



The Evolution, Formation and Development of Namatala Slum of Mbale Municipality, Uganda

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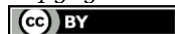
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Abstract

Namatala, is the largest slum in the industrial division of Mbale Municipality in Eastern Uganda, having depicted the strongest patterns of urban infill and sprawl between 2003 and 2013. The aim of this paper is to assess the evolution, formation, and development of Namatala slum drawing attention to the various challenges in the slum area in order to develop a place-centered approach for considering sustainable development solutions. The study targeted households in the slum area collecting data through observation, survey questionnaires, key stakeholder interviews and focus group discussions. It was found that Namatala is a significantly disadvantaged location; wrought with poverty, inadequate social amenities, poor housing, lack of solid waste management, lack of essential infrastructure, and inadequate access to clean water, safe sanitation facilities and security of tenure. This problem is largely attributable to lack of place-specific policy implementation of the national policies and guidelines inappropriate regulation, dysfunctional land markets, unresponsive financial systems, and a fundamental lack of political will. More so, there is absence of the means for public engagement.

Introduction

In developing economies, a growing proportion of the population lives in urban areas. Urbanization draws people from rural areas to urban centers, expanding its population and resulting in the generation of unplanned informal settlements with an impoverished urban population (UN-Habitat, 2011). Considerable pressure is exerted on housing, transport, water, health, education, social welfare, and employment resulting into slum formation characterized by poverty and environmental problems (National Planning Authority, 2017). This is because knowledge about their nature and solutions is imperfect (Levin, et al., 2012).



Metens (2015) classifies these problems as super wicked problems since first, social inequalities, poor health, lack of access to education and poverty are increasing; second, their solutions are time barred; third, there is a lack of coherent city-wide set of urban policies to address them; and lastly, because the people trying to solve the problems are also causing them.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals number 11 describes typical slums in developing countries as unplanned informal settlements where access to services is minimal or non-existent and where overcrowding is the norm. Slums can also be defined as ‘neglected parts of cities where housing and living conditions are appallingly poor’ and the words ‘slum’ and ‘informal settlements’ can be used interchangeably (UN-HABITAT, 2012). This study adopted the UN Habitat view that slums and informal settlements are one and the same thing therefore looking into its formation and development. While development remains a contested, complex and ambiguous concept, meaning; unfolding, growth, becoming fuller, working out of details or bringing out latent potential (Todaro & Smith, 2011), it has therefore been used in this study to represent the bringing out of the latent potentials of communities through community empowerment, engagement and participation.

Review of Related Studies

The growth of slums has been influenced by many factors among them rural-to-urban migration/uncontrolled urbanization, poor urban governance, location, and poorly designed policies. The aforementioned factors are discussed in the following subsections.

Rural-to-urban migration

Developing countries are especially impacted given the low capacity to cater for the influx from rural areas (Addas, 2015). People living in rural areas are mostly attracted (pulled) to cities by perceived better economic opportunities, provision of basic services such as education and healthcare within cities (Khan & Kraemer, 2014). They also move to seek freedom from restrictive social or cultural norms often found in rural areas (Mahabir, et al., 2016). Push factors include poverty, threat from natural disasters or conflict and war. With nowhere else to go, migrants end up in slums to meet their most basic housing needs (Vasudevan, 2015).

Poor urban governance

Urban governance sums up the many ways in which both public and private individuals and institutions, plan and manage the common affairs of the city in a continuing process (Resnick, 2021). In many countries, Local and national governments fail to enforce the planning regulations due to lack of resources. Urban governance systems also prevent urban governments from fully delivering on their responsibilities through inadequate decentralization, insufficient resources, poor capacity and weak frameworks for engagement with key stakeholders. As a result, common citizens suffer from poor public service delivery and they end up procuring services from informal, expensive yet unsafe channels. Government regulations are often bypassed by slum dwellers to meet their housing needs (Mahabir, et al., 2016). High land rates for instance present a challenge for slum dwellers, who do not have access to finances.

