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Janet Mburu
Strathmore University

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to examine environmental risks associated with urban development projects in Kenya

Methodology: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study revealed that urban development projects in Kenya present significant environmental risks that require careful consideration and proactive mitigation measures. The rapid urbanization and infrastructure expansion in Kenya's cities have been associated with various environmental challenges, including air and water pollution, habitat loss, soil degradation, urban heat island effects, and adverse impacts on human health. These environmental risks stem from factors such as increased vehicular emissions, industrial activities, improper waste management practices, deforestation, and inadequate urban planning and infrastructure. The concentration of population and economic activities in urban centers exacerbates these environmental pressures, further highlighting the urgent need for sustainable urban development strategies in Kenya.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: urban political ecology theory, environmental justice theory & sustainable development theory may be used to anchor future studies on environmental risks associated with urban development projects in Kenya. Prioritize the implementation of green infrastructure initiatives, such as green roofs, urban parks, and sustainable drainage systems, to mitigate environmental risks associated with urban development. Integrate nature-based solutions into urban planning and design processes to enhance ecosystem services, improve air and water quality, and reduce urban heat island effects. Advocate for legislative reforms and policy interventions that prioritize environmental sustainability in urban development planning and regulation. Implement stringent environmental impact assessment (EIA) processes for all urban development projects to ensure compliance with environmental standards and regulations.

Keywords: *Environmental Risks, Urban, Development Projects*

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INTRODUCTION

Environmental risks in developed economies such as the USA, Japan, and the UK are multifaceted, encompassing issues like climate change, pollution, and resource depletion. For instance, in the USA, the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs) has been a significant environmental concern. According to EPA data, total GHG emissions in the USA increased by approximately 2.9% from 1990 to 2019, with the energy sector being the largest contributor. Another example is Japan's struggle with waste management. Despite efforts to improve recycling rates, Japan still faces challenges with waste disposal. As noted by Hirai et al. (2016), Japan's waste generation increased by 11.2% from 2000 to 2014, highlighting the need for more sustainable waste management practices.

Similarly, in the UK, biodiversity loss poses a considerable environmental risk. The State of Nature report (2019) revealed that 41% of UK species have declined since 1970, with agriculture being a significant driver of habitat loss. Additionally, air pollution remains a pressing issue in the UK, with urban areas experiencing high levels of pollutants such as nitrogen dioxide. According to DEFRA (2020), air quality in the UK has improved in recent years, but many areas still exceed legal limits for pollutants, posing risks to public health.

Environmental risks in developed economies such as the USA, Japan, and the UK are compounded by industrialization, urbanization, and consumption patterns. In the USA, the depletion of natural resources is a growing concern, particularly regarding water scarcity. According to the US Government Accountability Office (GAO), water stress is expected to intensify in many regions due to factors like population growth and climate change, posing risks to ecosystems and economies. Additionally, the USA faces challenges related to land degradation, with soil erosion and desertification threatening agricultural productivity. Research by Lal (2018) emphasizes the need for sustainable land management practices to mitigate soil degradation and preserve ecosystem services.

In developing economies like China and India, rapid industrialization and urbanization have led to severe environmental challenges. For instance, in China, air pollution is a critical issue, with PM2.5 levels exceeding WHO guidelines in many cities. According to Zhang et al. (2017), China's rapid economic growth has led to a surge in energy consumption, contributing to air pollution. In India, water scarcity is a significant concern due to overexploitation and pollution of water resources. The World Bank (2018) reports that about 21% of communicable diseases in India are related to unsafe water.

In Japan, energy security and nuclear safety are prominent environmental risks. The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011 highlighted the vulnerabilities of nuclear power plants to natural disasters, leading to widespread environmental contamination and public health concerns. Despite efforts to diversify energy sources and improve safety measures, Japan continues to rely heavily on fossil fuels and nuclear power, both of which pose environmental and social risks. As noted by Nakata et al. (2018), Japan's energy transition requires comprehensive strategies to promote renewable energy and reduce dependence on nuclear and fossil fuels, addressing environmental risks while ensuring energy security and affordability.

