

Street Vending in Kampala: From Corruption to Crisis

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Abstract: For many decades, the Kampala City Council (KCC) tolerated street vending as a positive livelihood strategy for many poor urban dwellers. In 2010, the Parliament of Uganda passed legislation that changed the management of Kampala city from elected (KCC) to central government-appointed officials (KCCA). The main argument given for this change was that it would reduce endemic corruption, improve working conditions of very poor groups, and streamline service delivery. However, Kampala witnessed an unprecedented increase in the number of street vendors between 2014 and 2019. The central government and KCCA officials framed vendors' ongoing presence and refusal to vacate the streets as a suicidal problem. Ruthless eviction operations by KCCA law enforcement officers have yielded very limited success. This article argues that deliberate neglect of market vendors' needs and corruption embedded in the process of demolishing, redevelopment, and management of redeveloped/purchased markets left thousands of low-income market vendors without adequate relocation alternatives. Many resorted to street vending thus, turning an already existing issue into a crisis. Having contributed to this street vending crisis, state actors used ruthless means to evict but without success. Street vendors have used defiance, building alliances with opposition politicians, and bribing some KCCA law enforcement officers to defy KCCA eviction efforts. Heightened fear by the central government that continued crude eviction of street vendors without any viable livelihood option would have serious political drawbacks combined with the other factors to further circumvent KCCA efforts to evict them.

Key words: Kampala, street vendors, corruption, markets, Uganda.

Introduction

Kampala has for decades been dogged with serious challenges such as uncollected garbage, poor drainage, poor roads, inadequate sanitation, cramped classrooms, and insufficient health centers.¹ This mess became a constant personal embarrassment to President Museveni particularly when compared to Kigali, the capital of Rwanda.² President Museveni blamed the overall situation on the incompetence and corruption of opposition politicians controlling Kampala.³ Therefore, ruling party officials argued that it was only possible to reduce these challenges and modernize Kampala by changing its management structure.⁴ In 2010, the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) party utilized its control of parliament to pass the Kampala City Council Authority Act (KCCA Act 2010) that changed management of Kampala city from elected to government-appointed officials. The KCCA Act 2010 became effective on 1 March 2011 leading to the creation of a full Ministry for Kampala Affairs and an executive director (ED) directly appointed by the president to manage the city.⁵ Ms. Jenifer Musisi was appointed ED and started her work in April 2011. With a tremendously increased budget from

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central government and more funding through development partners, KCCA fixed many roads and improved some service delivery. Musisi also interdicted or sacked many corrupt officials—efforts that earned her praise from many commentators, including President Museveni.⁶

President Museveni and ED Musisi then argued that the presence of street vendors on the streets of Kampala was suicidal and must be removed.⁷ Cabinet passed a resolution that street vendors should be evicted from the streets. KCCA law enforcement officers intensified eviction operations, sometimes using uncivil methods that resulted in fights, loss of goods, accidents, and even deaths of street vendors.⁸ Despite of the ruthless eviction operations by KCCA, street vending actually expanded from 2014–19 (estimated to be over 10,000 vendors by 2019).⁹ Why did the numbers of street vendors in Kampala increase in this period? Why did they refuse to vacate the streets—even in the face of a sustained ruthless crackdown?

The government and KCCA propagated a narrative that Kampala management reforms reduced corruption, improved working conditions for low-income earners, and streamlined public service delivery. This article challenges this narrative, using empirical data to expose: (a) how KCCA appointed incompetent market leaders; (b) the deliberate neglect by KCCA of poor vendor needs; (c) how different forms of corruption resulted in mismanagement of redeveloped markets; and d) demolition and stalled redevelopment of other markets without adequate relocation alternatives for the affected low-income market vendors. The article proceeds with a literature review on the informal sector and street vending generally, followed by the nature of politics, corruption, and anti-corruption debates in Uganda and Kampala.

