

Research Paper

Barriers to Spatial Planning for Intermediary Cities in Kenya

The Case of Kisumu and Homa Bay Counties

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Abstract

Smaller urban centres (referred to as intermediary cities) are playing a key role in urbanisation in the Global South, including Sub-Saharan Africa. Effective spatial planning has been identified as crucial to unlocking the potential of these settlements, yet the barriers these areas face to effectively implementing plans have been largely overlooked. This study aims to shed light on this issue through the case studies of Kisumu and Homa Bay Counties in Kenya, which contain emerging intermediary cities, and have been facing barriers to implementing regional and local spatial plans as per their mandate under Kenya's devolution agenda. Through the analysis of semi-structured interviews and multiple focus group discussions, the paper highlights that the primary barriers include the lack of a legal framework to implement plans; weak political support leading to under-resourcing of planning departments; political interference in the planning process; inadequate land registry systems; and cultural practices around land use. Based on these results the paper draws conclusions about the need to strengthen the technical tools required to implement planning effectively in Kenya. It also opens avenues for further research regarding the importance of effective planning implementation in achieving healthier and more competitive intermediary cities in sub-Saharan Africa.

Keywords

Intermediary cities, spatial planning, plan implementation, devolution, Kenya, Sub-Saharan Africa

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1. Introduction

Smaller urban centres (referred to as intermediary cities) are playing an important role in the urbanisation of the Global South, including Sub-Saharan Africa. Intermediary cities have the potential to promote inclusive growth and poverty reduction, but their potential is being held back by a lack of effective spatial planning, with negative impacts on economic development, health and environmental sustainability. Implementing spatial planning can be challenging in smaller settlements, experiencing rapid growth with

limited financial and institutional capacity. There is an urgent need for a more practical, empirically-grounded understanding of spatial planning implementation in these contexts, currently insufficiently covered by academic literature.

This study uses the case of Kenya to explore this issue more deeply. As part of the country's ambitious devolution agenda, Kenya's 47 Counties have been mandated to prepare and implement spatial plans at the regional and local level. However, after more than a decade, most county governments are struggling to fulfil this mandate and, as a result, intermediary cities are growing unplanned. What are the barriers preventing counties from implementing spatial plans and what can be done to overcome these?

The paper focuses on Kisumu and Homa Bay, two counties in Western Kenya containing numerous fast-growing intermediary cities seeking to progress spatial planning. Using the findings from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with county officials and related stakeholders, it examines the barriers affecting recent plan-making and implementation in the counties. Based on this, it draws policy recommendations to promote effective planning implementation in Kenya and highlights wider debates for planning in fast-growing intermediary cities in sub-Saharan Africa.

The paper is structured as follows. **Section 2** presents a literature review of the opportunities and challenges for intermediary cities in Sub-Saharan Africa, the role of spatial planning in addressing these, and the current understanding of the barriers to spatial planning. **Section 3** introduces the case study, describing the spatial planning context in Kenya and Kisumu and Homa Bay counties. **Section 4** describes the research methods used. **Section 5** discusses research findings, including barriers relating to political, institutional and legal, financial, capacity, cultural and public participation-related factors. **Section 6** presents resulting policy recommendations to enhance spatial planning implementation in Kenya. **Section 7** discusses the wider implications of the findings for the planning of intermediary cities in Kenya and Sub-Saharan Africa. **Section 8** presents overall conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Opportunities and Challenges for Intermediary Cities

Intermediary cities (also referred to as secondary cities) are settlements which fall between large cities and rural areas in the urban hierarchy, typically defined as having a population under 1 million people.¹ They act as local economic, service and administrative hubs; and play a key role in connecting rural areas with metropolitan centres and the global economy (UCLG 2016; Roberts et. al. 2019). According to Roberts et. al. (2019), intermediary cities accommodate 20% of the global population and are projected to accommodate more than 400 million new inhabitants over the next 15 years, of whom 90% will be in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.² There are already over 1,700 intermediary cities in Africa, a number which is projected to grow significantly (Roberts et. al. 2019). According to UNICEF & UN-Habitat (2020), two-thirds of Africa's rural-urban migrants are expected to arrive in intermediary cities by 2040.

