a site for political contestation which has obviously fragmented and damaged the infrastructure and social fabric (Goodfellow, 2010). Besides, as Bidandi (2018) argues, many of the urban development projects proposed by KCCA meet stiff opposition from private landowners, including the Buganda kingdom. This seems to result from limited participation. Kampala's land tenure system legally provides for both private and public ownership of land, with private land ownership being far greater than public ownership. Meanwhile, the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda also recognises and protects private land rights, even in central Kampala. Since land ownership plays a significant role in urbanisation, this type of land tenure requires collective engagement in response to the city's sprawl. Externalities connected to urban services as well as heightening political aspects of service delivery and the creation of intensified opportunities for rent-seeking of various kinds appear to be another problem that requires introspection by the city government in Kampala.

Studies by Kasozi and Namyalo, 2018; Hendriks, 2014; Seto et al., 2011; Angel et al., 2011, show for example that political elites in Kampala have over the years used various urban groups to block the actions of their rivals, undermining formal institutional frameworks and creating an increasing political gridlock. This has resulted in developmental stagnation and the creation of a vacuum of effective authority and an environment hostile to transformative urban policy and

planning.

In relation to the above narrative, Kasozi and Namyalo (2018) assert that political elites in Kampala act as an umbrella for the land grabbers hence making urban communities suffer not only due to little or lack of knowledge with regards to their rights but also because the laws and policies in most African countries do not cater for protection and preservation of these rights. According to these authors, few individuals' voices have been able to surpass intimidation and open up through media or by petitioning parliament.

5. Research methodology

A qualitative research design was used in the study to facilitate the collection and analysis of data that were needed to analyse the issues of land, politics and planning in relation to Kampala's urban sprawl. Primary qualitative data were collected using interviews undertaken with key informants who included community leaders from Buganda, urban dwellers (tenants and landowners) and local council chairpersons (LC), officials from the KCCA planning unit, and the Ministry of Lands, Housing, Urban Planning and Development. Secondary qualitative data were collected using document reviews and observations. Data were analysed using the thematic procedure of the content method of qualitative analysis. The themes were developed according to the context of the variables of the study.

In total ten interviews were conducted between December 2018 and January 2019. In terms of gender, only two females (tenant and landowner) respondents were interviewed as many declined. The focus of the interviews was based on urban land, community engagement and politics. Document analysis was drawn from the KCCA five year plan, Uganda National land policy, and National Physical Planning Standards and Guidelines. For unanimity and ethical reasons, codes were used: A - Buganda community leaders, tenants and landowners, B - land ministry, C - KCCA officials, D - Local Council Chairpersons (LC), E - private land consultant.

6. Land as contextualised in 1998 Uganda's Land Act

The land reform in Uganda according to Kabengwa (2018) incorporates the different land tenure systems laid out in the Land Act of 1998 (customary tenure, freehold, milo and lease hold). The review of the 1998 Land Act reveals that one of the objectives of this Act is to ensure proper planning and well-coordinated development of urban areas. However, it protects the security of land tenure rather than facilitating land development. This makes it weak in promoting planned urbanisation in many of the sprawling suburbs of the city and its surroundings. Indeed, many of the urban development projects proposed by KCCA meet stiff opposition from private landowners, including Buganda Kingdom (Bidandi, 2018; Rugadya, 1999). Moreover, the review of the KCCA Act, 2010 reveals that the powers to enforce and monitor Kampala's urban sprawl are not clearly demarcated among the topmost recognised officials who include the Minister for the Presidency, the Executive Director and the Lord Mayor (MLHUD, 2011; MLHUD, 2013; Bidandi and Williams, 2017). This means that land policies have not been clearly spelt out at city level and as such make it complex to involve people on land matters at the grassroots level. The review revealed further that the National Physical Planning Framework guidelines spell out the standards of plot size and structure, materials, landscaping, parking space, access road, access to utilities and ancillary uses, ventilation, and other aspects that should be observed when putting up any physical developments, be it residential, hostel, commercial or factory.

While the guidelines recognize that attention should be given to the consensus of the various stakeholders involved in approving, monitoring and enforcing development control, they do not specify the kind and level of consensus that should be allowed. However, the Kampala Capital City Act of 2010 as one of the legal instruments to regulate

Kampala's urbanisation reveals that KCCA has the powers to enforce and monitor land use in the city but it is characterised by political wrangles (Bidandi, 2018; Williams and Bidandi, 2018). Excerpts from the interviews indicate that:

'The national land policy needs to be revisited as it causes wrangles in Kampala and has become a contributing factor to corruption, greed, and giving land to non-citizens. Some people are not of Ugandan origin and yet they have control over our land'.