Literature Review

Street vendors are broadly defined in this article as traders that use their bodies, wheelbarrows, handcarts, bicycles, temporary shades, trees, fences, mats, tables, and racks to carry, display, and sell their commodities. They have long existed and still do business in many cities both in developed and developing countries.¹⁰ Some argue that if properly managed, street vending can provide a meaningful livelihood option, particularly for unemployed and poor urban dwellers.¹¹ Others argue that street vendors undercut city authority/government revenue collection targets, inconvenience the flow of people/traffic, and take away customers from off-street rent/tax paying businesses, among others.¹² Because of the constantly changing opportunities and challenges that come with street vending, it is an occupation that falls in and out of favor across space and time. Kampala City Council (KCC)—the predecessor for Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA)—had for many decades tolerated street vending as a positive livelihood strategy.¹³ After the dismantling of KCC, street vendors fell out of favor from the new KCCA. Their presence, working spaces, and rights came under total suppression.¹⁴ Similar instances of street vendor repression and their determination not to vacate the streets occurred in Malawi after Bingu wa Mutharika came to power in 2004.¹⁵

Street vending is a complex occupation driven by various factors in different cities. Therefore, it is difficult to precisely explain the presence of street vendors in any city. In many sub-Saharan African cities, street vendors are a sub-group of a bloated informal sector which the World Bank blamed on the “urbanization of people without capital” or population increasing in urban centers without formal or industrial jobs.¹⁶ In the case of Uganda, a bloated low paying informal sector can be traced way back in the unfettered structural adjustment

policies (SAPs). During their bush war struggles (1980–1986), Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Army rebels espoused a vision to build an integrated and self-sustaining economy using a strong socialist-nationalist economic program. This plan hit a dead end when as president, Museveni turned to donors for aid to help him resuscitate a collapsed economy at the beginning of the early 1990s. Museveni quickly became a strong neoliberal economic orthodoxy convert who implemented wide-reaching SAPs with the guidance of donors and international financial institutions. These included abandoning investment in the agricultural sector, wholesale privatization of state owned enterprises, deep-reaching retrenchment of government workers, removal of agricultural subsidies, and liberalization of the economy among other reforms.¹⁷ Proponents of these reforms credited them for the impressive economic growth (six percent average), macroeconomic stability (single-digit annual and core inflation, stable exchange), and tremendous reduction in poverty per capita from the 1990s to the early 2000s.¹⁸

On the other hand, critics have argued that SAPs: (a) exposed a predominantly peasant society and collapsed Ugandan economy to an infectiously violent mode of capitalism where corruption was used to plunder public resources during the privatization process; (b) failed to deliver the promised private sector led industrialization transformation; (c) resulted in the collapse of the cooperative movement and low agricultural productivity; and (d) created mass unemployment and a bloated urban informal sector.¹⁹ In Kampala alone, over 70 percent of the 3.5 million people who work there daily are engaged in low paying informal sector activities.²⁰ Other scholars have pointed to similar consequences in other countries such as Zambia which also implemented ambitious SAPs in the early 1990s.²¹ These policies and experiences sharply contrast with those pursued in countries that succeeded to create mass and decent jobs in urban centers. For instance, in the East Asian Tiger countries pragmatic state interventionism in the economy led to high agricultural productivity in the countryside and urbanization accompanied by rapid industrialization that created decent jobs which absorbed most of the labor.²²

Many scholars stress that democracy—particularly free and fair elections, the rule of law, and eliminating corruption as key determinants of who governs and how—ultimately influences development.²³ When democracy is rendered dysfunctional, incumbents govern as they like with little risk of being punished by unsatisfied voters.²⁴ These arguments are plausible when contextualized in the Ugandan experience of the last thirty years and Kampala after the KCCA Act of 2010. They can also be directly correlated to struggles for the political control of Kampala city, its markets, and ultimately, the street vending crisis.