Intermediary cities offer several benefits for inclusive growth and poverty reduction in developing countries. While they do not generate the scale of agglomeration benefits found in large cities, they generate fewer negative externalities (such as traffic congestion); as such, they have the potential to be

¹ The definition of intermediary cities is based on both size and functional role. Several different size thresholds have been used to define intermediary cities for statistical purposes, for example, 20,000 to 500,000 (European Union), 20,000 to 1 million (World Bank), and 50,000 to 1 million (UCLG).

² These statistics refer to cities between 50,000 and 1 million people. This may understate the importance of the phenomenon since many fast-growing settlements below this threshold could also be defined as intermediary cities (based on their functional role) or share many of their characteristics.

more economically efficient (Rodriguez-Pose & Griffiths 2021). Intermediary cities play a key role in enabling rural-urban migration as they are a more accessible and lower-cost destination for rural migrants, who may then use them as a springboard to move to larger cities. Empirical studies suggest that the effect on poverty reduction was greater among migrants to intermediary cities than those who moved straight to larger ones (Christiaensen & Todo 2014; Ingalaere et. al. 2018). In addition, development within intermediary cities benefits surrounding rural areas with which they have close economic linkages (Rodriguez-Pose & Griffiths 2021). As such, investing in intermediary cities may represent a more effective development pathway than concentrating investment in larger centres.

Currently, intermediary cities in Sub-Saharan Africa are not meeting their potential. They suffer from urban challenges shared with large cities including uncontrolled urban sprawl, the proliferation of informal housing, structural unemployment, rising inequality, deficient provision of basic infrastructure and services, encroachment on environmental systems, and exposure to environmental risk (Dodman et. al. 2017; Satterthwaite 2017; UNICEF & UN-Habitat 2020). Despite their potential for better urban conditions, intermediary cities currently perform worse than large cities across almost all the SDG domains, including employment, child poverty, housing and health. The challenges for intermediary cities are also exacerbated by extremely rapid growth rates; low levels of administrative and financial capacity to manage growth and provide essential services; and the higher relative cost of infrastructure provision per capita (Roberts & Anyumba 2022). Intermediary cities have received far less attention than rural settlements or larger cities in both policy and financing terms by both national governments and donors (Parnell et. al. 2009).

2.2 The Role of Spatial Planning

Effective implementation of spatial planning is recognised as a critical need to unlock the potential of Africa's intermediary cities (UN-Habitat 2013; UN-Habitat 2017; UN-Habitat 2018). Among other benefits, effective implementation of spatial plans helps prevent uncontrolled urban sprawl, avoid the development of conflicting land uses, guide the efficient provision of infrastructure and services, ensure adequate provision of housing, protect environmental systems and provide certainty for inward investment. As a result, spatial planning can promote greater economic competitiveness and growth in African intermediary cities, as well as social inclusivity, safety, health, and livability (UN-Habitat 2013). Despite this, most intermediary cities in Africa lack any form of planning and those with plans in place cannot typically implement them effectively, which is a major factor undermining their performance (Roberts & Anyumba 2022).

Despite these strong arguments for spatial planning, empirical evidence is lacking around the factors preventing the effective implementation of spatial plans in Africa's intermediary cities. There is limited understanding of the factors that enable or obstruct plan development, implementation and enforcement in these contexts, which is crucial to inform effective policy.

Much of the literature focuses on critiquing the modes of planning and the content of plans, but significantly less on the factors which prevent plan development; or the mechanisms by which existing plans (however imperfect) can be implemented. For example, this literature highlights the imposition of western and colonially influenced planning systems and practices (Watson 2009; Parnell et. al. 2009; Bolay 2015; Silva 2012); rigid and inflexible 'masterplanning' approaches (Lwasa & Kinuthia-Njenga 2012) and a lack of public participation in the development of plans (Watson & Agbola 2013). The literature calls for innovation and a shift in modes of planning, from masterplanning to more integrated, inclusive and outcome-oriented models (e.g. Silva 2012). In contrast, Cirolia and Berrisford (2017) argue for

‘de-pathologising’ African planning and acknowledging the complex, sometimes messy pathways to plan implementation.