(Interview held with A on the 29th of January 2019)

Because of different land ownership policies, failure to document the land, and lack of transparency from the Ministry of Lands brings confusion. As stats have shown in the text, Kampala is expanding at a very fast pace but without clear planning policies. Besides, politicians play on the ignorance of the masses to steal their land. This has contributed to land grabs by rich people who sometimes sell the land to foreigners.

The above findings point to lapses in Uganda's migration policy and the corruption at the National Identification and Registration Authority (NIRA). Besides, Uganda's migration does not seem to have restrictions on foreigners wishing to buy land in Kampala or elsewhere in the country. This appears to have created a situation in which identity does not matter provided you have money. Furthermore, the 1998 Land Act does not explain in detail the circumstances under which a foreigner should buy land in Uganda (Interview held with B on the 16 January 2019).

The National Physical Planning Standards and Guidelines of 2011 which provide criteria for determining the scale, location and site requirements of various land uses and facilities should be in accordance with Uganda's migration policy in terms of land allocation and financial resources. They should, therefore, be applied with a degree of flexibility. Trade-offs may be necessary so that the community at large can benefit most from the development (B; D). The above views are critical as they speak to Lefebvre's (2009) writing in which he argues that cities are engaged in capitalist processes facilitated by the state with a neoliberal agenda and they seem to misconceive how urban inhabitants engage with the authorities in their everyday life.

Given the rapid expansion of Kampala, it would require that the city authority and central government work collectively with the community and other landowners in order to realise organised planning, especially in new sprawling areas (B). These findings resonate with what Goodfellow (2010) refers to as poor performance of urban planning policies, especially when there seemingly is a limited relationship between city authorities, the community and landowners (Williams, 2008b). It also resonates with Lefebvre's (2009) notion that urban planning is fundamentally a political process, a determining principle of land-use, a factor that ought to be acknowledged in Kampala also.

The findings indicate that government reaction on urban land through the commission of inquiry seems to be achieving some positive results, but according to (B) the land policy and act needs to be revisited to mandate the city and community to be at the helm of the decision-making process so that equitable and balanced spatial distribution of development is realised. Meanwhile (D) recommend that community leaders at grassroots level must be part of the planning process to ensure land is used in the most appropriate manner and in relation to current rapid urban sprawl. Thus, issues discussed in the findings are important in contemporary Uganda and beyond.

7. Community engagement in relation to urban land, politics and planning

Overall, community engagement is a planned two-way technique by which specific, identified groups of the community are given the opportunity to provide input that enhances decision-making processes on issues that could influence their well-being or interests. Bryson et al. (2013) assert that community engagement or participation is an

important aspect of city government in an urban setting since it is useful for urban dwellers and decision-makers. However, according to (A):

'There is no way the community around the city can be engaged about planning of the city due to the following: first, corruption by policy implementers is high, and, second, before you engage the community, you need to conduct some seminars to educate them but nothing is done and the community always take(s) whatever comes from the leaders who in other words are the beneficiaries'.

(Interview, 29th January 2019)

According to respondent (D), the views of the community are hardly taken seriously by the technocrats since the community members themselves do not have a collective voice. Whenever there is a problem, they run to the government. This perceived tendency, therefore, seems to indicate that there is no clear avenue to promote community engagement on land. One technocrat (C) indicated that:

'We have failed our community for reasons I cannot precisely explain, for example, there is an institutional disconnect between ordinary urban dwellers and city authority. The manner in which the city is expanding would mean that we work with landowners and ordinary people if we are to see organised planning especially in new settlements mushrooming all over the city boundaries and the periphery'.

(Interview on 14th January 2019)

In addition, 'what is at play is central government interfering in our work most of the time and therefore this makes it complex to address land and planning challenges'.

(Interview with D on 23rd January 2019)

The above outline of the urban problems in Kampala provides reasons why land issues and the planning challenges the city experiences are seemingly intractable. Perhaps we can think about the village or ward committees as an alternative since they are close to the people. For example, the Constitution of Uganda, 1995, and the Land Act, 1998, provide that land administration moves to the districts and sub-institutions of district land boards operating independently of the Uganda Land Commission (B). However, Ojambo (2012) argues that the decentralised land system is a mere political ploy rather than a genuine effort to promote engagement. It is noteworthy, therefore, to argue that the realities of community engagement in Kampala are substituted by politics. What would seem to be at play here are temporal dimensions of power relations of who and how people are involved in planning decision-making processes.