President Museveni took power in 1986 after a five year guerrilla war with a promise of establishing democracy but has instead established a semi-authoritarian regime and entrenched himself.²⁵ Starting from the early 2000s when political competition became very intense, the repression of opponents, marginalization of groups or places opposed to his rule, political patronage, and corruption became key tools to reproduce and consolidate power.²⁶ The entrenchment of political patronage created corrupt networks that run across the entire service delivery and administrative structure. Vertically, these run from central to local governments and extend horizontally across ministries, departments, and government agencies.²⁷ The use of patronage by President Museveni and his regime to win and maintain support fits in well with

patronage theory which asserts that the more vulnerable incumbent politicians are, the more likely they are to use patronage to win votes.²⁸

In the specific case of Kampala, city leadership was for many years under the firm control of opposition politicians who struggled to provide adequate public services due chronic underfunding by the central government. Many commentators considered this a deliberate strategy to undermine control of the city and punish Kampala residents for supporting the opposition.²⁹ Hundreds of thousands of low-income informal sector employed people in Kampala conduct their business in formal and informal markets.³⁰ Opposition politicians/parties gained firm political control of Kampala city in part through building alliances with market vendors by protecting their interests in return for votes.³¹ Most of these markets (particularly those generating a lot of money or located in prime places) have for many years been battlegrounds between vendors, land developers, politicians, Kampala authorities, and even the Buganda kingdom over who should own, manage, or redevelop them.³²

For many years, vendors fought against being dispossessed from their market areas.³³ President Museveni and his NRM party found it very difficult to gain political support among this huge section of Kampala's population.³⁴ This started to change when KCC aligned with interests that aimed to control city markets. Vendors then co-opted President Museveni as their new ally, an opportunity he grabbed with two hands in order to strengthen his political support in the city.³⁵ With this newfound alliance, the President vehemently condemned KCC's practice of selling market lands, arguing that it was against the principle of empowering poor people.³⁶ On several occasions, he intervened and cancelled land transactions in defense of vendors' interests. For instance, in 2009, Museveni ordered the cancellation of the Kisekka market land sale contract after demonstrations by vendors.³⁷ In 2010, he ordered the termination of Hassan Basajjabalaba's Haba Group contract to lease and manage Nakasero, Shauriyako, and St. Balikuddembe markets after vendors and parliament opposed the move.

Cancellation of these market contracts came with huge compensation costs. Wealthy businessman Hassan Basajjabalaba was compensated with a highly inflated Ush 142.6 billion (US\$ 61 million) and this caused a public uproar. The compensation process was marred with various irregularities. The Office of Auditor General determined that Basajjabalaba had forged documents relating to the payment and there was no basis for the compensation.³⁸ President Museveni blamed the scandal on the KCC which had given Basajjabalaba the contract in the first place. Skeptics were not convinced by his arguments, and many suspected that there could have been collusion to siphon off taxpayer money to finance Museveni's 2011 re-election. These allegations were built on the fact that numerous witnesses—including former Minister of Finance Syda Bbumba—testified that President Museveni had instructed them to push through the compensation. Basajjabalaba was the chairperson of the ruling NRM party business league at the time and a well-known contributor of huge sums of money to NRM election campaigns.³⁹ This corruption scandal was so bad that it was used in combination with other poor service delivery challenges as the basis for changing the management of Kampala from elected (KCC) to government-appointed officials (KCCA).⁴⁰

Many behavioral and organizational scholars have argued that once corruption and incompetence become deeply embedded within an organization, the structure of management should be changed by placing operations under the stewardship of leaders who are not only

very competent but also committed to high standards of behavior.⁴¹ The government of Uganda built a similar narrative and argued that changing Kampala city management from elected to government-appointed officials would reduce corruption, provide better working spaces for low income earners (in the form of modern market structures), and streamline general service delivery in the city.⁴² However, skeptics of Kampala city management reforms argued that the real intention of the reform was not necessarily to uproot corruption or stop land/market giveaways but in fact to carry these deals out with less resistance from opposition politicians.⁴³