Considering barriers to implementing planning, the literature frequently highlights insufficient skills and the lack of suitably qualified, locally trained planning professionals, with calls to expand and update the content of African planning education (Parnell et. al. 2009; Silva 2012). Other identified barriers included management issues such as unclear land tenure and limited land information systems (Roberts & Anyumba 2022); under-resourcing of local governments in terms of both technical staff and municipal budgets (Lwasa & Kinuthia-Njenga 2012); inadequate governance and institutional frameworks (Lwasa & Kinuthia-Njenga 2012); and a ‘project-driven’ development approach reflecting the priorities of donors or local political classes rather than planning or real local need (Dodman et. al. 2017; Cirolia and Berrisford 2017).

Specifically in Kenya, Kitur (2019) examined barriers to implementing urban plans in Nairobi, Nakuru and Eldoret. She finds that key barriers included the lack of explicit plan implementation mechanisms, currently reduced to development control; lack of political buy-in among city authorities, with elected officials focused on realising more ‘tangible’ short-term projects; and adversarial relationships between technical and legislative arms of local government.

3. Case Study: Kisumu and Homa Bay Counties, Kenya

Kenya’s urban areas are growing rapidly at 4% per year (World Bank, Urban Population Growth, 2021). The country’s urbanisation is dominated by intermediary cities, with only two cities (Nairobi and Mombasa) having more than 1 million people. The country has a long history of spatial planning dating back to the Local Government Act 1965 and Physical Planning Act 1996. Under the new Kenyan Constitution enacted in 2010, the country is undergoing a rapid and ambitious devolution programme aiming to decentralise administrative and financial autonomy to its 47 county governments. This includes a new mandate to undertake planning at both the county and the local level, including 10-year county PLUDP (Physical and Land Use Development Plan) and 5-year local PLUDPs. According to the 2010 constitution, public budgeting for the use of national funds at the county level should be justified based on spatial plans. As such, spatial planning is key to the entire Kenyan devolution process. However, after more than a decade, most county governments appear to be burdened with complex challenges around developing plans and the local institutional framework to implement these effectively. Only four counties have prepared a county spatial plan (Lamu, Kericho, Tharaka Nithi and Kajiado) and most urban settlements lack up-to-date plans.

Kisumu and Homa Bay counties are representative of urban dynamics around intermediary cities within agricultural regions found across Kenya and Sub-Saharan Africa. These counties are located in the Lake Region of Western Kenya, around the Winam Gulf of Lake Victoria, covering a combined area of 5,250 sqkm. Each county had a population of around 1.1 million in 2019, with their collective population projected to double over the next 20 years, most of which will occur in urban areas (CUSSE 2022a). Both counties are predominantly rural, though Kisumu is more urbanised than Homa Bay. Kisumu City, the county capital of Kisumu, is Kenya’s third largest city with around 500,000 inhabitants and serves as the economic hub of the Lake Region. Outside of Kisumu City, smaller settlements range between 10,000 and 50,000 in population, which could be defined as small intermediary cities or will emerge as such in the future. These function as local commercial, agro-processing and service hubs and many are growing at extremely rapid rates.

