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A case for urban liveability from below: exploring the politics of water and land access for greater liveability in Kampala, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Improving urban liveability and prosperity is commonly set as a priority in urban development plans and policy around the world. Several annual reports produced by international consulting firms, media, and global agencies rank the liveability of cities based on a set of indicators, to represent the quality of life in these cities. The higher is the ranking, the more liveable is the city. In this paper, we argue that such quantitative approaches to framing and addressing urban liveability challenges leave little room to reflect on people's experiences of this liveability, which cannot be expressed through numbers. To illustrate our argument, we draw on empirical evidence of urban liveability challenges in access to water and land in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, ranked recently as the most liveable East African city by various global agencies and media outlets. By showing that increasing the number of water connections does not guarantee improved access to water and sanitation in the long run, first, we demonstrate how urban liveability challenges are tightly linked with land-title issues in the city. Second, we highlight the political game-playing between the central government, the opposition, the traditional leadership, and the slum dwellers in governance processes of service delivery. Finally, by arguing that urban liveability can be enhanced by broadening political participation in city development planning, we discuss some of the strategies that can be used by communities to make collective claims towards improving their quality of life and the environment.

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1. Introduction

Improving urban liveability and prosperity has been often set as a priority in urban development plans and policy around the world (UN-HABITAT 2013). Annually, several reports produced by international consulting firms (Mercer 2017), media (Monocle 2017) or global agencies (UN-HABITAT 2013) rank urban liveability based on a set of indicators to explore the quality of life in cities. For example, Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a British company, evaluates liveability in cities based on six criteria, namely stability, healthcare, culture and environment, education, infrastructure and spatial characteristics¹ (EIU 2012). The higher is the ranking, the more liveable is the city. In the same vein, but in a broader context, the UN-HABITAT presents a perspective on the prosperity of cities based on five

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dimensions, i.e. productivity, infrastructures, quality of life, equity and environmental sustainability (UN-HABITAT 2013). The UN-Habitat prosperity dimensions are perceived to be unique for two reasons: (i) they focus on individual cities as opposed to countries; (ii) they are more concerned with social and environmental conditions of cities than solely focusing on the business environment in cities deemed crucial for local economy (ibid). Likewise, the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 emphasises the importance of using a similar set of indicators to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” (SDG 2015).

The dominance of these quantitative approaches to framing urban liveability, based on a set of variables related to quality of life in cities, has not been left unnoticed by critics. Simon et al. (2016), for example, highlight the difficulties of measuring the progress towards SDG 11 based on globally induced indicators, which might not capture the reality of the local contexts. Patel et al. (2017) similarly argue a set of indicators that are designed and implemented to assess the urban experiments in cities, requires to be discussed and selected by a range of actors involved in decision making processes over the city planning. In general, indicator-based approaches are concerned with what Sayer (2000) framed as a positivist understanding of the world, limiting our knowledge to observable and measurable data. Such worldview leaves little room to reflect on people’s experiences in relation to liveability, which cannot be simply expressed through numbers. Questions such as whose experience is reflected in the numbers, under what social and political conditions data is collected and interpreted, or how technocrats or politicians influence the process of data collection and analysis are simply left out in positivist ways of understanding urban liveability.

This paper aims to bring to the fore the importance of understanding the local contexts when analysing urban liveability in a certain city. In doing so, we explore the politics of access to water and land and how that affects urban liveability in Kampala, the capital city of Uganda, which is considered the most liveable East African city according to the latest urban liveability survey of the world’s top 230 cities by Mercer (Muhindo 2017). We draw on critical insights to problematise the concept of urban liveability and its implications in addressing social and environmental problems. Such perspectives, as it will be explained in Section 2, often throw light on the relation between city development plans and citizens’ quality of life, by engaging with everyday power dynamics among and between citizens, the state institutions at different levels, NGOs and other civil society groups. In Section 3, we delineate our data sources and research methods. Section 4 of the paper revolves around the agents of urban liveability and governance practices over development of the city with a focus on water service delivery. By highlighting the limitations of quantitative approaches in the water domain, we investigate the power dynamics in the communities of slum areas in Kampala in relation to water access and land-ownership issues. In Section 5, we discuss the alternatives to achieve greater urban liveability in Kampala given the current governance settings and political climate. This includes some suggestions on the strategies that can be used by the communities to make new claims for provision of adequate livelihoods and preservation of the environment.

2. Urban liveability beyond indicators

The notion of urban liveability has not been only attractive to international agencies and media, but also to the academic circle. Several research studies extend the concept, e.g. by incorporating socio-economic and psychological factors² affecting city life experiences (Pacione 2003) or by synthesising a set of indicators that, on the one hand focus on human well-being, and on the other hand, are concerned with the aspects of environmental quality and social determinants affecting health (Badland et al. 2014; Mohammad Sufian 1993; van Kamp et al. 2003; Zanella, Camanho, and Dias 2015). Furthermore, Kashef (2016) conducts a literature survey on urban liveability across disciplinary and professional boundaries, arguing to enhance cities’ living standards, urban planners and policy makers should go beyond using social-environmental indicators. He contends that citizen participations in decision-making processes as well as

their values and perceptions of quality of life should also serve as indicators of urban liveability (Kashef 2016).

