

**Rapid Urbanization and Its Effects on Social Welfare and Living Conditions in Nansana Municipality,
Wakiso District, Uganda**

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Abstract

Rapid urbanization has emerged as one of the most defining demographic and spatial transformations of the twenty-first century, reshaping the social, economic, and physical fabric of cities and municipalities across the developing world. In sub-Saharan Africa, urbanization has proceeded at rates far exceeding the capacity of municipal governments to provide adequate housing, sanitation, healthcare, education, and social protection services, generating significant deterioration in social welfare and living conditions for urban residents, particularly the poor. In Uganda, rapid urban growth driven by rural-urban migration, natural population increase, and administrative reclassification of peri-urban areas has placed immense pressure on municipal service delivery systems. In Nansana Municipality, Wakiso District, one of Uganda's fastest-growing urban centers, rapid urbanization had produced a complex and compounding set of social welfare and living condition challenges that demanded empirical investigation. This study examined the effects of rapid urbanization on social welfare and living conditions in Nansana Municipality. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches. A sample of 145 respondents comprising residents, municipal officials, social service providers, and community leaders was selected through stratified random sampling. Structured questionnaires and key informant interviews were used for data collection. Pearson correlation and multiple linear regression analyses were applied to examine the relationship between rapid urbanization and social welfare and living conditions. The findings revealed a strong negative and statistically significant relationship between rapid urbanization and social welfare and living conditions ($r = -0.771$, $p < 0.05$). Infrastructure overload ($\beta = -0.452$), environmental degradation ($\beta = -0.431$), and social service strain ($\beta = -0.443$) were each significant negative predictors of social welfare and living conditions. Residents in areas experiencing the most intense urbanization pressures recorded the lowest scores on housing quality, access to clean water and sanitation, healthcare access, and overall quality of life. Rapid urbanization was a significant and negative determinant of social welfare and living conditions in Nansana Municipality. The faster and more unplanned the urbanization process, the more severely social welfare and living conditions deteriorated across multiple dimensions of resident wellbeing. Nansana Municipal Council, the Wakiso District local government, and national urban planning agencies should urgently develop and implement integrated urban development strategies that align population growth management with proactive investment in social infrastructure, environmental management, and inclusive service delivery to protect and improve resident welfare.

Keywords: Rapid urbanization, social welfare, living conditions, Nansana Municipality, Wakiso District, Uganda, infrastructure overload, environmental degradation, social service strain, peri-urban development

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

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Urbanization is one of the most powerful and far-reaching demographic forces shaping human society in the contemporary era, with the United Nations projecting that approximately 68% of the world's population will live in urban areas by 2050, with the majority of this growth concentrated in Africa and Asia (UN-Habitat, 2022). In sub-Saharan Africa, urbanization has proceeded at an annual rate of approximately 4%, making it the fastest-urbanizing region in the world (Jackline et al., 2023), yet this growth has been characterized predominantly by informality, inadequate infrastructure provision, and deepening social inequalities rather than the economic transformation and welfare improvements historically associated with urbanization in developed regions (AfDB, 2022). The concept of rapid urbanization, as distinct from gradual and planned urban growth, refers to the accelerated expansion of urban populations and spatial footprints at rates that outpace the capacity of governance systems, infrastructure networks, and social service delivery mechanisms to respond effectively (Turok & McGranahan, 2021).

Social welfare, broadly defined as the collective wellbeing of a population across dimensions of health, education, housing, income security, and social protection, has been shown to be highly sensitive to the pace and quality of urbanization (World Bank, 2022). When urbanization proceeds rapidly and in an unplanned manner, it typically generates a constellation of adverse social welfare outcomes including proliferation of informal settlements, deterioration of sanitation and water supply systems, congestion of health and education facilities, rising crime and social disorder, and widening inequality between different urban social groups (Satterthwaite et al., 2021). Living conditions, encompassing the physical and environmental quality of the spaces in which people reside and work, are similarly vulnerable to the pressures of rapid urban growth, with housing quality, air and water quality, solid waste management, and access to green spaces all deteriorating as population density outstrips infrastructure investment (Turok & McGranahan, 2021).