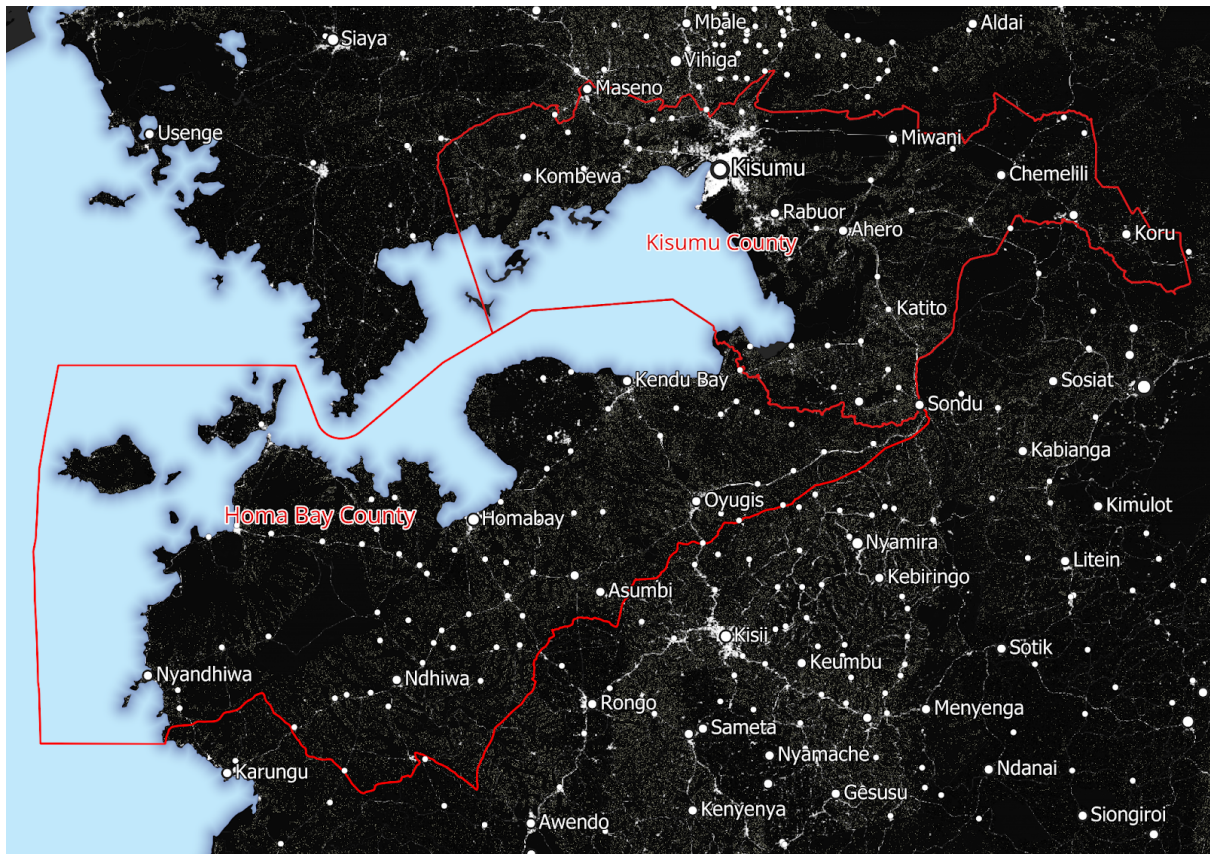


Figure 1. Settlement Patterns in Kisumu and Homa Bay Counties. Source: CUSSH, 2022

Neither of the counties currently has a county PLUDP in place and previous efforts to initiate these have failed. A PLUDP (Group Huit et. al. 2020) was recently approved for Kisumu City, however, the county has been struggling to move forward with implementation. A number of settlements in these counties have recently been designated as Towns under Kenyan spatial planning regulations. They are required to prepare a Local PLUDP and institute a local town management committee to oversee its implementation. Kisumu County initiated efforts to prepare PLUDPs for four towns (Muhoroni, Kombewa, Katito and Sondu) in 2019, engaging a consultancy team which undertook initial data collection. These efforts stalled at the stakeholder consultation phase. Homa Bay County has recently approved the local plan for the fast-growing town of Oyugis, which is one of the few local plans completed for intermediary cities in Kenya. The plan was approved by the county assembly in 2022 and the county is now seeking to put its implementation framework in place, as well as progressing PLUDPs for additional towns.