Location

Location is affected by social, cultural, and economic factors. It was established that the location-based choices made by slum dwellers were also guided by the quality of housing



and social amenities. There is a significant relationship between social ties, language and common culture which have been found to influence locational choices of new immigrants (Barnhardt, et al., 2017). Some slum dwellers perceive places outside of slums to be out of their reach (Brookins, et al., 2011). This suggests that any efforts to address the issue of slums must also consider the surrounding social structures. Slums develop in marginal locations such as steep slopes, riverbanks or dumping grounds (Sietchiping, 2005) posing risks to human life Namatala is one of such slums located on a wetland and at the banks of River Namatala (Mafabi, 2016).

Poorly designed policies

The continued failure of implementation of sound slum policies has facilitated the propagation of slums. In part, this is due to the inability of governments to fully understand the needs of slum dwellers and incorporate their needs when developing appropriate policies (Brown, 2012). There is, therefore, an emerging great need for policy makers to engage with both progressive and retrogressive slum policies for the benefit of slum dwellers. They should therefore address the issues more systematically, understand these actors and processes better and be able to identify when and how to support them more effectively (Twigg & Mosel, 2018).

The form and evolution of Slums

Slums are increasingly being viewed as integral places to a city as the slum population provides cheap work force, which actually helps develop and improve the city's economy. In this regard, slums need proper planning, control and management (Avuni, 2011). While planning for future urban expansion and development, it may be better to produce a simple spatial strategy document that could be updated every year by staff of a city's urban planning department. The emphasis of such a document would be on the current spatial situation and spatial trends whose objectives would be on ensuring housing and land affordability and adequate mobility (World Bank, 2012).

Slums have been in existence since the beginning of urbanization and are therefore, have been an inevitable part of modern urbanization and the choice, therefore, is to decide the vision for the slum of the future, the role of the slum, its design and purpose and how it can be transformed to create assets rather than liabilities (Brown, 2012). In this study, focus is laid upon economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects of Namatala slum, and the interaction by various agencies, including the government, third sector groups and the slum dwellers to bring about sustainable development (Avis, 2015). Cities need to recognize that the urban poor are active agents of economic growth. Policy makers should thus be concerned with how to integrate slums into the cities in a sustainable way rather than with slum eradication (Sori, 2012).

The absence of adequate knowledge on the evolution and subsequent development of slums over the course of time in Sub Saharan African (SSA) countries has resulted in ineffective urban planning and prevented the initiatives from alleviating the problem. The knowledge gap compounded with the lack of relevant theories and concepts developed from empirical analysis to explain the evolution, growth and spatial characteristics of Slum Development Stages (SDS) have led to persistence of slum-related problems. In Uganda, the second national government development plan reports that the progress in improving the lives of slum dwellers has been slow (National Planning Authority, 2015), hence the need to conduct this study in finding out how the Namatala slum was formed and therefore formulate policies that can break the cycle of exclusion and injustice for the urban poor.



Methodology

This study employed mixed method research design to establish the evolution, formation and development of Namatala slum in Mbale, Uganda. By involving the affected communities, the study included qualitative relationship building in order to take into account the quality of living and allow communities to contribute to the understanding of the problem themselves and involve stakeholders from the policy, program and community levels and work towards problem identification and solutions (Mertens, 2014). The data collection methods involved the use of face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions and questionnaires. Google maps were also used to produce images that displayed land-use patterns of the area for the past ten years. Further, an urbanization audit was performed to measure and define the physical delineation and development of Namatala slum, measuring urban growth, urban infill, and urban change.

In order to determine the sample size for the study, the following method was used. The total number of households (N) 1080 $e = 0.02$ Therefore, the sample was represented by:

$$n = 1080 / (1 + 1080 * 0.02 * 0.02) n = 758$$

Sample determination for strata

In this respect so as to explain the development of Namatala as a place and how it is changing, the physical delineation and its development and growth, an urbanization audit was conducted with the author focusing on use of Transect walks, Place analysis, Building survey and Cartographic analysis as data collection instruments. Google maps and cartographic analysis provided a source of information on participant observation. Through the urbanization audit, the profile of the Namatala slum using Google maps of the area over a ten-year period was established and a further delineation of the slum done to show its development. This involved the measurement of urban growth, urban infill, and urban change over ten years from 2003 to 2013. Google images were analysed to provide building counts. Quantitative data was deductively analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were inductively analyzed using a constant comparative method of analysis to code data, identify themes and emerging patterns and categorize findings (Creswell & Clark, 2010). More so, photographs of individuals or objects in the slum being used as the source of evidence. The use of visual material in social research has increased in recent years (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015).