Their suspicions are not without basis as there is well documented evidence of endemic corruption with impunity among top ranking government officials in Uganda.⁴⁴ Endemic corruption within wider Ugandan society complicates the fight against the same problem within KCCA. Scholars have long articulated that corruption may be very difficult to uproot from organizations when the wider institutional and political environments within which they operate are also corrupt.⁴⁵ It is even harder to uproot corruption from countries like Uganda where leaders frequently voice their disdain against corruption—as President Museveni has done—but in actual practice, they do little because they actually benefit from it.⁴⁶

As discussed above, a number of studies have discussed issues related with politics, corruption, changing fortunes of market vendors, and suppression of street vendors in Kampala. This study provides new knowledge illustrating how the actions and inactions of the government and KCCA officials now championing eviction of street vendors from Kampala contributed to their huge presence in the first place. The article critiques the government narrative which emphasizes that management reforms reduced corruption and improved service delivery for the very poor in Kampala. It argues instead that deliberate neglect of market vendors' priorities and corruption embedded in the management, demolition, and redevelopment of various city markets contributed to the vending crisis in Kampala city during the period 2014–2019. The article further provides new insights on why and how street vendors have defied KCCA eviction efforts.

Methodology

As earlier noted, hundreds of thousands of low-income informal sector-employed people in Kampala conduct their business in markets.⁴⁷ To understand how the street-vending crisis in Kampala unfolded, this article examines the processes, events and decisions involved during and after the demolition, redevelopment, and management of key markets. The five key markets—Nakivubo Park Yard, USAFI, Kasubi, Kisseka, and Wandegeya—were purposively selected for analysis in this study. Their demolition, redevelopment, and mismanagement significantly contributed to the street vending crisis during the period 2014–2019. Nakivubo Park Yard, USAFI, and Kisseka markets were selected because they are located within the CBD and have been affected by the mentioned developments differently. Nakivubo Park Yard market was demolished to pave way for other developments. USAFI was bought by KCCA to resettle street vendors. Kisseka was demolished and efforts to rebuild it have stalled. Wandegeya was redeveloped at a very huge cost but failed to attract vendors. Kasubi was demolished to pave way for road development.

This multiple case study approach helps provide wider and in-depth data which can even be used for external generalization of the study findings.⁴⁸ This study adopted a qualitative

research design and extensively used newspaper articles as a source of verifiable secondary data. Secondary data was supplemented with recorded testimonies of twenty-four market/street vendors and four key informants through in-depth interviews conducted in July 2018. Street vendors were randomly selected and interviewed. Interviews were conducted in Luganda and later translated into English. Six key informant interviews with people who have extensive knowledge on Kampala politics or directly involved in the management of Kampala affairs were conducted. These included three scholars from Makerere University, the Lord Mayor of Kampala, the KCCA director for market affairs, and the KCCA representative in Wandegeya market. Primary and secondary data were triangulated and concurrently analyzed.

Data Presentation and Discussion

Data on each of the sampled markets is presented and discussed separately so as to illustrate how different forms of corruption, neglect of market vendor's interests and incompetence contributed to pushing thousands of vendors onto the streets. Views of key informants and recorded testimonies of street/market vendors are discussed interactively.

Kisseka Market

This case illustrates how collusive corruption perpetuated by non-state actors (Kisseka Market committee leaders and rich businesspeople) combined with a dysfunctional justice system where cases take years before being resolved combined to stall a market redevelopment project intended to benefit thousands of vendors, thus forcing many onto the streets. Kisseka market used to be located in the city center along Namirembe road and was for decades home to over two thousand vendors. In 2009, Kampala City Council (KCC) sold the land to a company owned by Col. John Mugenyi. Kisseka market vendors violently protested this sale and had the support of parliament. President Museveni directly intervened and cancelled Mugenyi's contract. He gave the same land to the vendors and advised them to form an association to represent their own redevelopment interests. Vendors formed Nakivubo Road Old Kampala (Kisekka) Market Vendors Limited along with a redevelopment plan agreed by nearly nineteen hundred of the over two thousand vendors. In October 2011, KCCA gave them an initial five-year sub-lease with potential for a 49-year extension based on the condition of vendors building new structures within five years. The vendors had nowhere else to relocate during reconstruction. They therefore requested that the market be demolished in phases so that they could continue to work from one side as the other was developed. The market chairperson at the time rejected their plea and Kisseka was completely demolished at his orders on 22 December 2014.