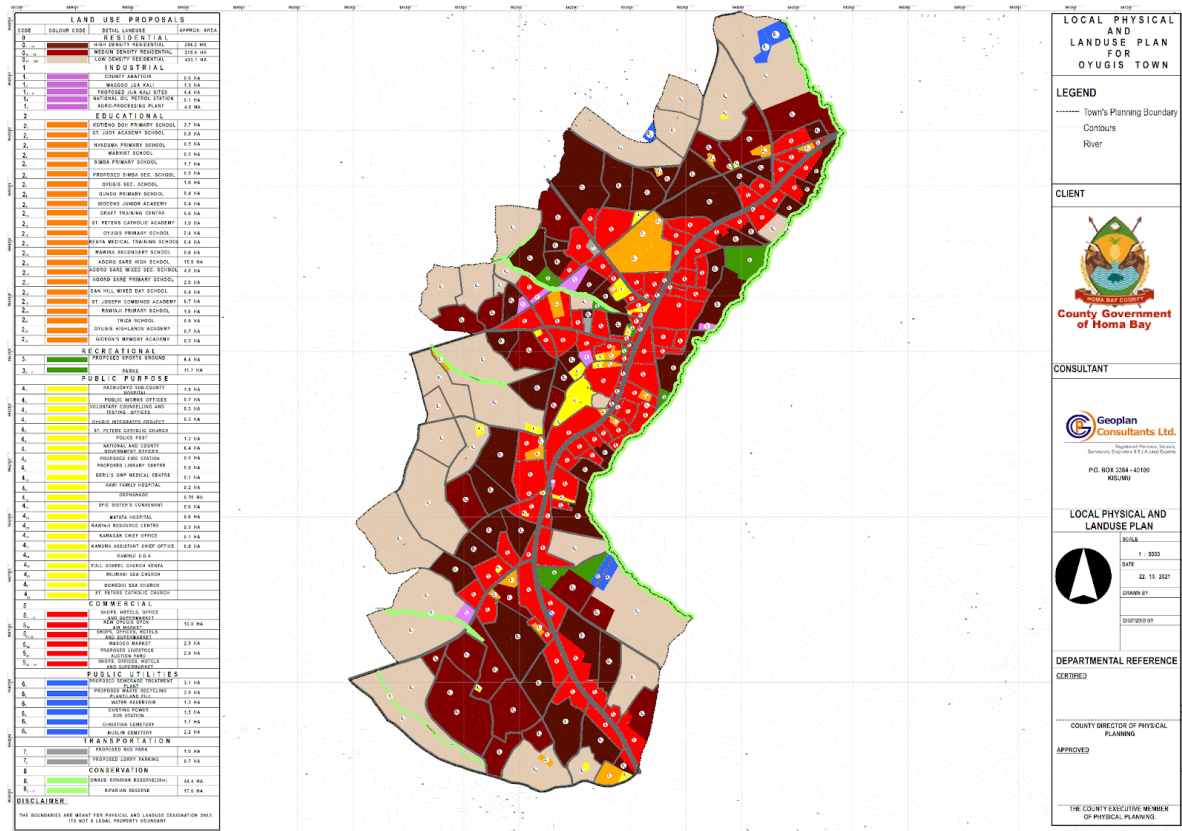


Figure 2. Oyugis Local Physical and Land Use Development Plan. Source: Geoplan Consultants LTD

4. Method

To understand the barriers that have impeded both plan-making and implementation in Kisumu and Homa Bay, this study conducted semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) with county officials, community members and physical planners working within the counties.³

31 KIIs were conducted, including 19 county officials in Homa Bay and 12 in Kisumu. The officials were drawn from key departments including finance, environment, health, energy, procurement, lands, housing and urban development. Respondents were asked about (i) the current state of spatial planning in their counties (ii) the key barriers that have affected plan implementation (iii) what steps the county could take to unlock planning; and (iv) the role of different actors within the current institutional framework. Prompts were used to further explore the issues raised by respondents.

³ The study was approved by the AMREF, Health Africa's Ethics & Scientific Review Committee (ESRC), REF: AMREF-ESRC P 506/2018. We also obtained approvals from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), REF: NACOSTI/P/19/199937/31473. Approval was also obtained from the African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) internal ethical review committee. All participants provided informed written consent before participating in an interview including consent for using photos and videos if there were any.

Two FGDs were conducted with market committees representing small towns undergoing spatial planning in each county (Oyugis in Homa Bay and Muhoroni in Kisumu). One FGD was conducted with members of the Kenya Institute of Planners, Western Kenya chapter.

Interviews and FGDs were analysed using standard methods of thematic analysis. Coding was applied to all transcripts identifying themes and sub-themes. The categories used were a combination of barriers identified in the literature and new issues that emerged in the transcripts. As new themes emerged, they were added to the list of codes.

In addition to the FGDs, the researchers participated in a five-day workshop with the Homa Bay County physical planning team and related departments, specifically focused on the challenges facing the development and implementation of the recently approved Oyugis local plan. This was used to further contextualise the findings.

5. Results

This section presents the research findings on barriers to plan implementation within the two counties. These are grouped into broad themes, namely: political, institutional and legal, financial, capacity, cultural and public participation-related factors.

5.1 Political Factors

Most respondents identified a lack of political support as one of the key barriers to implementing plans. Political leaders at the county level have not generally understood the benefits of planning and the long-term commitment required for its effective implementation. Indeed, elected leaders prefer tangible projects which they can demonstrate to their constituents within a short timeframe, rather than planning outputs which are not immediately visible. Political officials are also disincentivised to support planning as land management carries high political risks. The lack of political support has led to consistent under-resourcing of county planning activities.