It is also important to note that community engagement bridges the gap between city planners and other built environments (Hendriks, 2014; Konsti-Laakso and Rantala, 2018; Williams, 2006). Moreover, with planning policy for development being focused on land use allocation in most cases, engaging local people in the process would seem difficult, but surely they can be motivated to engage if the grounds on which you engage them are related to genuine development. This understanding seems to imply that engaging communities or participation on urban issues in Kampala would require central governments' political will, especially when human and financial resources are involved.

In context, without such arrangements, community engagement seems to be too dependent on personal relationships built between particular technocrats and community members, which are easily lost if the people involved change. As Seto et al. (2011) indicate, community engagement is primarily a relational process that operates at a local level. It is, therefore, an important aspect both in general and in relation to planning and land matters (Williams, 2007). It should be a widely held value of contemporary urban governance and management. This is an indication that a range of policy and administrative issues need to be carried out since some of the existing structures are just on paper but not practised for communities to engage government at all levels. Stewart and Lithgow (2015) argue that excluding urban dwellers in

urban-related issues that affect them, be it land or planning, erases the idea of having meaningful community participation in the area of decision-making. To have orderly planning with an exceedingly informed population, Kampala should be a space for community engagement in many aspects of urban planning and land use. The truth is that community engagement seems to remain at the lower end of the scale of participatory city governance, particularly in politics (Williams, 2008b). In contrast, communities enthusiastically come together during the electoral process but hardly do the same when they have pressing issues such as land. The general perception of respondents on community engagement indicates that:

'Early 1986 to about 1990 there was an attempt by the central government to engage the locals on some programs but corruption started growing and killed the plan and seem to have died forever according to respondent' (D).

Meanwhile, respondent B, indicates that:

'The attempted engagement in this particular circumstance could have been purely political not on matters of the city and its challenges. It could also be said that the technocrats have aligned themselves to party politics than serving the interest of urban communities. Moreover, corruption, in this case, has been more about politicians buying electorates to vote for candidates who promise them good returns which in the case could a job, a plot of land or any other'.

(Interview on 16th January 2019)

Fundamentally, the above finding reveals how the issue of land and planning seems to be influenced by politics and limited understanding of urban sprawl (Goodfellow, 2010).

For respondent C, it could make sense if politicians focus more on a city's sprawl but not on the people's future needs, especially those who now live at the periphery where there is no proper sanitation, transport and general infrastructural development to say the least.

This analysis points to what Scott (2013) and Jones et al. (2014) describe as expanding beyond boundaries without recognising or bearing in mind the number of services needed in newly established estates. While these authors give a good account of urban sprawl, they ignore the notion of community engagement. However, based on our observation the majority of the people in the city's new estates have no access to proper sanitation and water. Pit latrines and septic tanks are the most common sanitation facilities. To some extent, people buy cheap land outside the city and establish estates without the approval of the city government. Sometimes they bribe city officials to approve the plan and the worst challenge now is land grabbing since most of our people obtain land through trust.

Respondent D pointed out that:

'That is to say that the community used to be the guarantor when one buys land. Also, there are cases where people from the land registry forge certificate of ownership they establish that one's land is not registered. This has created a trust deficit among the population to government and yet engagement requires that government provides a mechanism to protect people's land even if not registered with the land ministry'.

(Interview 23 January 2019)

Meanwhile, E had this to say:

'In my view, though politics seem to act in the form of community engagement, it brings a lot of confusion and misunderstanding. For example, in many cases where politicians are supposed to work with the community on matters of the city, they instead take advantage to grab people's land since most of our people inherited the land. It is a huge problem that is why you see those with money don't go through proper procedures'.

(Interview 24th January 2019)

The above finding resonates with the case of Muyanja Hussein versus Mubiru Christopher (civil suit no. 0129 of 2010[2018] UGHCCD 29 May 2018) in which the court established that the evidence of purchase was actually illegal and fraudulently obtained documents were used to acquire land. As Bryson et al. (2013) argue, urban dwellers like any other community are commonly characterised by different collective engagements, such as planning, and land should have shared space in which they deliberate on issues which affect them daily. This is a situation in which the desired understanding or involvement is upheld by players who do not share common political power relations or engagement (Williams, 2007). To address this predicament, we should be reminded that involving communities in urban issues can provide the necessary tool for reducing land tensions and grabbing. Community engagement techniques can facilitate decision-making processes concerning complex urban social environmental or planning problems. Lefebvre's idea of the right to the city seems to indicate deep concern about urban conditions and the everyday life people go through on a daily basis such as land grabbing, poor planning, mushrooming of slums, and poor health services among others. While politics is the guarantor of land for investment, it complicates the orderly urban planning process, as further clarified here below.