Redevelopment then started despite a court order obtained by vendors. The redeveloped market was to specifically belong to its former vendors. However, when the construction started, members on the construction committee colluded with rich business people who acquired shops although they were not in the redevelopment plan. Shops and stalls were supposed to be affordable and allocated following a one-vendor-one-stall criterion according to the Presidential directive. However, members on the construction committee booked multiple shops for themselves. They also inflated the prices for shops (Ush 25 to 50 million) and stalls (Ush 9 to 25 million) depending on size. The deliberately hiked prices completely locked out

many vendors who resorted to legal action. The ensuing court battles have taken years without judgment and resulted into the stalling of the entire redevelopment process of Kisseka market.⁴⁹ Those Kisseka vendors with enough resources have since moved on and rent out other spaces. However, this research also revealed that hundreds of very low-income vendors who operated in this market were left without any other place to operate and turned to street vending.⁵⁰

Wandegeya Market

The case of this multi-million-dollar modern market illustrates how corrupt officials within KCCA sold stalls to actors not working in the market, resulting in serious problems. It also reveals a lack of sensitivity to vendors in terms of changing prices and a disrespect of their rights in electing people entrusted with managing the markets—all of which contributed to pushing many out of this infrastructure onto the streets as illustrated hereunder. The government of Uganda in partnership with the African Development Bank initiated a Markets and Agricultural Trade Improvement Project (MATIP), which aimed to build twenty-one modern markets across the country. These were aimed at providing a better working environment and a broader objective of getting vendors off the streets.⁵¹ In Kampala alone, three markets, including Wandegeya, were planned under this program.

In 2014, Wandegeya market was commissioned while others were under construction. However, by June 2016, two years after it officially opened, Wandegeya market still had over forty per cent of its stalls sitting empty.⁵² Since then, the occupancy situation has not improved yet there are many street vendors operating in Wandegeya suburb. This is mainly attributed to the fact that KCCA officials appointed to manage the market sold off strategically located ground floor stalls to outside people with more money rather than the intended poor vendors. The non-vendor individuals who acquired stalls put them up for rent at exorbitant rates that many vendors could not afford. In March 2015, a section of vendors opposed to this kind of corruption wanted to elect a new team to look into these matters. However, KCCA officials blocked the election insisting that the committee they had put in place was their preferred option.⁵³ This caused many vendors to remain with no choice other than operating on the streets of Wandegeya suburb.⁵⁴ Vendors operating on the streets of Wandegeya undercut the prices of those who remained in the market. Even those with stalls in the market also opt to bring their goods onto the streets because of fewer customers inside the market thus compounding the matter.⁵⁵ In July 2016 KCCA officials convened a meeting in Wandegeya market aimed at slashing the rent by thirty percent.⁵⁶ According to vendors on the street, however, this was window dressing the problem because the slashed rent was for stalls located on the upper floors, which attract fewer customers.⁵⁷

Nakivubo Park Yard and USAFI Markets

Nakivubo Park Yard market is a clear example of different forms of political corruption working in different ways to influence the demolition, with a lack of appropriate or adequate relocation alternatives forcing thousands onto the streets. USAFI market is concurrently discussed because of linked experiences illustrating how incompetence, exclusion, and incidental corruption also forced some formerly resettled street vendors back onto the streets. The ways in which crony capitalism plus state and regulatory capture manifested in the demolition of Nakivubo Park Yard market are complicated. They might not be easily

recognizable as corruption or contested, and in other instances they are hard to prove. Nonetheless, that does not stop them from being corrupt practices. State capture is defined in this article as a type of corruption that happens when private interests significantly influence the decision-making processes of a state.⁵⁸ Regulatory capture happens when an agency charged with regulating a sector advances the special concerns of a particular interest group.⁵⁹ Crony capitalism happens when individual favoritism is exercised in the distribution of legal permits, government grants, special tax breaks, and other forms of state intervention.⁶⁰

Nakivubo Park Yard market, which started in the 1980s, at one point housed over 25,000 vendors. The market was located on land owned by Nakivubo War Memorial Trust.⁶¹ The trust entered into an agreement with KCC and vendors, wherein KCC would collect taxes from vendors and share it with the trust. In 2014, Nakivubo Stadium board of trustees awarded a redevelopment contract to four companies. However, with influence from top politicians including President Museveni, Minister of Sports Charles Bakkabulindi, and Minister for Kampala Affairs Beti Kamyá, Nakivubo Trust reneged on the contract it had signed with the four companies. Instead, it re-awarded the contract to Ham Enterprises (U) Ltd, a company owned by Ham Kiggundu. According to President Museveni, Mr. Kiggundu had achieved tremendous success in developing commercial buildings in and around the city, thus he was the right person to redevelop Nakivubo Park Yard.

Other key stakeholders objected President Museveni's recommendation of Ham Kiggundu. These included the KCCA Executive Director Jenifer Musisi, Kampala Mayor Elias Lukwago, Ministry of Trade Amelia Kyambadde, the market vendors, and of course the companies that had valid contracts to redevelop the land. However, Kiggundu was still granted a 49-year lease to redevelop the land. The aggrieved companies went to court and secured an injunction halting the redevelopment. However, a judgment to the contrary was passed, two days after the aggrieved companies had secured an injunction.⁶² On 20 February 2017—without informing KCCA—Minister for Kampala Affairs Beti Kamyá directed all vendors to vacate Nakivubo Park Yard market within thirty days. The vendors and KCCA argued that an alternative relocation site should be provided before any eviction.⁶³

However, on 27 February 2017 Nakivubo Park Yard market vendors woke up to the news that Ham Kiggundu's workers were demolishing the market under protection from a massive police deployment. KCCA officials insisted that they never gave Kiggundu permission to demolish Nakivubo Park Yard market.⁶⁴ The speaker of Parliament Rebecca Kadaga and the Minister for Trade, Investment and Cooperatives Amelia Kyambadde castigated Beti Kamyá for aiding demolition of the market without adequate relocation plans.⁶⁵ On their part, Kamyá and Kiggundu argued that vendors were paid Ush 200 million to help them relocate to USAFI market.⁶⁶ Most vendors denied ever receiving any money from Kiggundu and that if any money was given, it was their compromised leaders who took it to okay the eviction.⁶⁷

USAFI market had been bought by KCCA in 2013 to specifically accommodate around seven hundred street vendors.⁶⁸ These vendors initially occupied the market without paying any rent because they were still struggling to attract customers to the new place.⁶⁹ The moment USAFI market leaders learnt about what had happened at Nakivubo Park Yard, they demanded fifteen months rent in arrears and those who could not pay were forced to vacate their stalls. Many went back to the streets.⁷⁰ But even when these vacated, the remaining stalls at USAFI

were not enough and thousands of Nakivubo Park Yard market vendors ended up on the streets.⁷¹

According to Dr. Esau Galukande (KCCA deputy director for production and marketing) KCCA made many efforts aimed at creating a good working environment for the very poor, including street vendors. This included establishing some city roads where goods could be sold on Sundays, plus buying or rebuilding markets such as USAFI and Wandegeya. However, its technical officials are also overwhelmed by challenges created by forces outside their control. The illegal demolition of Nakivubo Park Yard—which they opposed but were ignored by more powerful people inside and outside government—resulted in the displacement of tens of thousands of market vendors, many of whom ended on the streets.⁷² From Dr. Galukande’s assessment, one can aptly assert that while executive director Jenifer Musisi may have made tremendous efforts to uproot corruption within KCCA, she also had limits in terms of how far she could reach in uprooting corruption from Kampala while also solving the street vending issue. Musisi’s failure to stop the illegal Nakivubo Park Yard market giveaway exemplifies how corruption may be very difficult to uproot from organizations or specific places when the wider institutional and political environments are very corrupt.⁷³ It also reveals the role of power in determining whether a corrupt activity can be successfully initiated and implemented with impunity.⁷⁴

Kasubi Roadside Market

Kasubi roadside market illustrates how a lack of commitment to the priorities of the very poor contributed to the displacement of market vendors from their working premises without any relocation alternative. For over thirty years, two thousand or more vendors operated a roadside market along Hoima road in the Kampala suburb of Kasubi. When the expansion of Kampala-Nansana-Hoima road started in 2016, government promised to construct a new market, but this never materialized. The vendors identified a two acre piece of land at Kasubi zone on Hoima road where they could be relocated but KCCA claimed it had no money.⁷⁵ Without an appropriate relocation alternative, many vendors turned to street vending as a means for survival in the suburbs of Nakulabye, Lubaga, Makerere, and old Kampala.⁷⁶ According to Elias Lukwago, Lord Mayor of Kampala, the failure to urgently raise money to buy two acres of land for over two thousand vendors reveals a lack of commitment to the priorities of the very poor in Kampala.⁷⁷ Lukwago’s assertions are supported by a long list of prime land giveaways, huge government money compensations to rich businesspeople, and rewarding bonuses to government-employed people for essentially doing their job.⁷⁸ Lukwago—whose efforts to defend street vendors in Kampala are well documented—further stressed that they should not be hounded off the streets before adequate relocation plans are provided, particularly those directly affected by demolition of their markets.

Efforts to Evict Street Vendors: Why Limited Success?

After declaring vendors unwanted on the streets of Kampala, KCCA law enforcement have used different methods including criminal prosecutions, confiscation of goods, harassment, specifying streets for them to sell goods on Sundays, and redeveloping/buying markets. Nevertheless, all these efforts aimed at removing street vendors from the streets have yielded

limited success. Several factors which are highly intertwined have combined to thwart KCCA efforts to get street vendors—now estimated to be over ten thousand—off the streets of Kampala.⁷⁹

Street Vendor Resistance

According to Dr. Kafureeka Lawyer, the refusal of street vendors to vacate the streets even in the face of severe crackdown should be understood in the prism of the struggle for space and business in Kampala. Shopping mall/arcade owners and those operating in them are totally opposed to the activities of street vendors who take away customers and undercut prices. From 2010, this disdain aligned with the ambitions of government aimed at “modernizing” Kampala. The presence of street vendors in the streets is antithetical to that ambition. Thus, these two sides are aligned in opposition to and suppression of street vendors. On the other hand, many street vendors—who blame their presence on the streets from the inactions and actions of government, rich businesspeople, and arcade owners—are determined not to leave the streets. For many, particularly the very poor who may not have other sustainable livelihood options, the streets are their last stand.⁸⁰ These street vendors, just like other informal sector working groups such as taxi owners and *boda-boda* (motorcycle) drivers have also built alliances with opposition politicians to defend their interest with some success, as reflected in the 2016 election results.⁸¹

According to Professor Julius Kiiza, all actors involved in street vendor eviction operations are keenly aware that in the era of smartphones when anyone can capture an incident, post to social media, and cause a public storm, they must be careful. Pictures of women carrying babies on their backs and baskets of mangoes on the head running away from law enforcement officers is not what the government wants appearing on different media platforms.⁸² Government does not want a repeat of incidents such as the one on 5 August 2017, when a 38-year-old Olivia Basemera—a single mother who was vending handkerchiefs—died while running from KCCA enforcement officers.⁸³ This sparked serious social media-driven public outcry and demonstrations echoing those in Tunisia (a street vendor burnt himself to death after harassment from government officials and ignited the Arab spring). Thus, KCCA and government officials know that brutalization of the most vulnerable in this era of media platforms that can drive things viral have the potential to end careers of the officers involved, cause public violence, and even cause regime instability. Indeed, the KCCA officers involved in the Basemera incident were arrested and prosecuted. Since then, most of them are very cautious not to be caught up in a similar accident, rendering their eviction operations less effective.