Political interference in planning was frequently highlighted. Several respondents mentioned that political officials pressure planners to amend approved plans or introduce projects without going through proper approval processes. Staff can be appointed or dismissed directly by political officials, which weakens their ability to control planning from a technical standpoint. Respondents mentioned cases of cronyism within the planning system, with the installation of planners beholden to political interests.

It was stated that there is a need to sensitise political leaders on the value of spatial planning and gain commitment to planning as a technically driven, long-term process. Some respondents saw signs of improvement in political commitment to planning, reflected in recent efforts to increase the staffing of planning departments and commission plans.

5.2 Institutional and Legal Factors

While there is a clear legal framework for spatial planning at the national level, there is a lack of direction from the national government on how to set up local implementation and enforcement mechanisms, such as by-laws. During the workshops on the implementation of the Oyugis local plan, participants highlighted that essential legal mechanism for plan implementation were missing, like land registration records, local policy regulations and by-laws, and a town charter. This was identified as a critical barrier as the plan, despite being approved by the county assembly, lacked the tools to be effectively implemented and monitored. Many respondents highlighted the need for greater technical collaboration between

counties and central government, including greater support to develop a common planning implementation framework.

Issues around land titling were frequently highlighted as among the primary barriers. Land registration has relied on paper-based systems centralised at the national Land Registry office in Nairobi, not easily accessible by county planners and the general public. The non-transparent nature of land registration opens possibilities for corruption within the land registry office. Missing titles and overlapping claims are common. The county government frequently runs into land disputes when trying to implement public infrastructure and facilities due to land ownership challenges that cannot be solved at the county level. Encroachment onto supposedly public land is a common problem. There is a lack of efficient mechanisms for the county to recover land for public use or transfer land to the private sector. Disputed land ownership is a deterrent to donor and private sector investment and the lack of effective land registration systems severely limits the ability to raise revenues locally. Although the Government is currently developing a digital land information system (Ardhisasa) with remote access for county officials, it has not yet been rolled out to Kisumu and Homa Bay counties.

Respondents highlighted a lack of continuity between staff involved in plan development (often led by external consultants due to limited resources) and those required to implement them. High turnover of staff, often employed on a contract basis, contributes to a lack of 'institutional memory'.

It was noted as crucial that donors and external consultants involved in planning prioritise the development of effective implementation frameworks, not just the plans themselves. There is a risk that these third parties do not fully understand the local context for implementation which will lead to plans that lack the essential prerequisites to be implemented.

5.3 Financial Factors

There was a strong consensus that inadequate funding of planning activities, due to a lack of political support, is a primary barrier to both plan-making and implementation. County budget allocations for planning are small and funding is unreliable, with money often released late or in lower quantities than expected. Consequently, planning departments are severely under-resourced.

Securing funds for plan-making has been consistently challenging, perceived as an expensive exercise not resulting in tangible outcomes, leading to the perception of spatial planning as lacking value-for-money or even accusations of corruption. For example, the 100,000,000 Kenyan shillings (830,000 USD) cost of the Kisumu County Spatial Plan was questioned by the anti-corruption commission leading to its cancellation. Consequently, funds earmarked for planning are often diverted towards physical projects and counties have had to rely on part-funding from donors to prepare spatial plans (which has been the case for the local plans in Oyugis and Kisumu City).

Further, as highlighted by respondents, counties lack local revenue generating powers, partly due to inadequate land registration systems, and the national government budget allocated to them is often not enough to cover plan implementation. Focus group discussion participants confirmed that, regarding the spatial plan for Oyugis, most of the 10.4 trillion Kenyan shillings (86 million USD) budget for capital investment identified in the plan had not secured funding. This is problematic as until at least some of that amount is secured, the plan, which took three years to develop and cost around 15 million Kenyan shillings (125,000 USD), is not implementable. Consequently, respondents highlighted the need to strengthen cooperation with the private sector around infrastructure and mobilise real estate.

While there is a gap in funding, conversely, having a spatial plan in place was highlighted as essential to secure both public and private inward investment. Respondents noted that having an established plan can

reduce the risk of investment and provide confidence to both the donor and private sector. For example, at the first Homa Bay Inward Investment Conference (in 2016), the county engaged a university in Nairobi to prepare the plan aimed at investors for 4 million shillings (33,000 USD), which led to the signing of several MOUs including agriculture and wind energy projects. Indeed, spatial plans are intended to be the basis for national government budget allocations to Counties under Kenya's devolution structure.