Results and Discussion

This paper examines the location of Namatala, giving a snapshot of its urban spatial geography and what it looked like between 2003 to 2013, tracing the origin and evolution of Namatala Slum and providing a physical delineation of the slum. Further the study covers the urbanization theme by measuring the urban growth, infill and change of Namatala slum and, by so doing, examines the spatial patterns and dynamics of the slum.

Location of Namatala Slum

Namatala is a slum found in Mbale Municipality in the Northern division (see Figure 1, 2, and 3). It is located in the industrial division of the Municipality with a population of 24,123 (UBOS, 2016). Namatala ward is made up of 8 cells: Somero, Mvule, Sisye, Nyanza, Wandawa, Doko, Bubirabi and Kiduda. However, to date, more cells have been created for political reasons.

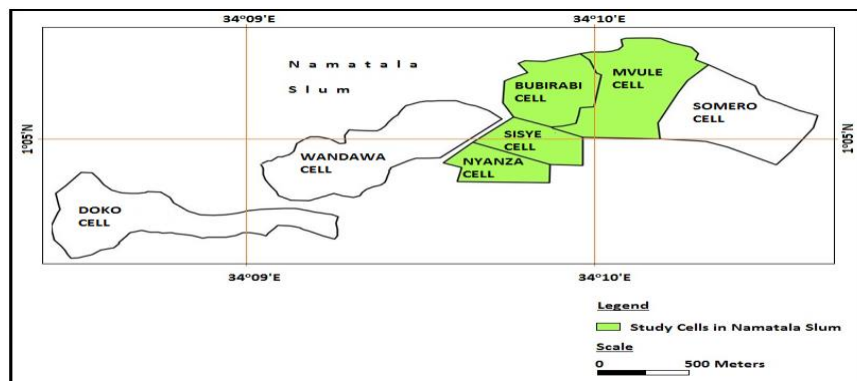


Figure 1: Namatala slum by Cells

Source: Field Data

The Origin of Namatala Slum

Namatala slum came to prominence due to the existence of Mbale town. Mafabi terms Namatala as a 'slum region' within Mbale (Mafabi, 2016). Mbale, in the local language, Bagisu, originally means a stone, 'Mabale'. Mbale town is nearly 110 years old, with its origins traced as far back as the late 19th century, when Arab slave traders ventured into the interior of East Africa and set up a commercial outpost at the foot of Wanale ridge, a part of Mt. Elgon (UN-Habitat, 2011). The town became a regional center hosting regional offices to date and becoming the first town in Uganda to be granted the status of an urban authority after independence. More so, Mbale remains one of the most competitive and appealing business centers in eastern Uganda due to its close proximity to the Kenyan boarder (UN-Habitat, 2011).

The population of the Mbale municipality was estimated at 96,189 in the 2014 census (UBOS, 2016). It is distributed in the three divisions with the largest being Industrial Division with 42,310 (UBOS, 2016). The Industrial Division had the largest population which is attributed to immigration (IOM, 2013). Many of these people live in slums. An estimated 42,310 reside in the Industrial Division where Namatala ward settlement a slum and a parish in Mbale Municipality, is located. The slum is the largest in Mbale with an estimated population of 24,123 people (UBOS, 2016). Around 40-45% of the people living in Mbale slums are from Mbale, Karamoja (Kotido, Moroto and Nakapiripirit districts). Others are mainly from the Teso sub-region (Katakwi, Amuria, Soroti, Kumi, Bukedea and Kaberamaido districts) and Acholi sub-region (Gulu, Kitgum, Pader and Lira districts), and from other districts, like in the West Nile-Arua sub-region (Mcelroy, et al., 2012). Most of these residents left their rural homes to escape from drought, civil unrest, and natural disasters such as floods and landslides, as well as to search for employment. The residents of Namatala were forced to relocate from their original homes because of socio-economic, environmental and political reasons, including insecurity and civil wars (Dolan, 2009). More people have joined the slum over time due to civil unrest, drought, natural disasters like floods and landslides leading to the creation of more zones (Mafabi, 2016).