8. Urban land and politics

Politics plays an important role in influencing urban activities, be it economic, social or any other (Harvey, 2003). However, politics can produce several negativities, for example, land grabbing, land tension, corruption, poor urban planning and a negative effect on the urban environment among others. Findings show that politicians use bribes or their influence to put up structures in places gazetted as a wetland, for example, and sometimes do not follow KCCA guidelines. Findings further show that land problems in Kampala seem to emanate from the land registry whereby a lot of dubious transactions by politicians have been exposed by the Bamugemeire commission. Extant literature indicates that politics in most cases produces unwarranted tensions and has a negative impact on planning, especially when dubious land matters are recorded but no serious prosecution is taken by urban authorities (Magigi and Drescher, 2010; Seltzer and Mahmoudi, 2012; Tritter and McCallum, 2006). Seltzer and Mahmoudi (2012) mention that engaging communities on land matters without the involvement of politics assists urban authorities to establish legitimacy for the planning effort, and addresses the moral and ethical commitment for planners to ensure that those who are the most affected by a given decision have a hand in making it, thereby developing a robust and possibly the widest set of views. Study findings show that engagement is the act of creating new knowledge and contributing new perspectives with other stakeholder groups. This perspective, according to Tritter and McCallum (2006), improves the knowledge foundations of planning processes. The general views from the interviews indicate that:

'Since there are political fights within the constituencies making up greater Kampala, there will be no effective or orderly planning taking place. Because of fighting for power, two issues emerge (1) there is heightened degree of corruption which affects any positive planning to take place especially in new areas; (2) dictatorship from the central government also is one of the reasons that hinder any proper plan to take place as well as lack of nationalism'.

(Interview held with A on the 29th January 2019)

The above findings seem to suggest that the tensions between political parties are more about power relations and management of the city rather than people's needs. This is evident during electioneering when political parties manufacture consent to claim the mandate of the people when in fact is just the marriage of convenience to get votes. After the electoral process, people don't seem to matter anymore. For example, according to (B):

'The state contradicts the city bylaws and politics are used to allocate land in the city which in essence has a negative effect on the planning process. Yet, there are other conditions such as budget, protection, and diversity of the city population which are not put into consideration'.

(Interview on the 16th of January 2019)

The findings above resonate with the views of Stewart and Lithgow (2015) discussed earlier in the text.

Meanwhile (C) indicates that: "leadership, administration, and people inland office are linked to the ruling party and as such creates a lot of compromises regarding the management and administration of land in Kampala". For (D) it is about lack of clarity in the law established by the Kampala Capital City Authority as it is problematic and politicians use the loopholes to make land decisions which are contrary to the law and this further exacerbates land conflict and tensions. The findings above seem to relate to what Kasozi and Namyalo (2018) have in fact alluded to, especially with regard to how the elites in Kampala act as an umbrella for the land grabbers. Hence this could be attributed to three diverse but related challenges: lack of a clear city policy framework, the misuse of power by the elites to get resources such as land, and corruption in which public funds are diverted for political activities.

The findings above point to what Seltzer and Mahmoudi (2012) describe as a moral and ethical commitment of urban authorities, particularly the ways in which decisions are made which are usually different from what is actually practised. This understanding is a true reflection of the general situation in Kampala as politicians usually use their influence to manipulate public institutions for their individual self-gain. Magigi and Drescher (2010) and Goodfellow (2010) indicate that the contestations in urban spaces seem to escalate conflict over urban land and the poor performance of urban planning and its related land laws and policies. However, Lefebvre (2009) asserts that urban spaces on which a range of social-economic entities such as recreation, transport, sanitation, solid waste management and others take place should take place without political interference. The findings further reflect what Blomley (2004), Kandel (2017), Mutabazi (2018) and Kaweesa (2018) indicated earlier in the text.

Generally, there are no clear indicators of a commitment to meaningful and substantive, transformative community engagement in planning processes. The overriding attitude appearing among officials was that they know what people want and therefore engaging the community is not essential. This could simply mean that politicians unconsciously make assumptions and judgement about people's views without necessarily understanding their needs! Besides, the state through its security apparatus has created fear among people, making it difficult for the community to, for example, use demonstrations as a form of engagement. As one respondent observed, "We know what people's needs are" (A). This attitude seems to be a technocratic approach to planning, thus opposing the notion that local knowledge processes assist in shaping policies and implementing services.