5.4 Capacity Factors

Although it was highlighted that town management committees (including planners) are essential to support the implementation of local plans, almost all respondents stated that planning is severely under-resourced. In Homa Bay, there are only three planners serving the entire county, supported by unpaid interns; it was estimated that 8-9 are required at the county level, 3-4 for each sub-county and more serving the towns. In Kisumu, the planning teams have recently been expanded, however, the city, sub-counties and towns are still under-resourced. The lack of capacity at the sub-county and town level means functions are centralised in the county office, creating unmanageable workloads. Counties have needed to outsource work to consultants or borrow staff from adjacent counties or the national government.

The lack of capacity was widely perceived as a consequence of inadequate financial resources, rather than inadequate skills. Indeed, there are many well-qualified planners available in the local labour market, but counties lack resources to hire and retain them on a full-time basis. The level of skill within planning teams was generally seen as adequate, though some claimed a number of insufficiently qualified planners had been hired due to political influence. Respondents highlighted the need to upskill planners in specific areas, particularly around use of GIS technologies, policy and legal frameworks for plan implementation, inward investment attraction and private sector partnerships. Others noted the need for capacity-building of other county departments on spatial planning, including potentially seconding their staff into the spatial planning team.

Planning departments also lack resources for equipment. Both counties have established GIS labs but have not been able to purchase quality computers or renew software licences. Access to more vehicles is required for public engagement and enforcement; it was noted that new technologies such as drones could be used for cost-effective planning enforcement. Some respondents noted data availability as a challenge, citing non-digitised data and data hoarding by departments. Collaboration with universities has been beneficial in this regard.

5.5 Cultural Factors

Several respondents highlighted the lack of public understanding and acceptance of planning as a barrier, closely related to cultural issues around land. The majority of land around urban centres is freehold. The public generally views freehold land rights as absolute and may not accept the legitimacy of public intervention, particularly where there have been historical land injustices. Respondents highlighted that towns in areas with large government leasehold land were easier to plan and to implement.

Land use practices in Luo traditional culture - the predominant ethnic group in Kisumu and Homa Bay - create additional complexities for planning. Luos traditionally live in homesteads consisting of dispersed dwellings. Young men from each generation establish new homesteads resulting in low density land sprawl. Land is passed informally within the community which makes land ownership hard to trace. Luo have a strong attachment to land; land around the fringes of Luo homesteads is used for traditional burials which imbues land with strong cultural and sentimental value and makes any kind of planning highly contentious. Not formally recorded, these ownership and cultural practices introduce practical

difficulties for planners. Changes of land use or ownership may require negotiation and agreement from the entire clan which can delay plan implementation.

5.6 Public Participation

All respondents highlighted public participation as fundamental for implementing planning. A rigorous participatory process is required within Kenyan planning legislation. However, some respondents highlighted that the required level of participation is highly costly and labour-intensive, consequently delaying the development of the county and local plans.

Conversely, some said that recent participation had not been sufficiently rigorous or has failed to reach important stakeholders, including clan leaders. In Oyugis, it was highlighted that many local leaders were unaware that a plan had been prepared. Respondents cited inadequate budgets for participation and sensitisation activities, and in some cases the use of external consultants lacking local networks required to reach all necessary stakeholders. The COVID pandemic further exacerbated this. Inadequate planning creates risks of public resistance. After a lengthy participatory process, if the plans do not generate expected outcomes, strong frustration and lack of trust in planning may arise among the public.

It was also noted that broader efforts to communicate the purpose and benefits of planning to the general public (including through social and traditional media) were crucial to gaining public buy-in and increasing the reach of more targeted public participation efforts.

6. Policy Recommendations

Having considered the barriers observed in Kisumu and Homa Bay, we identify the following enabling actions for spatial planning implementation in Kenya:

- Support stronger communication between the National State of urban development and counties to promote critical benefits of planning to local political leaders;
- Ensure that county planning officials are isolated from political interference;
- Ensure that national budgets earmarked for county planning are not diverted to other departments and are allocated specifically towards planning implementation tools (including plan-making, scaling of planning department and capabilities, developing legal frameworks, increasing monitoring and enforcement capabilities, appointment of town management committees etc.);
- Enable counties to raise their own sources of revenue by raising local taxes, apply for donor support and attract private inward investment;
- Support capacity-building for county planning departments and other related departments (land surveying and valuation, housing, land adjudication, finance) focused on identified needs (such as GIS);
- Provide technical support from central government to develop local legal frameworks;
- Sensitise the wider public on the purpose and benefits of spatial planning, including through radio and social media channels; and
- Re-examine public participation requirements and processes in plan development to consider alternative engagement mechanisms that could be streamlined while ensuring that key groups are reached.