Despite the endeavours to measure and improve urban liveability, the notion is contested by critical thinkers, questioning the rationale behind its definition and conceptualisation. As far back in 1980, Ley argues urban liveability serves as a discourse in urban arenas wherein economic, political and professional elites compete for the power to define the quality of urban life (Ley 1980). Likewise, Evans (2002) demonstrates how often the elite imaginaries of the global cities override the poor's dreams of urban homes when it comes to defining and approaching urban liveability in different cities around the world. Similarly, in the African context, Parnell and Pieterse (2010) argue how making cities work as efficient economic nodes in the global financial system, is not going to have positive impacts on the livelihoods of the urban poor. Following this, Hankins and Powers (2009) argue that urban liveability discourses often shape city development activities focusing on individual rights and the free market choices rather than collective notion of citizenship. They contend that, "urban liveability requires a focus on the collective ability of people to live in the city, an opportunity to reinsert the state and a collective public into the discourse of urban life" (Hankins and Powers 2009). Without attention to a collective sense of struggle or awareness, the concept remains as an exclusive ideology of urban growth enabling and legitimising entrepreneurial policy initiatives often in line with the interests of elites (ibid). Furthermore, critical interpretations of urban liveability point out the concept has been often raised a descriptive condition of urban life in politics, policy making and science (Kaal 2011; Teo 2014). Thus, the issues of governance and citizenship as normative concepts have been often left out of the debates (ibid). Lack of public discussions on what constitute liveability in cities and for whom, can lead to de-politicisation of the concept (ibid). As noted by several research studies, incapability of the state and local government in many African cities to engage with the poor neighbourhoods and to include their perspectives and visions on development initiatives has not positively affected everyday life for the urban poor (Narsiah 2010; Parnell 2005; Pieterse et al. 2008).

What the aforementioned critical insights bring to light is the importance of understanding the power dynamics in framing and achieving urban liveability. As postulated by Evans (2002) and echoed by Dale and Newman (2009), urban liveability is essentially about preserving environmental conditions in cities while providing livelihoods not only for the affluent, but also for the ordinary and poor (Dale and Newman 2009; Evans 2002). Achieving this requires a new form of making collective claims that can actually move poor communities in the direction of greater liveability. This, in turn, calls for citizenship practices and political mobilisation that go beyond participation in multiparty elections, which in some fragile situations can actually serve to disempower poor communities, especially in the global South context (Beall, Goodfellow, and Rodgers 2013; Heller and Evans 2010; Tarrow 2011). Making collective claims for greater urban liveability requires day-to-day civic engagements with the local state, essentially meaning engagements with the state apparatus, political parties, traditional leadership and NGOs as explained in the preceding sections. Such citizenship practices in essence is about recognising the positive role of urban politics and public spaces for the negotiation and consolidation of different interest-groups so that counter-powers to the state become institutionalised (Beall, Goodfellow, and Rodgers 2013). But what can give communities the capacity to act collectively in order to change the way the city deals with problems of livelihood and the environment?

In response and in contextualising challenges and strategies towards greater urban liveability, we map out the agents of urban liveability in Kampala and investigate how they interact in relation to the case of access to water and sanitation and land-ownership issues. Moreover, we analyse urban struggles as well as the relations between and within community actors, state agencies, political parties, traditional leadership and NGOs to find pathways that can bring about a meaningful and inclusive process to improve quality of life and environment.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case study

Kampala is ranked as the best liveable city in East Africa mainly because of the low cost of living, incl. cheap prices of food, shelter, electricity as well as high personal safety, considered as a crucial factor for multinational companies sending employees abroad (Muhindo 2017). Despite the good place in the ranking, however, the city's infrastructure is struggling to keep up with the rapid pace of urban expansion. Around 70% of 1.5 million inhabitants in Kampala, lives in informal settlements and poor quality housing relying on communal standpipes, water vendors and public wells (Heymans, Eales, and Franceys 2014). The figure for water access in Kampala is estimated to be 80% while less than 1% of (around 400,000) households own a toilet facility (UBoS 2017). We focus on the issue of access to water and sanitation in Kampala because it has a direct impact on lifestyle, health, environment and overall well-being of urban dwellers. The water access issue in the city cannot be analysed without considering the impacts of competing claims over lands where water and sanitation facilities are put in place.

As we shall see in the next section, Kampala is a representative case of urban liveability challenges around water and land access in slum areas of the global South metropolises, associated with prevailing top-down management approaches in spatial planning, paving the way for implementation of the neo-liberal "pro-poor" reforms with little actual impact on the quality of life for the urban poor (Goodfellow and Titeca 2012; Gore and Muwanga 2014; Guma 2016; Lambright 2014; Narsiah 2010; Pieterse 2011). Exploring barriers and discussing alternatives to achieving urban liveability, gives us the possibility of knowledge transferability from the Ugandan case to other East African cities, where access to land and water remains a challenge.