9. Urban sprawl in relation to politics, planning and community engagement

Polidoro, De Lollo and Barros (2012) describe urban sprawl as the leapfrogging of development characterised by unrestricted expansion which occurs considerably in unplanned poor residential settings. Some indicators of urban sprawl include encroachment on public land by people with authority, difficulties in accessing public services (such as health, education, water, sanitation, etc.), creation of new urbanisation (usually in the form of slums), and inability by city government to plan for new areas (Hasse & Lathrop, 2003). Though urban sprawl could be a significant characteristic of urban development, it is important to understand the ways in which cities expand since they vary according to specific norms and standards. To understand urban sprawl, there first

needs to be understanding of land utilisation alongside planning, politics and community participation.

However, according to Kaggwa, Hogan and Gowa (2004) urban expansion brings with it scandalous land grabs especially when the process is done without considering the involvement of communities in new urban areas. While Kaggwa et al. (2004) seem to discuss the consideration of community involvement, they fail to discuss in detail problems associated with urban sprawl. Consequently, the city outskirts suffer from the lack of quality infrastructure, as well as difficulties in transportation due to the precarious system of public transport to new areas where housing and land seem cheap to afford by many (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Jones, Cummings and Nixon (2014) argue that urban sprawl influences the available space for service infrastructure and economic activities but the author fails to account for the role of the community members and their understanding of urban growth challenges. In context, studies conducted about Kampala's urban sprawl indicate that the city is characterised by lack of proper zoning of economic activities and construction of formal physical infrastructure without regard to the subsequent spatial quality and environmental conservation (Somik, 2012; Rwakakamba, 2009; Hepworth & Goulden, 2008). Excerpt from one of the respondents A:

> 'Kampala's expansion has fuelled land grabbing including what the community use for farming. This would in the near future cause food crisis if action is not taken. The city is urbanising rapidly and the land planned land for agriculture is gradually being occupied by settlers. If we don't plan for our city, it means we will have uneven development'.
>
> (Interview 29th January 2019)

This seems to indicate that Kampala's sprawl depicts sharp differences in residential standards where expensive housing co-exists with shantytowns and informal settlements, with about 60% of the city's population living in unplanned residences and using very dirty, largely potholed and narrow roads with no street lights (Lwasa, 2014). Other studies show that Kampala's sprawl is typified by deteriorating environmental health characterised by air and noise pollution (Kashaka, 2014; National Environment Management Authority, 2012).

Another respondent (C) pointed out that:

> 'Kampala's urban sprawl typically exhibits poor planning which in essence has resulted in traffic congestion, crime and other problems we experienced in the city today. There are places in Kampala difficult to stay because of crime especially on the periphery. Such places are cheap due to the nature of settlements. If we are to enjoy our city like beautiful cities in Europe and elsewhere in the world, then proper planning should start with the new mushrooming suburbs'.
>
> (Interview 14th January 2019)

This means that planned urbanisation enables the cities to perform their cardinal roles in driving economic development without political influence as earlier indicated. Nonetheless, Kasozi (2013) points out that city peripherals, including Kampala, have similar challenges especially in cases where construction of houses takes place and swamps and green belts are closely interspaced with muddy huts in slums (Kasozi, 2013; Nyende, 2010). Hence there is the need to understand urban land, politics and planning in relation to Kampala's sprawl.

10. Conclusion

The paper has discussed urban land, politics and planning in the context of Kampala's urban sprawl. We argue that, as cities expand, they generate enormous complexities, which include, among others, space for housing and a range of other services. Key themes include urban land, politics, urban sprawl, and community engagement. Land is contextualised from the 1998 Uganda's Land Act. The possible

consequences for Kampala's urban land include land grabbing, disorganised planning, unclear urban policy and conflict among political office-bearers. While studies point to historical factors as a problem with regard to urban land, politics and planning, they seem to ignore community engagement as an important factor.

The study findings were analysed and presented in relation to existing scholarship and, theoretically, buttressed by Henri Lefebvre's writings on the production of space and right to the city. The study findings indicate that government's response to prevailing contradictions, tensions characterizing urban land, by appointing commission of inquiry seems to be achieving some measure of positive results. Even so, with the view to sustain such positive results, progressively, the land policy act has to be revisited to mandate/empower both the city and communities to steer the decision-making processes for the equitable and inclusive spatial distribution of development in Kampala and environs. Moreover, results have also shown that there is an institutional disconnect between ordinary urban dwellers and the city authority.

Further, findings show that urban sprawl in the global south, and Kampala in particular, typically exhibits an absence of community engagement and we argue that urbanisation should be community-driven. Finally, we recommend that further studies be carried out on community engagement in relation to intractable and emerging urban issues.

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