City planning; let's go back to the basics

According to 2025 publications by the Kampala Capital City Authority on the state of the city's wetlands, the country's capital has lost up to 56 percent of its wetland cover in the last 30 years or more exactly, since 1994. These findings were presented in a wetland situational analysis report of the city, mid last year.

This state of affairs is worrying for many reasons, chief among which is that the loss of the city's wetlands affects its ability to absorb and manage storm waters. With the continuing seven percent annual loss of the wetland cover, frequent floods will continue to be a feature of the city's wet seasons since the wetlands originally serve as natural drainage and water filtration areas.

Illegal construction across the city, unplanned settlements and failure to plan or follow guidelines on drainage and storm water management act as both a cause and catalyst of the city's floods, which continue to grow in frequency and severity, affecting the livelihoods of thousands of city dwellers. This is not helped by the rapid population growth in Kampala, driven by, among others, high numbers of rural-urban migrants. The city's daytime population swells further, with the sheer volume of workers and tradespeople pouring in from surrounding districts for their daily grind.

The issue:
City planning

Our view:
It is urgent and necessary, at these rates of growth and development, to prioritise proper infrastructural development that does not worsen the conditions of an already constrained city population. A comprehensive plan for city development, supervised by experts and in accordance with environmental regulations, is not just critical. It is non-negotiable.

It is a cycle that imposes pressure on development to cater for a city population recorded at 1.79 million in the 2024 census, with the surrounding metropolitan area numbering in excess of four million people.

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If authorities, in collusion with business interests, continue to violate environmental safeguards in pursuit of shortcuts to property development, the consequences for an already struggling city will be dire.

We need to return to the basics, with proper development of city construction and expansion plans, adequate supervision and enforcement of environmental safety and structural plans. The tendency towards short-circuiting approved plans or avoiding the making of proper plans altogether will only result in disaster, as has proven to be the case time and again.

There is no shortcut to proper, safe and environmentally friendly sustainable infrastructure development. Nature will not allow it.

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