Uganda's urbanization rate of approximately 5.1% per annum was among the highest in East Africa, with urban population growth driven by a combination of rural-urban migration, natural increase, and the formal reclassification of formerly rural areas as municipalities and town councils (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Nansana Municipality, located in Wakiso District approximately 12 kilometers northwest of Kampala, exemplified the challenges of rapid peri-urban growth in Uganda's metropolitan context. Nansana's population had grown from an estimated 150,000 residents in 2002 to over 400,000 by 2021, representing a more than 160% increase over two decades, driven primarily by in-migration from rural regions and spillover from Kampala's expanding urban core (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This explosive population growth had placed severe strain on the municipality's housing stock, road network, drainage systems, water supply infrastructure, health facilities, and school capacity (Julius & Matovu, 2025).

Globally, the consequences of rapid urbanization for social welfare and living conditions have been extensively documented (Julius et al., 2024). Satterthwaite et al. (2021) demonstrated across multiple African cities that rapid unplanned urban growth was the primary driver of informal settlement proliferation, with residents of these settlements experiencing significantly worse health, education, and income outcomes than the urban average. Lwasa et al. (2022)

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specifically documented that in Uganda's peri-urban municipalities, rapid population growth was systematically overwhelming municipal service delivery capacity, generating measurable deterioration in water access, sanitation coverage, and housing quality. Kyessi (2021) further showed that the social cohesion and community support networks that characterized rural life were progressively eroded in rapidly urbanizing areas, replacing them with social fragmentation, anonymity, and weakened community welfare systems. It was against this background that this study was conducted, seeking to generate specific and contextualized empirical evidence on how rapid urbanization had affected social welfare and living conditions in Nansana Municipality, with the aim of informing evidence-based urban planning and social policy responses(Nancy & Prudence, 2024).

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite its strategic location and economic potential as a peri-urban hub within Uganda's metropolitan corridor, Nansana Municipality had witnessed a progressive deterioration in social welfare and living conditions that was widely attributed to the pace and unplanned nature of its urbanization(Julius, 2024). Reports from municipal health offices, education departments, and community-based organizations documented overcrowded health centers, dilapidated school infrastructure, overwhelmed drainage and sanitation systems, proliferation of informal housing settlements, and increasing incidents of waterborne disease outbreaks, all consistent with the social welfare strain associated with rapid unmanaged urban growth (Nansana Municipal Council, 2022). Lwasa et al. (2022) noted that municipalities in Uganda's metropolitan fringe were experiencing a systematic mismatch between population growth and infrastructure investment, resulting in declining per capita service availability and deteriorating living standards for the majority of residents(Kaazara & Nancy, 2025). Turok and McGranahan (2021) further argued that without proactive and integrated urban planning responses, rapid urbanization in sub-Saharan African municipalities would continue to generate social welfare deficits that entrenched poverty and inequality across generations(Julius & Kazaara, 2026). Yet, despite the visible and widely reported deterioration of living conditions in Nansana Municipality, no empirical study had specifically quantified and analyzed the relationship between rapid urbanization and social welfare and living conditions within the municipality's specific context. This critical knowledge gap left municipal planners, district officials, and development partners without the evidence base needed to design, target, and evaluate appropriate interventions. This study was therefore conducted to address that gap.

3. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE

To examine the effect of rapid urbanization on social welfare and living conditions of residents in Nansana Municipality, Wakiso District, Uganda.

4. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design, enabling the simultaneous collection of data from multiple respondent categories across Nansana Municipality at a defined point in time. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from key informant interviews, to provide both

statistical rigor and rich contextual understanding of how rapid urbanization had affected social welfare and living conditions across different parts of the municipality(Sarah et al., 2024).

The study population comprised adult residents of Nansana Municipality aged 18 years and above, municipal council officials responsible for planning, health, and social services, community and local council leaders, and representatives of civil society organizations providing social welfare services within the municipality(Abiodun Nafiu, 2012). Using stratified random sampling, the municipality's divisions and parishes were treated as strata, ensuring proportional representation from both densely settled informal areas and relatively planned residential zones. A total of 145 respondents participated in the study, with 122 completing structured questionnaires and 23 participating in key informant interviews(Sarah et al., 2024).