Most people took refuge in this area to escape wars and insecurity that were widespread in their ancestral homelands. Firstly, Uganda suffered largely due to the actions of Joseph Kony who instigated a war in Northern and Eastern Uganda that lasted for almost two decades (Mcelroy, et al., 2012). Between 2006 and 2007, the Karimojong people also fled



from armed conflict in their home area caused by the government’s disarmament exercise (Mary, 2010).

Namatala was occupied in the 1970’s and 1980’s when there was an insurgence in the north. The insurgence drew people from Karamoja, Northern Uganda and Teso who were regarded as refugees, to the extent that the government catered for them in 1986. The government provided them with their needs such as food. However, when the northern region was fighting against the present government, the government decided not to help them, so the people remained in Mbale in great numbers, most of them have not gone back and they have no help. These areas have remained unplanned and eventually turned into informal settlements like Namatala (Mbale Development Forum, 2018). Many of the rural-urban migrants end up in Namatala due to the high costs of living in the town. As a result, these people have faced challenges due to changes in their livelihood options (MCelroy, et al., 2012). These migrant populations, majorly the poor people, end up settling in informal settlements which previously were not settled because of their conditions partly being wetlands and also lacking the physical

Table 1: Ethnic Representation in Namatala

Ethnic group	Bubirabi	Mvule	Nyanza	Sisye	Mean (%)
Bagishu	35%	14%	50%	65%	41
Itesos	21%	39%	10%	7%	19
Karamojong	25%	36%	2%	4%	17
Others	8%	7%	13%	4%	8
Bagwere	2%	1%	11%	8%	6
Basoga	4%	1%	8%	8%	5
Baganda	5%	2%	6%	4%	4

Source: Field Data, N= 758

The population of Namatala slum thus originated from the Eastern (62%) and Northern (33%) regions of Uganda. The Bagishu, Ateso and Karamonjong are predominant in the slum. The largest ethnic group in Namatala was found to be the Bagishu (41%) followed by the Itesos (19%) and the Karamojong (17%) as shown in Table 1.

On average, 54% of the respondents had lived in Namatala for more than 10 years, 32% had lived between 2-10 years and very few, 14% had lived in Namatala for less than 2 years, showing that 86% of the population living in Namatala had been there for more than two years, indicating that the slum is an old and established slum (see Table 2).



Table 2: Length of time lived in Namatala

Period lived	Bubirabi	Mvule	Nyanza	Sisye	Mean (%)
More than 10 years	53%	61%	55%	46%	54%
2 – 10 years	37%	32%	31%	28%	32%
Less than 2 years	10%	7%	14%	26%	14%

Source: Field Data, N =758

The first cell to be inhabited in Namatala was Mvule. The influence of development on the slum dwellers and gentrification because of opening of new roads, construction of improved accommodation by the landlords, pipe water connection and the establishment of other facilities such as schools can explain the fact that the numbers of people who have lived in Namatala for a short time, except for Sisye are very low. These modern establishments come along with costs that should be met by the beneficiaries and, when the wage increase of slum dweller is slower than the rate of development, they are forced to move out to other slum establishments or back to their home of origin (Arimah, 2010).

Delineation of Namatala Slum

A delineation of the area of Namatala, classifying informal settlements was done not only to show land cover change but also to identify the growth and possible spread of the informal settlements within Namatala Ward (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Delineation of the Namatala Ward, with the 2013 Google Earth Image

Source: Field Data

The ward was divided into 10 zones that were relatively equal in area with the boundaries defined by roads (Figure 3). The delineation of the Namatala ward was fundamental in the construction of the zones to aid in the visual housing counts hence a better analysis of



urban growth in the Namatala ward and to ascertain zones experiencing the most growth (Kayet & Pathak, 2015).