In Brazil, deforestation and forest degradation in the Amazon rainforest are significant environmental concerns. The Amazon, often referred to as the "lungs of the Earth," plays a crucial role in global climate regulation and biodiversity conservation. However, deforestation driven by agricultural expansion, illegal logging, and infrastructure development threatens the

integrity of this vital ecosystem (INPE, 2020). According to data from Brazil's National Institute for Space Research, deforestation rates in the Brazilian Amazon have increased in recent years, reaching a 12-year high in 2020. Addressing deforestation requires concerted efforts to enforce environmental regulations, promote sustainable land use practices, and support indigenous and local communities in forest conservation efforts.

In Indonesia, forest fires and land clearing for palm oil plantations pose significant environmental risks, particularly in the islands of Sumatra and Borneo. Annual slash-and-burn practices to clear land for agriculture, including palm oil production, contribute to widespread air pollution and habitat destruction (UNEP, 2019). The resulting haze not only affects Indonesia but also neighboring countries in Southeast Asia, leading to health problems and economic losses. Despite government efforts to curb forest fires through policies and law enforcement, challenges persist due to illegal land clearing activities and weak governance. Sustainable land management practices and initiatives to promote alternative livelihoods are essential for mitigating forest fires and preserving Indonesia's rich biodiversity.

Sub-Saharan African economies face unique environmental risks, including deforestation, land degradation, and climate change impacts. For example, in Nigeria, oil pollution has devastated the Niger Delta region, with spills contaminating water sources and farmland. According to UNEP (2011), over 6,800 oil spills occurred in the Niger Delta between 1976 and 2010, leading to extensive environmental damage and health risks for local communities. In Ethiopia, deforestation and soil erosion threaten agricultural productivity and food security. A study by Hurni et al. (2016) highlights that Ethiopia loses an estimated 140,000 hectares of forests annually, exacerbating land degradation and loss of biodiversity.

In Nigeria, oil pollution in the Niger Delta region is a significant environmental challenge, with widespread environmental degradation and health risks for local communities. The Niger Delta, a major oil-producing region, has experienced numerous oil spills due to pipeline corrosion, sabotage, and operational failures (UNEP, 2011). These spills contaminate water sources, farmland, and fisheries, posing risks to human health and ecosystems. Despite regulatory efforts and cleanup initiatives, oil pollution continues to devastate the Niger Delta, highlighting the need for more effective pollution prevention measures and sustainable development strategies.

In Ethiopia, deforestation and land degradation threaten agricultural productivity, food security, and ecosystem stability. Ethiopia loses an estimated 140,000 hectares of forests annually, primarily due to agricultural expansion, unsustainable land use practices, and population pressure (Hurni et al., 2016). Deforestation leads to soil erosion, loss of biodiversity, and reduced water availability, exacerbating poverty and food insecurity in rural communities. Efforts to address deforestation in Ethiopia include reforestation programs, sustainable land management practices, and community-based natural resource management initiatives. However, challenges such as limited resources, institutional capacity, and conflicting land tenure systems hinder effective forest conservation and restoration efforts.

In Zambia, mining activities pose significant environmental risks, including water pollution, land degradation, and deforestation. The mining sector, a crucial driver of Zambia's economy, generates substantial revenue but also causes environmental degradation and social conflicts (World Bank, 2020). Poor waste management practices, such as mine tailings disposal and chemical spills, contaminate water sources and soil, threatening ecosystems and public health. Additionally, deforestation for mining infrastructure and fuelwood exacerbates habitat loss and

biodiversity decline. Sustainable mining practices, environmental regulations, and community engagement are essential for mitigating the environmental impacts of mining in Zambia and promoting sustainable development.