3.2. Data sources and collection methods

In mapping out the agents of urban liveability and understanding the institutional settings around delivery of services in the city, we review policy documents and reports on urban development and water services developed by the regional and local governments (KCCA 2015a, 2015b; MoWE 2016; NWSC 2016) and by NGOs and other organisations (Mugabi 2004; Tumushabe, Muyomba-Tamale, and Ssemakula 2011). We combined this with an analysis of other document types, such as memoranda, reports, press releases and articles in scientific journals (Bashaasha, Mangheni, and Nkonya 2011; Goodfellow and Titeca 2012; Gore and Muwanga 2014; Guma 2016; Lambright 2014; Madinah et al. 2015; UBoS 2017). Furthermore, we conducted interviews with officials from the Ministry of Water and Environment, Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) as well as NGOs to triangulate data for further confirmation of our understandings of barriers to water provision in slum areas in Kampala.

In investigating urban livelihood challenges in access to water and land as well as exploring power dynamics within communities and between different actors, we draw on empirical data collected through fieldwork in slums of Kampala carried out between June and September 2016. This included open-ended interviews with residents in seven slum areas in Kampala as shown in [Figure 1](#). Data was collected based on information related to: (1) water connectivity, sufficiency of supply, frequency of water availability, and affordability of price, (2) land and property ownership where the water facility was located, and (3) community dynamics in terms of the interaction between the community leader (chairperson) and committee and residents in decision making processes over the management of the water points.

In total, we carried out 147 in-depth interviews, approximately 45 min each, with residents of Bwaise II Parish (Tebulyoka zone), Bwaise III Parish (Katoogo and St. Francis zones), Nabweru Parish (Kafunda zone-Nabweru south cell I), Makerere (Makerere II zone C and Mukubira zone) and Kawaala zone. These areas were selected based on our familiarity with the city (two of the paper's authors reside in Kampala) as well as through other research studies regarding slums in

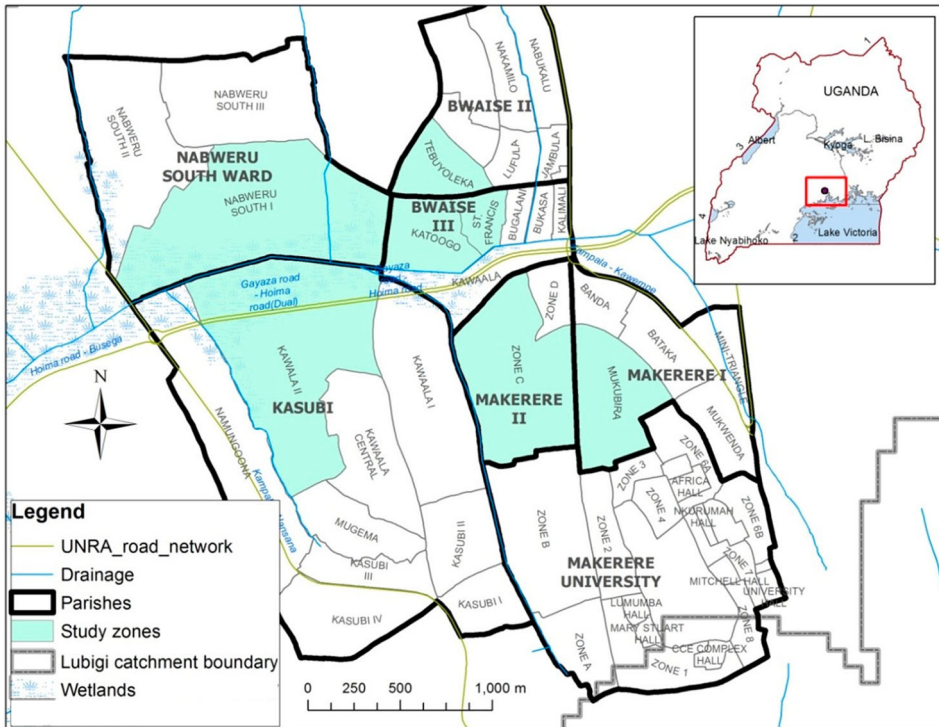


Figure 1. The locations of study zones (in green) in Kampala where the interviews were undertaken.

Kampala. Interviews were conducted based on the slum residents' availability and willingness to discuss water-related issues. All the interviews were conducted in an open-ended format through local researchers who were fluent in Luganda and English. Narrative walks, in which people share their knowledge and experiences with the researcher in a storytelling style, were also used to enable the triangulation of data from interviews, documents, and in situ observation (Jerneck and Olsson 2013).