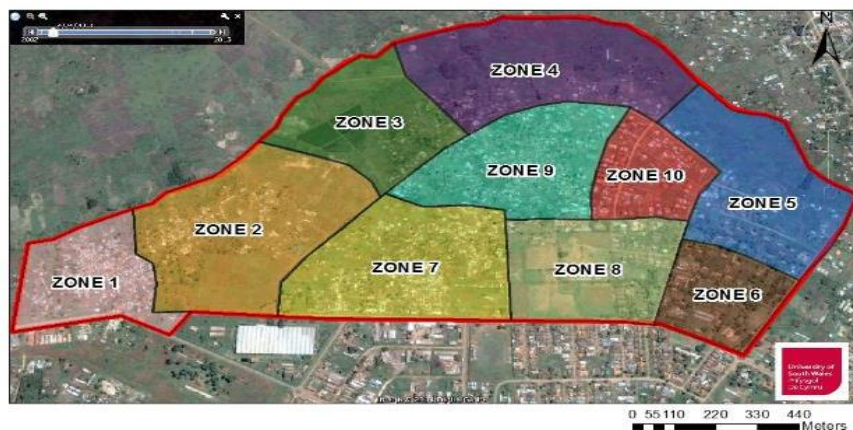


Figure 3. Zoning of the Namatala Ward using the 2003 Google Earth Image

The red outline in Figure 3 represent the area covered by the cells thus, the boundary of Namatala. This area falls within the classification of informal settlements which include Mvule, Sisye, Bubirabi and Nyanza, the core of Namatala, represented by zone 7, 8,9,10 respectively.

Changes in Namatala between 2003 and 2013

Namatala has a mixture of traditional grass or bamboo thatched round shaped mud huts, semi-permanent houses with mud walls roofed with iron sheets and permanent houses built with local clay brick and sheets of tin as roofing. This study found that, in most zones, majority of the dwellings in the study area both in the year 2003 and 2013 were houses and not huts (Table 3).

Table 3: Visual Housing Counts and Huts in 2003 and 2013 in the Namatala Ward

Date	Total Number of Houses	%of Houses	Total Number of Huts	% Of Huts	Total Number of Houses and Huts
2003	2249	75.8	718	24.2	2967
2013	4320	83.9	829	16.1	5149

Source: Field Data

Zone 7 had the largest number of ‘Houses’ while zones 3, 4 and 9 had the lowest number of houses of which half of the dwellings, 40% and 50% respectively, were huts. Within zone 2, 5 and 6 there were no ‘Huts’ in 2003. The visual housing counts show a large increase in the total number of ‘Houses’ with the number of ‘Houses’ almost doubling in all the zones and the number of huts decreasing (Table 3). The periphery of Namatala appeared to have few ‘Huts’ and more houses. There was a significant comparative reduction in the proportion of round huts in most areas indicating gentrification. The counts for the ‘Huts’ in the majority of the zones (1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10) decreased. The highest percentage decrease in huts



was in zone 3 at 58.3%. This suggests an increase in affluence in these zones enabling the inhabitants to upgrade their living accommodation from ‘Huts’ to ‘Houses’.

Table 4: Visual Housing Count per Zone in 2003 and 2013

Zone	2003		2013		2003		2013	
	Number of Houses	%	Number of Huts	%	Number of Houses	%	Number of Huts	%
1	358	95.7	16	4.3	672	98.8	8	1.2
2	250	100	0	0	557	100	0	0
3	84	46.7	24	13.3	306	96.8	10	3.2
4	82	59.4	56	40.6	262	91.6	24	8.4
5	100	100	0	0	234	100	0	0
6	69	100	0	0	96	100	0	0
7	643	81.3	148	18.7	1045	94.3	63	5.7
8	87	77.7	25	22.3	191	88.8	24	11.2
9	439	50	439	50	767	54.2	694	45.8
10	137	93.2	10	6.8	190	96.9	6	3.1

Source: Field Data

The only zone to experience increases in the number of ‘Huts’ in the last 10 years was in zone 9 with an increase of 15.8%. It is also notable that there was already a high portion of huts in this zone in 2003. Traditionally, the Karamojong and the Iteso live in huts owing to their environment (Green, 2013). The high proportion of Huts in zone 9 can therefore be attributed more to cultural preferences than poverty. This result could also be related to the low levels of income in the zone and the increase in rural to urban migration taking place predominantly in this zone. This is because incoming migrants tend to settle in the cheaper areas affordable to them (Arimah, 2010).