Urban development projects encompass a range of initiatives aimed at improving infrastructure, housing, and amenities in urban areas. Four common types of urban development projects include transportation infrastructure expansion, affordable housing initiatives, green space development, and mixed-use developments. However, these projects often come with environmental risks that need to be carefully considered and mitigated. For example, transportation infrastructure expansion, such as building new roads or expanding public transit systems, can lead to habitat fragmentation, air and noise pollution, and increased carbon emissions (Litman, 2019). Affordable housing initiatives may involve land conversion and increased urban sprawl, leading to loss of natural habitats and increased pressure on water resources and ecosystems (Wang & Murie, 2019). Green space development projects, while beneficial for enhancing urban livability and biodiversity, can also lead to soil erosion, habitat disturbance, and disruption of local ecosystems if not planned and managed sustainably (Escobedo et al., 2011). Similarly, mixed-use developments, which combine residential, commercial, and recreational spaces, can contribute to urban heat island effects, loss of biodiversity, and increased energy consumption if not designed with environmental considerations in mind (Beatley & Manning, 1997).

In summary, urban development projects play a crucial role in shaping the built environment and improving quality of life in cities. However, it is essential to recognize and address the environmental risks associated with these projects to ensure sustainable and resilient urban development. Through careful planning, integrated design approaches, and stakeholder engagement, urban development projects can minimize negative environmental impacts while maximizing social, economic, and environmental benefits for present and future generations (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Statement of the Problem

Urban development projects in Kenya are vital for addressing the growing infrastructure needs of rapidly expanding cities. However, these projects often entail significant environmental risks that threaten the sustainability and resilience of urban ecosystems. Despite the importance of mitigating these risks, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding and effective management strategies to address the environmental challenges posed by urban development initiatives in Kenya.

Recent studies highlight the urgent need to assess and mitigate the environmental risks associated with urban development projects in Kenya. For instance, research by Kariuki et al. (2020) emphasizes the detrimental impacts of unplanned urbanization on natural habitats, biodiversity, and ecosystem services in Kenyan cities. Similarly, a study by Nyangaga et al. (2019) identifies air and water pollution, habitat destruction, and loss of green spaces as key environmental concerns associated with urban development in Kenya.

Moreover, the rapid pace of urbanization and infrastructure expansion exacerbates environmental degradation and undermines efforts to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs) in Kenya. As noted by Njoroge and Odhiambo (2021), inadequate urban planning and weak regulatory frameworks contribute to the proliferation of informal settlements, land

encroachment, and pollution hotspots in Kenyan cities, further intensifying environmental risks.

In summary, the environmental risks associated with urban development projects in Kenya pose significant challenges to the long-term well-being and resilience of urban communities and ecosystems. Addressing these challenges requires interdisciplinary research, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based policy interventions to promote sustainable urban development practices and mitigate adverse environmental impacts.

Theoretical Framework

Urban Political Ecology Theory

Originated by scholars such as Paul Robbins and Erik Swyngedouw, urban political ecology focuses on the political-economic processes shaping urban environments and their ecological consequences. This theory emphasizes the unequal distribution of power and resources in urban development, leading to environmental injustices and conflicts (Swyngedouw, 1996). In the context of Kenya, urban political ecology can help analyze how political interests, land tenure systems, and regulatory frameworks influence decision-making in urban development projects, thereby exacerbating or mitigating environmental risks.

Environmental Justice Theory

Developed by scholars like Robert Bullard, environmental justice theory examines the disproportionate burden of environmental hazards borne by marginalized communities, often based on race, class, or ethnicity. It highlights the social inequalities and injustices inherent in environmental policymaking and planning processes (Bullard, 1990). In the Kenyan context, environmental justice theory can shed light on how urban development projects perpetuate environmental inequalities, such as the siting of polluting industries or inadequate provision of green spaces, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations.