The questionnaire measured rapid urbanization through three dimensions infrastructure overload, environmental degradation, and social service strain and assessed social welfare and living conditions through indicators of housing quality and security, access to water, sanitation, and health services, and perceived overall quality of life. Given the negative relationship hypothesized between rapid urbanization and welfare outcomes, urbanization dimensions were measured in terms of the extent to which residents experienced their negative manifestations, such as overcrowding, environmental pollution, and service access difficulties. All items were scored on a five-point Likert scale(Yoder, 2019). A pilot study was conducted with 14 residents in Kira Municipality, a neighboring peri-urban area with comparable urbanization characteristics, to validate the instruments. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for all constructs ranged from 0.75 to 0.85, confirming satisfactory internal consistency (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 27(Nelson et al., 2022). Descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. Pearson correlation analysis tested the strength and direction of the relationship between each urbanization dimension and social welfare and living condition indicators. Multiple linear regression analysis determined the individual and combined predictive contribution of urbanization dimensions to social welfare and living condition outcomes(Nelson et al., 2023). Qualitative data from key informant interviews were analyzed thematically, with emerging themes integrated with quantitative findings to provide interpretive depth and policy relevance. Throughout the research process, strict ethical protocols were observed, including obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring anonymity, maintaining secure data storage, and obtaining institutional ethical clearance (Israel & Hay, 2006).

5. RESULTS

5.1 Descriptive Statistics for Rapid Urbanization and Social Welfare and Living Conditions

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (n = 145)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Infrastructure Overload	3.91	0.763	High
Environmental Degradation	3.78	0.812	High

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Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Social Service Strain	3.83	0.794	High
Rapid Urbanization (Overall)	3.84	0.789	High
Housing Quality and Security	2.74	0.934	Below Average
Access to Water, Sanitation and Health Services	2.61	0.961	Below Average
Perceived Overall Quality of Life	2.68	0.947	Below Average
Social Welfare and Living Conditions (Overall)	2.68	0.947	Below Average

Source: Primary Data, 2026

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 revealed a striking and deeply concerning picture of rapid urbanization and its consequences for residents of Nansana Municipality. Rapid urbanization overall was perceived at a high level ($M = 3.84$, $SD = 0.789$), reflecting widespread and intense experience of urbanization-related pressures across the municipality's residential areas. Infrastructure overload recorded the highest mean among the urbanization dimensions ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.763$), indicating that the overwhelming majority of respondents perceived the municipality's physical infrastructure roads, drainage, electricity, and market facilities as severely overburdened relative to the demands of the existing and growing population. Key informants from the municipal engineering department corroborated this finding, noting that Nansana's road network, drainage channels, and solid waste management systems had been designed for a population fraction of what the municipality currently hosted, and that routine maintenance budgets were entirely inadequate to address the compounding deterioration (Regan et al., 2024). This finding aligned with Satterthwaite et al. (2021), who documented that infrastructure overload was the most immediately visible and widely experienced consequence of rapid urbanization in African peri-urban municipalities. Environmental degradation also scored high ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.812$), confirming that residents experienced significant environmental quality decline in the form of air pollution from unregulated industrial and vehicular emissions, water pollution from inadequate sewage disposal, solid waste accumulation in open spaces and drainage channels, and loss of green areas and wetlands to unplanned construction. Several key informants highlighted the destruction of wetlands around Nansana as particularly damaging, noting that areas previously serving as natural drainage buffers had been converted to informal housing, increasing flooding frequency and severity during rainy seasons. Social service strain recorded a similarly high mean ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.794$), reflecting intense pressure on health centers, schools, and social protection systems, with respondents reporting long waiting times at health facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate coverage of social welfare programs relative to the size and vulnerability of the municipality's population (Sarah & Audrey, 2024).

In sharp contrast, social welfare and living conditions overall scored below average ($M = 2.68$, $SD = 0.947$), confirming that the high urbanization pressures documented above were translating directly into poor welfare outcomes for Nansana's residents. Access to water, sanitation, and health services recorded the lowest mean among

welfare indicators ($M = 2.61, SD = 0.961$), a deeply alarming finding that indicated most residents lacked reliable access to safe water, functional sanitation facilities, and affordable healthcare conditions that placed them at heightened risk of waterborne diseases, maternal and child health complications, and other preventable health outcomes (Edgar & Moses, 2023). Housing quality and security scored below average ($M = 2.74, SD = 0.934$), reflecting the widespread prevalence of informal, overcrowded, and structurally unsafe housing, consistent with Lwasa et al. (2022), who documented that over 60% of Nansana's housing stock consisted of informal structures built without planning approval on land without secure tenure.