4. Agents of urban liveability and challenges around water and land access

4.1. Governance settings

In improving Kampala's infrastructure, the Ugandan government has developed several decentralisation policies and reforms since late 90s, e.g. through the Local Government Act, Cap 243 and the Water Act, Cap. 152 (MoLG 1997; MoWE 1997), to transfer administrative, financial and political power to local governments for provision of urban services. These acts particularly aim at eradicating poverty and ensuring sustainable and equitable growth at the local level (ibid). In making the city vibrant, attractive and sustainable, the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) seeks to:

Reconstruct and upgrade 80% of the road network to improve mobility and connectivity, create more work-spaces, improve the quality of life and develop the human capital needed to support city economic development, create an enabling environment for establishment and growth of businesses and put in place the necessary systems to support public service delivery. (KCCA 2015b)

KCCA collaborates with other governmental bodies and NGOs in delivery of civic services. In provision of water, for example, KCCA works together with the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), a state-owned utility company. Aiming to be "the leading customer centred water utility in the world", NWSC formulates its mission as:

Sustainably and equitably provide cost effective quality water and sewerage services to the delight of all stakeholders while conserving the environment. (NWSC 2016)

According to the KCCA Strategic Plan in 2015, only 7% of Kampala residents have access to the NWSC sewer grid (KCCA 2015b). Aiming to increase this figure to 45% by 2020, KCCA seeks to work in partnership with NWSC to construct a total of 50 public toilets across the city, to extend the pipelines, to overhaul the sewerage system in the city and improve the sanitation through condominium sewerage system (ibid).

In facilitating the interactions with the communities, there are several NGOs and CBOs³ collaborating with KCCA officials (Tukahirwa, Mol, and Oosterveer 2010), particularly in relation to slum upgrading⁴ and WASH programmes.⁵ Such collaborations have led to several initiatives in improving access to clean water, health services and roads as well as collecting garbage in slums and informal settlements (KCCA 2015a; Tukahirwa, Mol, and Oosterveer 2010). For example, the Kampala Slum Transformation Initiative (KASTI) project, which involves KCCA, NWSC and several NGOs in the water and urban development sectors, aims to improve access to WASH facilities and information services among both the school children and the slum dwellers (Environment Alert 2016). Such attempts as well as many of the KCCA's and NWSC's initiatives in improving urban services have been praised both nationally and internationally. The cabinet endorsed NWSC as the government's flagship enterprise because of its excellent provision of public services (Otage 2016) and the World Bank supported the second Kampala institutional and infrastructure development project implemented by KCCA 2014–2019 (WB 2014).

Despite the above endeavours exerted by the local governments and NGOs to put in place the necessary systems to support public service delivery, it has become evident that there is a gap between the goals and the actual impacts on citizens' quality of life, especially for the urban poor (Goodfellow and Titeca 2012; Gore and Muwanga 2014; Guma 2016; Lambright 2014; Madinah et al. 2015). Adjusting to enormous governance and political changes, following the decentralised policies and reforms in Uganda, has been a challenging task for the local governments. Inadequate public finances and improper accounting procedures as well as emergence of national partisan political struggles in local arenas, have adversely influenced local service delivery (ibid). As it will be demonstrated in the next chapter, there are yet numerous challenges when it comes to access to safe drinking water and sanitation especially in the slum areas of the city, raising questions about the impacts of the ongoing initiatives and approaches to enhancing urban liveability.

4.2. The more connections, the better access?

In provision of basic water services, NWSC installed 1129 Public Stand Posts (PSPs) during 2015–2016 bringing the total number of pro-poor connections to 10,841 (NWSC 2016). Along with this, NWSC aimed for 5000 prepaid standpipe meters⁶ by 2016 serving 15–30 households per water dispenser (Heymans, Eales, and Franceys 2014). Despite the increasing number of PSPs and prepaid standpipes, our findings from the fieldwork in the seven slums of Kampala indicated that access to safe drinking is still a major challenge for the residents.

The result of our interviews reveals that when the prepaid standpipes were installed, tokens (small magnetic stripe cards) were given to the community free of charge and they could load them with credit to buy water. At the time, the price of one jerry can (a 20-liter bucket of water) was 25 Ugandan shilling (0.01 USD), so with a credit of 100 shillings one could buy 4 jerry cans. Over time, with the same amount of money, residents could get only 3 jerry cans. When we asked about the reasons behind this change, residents mentioned the deduction of tax (which varies each year) from the available credit, leaves less money in the token to fetch water. It was also mentioned that tokens were not given free of charge anymore, so in cases that the token is lost, damaged or stolen, people have to pay 15,000 up to 25,000 Shillings to buy a new one.

This price is not affordable for many of low-income residents of slums. As a result, they need to buy water from caretakers of prepaid standpipes who have tokens and access to the water dispensers. Under such conditions, the price of one jerry can of water is 100 Shillings (in some cases 200–250 Shilling), much more expensive than the original price introduced upon installation of prepaid standpipes. In explaining the price disparity, the interviewed caretakers pointed to the costs of maintenance, cleaning and making phone calls to NWSC in cases of water interruption. In addition, they collect 12% commissions by selling water to others. In many cases, however, as observed in the field and reflected by the residents, the price disparity is simply because of making profit out of the situation which limits residents' access to safe drinking water.

