

Public Space Policy Analysis in Uganda: Parks and Playgrounds, Streets, and Markets

Public spaces – parks, open and green spaces, markets and streets – play a major role in making cities inclusive, resilient, and sustainable. This role is, however, largely dependent on the existence, implementation, and promotion of robust policies and legislation including explicit inclusion of these spaces in urban plans. The analysis below assesses the quantity, quality, accessibility and usability of public space in Uganda’s capital city Kampala and the supportive environment (policies, legislation and plans) .

1. Parks, playgrounds and open spaces

Public parks and open green spaces have been recognized as an international priority through its inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals. Target 11.7 under the Cities Goal states: By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities.

Availability and quality of parks, open spaces

Two studies, conducted by Advocates for Public Spaces (APS) between 2015 -2016, examined the availability, location and quality of local parks and public spaces in Kampala. These studies established an acute shortage of the spaces in the capital city. The first study –Availability and Quality of Parks in Kampala – performed systematic observations of the parks in all divisions of Kampala to:

- identify all park categories including public, private, school grounds open to the public,
- activities at the parks including green spaces, paths, sports fields, play grounds, other activities,
- attractiveness to users including cleanliness, accessibility and facilities.

APS also conducted interviews with 70 park users and residents living within a 1,200 m radius of a selected sample of case study parks to identify perceptions about the accessibility, attractiveness and use of parks.

Acute shortage: The study found only 14 parks that could be described as public, which is too few to provide the majority of city residents with access to a park close to their homes. The parks that exist are of poor quality and primarily serve the sports activities of adult males. The shortage affects low-income city dwellers who

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are less likely to have a public park within proximity of their homes. Commercial developers continue to encroach on the available public space. A significant number of parks and open spaces available to the public are private spaces or those owned by private schools and therefore have the potential to be restricted to public access either by stopping people from using the spaces or charging entrance fees. Most of the open space are located in the inner city (Central Division) leaving the outlying suburbs, where the poorest residents live, with less spaces for recreation.

Quality of spaces: Most of the space have some green space with soil surfaced and unplanned paths but fewer sports fields and playgrounds, especially for children and women. Almost a half of the sports fields, where they exist, can be described as below average and poor. A shortage of user facilities such as playgrounds, shelters, toilets, lights and security, and access sidewalks along access roads is a major drawback at the majority of the open spaces, especially the public ones.

The second study – Informal spaces for active recreation and children play in Kampala slums, Uganda – examined the informal spaces. Informal spaces are not officially recognized as parks or other public spaces and may exist within and near slums. The objectives of the study was: to identify, describe, and map informal open spaces in Kampala Capital City slums where children play; and, to better understand the perceptions of such spaces by slum dwellers, including desired improvements. The study involved direct observation survey of informal open spaces in (and near) the selected 10 slum areas, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted in informal open spaces used by slum dwellers.

Informal spaces bridges the space shortage: The study found the informal spaces greatly increased the coverage of space for recreation. However, the informal spaces were crowded and the safety conditions in most spaces were poor, especially for children and women. The majority of spaces are private yards. Some spaces are located on empty lots and in alleys. Football is the dominant sports activity, found at 97.1% of informal open spaces surveyed. The FGD participants expressed the desire to upgrade informal open spaces to official parks, owned and managed by the surrounding community.

The supportive environment

Urban leaders and developers often attribute the acute shortage of parks, open and green spaces to lack of resources and land. However, lack of an explicit policy, understanding of the benefits of the spaces, political will, plus public engagement over the matter, continues to undermine the capacity to explore and use all possibilities to address the shortage of parks, open and green spaces.



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There is no specific policy on parks, playgrounds and open spaces in Uganda. Provisions are scattered across different pieces of legislation and plans. The laws are explicit on the protection, preservation and maintenance of the planned parks, open and green spaces but silent on the creation of these spaces.