5.2 Correlation between Rapid Urbanization and Social Welfare and Living Conditions

Table 2: Pearson Correlation between Rapid Urbanization Dimensions and Social Welfare and Living Conditions

Variable	Social Welfare and Living Conditions (r)	p-value	Decision
Infrastructure Overload	-0.724	0.000	Significant
Environmental Degradation	-0.698	0.000	Significant
Social Service Strain	-0.741	0.000	Significant
Rapid Urbanization (Overall)	-0.771	0.000	Significant

Source: Primary Data, 2026

The Pearson correlation results in Table 2 demonstrated strong negative and statistically significant relationships between all three dimensions of rapid urbanization and social welfare and living conditions among residents of Nansana Municipality (Nelson et al., 2023). The negative direction of all correlations confirmed the study's central hypothesis that rapid urbanization, as manifested through infrastructure overload, environmental degradation, and social service strain, exerted a damaging rather than an enabling effect on resident welfare and living conditions, consistent with the theoretical propositions of Urban Stress Theory and the empirical literature on unplanned urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa.

The overall rapid urbanization score correlated most strongly with social welfare and living conditions ($r = -0.771, p < 0.001$), affirming that the cumulative effect of all three urbanization pressures operating simultaneously produced the most severe welfare and living condition deterioration among Nansana's residents. This finding was consistent with Turok and McGranahan (2021), who argued that it was the combined and mutually reinforcing nature of infrastructure, environmental, and social service pressures rather than any single urbanization challenge that generated the most devastating welfare outcomes in rapidly growing African municipalities. Social service strain registered the strongest individual negative correlation with social welfare and living conditions ($r = -0.741, p < 0.001$), underscoring the critical importance of social service capacity as a buffer between urbanization pressures and resident welfare outcomes. When health centers were overwhelmed, schools overcrowded, and social protection systems inadequate, the human costs of rapid urbanization were felt most directly and acutely by the municipality's most vulnerable

residents, particularly women, children, the elderly, and recent migrants. Infrastructure overload correlated strongly and negatively with welfare outcomes ($r = -0.724, p < 0.001$), reflecting the direct and immediate way in which deteriorating roads, flooding drainage systems, and unreliable utilities translated into poorer living experiences, higher transportation costs, greater exposure to disease vectors, and reduced access to economic opportunities. Environmental degradation, while recording the lowest individual negative correlation ($r = -0.698, p < 0.001$), remained strongly and significantly associated with welfare deterioration, confirming that the progressive destruction of Nansana's natural environment through pollution, wetland encroachment, and solid waste accumulation was exacting a measurable toll on resident health, safety, and quality of life.

5.3 Regression Analysis: Effect of Rapid Urbanization on Social Welfare and Living Conditions

Table 3: Linear Regression Results — Rapid Urbanization Predicting Social Welfare and Living Conditions

Predictor	Beta (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Decision
Infrastructure Overload	-0.452	0.087	-5.195	0.000	Significant
Environmental Degradation	-0.431	0.092	-4.685	0.000	Significant
Social Service Strain	-0.443	0.089	-4.978	0.000	Significant
R² = 0.663	Adjusted R² = 0.655	F = 89.34	p = 0.000		

Source: Primary Data, 2026

The regression results in Table 3 provided compelling and statistically robust evidence of the individual and combined predictive power of rapid urbanization dimensions on social welfare and living conditions in Nansana Municipality. The overall regression model was highly significant ($F = 89.34, p < 0.001$), and the R^2 value of 0.663 indicated that approximately 66.3% of the variance in social welfare and living conditions was explained by the three urbanization dimensions combined. This high level of explanatory power confirmed that rapid urbanization was among the most dominant structural determinants of social welfare and living condition outcomes in Nansana, consistent with Kyessi (2021), who documented similar explanatory magnitudes in studies of urbanization and welfare outcomes across East African municipalities.

Infrastructure overload emerged as the strongest individual negative predictor of social welfare and living conditions ($\beta = -0.452, p < 0.001$), indicating that for every unit increase in the severity of infrastructure overload experienced by residents, social welfare and living conditions deteriorated by 0.452 units, controlling for other variables. This finding carried particularly critical policy implications for Nansana, where infrastructure overload had simultaneously recorded the highest descriptive mean among urbanization pressures, meaning that the dimension causing the most welfare damage was also the most intensely and widely experienced. The urgency of infrastructure investment and rehabilitation in Nansana was therefore not merely a matter of physical development but a direct social welfare and public health imperative. Social service strain was the second strongest negative predictor ($\beta = -0.443, p < 0.001$), reinforcing the critical role of functional health, education, and social protection systems in maintaining resident