The issue of limited access to water and sanitation in these areas is tightly linked with the issue of land ownership where water dispensers (or toilet facilities) are installed. Upon the installation of the prepaid standpipes, there has been a binding agreement, signed between the private land-owner and NWSC, on the condition that the land-owner receives a 12% commission, s/he lets people use water with the price set by NWSC. However, in practice, they can overcharge residents as they can make decisions about who can access the service. The majority of the residents of these areas are tenants, and often unaware of the binding agreement between NWSC and the landowners, and consequently are uninformed about their right to access these facilities. Thus, they have to either pay much more per drop of water or to find other sources like unprotected or protected spring water.⁷

The majority of the interviewees indicated that the issue of water access cannot be resolved as long as the prepaid water standpipes are installed on private lands. Addressing this issue, as reflected by the residents, requires compensating the land owner in exchange of gaining communal title of the land wherein the standpipe is installed. We will discuss this alternative in details in Section 5.

Intermittent water supply from prepaid standpipes is another factor making residents seek for the alternative water sources. A 34-year male resident of Tebuyoleka Zone in Bwaise II Parish who has lived in the area ever since he was born, stated:

... when the prepaid meters break down, it takes about 3 months before NWSC staff show up for repair works and landlords/caretakers of other taps would not allow us fetch from their taps ... when water is in short supply, we have to walk a long distance to the spring and sometimes encounter male youths who fight us ... (translated from Luganda)

Spring water sources are often free of charge or cost less than other sources, but the quality is very low because of diffuse and/or point source infiltration of waste water throughout the spring recharge areas. In addition, accessing the protected springs might be difficult because of the often long queues as well as the far-distance locations. These make access to water more challenging, especially for women and children, as reflected below:

... water here [from prepaid standpipes] is too expensive for me so I can only use the water from an unprotected spring nearby, which is very dirty ... there is also a protected spring but it is too far away, on the other side of the road, quite far ... crossing the road is very dangerous causing many accidents ... (A female mid-age resident of the Nabweru community, translated from Luganda)

Under the above conditions, residents have to turn to water vendors and resellers, those bringing water from the spring or fetching it from private wells or tanks and selling at homes. In these cases, the price of one jerry can of water varies from 200 up to 1000 Shillings.

As seen from the account given, increasing the number of water connections without paying enough attention to the politics of land rights have not necessarily improved water access for many of the slum residents. This highlights the limitations of quantitative approaches used by the local government to water service delivery, an essential component of urban liveability. The challenges in the visited slum areas, however, were not limited to the water access issue. Other problems, commonly pointed out by the residents, included lack of access to sanitation facilities, lack of community access roads and dumping sites for waste disposal, expensive school fees and the high level of unemployment among the youth. These not only hamper people's livelihood, but also the

environment. For example, during the interviews, many raised their concerns about unsanitary disposal of faecal matter in the environment (open defecation and flying toilets), especially in the rain season affecting the groundwater quality. Consequently, each and every of these problems cannot only affect slum dwellers' day-to-day life, but the city and the environment as a whole.

4.3. The leadership and power dynamics in the communities

In facing urban liveability challenges, our findings indicate residents often approach chairpersons or committee members of their areas rather than contacting NWSC (in case of water issues) or the municipality (in other cases) directly.

Chairpersons and committee members constitute the local council, a locally elected governmental body within districts of Kampala (MoLG 1997). According to the Local Government Act, the election should take place every five years. However, our findings reveal that the local elections have not occurred as mandated. In many of the visited slum areas, the chairpersons have been in charge for more than 20 years. The reason behind this, when we asked, is embedded in the relation between the ruling central government⁸ and the opposition which has a political influence at the Kampala city centre areas wherein most of the slums are located. Many of the residents believed that the central government is concerned with the potential social unrest that may arise by regularly holding elections in these areas. One of the chairpersons, who wishes to be anonymous, stated:

I have held this position for 15 years now as the government has not run any election since then ... they say it is because the cost of election is high and there is not enough funds for this ... but the underlying reason is political ... since people at the centre, including this division and parish, are mainly from the opposition, the government wants to avoid any social unrest which might come with holding the elections ... (Translated from Luganda)

The absence of elections and overstay of the local leadership have contributed to distrust among the community residents in many areas. Several of the interviewees could not recall the last time that they attended a community meeting since they did believe the leadership neither has the capacity nor the willingness to address their issues. Only in Kafunda zone in Nabweru parish, most of the residents seemed to be relatively satisfied with the local council activities. In this case, the chairperson was perceived to be active and to have the capacity to address community issues when needed. Interestingly enough, the chairperson of this zone, has a strong inclination to the ruling political party (NRM) receiving political and financial supports for the party activities in the communities. Lack of such support was evident in other areas. For example, in Kawaala, although the local council was perceived as non-corrupt and in unity with most of the community residents, it has not been able to implement its roles in handling water and waste disposal issues because of financial constraints.

Our findings are in line with several research studies pointing out that central government officials frequently intervene altering actions, choices and decisions of the municipal council (Goodfellow and Titeca 2012; Gore and Muwanga 2014), preventing the local government to have a full and functional autonomy over its activities (Guma 2016; Lambright 2014; Madinah et al. 2015; Mbazira 2013). As a result, the performance of the local councils has been weakened and deteriorated. This phenomenon has been also observed and discussed in other African context, wherein the developmental state in the name of efficiency and better service delivery has marginalised decision making processes at the grassroots level (Heller 2009; Heller and Evans 2010; Parnell and Robinson 2006). In Johannesburg, South Africa, for example, ANC,⁹ the main organisation that liberated the oppressed majority from apartheid has insulated decision-making processes, and local government is seen as an instrument of delivery rather than as a forum for decision-making and development planning (Heller 2009; Nastar and Ramasar 2012; Parnell and Robinson 2006; Sinwell 2011). Lack of political and financial support of the local governments, leads to the municipalities being dependent on help of international NGOs or donor agencies. The tendency of these organisations in downplaying the politics of service delivery and the consequences it comes with it, have been discussed at length (ibid).

The net result is that the current governance settings are unlikely to change the status of urban liveability for the disadvantaged as seen in our case study.

4.4. The politics of access to land

During our interviews with the residents, the majority stated that liveability challenges cannot be addressed unless the issue of access to private lands (to fetch water) is resolved. Many believed by compensating the private land owners, where water dispensers or sanitation facilities are located, they should first gain the communal land title (where the land is owned collectively by the residents). In doing so, the majority expressed their willingness to contribute to collecting the money required to buy the land from private owners. It was deemed by the residents that once the water and sanitation facilities are in the communal lands and accessible to all, they can manage the maintenance cost collectively. It is, however, important to note that since slums are within the city planning area, any initiative related to service delivery, must be submitted for inspection and approval by KCCA (Nkurunziza 2006).

In taking up such a collective initiative, there are several barriers. First, there is evidently a lack of trust among community members when it comes to collection of money to initiate the process. A female resident of Francis Zone who has lived in the area for 4 years and is a caretaker of an ordinary water tap states:

There is no unity among the people. If people can work together all would be well in terms of development. The leaders are also not enthusiastic enough. (Translated from Luganda)

The assumed corruption within the leadership that has overstayed for a couple of decades in addition to political games at play between the local councils and KCCA¹⁰ have all contributed to the community distrust. Second, changing the land title from private to communal is a complex process. Our findings revealed that in many cases landlords do not own the lands, rather they reside on the lands belonging to the Kabaka (the Buganda King) by agreements or illegally. In such cases, the real owner of the land is the Buganda Land Board (BLB), which manages the Kabaka's private assets, and any negotiation regarding changing the land title should involve BLB (Nkurunziza 2006). As stated by the communication manager of BLB there is often no clear record of the land agreements between BLB and the residents "owning" lands:

It is not their land and the law says a landlord must know you, which we are trying to do, to know our tenants, to require that they come and introduce themselves. (Interviewed by Namaganda (2013) in Daily Monitor newspaper)

BLB, on the one hand is concerned with illegal land occupations, and on the other, with its public image and the role of traditional leadership in cases they need to evict illegal owners from the Kabaka's lands (Namaganda 2013). Such concerns have contributed to the ambiguity over the land ownership in slums and making acquisition of communal land title a long-lasting challenge.

Involvement of KCCA in this process, adds another layer of complexity around water-land access issues. As a governmental organisation, KCCA endeavours to acquire the public (not communal) land title before installation of water and sanitation facilities (may be that installed by NWSC, NGO's or private donors). As stated by the manager of the NWSC urban pro-poor branch in Kisenyi:

In the upcoming projects, NWSC is only going to construct toilets (for public use) in public areas given that landlords actually can afford to put up toilet facilities on their premises but only want free things. This also follows from complaints we have received of those landlords that have denied access to the community members to use the community facilities that were installed on their land. When we receive such complaints, currently, NWSC together with KCCA work hand in hand to sort out such issues by reminding the landlords (and caretakers) of their agreements.

The public land is owned by the state (not a group of residents), and this makes the negotiations between BLB, KCCA and local councils much more complex because of the political significance of

the lands in central Kampala. As argued by several research studies, the central government's interest (represented by KCCA¹¹) in public ownership of lands or protecting tenants' rights is motivated by political legitimacy gain, especially in central Kampala, perceived to be affiliated with the opposition (Guma 2016; Lambright 2014; Médard and Golaz 2013). Thus, acquiring the public land title becomes a more challenging task than communal land title under the current political climate in Kampala, dominated by NRM as the ruling party. These challenges illustrate only a surface of the politics of land rights in Kampala, whose details are beyond the scope of this article (cf: Beardsworth (2016), Nkurunziza (2006)). Nevertheless, bringing to the fore the politics of access to land, is essential to understanding the barriers laying on the way of taking up a collective initiative at the community level to improve water access.

