

Our planners should strive to restore urban order

Posted on May 29, Posted by [Mwathane](#) Category [Land Governance](#)

Uncontrolled urban growth

Not too long ago, Thika, Kericho, Naivasha and Nakuru were like model towns. Absolutely clean. With all developments seemingly at their rightful positions, and land uses well thought out. Not anymore! These towns too, like many others in Kenya, have lost it. They are developing and expanding ad hoc. Apparently, there is no order of things, and no effective attempt to enforce any.

Every time I drive from Nairobi towards Machakos, I am amazed at the speed of emerging physical developments. The corridor between Nairobi and the turnoff to Machakos town is gradually connecting. Similarly, developments of all kind line up the corridor between Nairobi and Limuru, just as they do towards Thika. Kiambu town is now literally part of Nairobi, with residential and business premises having taken up what had been left of Kiambu's coffee farms along Kiambu Road. Karura forest sticks out like some refreshing interruption.

The disappointment though is that a lot of this growth is embryonic, and linear. It starts small, and, before we know it, we have full blown developments without regard to spatial order, uses, drainage or the available services. And this is so with most of our cities and towns. Thanks to the style, we've had people relocate from Killeleshwa, Lavington, Karen and other upmarket Nairobi estates as incompatible land uses emerged. Relocations too have happened from Eastlands to escape factory pollution or even unreliable water supply as population increased. Some businesses in Nairobi's CBD have found themselves marooned by aggressive informal traders who callously block their front views and customer accesses. Left to continue, unplanned developments and urban disorder spares no one.

Opportunity to manage growth

And on taking the drive between Isiolo and Moyale, I was convinced that we should do more to

manage urban growth. Budding towns like Archers Post, Merille, Laisamis, Turbi and Sololo are growing fast and should be easy to plan and control. The bigger towns of Isiolo, Marsabit and Moyale also haven't sprawled beyond control. Luckily, these towns have the benefit of adequate peri-urban land within which to spill over, given that land prices are still mundane should purchase or compulsory acquisition for urban expansion become necessary. But, are those concerned paying heed? Are there teams taking data, drawing up plans and strategies to restore the glory of Kenya's old towns and cities, and to contain and manage the growth of the emerging ones?

Big price for urban disorder

Statistics indicate that of our 54 million people, about 27%, or 15 million, are in urban areas. This number will continue to rise. While urban populations provide a big opportunity for development, we will ultimately pay a big price if we don't arrest unplanned urban growth. I am aware that we have some policies, and even plans in some cases, meant for the purpose. But without application and enforcement, they count for little. This is the challenge our urban planners, county and political leaders in every County must bravely take up.

Dated 28th May, 2021

Tags: