

THE NAIROBI SPRAWL; MISERY OR FELICITY?

ANYAMBA T. J. C.

University of Nairobi, Nairobi, Kenya

ABSTRACT

The Nairobi Sprawl; Misery or Felicity

The city of Nairobi was founded in 1899 as a railway town of the Uganda Railway. The Nairobi site was situated about midway between the port of Mombasa and Kisumu on Lake Victoria, which were to be the two termini of the railway line.

The Plan for a Railway Town (1898), the Plan for a Settler Capital (1927) and the Plan for a Colonial City (1948), guided the urban development of Nairobi during the colonial period. Over the years, the city has grown to become a metropolis of more than four (4) million people. However, unlike the colonial period the city has grown informally without clear guidelines for its development.

At independence in 1963, there was a relaxation on the movement of Africans leading to a massive population growth of Nairobi. The colonial development control mechanisms that were inherited by the new African regime were unable to provide the requisite urban goods and services. This led to the production of these goods and services through informal processes. The Metropolitan Growth Strategy of 1973 was never fully implemented, and the city continued to grow informally.

Nairobi became an enormous urban sprawl, making travel time quite long between residences and places of work. This has not been made any better by the collapse of the public transport system and the dependence on the chaotic privately run *matatu* transport system.

In 2014 a proposal for the Integrated Urban Development Master Plan for the city of Nairobi (NIUPLAN) was launched. This plan is meant to address the challenges facing the city. However, not much has happened as a result of this launch and most Nairobians continue to live in misery on a day to day basis. Surprisingly Nairobi has at the same time become the choice destination for local and international real estate developers.

This paper argues that unless a sustainable urban infrastructure is realized, the city of Nairobi may one day grind to a halt. This is the fate that befell Old Delhi give rise to the establishment of New Delhi.

KEYWORDS: Sprawl, Colonial, Railway, Informal, Sustainable