As critical thinkers on the notion of urban liveability would remind us, the approaches to improving urban livelihoods and environment, have been often de-politicized, leaving less room for public debate on what need to be prioritised as liveability challenges for the urban dweller, especially in disadvantaged neighbourhoods (Kaal 2011; Teo 2014). In Kampala as well as in many other African cities, decisions on how urban liveability can be improved, how city should be developed, and how services should be delivered are often made in conformity with the interests of the powerful and influential actors as well as international donor agencies paving the way for implementation of neoliberal policy where the disadvantaged are systematically left out (Bond and Ndlovu 2010; Devas and Delay 2006; Guma 2016; Narsiah 2010; Parnell and Robinson 2006; Pieterse et al. 2008). As shown in our case study, the struggle for improving water access, and more broadly, urban liveability, is essentially about broadening political participation for the slum residents. This is a challenging task for the slum communities, given their limited resources as well as inadequacy of participatory platforms at the local level intertwined with political game-playing between the central government, the opposition and the traditional leadership.

As long as these actors operate at cross-purposes, the quest for liveability is likely to fail. Below, we discuss if and how community strategies can be strengthened to address the barriers that lie on the way of improving urban liveability.

5. Towards greater urban liveability

5.1. Strategies for making collective claims

The above challenges as well as day-to-day liveability issues in slums of Kampala have indeed made it difficult for the communities to come together around common projects from which they all can benefit. In search for what gives communities the capacity to act collectively, some research studies highlight the role of social capital (Brondizio, Ostrom, and Young 2009; Newman et al. 2008). In the visited slums, some of the community organisers have mentioned that it will be challenging to mobilise resources (i.e. funds, information, goods and services), for the greater good since the majority of residents are tenants with weak social ties to the community. For example, Nuru, one of the landlords living in Katoogo, Bwaise III, mentioned:

We (landlords) can collaborate with those neighbours who would wish to cooperate with us. We trust a few neighbours and hence we would only work with a few selected. The neighbours we trust are those whom we have known for a long time (about 10 years). I cannot work together with tenants but can work with landlords on community projects. Tenants leave abruptly and cannot be trusted. (Translated from Luganda)

While it might be true that the shared longevity of residents and common cultural ties could enhance social networks and mobilisation of resources, it may not necessarily give the community the power and capacity to act collectively when needed (Evans 2002; Newman et al. 2008). There are several examples of communities with strong social cohesion that have failed in raising their concerns and demands to improve their livelihoods (ibid). As argued by Portes and Landolt (1996), there is also the downside to strong social capital that, for example, can lead to exclusion of residents (e.g. tenants) in decision making processes over management of the community resources. What is

more important than achieving social cohesion, is the experience of working together while engaging in struggles for liveability (Evans 2002; Hankins and Powers 2009; Portes and Landolt 1996).

Such struggles are more likely to occur when residents believe in the possibility of achieving some common end (Beall, Goodfellow, and Rodgers 2013; Evans 2002; Tarrow 2011). As of now, the interviewees believe the only possibility that can be achieved to address the issue of access to water and sanitation services, is acquisition of the communal land title prior to the installation of water and sanitation facilities. Such possibility is believed to be less feasible in the case of acquiring the public land title given the current social and political dynamics among different governance actors in Kampala.

The quest for liveability could not only benefit from constructing a feasible vision, but also from linking the livelihood struggles with broader sustainability issues. Historically, disadvantaged urban communities have been often concerned with making claims on the right to livelihood than raising demands that are ecologically aligned, which is more of concern in middle-class neighbourhoods (Beall, Goodfellow, and Rodgers 2013; Evans 2002). However, cities provide opportunities for people from various strata of the society come together around common interests that can reduce the negative externalities of urban life, such as environmental degradation, from which even elites cannot fully insulate themselves (Beall, Goodfellow, and Rodgers 2013). Thus, reorienting the livelihood struggles in ecological directions could help disadvantaged communities to mobilise extra allies and ultimately more resources in achieving their goals. As in the case of communities in slums, for example, they can benefit from linking their struggle over access to land to environmental and health issues that are linked with poor water and sanitation services. As demonstrated by Kula-bako, Nalubega, and Thunvik (2007), the poor water and sanitation conditions in most of the Lubigi catchment contaminates (ground)water, which explains the prevalence of disease outbreaks such as malaria, cholera, typhoid, etc. This not only threatens the well-being of slum dwellers but the city as a whole. Hence, reframing the liveability struggles in terms of environmental degradation in the city could potentially attract more allies in addressing the water-land issues in slums.

5.2. Building ties

The endeavours in linking the livelihood and ecological struggles together, however, require support and reinforcement by a broader set of actors and organisations (Evans 2002). NGOs, universities, social movements and even political parties can play a crucial role in magnifying the ability of communities to act together and achieve their liveability goals (*ibid*).

For instance, ACTogether, a local NGO in Kampala, has acted as a base for planning interventions in communities that prioritise sanitation by using local savings and skills to leverage limited resources and outside support (ACTogether 2017). By providing necessary technical assistance in the design of sanitation units, sourcing additional funds and loans, and training in financial and physical maintenance, ACTogether strives to cultivate a sense of community ownership that protects sanitation facilities against vandalism and sustains long-term use and maintenance (ACTogether 2017; Bachmayer and Shermbrucker 2014). Transformation of such initiatives into instances of universal issues such as human right to water and sanitation, social and environmental justice in cities, etc. can draw transnational NGOs' and other social groups' attention to support local struggles.