- The Physical Planning Act, 2010 [Section 32(e)] requires a physical planning committee to ensure the preservation of all land planned for open spaces, parks, urban forests and green belts, environmental areas and physical infrastructure in accordance with the approved physical development plan. The Fifth Schedule addresses the matters to be dealt with in the district, urban and local physical development plans. This includes requiring that the development plans should classify the planned areas for commercial, residential, industrial, agricultural, as well as public and private open spaces.
- The Public Health (School Buildings) Rules SI. 281-20- require every school to have an open space, where possible, adjacent to the school to be used as playground. This requirement is flouted by many mushrooming private schools that do not have playgrounds.
- The Local Governments (Kampala City Council) [Maintenance of Law and Order Ordinance 2006 section 1(a)] provides for the proper layout, equipment, maintenance and control of parks for use by the public. Section 5 provides for the rules for conduct in a park by the public which includes safety of infrastructure, cleanliness, litter and rubbish. Section 27 outlines the offences and penalties for non-compliance.
- The Country Programme Document 2016-2021 Uganda: Support to Sustainable Development in Uganda identifies the lack of public spaces as one of the challenges of urban development. But while it identifies the opportunity to protect and preserve public spaces, they not included among the priority areas and issues to be addressed in the programme.

Whereas local governments, cities, municipalities and town councils are well placed to design policies, bylaws and plans on parks and open spaces, a specific inclusion of parks and open spaces in the national urban policy framework is necessary to provide direction on how the nation can provide for the recreation needs of its population. This will provide guidance on the public interest and compelling need to provide land for the parks, location to ease accessibility, design to attract usability, quality to address safety issues, management and funding.



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Recommendations:

- Increase the number of public parks and open spaces in the city with a specific focus on areas where low-income residents live.
- When designing new parks, consider all the activities that residents will undertake in that park including playgrounds, sports fields, seating, toilets, and water taps.
- City authorities need to improve streets bordering parks by putting in place safe footpaths, street crossing aids, and speed limits.
- When designing or re-designing parks, the city authorities should use a community engagement model and undertake the improvements with the community.

2. Non-Motorised Transport (NMT)

Sustainable transportation, which includes walking and cycling, is recognized as an international priority through its inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals. Target 11.2 under the Cities Goal states: By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

Walkability in Kampala

There is a shortage of pedestrian infrastructure and this has an impact on the walkability of the city, which is documented well in a 2018 study on the relationship between perceived walkability, built environment, and pedestrian route choice (Riemens S.C.A 2018). The study sought to assess how (a) road users in Kampala perceive walkability, (b) the state of built walk environment, (c) how users make walk route choices (can built environment characteristics explain how they make their choices?), and, (d) how pedestrians navigate through those walk routes.

According to the findings, walkability is perceived to be better in the city centre than the surrounding sub-urban



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and slum areas. This is explained by the difference in infrastructure quality. The built environment suffers from decades of neglect. Motor vehicles are given more than their fair share of road space leaving pedestrians are sandwiched between open sewers and speeding vehicles. The alternative is walking through slums, which can be prone to flooding and security issues.

The findings further show that walking was positively impacted by the state of the road surface. This is considered more important than the condition of the pavement. The later could be explained by the widespread non-existence of walking pavements especially in the suburbs. In addition pavements are considered considered more as a privilege than a right. Open drainage and presence of children(unexpected) too have a negative influence on the choice of route for pedestrians. Low or no liter, presence of police or guards, road being in a decent condition, low and medium crowdedness were positive influences on route choice.

The supportive environment

Currently, the challenge with improving the walking and cycling environment is not so much the lack of policy as its implementation. The Non-Motorized Transportation (NMT) policy 2016 has the primary objective to increase recognition of NMT as one of the key transport modes and essential components of public transport.

The specific objectives of this policy include: increase and recognize walking and cycling in planning, design and infrastructure provision; provide infrastructure for pedestrians and cyclists; mainstream resources for NMT in agency's financial planning; improve regulation and enforcement to enhance safety for pedestrians and cyclists; and, provide guidelines for the inclusion of NMT within transport projects.