7. Discussion

Spatial planning so far represents a failure of Kenyan devolution. This could be considered an unfunded mandate and reflects the abrupt transition from the previous centralised system. Given the crucial role of spatial planning in the devolution system, this failure weakens the wider devolution agenda and impedes national development.

Effective spatial planning implementation is key to unlocking the potential of Africa's intermediary cities. There is an urgent need to better understand how planning can be implemented in this context, to which this paper contributes. In contrast to existing literature which critiques the modes of planning and content of plans, this paper has focused on the practical barriers to developing and implementing plans. The issue in Kisumu and Homa Bay has not been the quality of the two completed plans - which are, on the whole, robust, evidence-based and participatory exercises which could have a positive impact on their areas - but the severe difficulties encountered developing plans and, now, the inability to implement them. Without implementation there is the risk of a vicious circle, where planning is perceived as ineffective, leading to further de-prioritisation of planning.

The barriers examined here may not necessarily be generalised to other national contexts, but similar factors are likely at play including limited political will and understanding of planning; funding constraints; contested land ownership and cultural factors around land use; weak legal and institutional mechanisms for implementation. Similarly, solutions are likely to focus on establishing political support and commitment to planning; addressing land registration issues; effective approaches to public engagement and sensitisation; and establishing the appropriate legal and institutional framework to implement plans. Some existing literature suggests that a lack of available technical skills is a major barrier to planning, which can be addressed through capacity-building. In contrast, our findings suggest that skilled planners are available, but planning departments lack the financial resources to hire them. Generic capacity-building workshops are unlikely on their own to have a substantial impact on unblocking planning implementation.

National governments and donors could both play a role in supporting local planning teams to overcome those barriers. Legal and institutional planning frameworks are likely to be locally replicable across the country. Efforts to develop these could easily be scaled. There is a strong case for donors to support spatial planning (which they have not recently prioritised) as this can help intermediary cities achieve their development potential and increase the efficiency of other donor investments in these cities.

8. Conclusion

This study was aimed at advancing understanding of how to implement planning for intermediary cities in sub-Saharan Africa which is a key gap in the literature. In particular, this study examined the fundamental barriers preventing spatial planning implementation for intermediary cities in the counties of Kisumu and Homa Bay, in western Kenya, based on 31 key informant interviews and three focus group discussions.

The study found that counties lack the tools to operationalise plans such as adequate local by-laws, policies, regulations and administrative capacity as well as a complete land registry and land management powers at the local level. There is a lack of political support at the county level, which stems from a bias toward 'tangible' infrastructure development projects over the perceived 'intangible' and long-term nature of planning, as well as the fact that planning and land management issues are perceived by politicians as politically risky due to their historically contentious nature. This lack of political support to spatial planning contributes to inadequate and unreliable funding for spatial planning and severe under-resourcing of county planning departments which are unable to fulfil their mandates. The planning

process is vulnerable to political interference due to the lack of isolation of technical staff from political interests. Planning implementation is further complicated by interrelated factors including contested land ownership and inadequate land registration systems; weak public acceptance of the legitimacy of planning, particularly on freehold land; and cultural and historical practices around land use in the Luo community. These create practical barriers to zoning, transferring or developing land to achieve desired spatial planning outcomes.

We suggest policy responses for Kenya including greater financial and technical support from the central government to counties to effectively develop and implement spatial plans. In contrast with existing literature, this paper did not find inadequacy in the types of plans developed but rather strong barriers in completing plans and transforming these into strong outcomes on the ground. The results did not find a lack of available planning skills as a primary barrier, but rather a lack of funding for an adequately resourced planning department.

This paper opens an overlooked area of research around the importance of planning implementation capacity for intermediary cities in the wider African Context. More research should focus on understanding the barriers to implementing planning in other African contexts. Research could also focus on evidencing the benefits of implemented spatial planning in delivering healthier and more competitive intermediary cities.

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