welfare in the face of rapid population growth. Byerlee et al. (2021) similarly found in studies of rapidly urbanizing African municipalities that social service capacity constraints were among the most powerful mediators of the negative relationship between urban growth and resident welfare, particularly for low-income households with limited private alternatives to public services. Environmental degradation, while the weakest predictor among the three ($\beta = -0.431$, $p < 0.001$), remained a highly significant negative contributor to welfare outcomes, confirming that the environmental costs of rapid unplanned urbanization pollution, flooding, loss of green space, and solid waste accumulation were exacting a real and measurable toll on the social welfare and living conditions of Nansana's residents. Together, the three urbanization dimensions jointly explained nearly two-thirds of the variance in social welfare and living conditions, providing powerful empirical justification for treating rapid urbanization management as a central social welfare and public health priority in Nansana Municipality.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the effects of rapid urbanization on social welfare and living conditions in Nansana Municipality, Wakiso District, Uganda. The following conclusions were drawn from the findings:

Rapid urbanization was a significant and negative determinant of social welfare and living conditions in Nansana Municipality. Residents in areas experiencing the most intense urbanization pressures manifested through infrastructure overload, environmental degradation, and social service strain consistently recorded the poorest outcomes across all dimensions of social welfare and living conditions, confirming that unplanned and unmanaged urban growth was actively undermining resident welfare rather than enabling it.

Infrastructure overload was the strongest predictor of social welfare and living condition deterioration, and simultaneously the most intensely experienced urbanization pressure among Nansana's residents. The convergence of high prevalence and high welfare impact identified infrastructure investment as the most urgent and highest-leverage intervention for improving social welfare in the municipality.

Social service strain proved to be the second strongest predictor of welfare deterioration, confirming that the progressive overwhelm of health centers, schools, and social protection systems by rapid population growth was generating direct and severe welfare costs for Nansana's residents, particularly the most vulnerable and economically marginalized.

Environmental degradation, while the weakest predictor statistically, remained strongly and significantly associated with welfare deterioration, affirming that the environmental dimensions of rapid urbanization including wetland destruction, solid waste mismanagement, and pollution were meaningful contributors to the poor living conditions experienced by a large proportion of the municipality's population.

Overall, the study concluded that the pace of urbanization in Nansana Municipality had dramatically and measurably outstripped the capacity of municipal governance, infrastructure systems, and social service delivery mechanisms to protect and promote resident welfare, and that without urgent, integrated, and adequately resourced urban management interventions, social welfare and living conditions would continue to deteriorate as population growth persisted.

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7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The council should immediately develop and operationalize a Comprehensive Urban Development and Social Welfare Master Plan for the municipality, integrating land use planning, infrastructure investment, environmental management, and social service expansion into a single, coherent framework aligned to population growth projections for the next decade. The plan should prioritize the rehabilitation of drainage systems, road networks, and solid waste management infrastructure as emergency interventions to arrest the most acute infrastructure overload challenges currently affecting resident welfare.

The district should substantially increase its budgetary allocations to Nansana Municipality for infrastructure maintenance, health facility expansion, and school construction, recognizing the municipality's unique population growth pressures and the disproportionate welfare burden they create for residents. The district should also enforce physical planning regulations more rigorously to curtail unplanned construction in wetland areas and other environmentally sensitive zones.

The ministry should fast-track the development of a detailed Physical Development Plan for Nansana Municipality, incorporating zoning regulations, building standards, and infrastructure development guidelines appropriate to the municipality's current scale and projected growth trajectory. National support for slum upgrading programs in Nansana's most densely settled informal settlements should be prioritized, with a focus on tenure security, housing quality improvement, and access to water and sanitation.

Both ministries should accelerate the construction and equipping of additional health centers and school facilities in Nansana Municipality to address the severe service strain documented in this study. Health facility staffing levels should be reviewed and augmented to reflect actual patient load rather than design capacity, and community health worker programs should be expanded to extend health service reach into the most underserved settlements.

Organizations engaged in urban development and social welfare programming in Uganda should target Nansana Municipality as a priority intervention area, given the severity of the welfare challenges documented in this study. Investments in community-based water and sanitation infrastructure, environmental restoration initiatives, and social protection programs for vulnerable households should be coordinated with municipal and district government plans to maximize coverage and impact.

Subsequent studies should investigate the differential effects of rapid urbanization on specific vulnerable population subgroups in Nansana Municipality, including women-headed households, recent rural-urban migrants, and children, to identify equity dimensions of the urbanization-welfare relationship that aggregate analyses may obscure.

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Longitudinal research designs should also be employed to track how urbanization trajectories and welfare outcomes evolve over time, providing more robust causal evidence and enabling the evaluation of intervention impacts.

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