The NMT policy was passed in 2016 long after the current roads were designed and constructed without considering the needs of pedestrians and cyclists. Some attempts are being made to include pedestrian sidewalk ways but cyclists' lanes are yet to be considered at all. The second Kampala Institutional and Infrastructure Development Project (KIDP-2), in an effort to improve urban mobility, provides for street lights and sidewalks for pedestrians in the city-wide infrastructure plans.

Recommendations:

- All road infrastructure, design, and development should provide for walking and cycling, which includes providing safe, comfortable and connected sidewalks and cycle lanes as well as safe crossings at intersections.



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- Streets should be considered as places as well as mobility corridors and should be designed to include trees to provide shade, benches for sitting, and spaces for informal vendors to sell their products.
- Urban development plans should contain urban sprawl and ensure that the distances people must travel are shorter. Mixed uses should be adopted for every neighbourhood so that people are able to live, work and play within their neighbourhoods.

3. Fresh Food Markets

The urban population in Uganda is growing at a rapid rate. Ensuring people have access to fresh and healthy food markets is critically important, especially in the context of sprawling supermarkets in the urban centres. These supermarkets, based on global experience, are not known to offer affordable fresh and health foods. Yet, fresh food markets can only flourish under a supportive environment composed of sound policies, laws and strategic plans.

Market availability and quality

APS conducted a study of local markets in 2019 to better understand the situation of markets in Kampala. This study discovered that most of the markets in Kampala capital city are privately owned with only a few publicly owned by Kampala capital City Authority (KCCA). The majority of markets (48%) operate under temporary structures and only 29% have paved walkways within the markets. Garbage disposal is a problem at most of the markets. At 71% of the markets, garbage is disposed or dumped in and around the market space instead of garbage bins where provided.

Nearly a half (48%) of the markets do not have seating facilities where shoppers can sit and wait. Although 62% of the markets are considered somewhat safe, more than half of the markets do not have sufficient lights and emergency exits, which partly explains why there is an increase in the number of markets considered somewhat unsafe during the night (86%).

Nearly half (46%) of the vendors interviewed sell fresh produce and others consumer goods and rely mostly on motorized transport to ferry their stock of fresh foods. Two-thirds (61%) of the vendors used their own savings for the initial working capital to start their businesses. Many vendors bring children to the markets, partly due to lack of strict enforcement of the regulations prohibiting children from market stalls. The situation is compounded



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by the lack designated spaces for children at most of the markets.

Supportive environment

While in the past establishing and maintaining markets was the responsibility of local governments (Markets Act 1942 Cap 94), under the Local Governments (Kampala Capital City) Ordinance 15 (2006), private entities can apply and be given permission and a license to establish markets. This has given rise to the establishment of privately-owned markets alongside the public ones managed by KCCA. By 2018, there were 84 markets in Kampala city, with KCCA owning seven (7) with an 8th co-owned with a private entity.

The Ordinance also outlines the acceptable conduct within the markets. The Ordinance prohibits: vendors from letting any part of the fresh foods come in contact with the ground; playing loud music and games; bars and lodges; slaughtering of animals, birds and fish; and motor vehicles. It also requires the layout and design of markets to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities. However, our study suggested that these rules were not adhered to in every market.

Recommendation:

- There is need to develop a policy for fresh food markets to provide guidance on matters of location and accessibility in walking distance to places of work or abode accessibility, stocking of fresh foods, layout and design and funding for publicly owned markets.
- Safety and hygiene issues need to be addressed in the market setting including timely and proper garbage disposal and sufficient drainage. Many markets lack sufficient fire and emergency exits and most lack appropriate fire extinguishers.
- There is little or nothing to do for the many children that spend their days in the market. Decision makers should explore creating playgrounds for children's recreation to improve the markets as an important community public space.