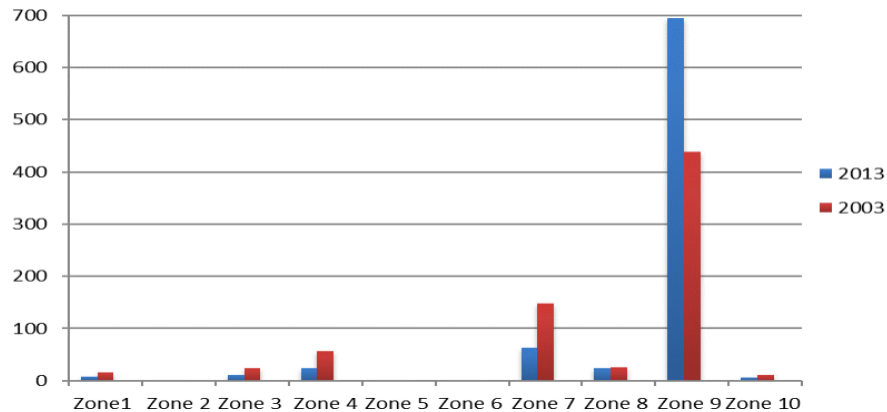


Figure 4: The Number of Houses in the Namatala Ward in 2013 and 2003

There was intensification rather than “extensification” of housing in Namatala indicating more urban infill of the informal settlement and less urban sprawl. There was evidence of rapid urban growth within Namatala ward with most zones experiencing an increase in the number of houses between the years 2003 and 2013 (see Figure 4). This is because the number of houses within the area increased with the core of Namatala experiencing the highest growth rates whereas peripheral areas faced reduced amounts of growth. There has been urban infill within the Namatala ward with sprawl evident, particularly in zones 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8 from 2003 to 2013.

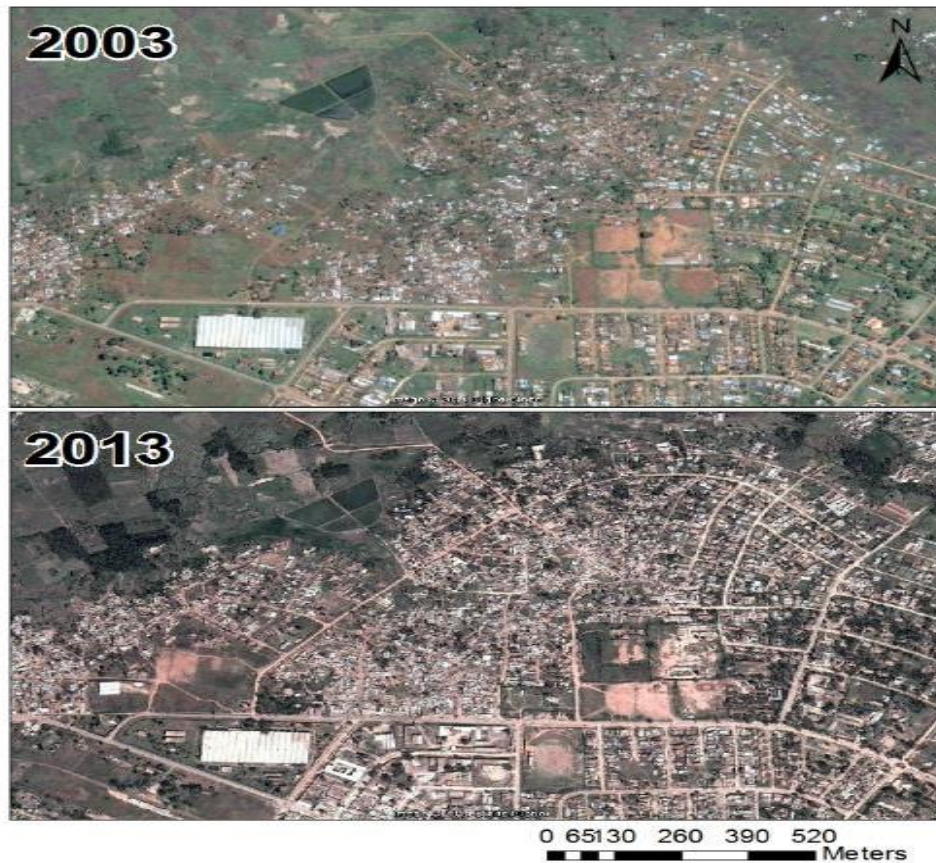


Figure 5. The land cover changes between the 2003 and 2003 showing the intensification of the land use (Google Earth, 2014)