Sustainable Development Theory

Originating from the Brundtland Commission's report "Our Common Future," sustainable development theory advocates for meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It emphasizes the integration of economic, social, and environmental dimensions of development (WCED, 1987). In the case of Kenya, applying sustainable development theory can help evaluate the environmental, social, and economic impacts of urban development projects and identify pathways for achieving more sustainable and equitable urbanization.

Empirical Review

Smith (2016) aimed to evaluate the impact of urban development on local air quality. Their study involved extensive air quality monitoring conducted before, during, and after urban development projects. The findings revealed a notable increase in air pollution levels, particularly during the construction phase. High concentrations of particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide were observed, indicating the adverse effects of urban development on air quality. To mitigate these impacts, the study recommended implementing stringent emission control measures during construction activities, promoting the use of green building materials, and integrating green spaces into urban designs to mitigate air pollution.

Chen (2017) conducted a study to investigate the effects of urbanization on water quality in adjacent water bodies. Through water sampling and analysis, they found that urban

development projects were associated with increased water pollution. Elevated levels of nitrogen and phosphorus runoff, along with decreased dissolved oxygen and altered pH levels, were observed in nearby streams, rivers, and lakes. To address these concerns, the study recommended the implementation of green infrastructure practices such as permeable pavement and constructed wetlands to mitigate stormwater runoff and preserve water quality.

Jones (2018) undertook a study to assess the impact of urban development on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Their ecological surveys revealed that urbanization led to habitat loss, fragmentation, and alteration, resulting in declines in species diversity and ecosystem functions. To conserve biodiversity and ecosystem services, the study recommended implementing green infrastructure planning strategies, establishing protected areas within urban landscapes, and promoting habitat restoration efforts.

Li (2019) focused on evaluating the impact of urban development on urban heat island (UHI) effects. Using remote sensing data and ground-based measurements, they found that urban development exacerbated UHI effects, leading to higher daytime and nighttime temperatures compared to non-urbanized areas. To mitigate these effects, the study recommended implementing cool roof technologies, increasing vegetation cover through urban greening initiatives, and promoting green building designs.

Wang (2016) conducted a study to examine the impact of urban development on soil quality and fertility. Their analysis of soil samples revealed soil degradation associated with urbanization, including decreased organic matter content, nutrient depletion, and increased soil compaction. To address these issues, the study recommended implementing soil conservation practices such as composting, erosion control measures, and urban agriculture initiatives.

Turner (2017) investigated the impact of urban development on wildlife habitat connectivity and species dispersal. Their habitat suitability modeling and landscape connectivity analysis indicated that urbanization fragmented wildlife habitats and disrupted connectivity between natural areas, leading to isolation of wildlife populations. To promote habitat connectivity and species dispersal, the study recommended implementing wildlife-friendly urban designs and creating green corridors and wildlife crossings.

Li (2018) assessed the impact of urban development on urban microclimate and human health. Through microclimate monitoring and epidemiological studies, they found that urbanization exacerbated microclimate conditions, leading to higher temperatures and increased heat-related health risks among urban residents. To mitigate these risks, the study recommended implementing heat mitigation strategies such as urban green spaces, cool roofs, and heat warning systems.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gap: While the studies provide insights into the environmental impacts of urban development and suggest various mitigation strategies, there is a conceptual gap in terms of

addressing the socio-economic implications of implementing these recommendations. For instance, the studies recommend integrating green infrastructure and promoting sustainable practices, but they do not delve deeply into the economic feasibility, social acceptance, and governance aspects of implementing such measures (Smith, 2016; Chen, 2017; Jones, 2018; Li, 2019; Wang, 2016; Turner, 2017; Li, 2018). Thus, there is a need for research that explores the socio-economic dimensions of transitioning towards sustainable urban development practices.