The role of political parties in facilitating communities' collective actions is more complicated than engagement with NGOs or social movements. There are several examples wherein political parties have co-opted community leaders, constructed clientelistic networks, and ultimately demobilised the community (Heller and Evans 2010; Shatkin 2013). Nevertheless, the political parties at the local level can open political spaces for communities, NGOs, and social movements to participate in debates over the city governance rules and policies (Heller and Evans 2010; Tarrow 2011). Such spaces cannot only be used to create discursive power to promote the community vision and imaginaries beyond usual demands and claims, but also can support NGOs and CBOs to better implement the community projects, which are currently hampered by financial, policy and political challenges in Kampala (Tukahirwa, Mol, and Oosterveer 2010). By drawing on several empirical

cases around the world, Tarrow (2011) argues that the impacts of changes between and within political parties around the time of election (at the local or national level), can increase the level of political access for citizens to better coordinate their efforts towards a collective goal. Hence, it is crucial for the community organisers to be prepared for mobilising the community once political opportunities present themselves.

Finally, in making collective claims, communities can benefit from interacting with the governmental agencies through what Evans (2002) calls Jujitsu Tactics: “efforts to leverage the conflicts and contradictions that already exist within state apparatuses to shift the balance of state action toward liveability”. The public institutions are often parts of the state apparatus. But, they also comprise groups or individuals whom have vested interest in struggles for liveability even those that might not be aligned with the state political agenda. Tarrow (2011) refers to these groups as “friends in court” who can act as guarantors against repression, or as acceptable negotiators on behalf of communities and support their initiatives. Intermediator organisations, such as universities, research centres, NGOs or social groups could play a role in identifying these actors together with communities. For example, finding and interacting with those actors that are more concerned with the community’s needs than the political agenda of KCCA, influenced by the ruling party, could facilitate gaining the permission required to manage the water and sanitation facilities collectively.

As argued above, building ties between communities, NGOs, other civil society groups, political parties and parts of the state agencies could give the community the capacity to act and address the challenges lying on the way of making cities liveable for all. Whether or not the communities in slums of Kampala can broaden their political participation during the course of struggles for urban liveability remains an open question. But such collective endeavours are increasingly tenacious and likely to be a persistent force in shaping the disadvantaged groups’ claims and demands in the cities of the global South. As Nelson Mandela would remind us: “It always seems impossible until it’s done”.

6. Concluding remarks

In making cities more liveable, the urban development initiatives are often focused on improving urban liveability based on quantitative approaches promoted by international consulting firms, media, or global agencies. By using a case study of water provision in Kampala, we highlight the pitfalls of these approaches as they miss the complex governance and contested political space in which water services are delivered. By drawing attention to the politics of land rights, the paper demonstrates how political game-playing between the central government, the opposition and the traditional leadership in Kampala, has made access to water and sanitation facilities ever challenging for slum dwellers. We, thus, contend taking steps towards making cities sustainable and resilient, as emphasised in SDG 11, should be based on the reality of the local context rather than globally induced indicators, like the number of water connections in cities.

Our findings indicate that changing the land title, from private to communal prior to installation of water or sanitation facilities, as desired by the communities’ residents in central Kampala, can potentially address the barriers to water access, which is a must in improving urban liveability. This, however, is a complex process and challenging task, bringing different political actors to the table with often conflicting interests and agendas. Given slum community residents are the actors with the least resources in this process, then it becomes crucial to find ways that they can broaden their political participation and make collective claims to pursue a common goal. As discussed in the paper, constructing a vision that links livelihood struggles with broader sustainability issues as well as building ties among communities, intermediary organisations (i.e. NGOs, universities, social movements, etc.) and some groups within the governmental agencies could help the slum dwellers to acquire the communal land title and address some of the issues in access to water. It is only when the quest for urban liveability thrives that one could expect healthier and safer places for urban dwellers and a more sustainable environment for all.

Notes

1. Which includes urban form (sprawl, green space), the geographical situation of the city (natural assets, isolation and connectivity), cultural assets and pollution.
2. Including the availability of parking spaces, the number of sheltered walkways, and the general walkability of neighbourhoods.
3. Community-Based Organizations.
4. See Shack/Slum Dwellers International Network (SDI 2017).
5. See Uganda Water and Sanitation Network (UWASNET 2017).
6. A prepaid standpipe meter is a technology through which customers pay in advance for a specified amount of water. Once the supply is provided, the meter disconnects automatically. The rationale behind using this technology is to improve revenue collection and deliver water directly to users at a social tariff (Heymans, Eales, and Franccys 2014).
7. A protected spring is a spring that is free from run-off and from bird droppings and animals (JMP 2017).
8. Uganda's National Resistance Movement.
9. African National Congress.
10. Often the local councils and KCCA are perceived by the residents to be affiliated with the opposition and the central government/NRM respectively.
11. The executive head of KCCA is directly appointed by and accountable to the President (Lambright 2014).

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