Zone 6 had the least amount of growth. In zone 6, the 'Houses' appear to be placed in a more structured manner with some roofs covering a large area as depicted in Figure 5. Therefore, this supports the results that zone 6 is a more affluent area in the Namatala ward. However, some areas such as zone 9 are experiencing faster growth rate in slum like conditions than others. The comparison of zone 6 and zone 9 shown in Figure 6 is an example of how different zones can be within a defined ward, showing different levels of wealth. In this zone,

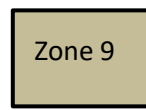
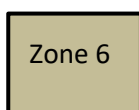


Figure 5. Comparison of Zone 6 and Zone 9. 2013 Google Earth Image

a greater number of 'Houses' appear to be placed in an irregular pattern, with numbers of 'Huts' being interspersed between them.

Discussion of Findings

Slums are results of rapid urban growth and people migrating to the urban areas as they seek employment opportunities. The development of slum and squatter settlements in Africa is a direct manifestation of the high rate of urbanization (UN-HABITAT, 2003). African economies are ill-prepared to absorb enhanced urban population resulting in the proliferation of unplanned, informal settlements (Fox, 2014). The poor rural immigrants who



cannot afford to build or rent houses in middle-class settlements resort to constructing cheaper alternative houses with resources from the surrounding environment instead. The impoverished migrants employ traditional methods of construction that are used in the rural areas to build homes, hence transporting rural skills to the urban areas. Slums develop as more people migrate to this area and adopt the same housing initiatives.

The gentrification of slums and the intensification of housing in slums portrayed by the urban audit could be related to a number of factors. The notable increase in houses as opposed to huts with time can be explained by the fact that traditionally, slums have been portrayed as a temporary phenomenon associated with urbanization. This is in the sense that they act as “the staging area for the migrating poor” as they work to integrate into the economic life of cities in developing economies (UN-HABITAT, 2003). As the rural migrants become integrated into the urban sphere and their incomes rise, they upgrade their housing standards (UN-HABITAT, 2003). People seek to build more permanent housing structures with tin roofs as opposed to grass-thatched in the urban areas as they find sustainable livelihoods. As more people enter the slum, the vacant lots are occupied leading to infill.

Bidandi (2015) attributed this change to rich people’s conversion of surplus money into construction of new business developments or replacing old structures with better structures. The change from huts to houses can also be explained by environmental factors such as shortage of grass for thatching the roofs, differences in the levels of income in the Namatala ward as well as the slum improvement programs within majority of the zones in Namatala ward the 10 years period.



Conclusion

The urbanization audit showed that Namatala is experiencing infill and sprawl as well as some upgrading of housing quality in most cells. All zones are experiencing different levels of growth with the core of Namatala experiencing the highest growth rates whereas peripheral areas are facing reduced amounts of growth.

The urban audit portrayed the gentrification of slums and the intensification of housing in slums. Contrary to expectation, this study found that, in most zones, majority of the dwellings in the study area both in the year 2003 and 2013 were houses and not huts. There was a percentage increase in the 'Houses' that had tin or tiled roofing and a marginal percentage decrease in the number of huts in the zones ringing the boundary of Namatala. The periphery of Namatala appeared to have few 'Huts' and more houses. The study found that there was intensification rather than "extensification" of housing in Namatala indicating more urban infill of the informal settlement and less urban sprawl.

The problem of slums in Namatala and Uganda as a whole cannot be blamed on lack of policy but can largely be attributed to a lack of implementation of the policies and guidelines. It could also be because of uncoordinated intervention by the third sector groups. There is, therefore, need for a place-based intervention that would tap into the already existing policy instruments and actors and bring them to play with the intended recipients bearing in mind the culture and the environmental, economic, and social situation of the slum.

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