Politicization of City Management

According to Professor William Muhumuza, while KCCA reforms aimed to depoliticize the management of Kampala and run it as a corporate entity, the entire process was from the very beginning captured by the ruling government with President Museveni at the center.⁸⁴ The KCCA Act 2010 suppressed the voices of the electorate in how the city should be managed. This suppression empowered KCCA ED Jenifer Musisi to ruthlessly evict street vendors without any fear of voter’s backlash because she was unelected official.⁸⁵ The voters in Kampala projected their anger at President Museveni, however, and repaid him by overwhelmingly voting the opposition during the 2016 general election. After the elections, President Museveni lamented

that her actions were a major contributor to his poor performance in Kampala. He immediately appointed two opposition politicians (Beti Kamyá and Bena Namugwanya) as ministers for Kampala Affairs. Kamyá publicly rebuked Musisi for her actions and vowed to get Museveni eighty percent of Kampala votes in the 2021 election.⁸⁶

After these rebukes by the President and the Minister, Musisi adopted a hands-off approach in her efforts to evict street vendors and resigned from her position in December 2018, citing political interference in her work.⁸⁷ While anti-street vending rhetoric has remained high, current actions against street vendors are muted because of clear political calculations for the forthcoming 2021 elections. President Museveni, Minister Kamyá, and the Acting ED Godfrey Kitaka are very aware that any outcry from street vendors has potential electoral implications, as evidenced in 2016. This may partly explain why the vendors are still on the streets.⁸⁸ The politicization of reforms has also been sustained from the opposition side—particularly the Lord Mayor of Kampala, various division mayors, and Kampala councilors. From the very start, the political opposition tried to make the work of KCCA technical officials very difficult particularly by inciting the public on the issue of street vendors.

Petty Corruption

Petty corruption, which usually involves exchanges of small amounts of money, can be either extortion or collusion.⁸⁹ In Uganda, other studies have revealed that even when corruption is petty in nature, it can have devastating consequences if widespread or embedded in a critical sector.⁹⁰ Similarly, shop owners and street vendors interviewed for this study intimated that law enforcement officers sent to evict street vendors sometimes extort money or get ‘tips’ to turn a blind eye on their activities. This practice was reported to be very common in locations that attract more customers. Those who cannot afford the ‘tip’ are the ones whose goods are confiscated or arrested.⁹¹ Both the vendors and the law enforcement officers involved in this kind of corruption benefit at personal level. However, the practice makes efforts to clear the streets of vendors more difficult. Such corrupt practices are not unique to KCCA law enforcement officers. Research in other cities such as Nairobi, Harare, Lagos, and Mumbai have indicated that bribes or direct extortion of money from street vendors by corrupt officers runs into millions of dollars per year.⁹²

Conclusion

This article set out to examine the key factors, events, decisions, and processes that resulted in the significant increase in the number of street vendors in Kampala between 2014–2019. The main findings of this study revealed that the decisions of top government and KCCA officials, businesspeople, and market leaders to demolish and displace thousands of market vendors from their working places without proper and effective relocation plans pushed many vulnerable market vendors into street vending. In addition, this article has also illustrated how deliberate neglect of market vendor needs and different forms of corruption embedded in the demolition, redevelopment, and management processes of different markets combined to force thousands of market vendors into street vending. The article has also challenged the government narrative that the Kampala city management reform reduced corruption and improved service delivery for the poor. To the contrary, this study concludes that the reforms

were politicized and captured by central government officials who have used the opportunity to execute transactions such as market and prime land giveaways that have hurt the very poor and directly contributed to increased street vending. Street vendors have also used different methods to defend their presence, with some bringing temporary wins and others putting their lives into harm's way. It is the hope of the author that the illustrations of how corruption has manifested itself in the different market demolitions, redevelopment, and management will provide better understanding of how it is perpetuated and how it can be stopped in future.

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Notes

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