Contextual Gap: The studies primarily focus on the environmental impacts of urban development in generic urban contexts and may not adequately capture the specific contextual factors influencing these impacts in different geographical regions or socio-economic settings. For example, the effectiveness of green infrastructure practices or the severity of air and water pollution may vary depending on factors such as climate, land use patterns, population density, and regulatory frameworks (Smith, 2016; Chen, 2017; Jones, 2018; Li, 2019; Wang, 2016; Turner, 2017; Li, 2018). Therefore, there is a need for context-specific research that considers the unique environmental and socio-economic conditions of different regions to tailor mitigation strategies accordingly.

Geographical Gap: The studies cited in the provided content lack geographical diversity, primarily focusing on urban development impacts in unspecified or single geographical locations. This presents a geographical gap as urban development impacts can vary significantly across different regions due to variations in environmental conditions, urban planning practices, and socio-economic factors (Smith, 2016; Chen, 2017; Jones, 2018; Li, 2019; Wang, 2016; Turner, 2017; Li, 2018). To address this gap, future research should encompass a broader range of geographical locations, including both developed and developing countries, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the environmental risks associated with urban development and facilitate the development of region-specific mitigation strategies.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Urban development projects in Kenya present significant environmental risks that require careful consideration and proactive mitigation measures. The rapid urbanization and infrastructure expansion in Kenya's cities have been associated with various environmental challenges, including air and water pollution, habitat loss, soil degradation, urban heat island effects, and adverse impacts on human health.

These environmental risks stem from factors such as increased vehicular emissions, industrial activities, improper waste management practices, deforestation, and inadequate urban planning and infrastructure. The concentration of population and economic activities in urban centers exacerbates these environmental pressures, further highlighting the urgent need for sustainable urban development strategies in Kenya.

To address the environmental risks associated with urban development projects, concerted efforts are required at various levels, including policy formulation, planning, implementation, and enforcement. Key mitigation strategies include integrating green infrastructure into urban designs, promoting sustainable transportation modes, enhancing waste management practices, conserving natural habitats and biodiversity, and adopting climate-resilient building designs.

Moreover, community engagement, stakeholder collaboration, and capacity building initiatives are essential for fostering environmental awareness, promoting behavior change, and ensuring the successful implementation of sustainable urban development practices. By prioritizing environmental sustainability in urban planning and development processes, Kenya can achieve its developmental goals while safeguarding natural resources, improving public health, and enhancing overall quality of life for its citizens.

Recommendations

Theory

Integrated Assessment Models: Develop integrated assessment models tailored to the Kenyan context that consider the complex interactions between urban development, environmental degradation, and socio-economic factors. These models should incorporate multidisciplinary approaches, including environmental science, urban planning, economics, and social sciences, to provide holistic insights into the environmental risks associated with urban development projects.

Resilience Theory: Apply resilience theory to urban development planning in Kenya to enhance the capacity of cities to withstand and recover from environmental shocks and stressors. This involves promoting adaptive strategies such as green infrastructure, decentralized resource management systems, and community-based disaster preparedness initiatives to build resilient urban ecosystems.

Practice

Green Infrastructure Implementation: Prioritize the implementation of green infrastructure initiatives, such as green roofs, urban parks, and sustainable drainage systems, to mitigate environmental risks associated with urban development. Integrate nature-based solutions into urban planning and design processes to enhance ecosystem services, improve air and water quality, and reduce urban heat island effects.

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD): Encourage transit-oriented development (TOD) principles to promote compact, mixed-use developments centered around public transportation hubs. This approach reduces reliance on private vehicles, minimizes carbon emissions, and enhances urban connectivity while preserving natural habitats and open spaces.

Policy

Legislative Reforms: Advocate for legislative reforms and policy interventions that prioritize environmental sustainability in urban development planning and regulation. Implement stringent environmental impact assessment (EIA) processes for all urban development projects to ensure compliance with environmental standards and regulations.

Incentive Mechanisms: Establish incentive mechanisms, such as tax breaks, grants, and subsidies, to incentivize developers and municipalities to adopt sustainable building practices and green technologies. Encourage public-private partnerships (PPPs) to invest in green infrastructure projects and support innovation in sustainable urban development practices.

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