

Comparative Analysis Between Urban Livability and Social Exclusion in Sub Sahara Africa: A Literature Review

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DOI : <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.8080199>

Received: 30 July 2024; Revised: 5 August 2024; Accepted: 10 August 2024; Published: 12 September 2024

ABSTRACT

The Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region is undergoing rapid urbanization, which brings challenges such as unemployment, poverty, inadequate healthcare, poor sanitation, and the expansion of slums, all of which diminish the livability of its cities. To fully grasp Africa's socio-economic realities and disparities, it is crucial to understand the factors influencing urban livability and social exclusion. A comparative analysis of urban livability and social exclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was conducted. Therefore, this study employs a systematic literature review to identify and assess relevant publications. The research highlights the importance of various factors in shaping urban livability and social inclusion, including open public spaces, economic opportunities, infrastructure, public services, safety and security, environmental quality, social cohesion, and urban planning. The study identifies critical elements for improving urban livability and reducing social exclusion in SSA cities, such as equal opportunities, economic development, adequate infrastructure, high-quality public services, safety and security, environmental sustainability, social cohesion, and inclusive urban planning. The paper concludes with recommendations for policymakers and urban planners to prioritize these elements in their efforts to develop more livable and inclusive cities.

Keywords: Urban livability, Social exclusion, Sub-Saharan Africa, Comparative Analysis, Urban development

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is a notable worldwide trend, with over half of the global population currently residing in cities and towns, a figure projected to exceed 70% by 2050, according to the United Nations. The Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) region, despite having the lowest proportion of its population in urban areas—40%, or 472 million people—is experiencing the fastest urbanization rate globally, with an annual urban population growth rate of 4.1% compared to the global rate of 2% (UN-Habitat, 2020).

This rapid urbanization in SSA brings a myriad of challenges, including unemployment, poverty, inadequate healthcare, insufficient sanitation, poor water supply, and the proliferation of slums (Kasim et al., 2021). As the urban population in SSA is expected to grow significantly in the coming years, addressing these challenges is crucial for sustainable development. Consequently, scholars, policymakers, and urban planners are increasingly focusing on the concepts of urban livability and social exclusion.

Urban livability encompasses various locational characteristics that enhance an individual's quality of life and well-being. It includes aspects such as good governance, a competitive economy, high quality of

life, and a sustainable environment (Iyande et al., 2017). In contrast, socially exclusive cities are marked by economic inequality, limited access to services, segregation, high crime rates, and environmental degradation, leading to the marginalization of vulnerable populations. Social exclusion refers to situations where groups of people live below the standard of living of the majority, facing inadequate resource access and suffering (Vidojevi, 2017).

Public spaces like parks and recreational areas improve physical and mental well-being, enhance social connections, and foster community spirit (Akbar et al., 2017; Aydin et al., 2019). However, insufficient investment in public spaces, particularly in low-income areas, poses a significant challenge (Bako et al., 2021). Individual characteristics such as income, gender, age, and education significantly affect access to resources and opportunities (Chigbu, 2016; Owusu et al., 2018).

Access to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities reduces poverty and enhances social integration (Ogden & Heynen, 2017; Smit & Watson, 2018). Adequate infrastructure is critical for urban livability, while poor infrastructure exacerbates inequality and limits access to essential services (Debela & Melese, 2020; Haase et al., 2017).

High-quality public services are essential for reducing social exclusion and improving urban livability (Oyekale et al., 2018; Sarfo-Mensah et al., 2021). Ensuring safety and security is vital for fostering a sense of belonging and improving the quality of life (Kakembo & Hein, 2018; Oyedele et al., 2020). Good environmental quality positively affects residents' health and overall well-being (Macharia et al., 2019; Oloruntoba & Dara, 2021).

Promoting social cohesion through community participation and inclusive governance is crucial for enhancing urban livability (Eskandarpour & Jalili, 2019; Magigi et al., 2021). Furthermore, effective urban planning that incorporates social, economic, and environmental considerations is essential for sustainable urban development (Kulsum et al., 2020; Mutambirwa et al., 2021).

Based on the work of Iyande et al. (2017) and other researchers, the urban livability theory posits that various urban characteristics collectively determine the quality of life in urban areas. Social exclusion theory explains the processes and factors that lead to the marginalization of certain groups in society (Vidojevi, 2017). The sustainable development theory emphasizes the need for development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (UN-Habitat, 2020).

Understanding social exclusion provides a deeper insight into SSA's socio-economic realities, especially the interconnectedness of poverty and deprivation. This analytical framework helps in gathering data on various imbalances and deprivations experienced by marginalized groups due to gender, age, ethnicity, citizenship status, and labor market disadvantages. The perspective of social exclusion also offers a comprehensive approach to understanding issues related to access to productive land, well-paying jobs, and political and organizational representation.

To foster inclusive and sustainable urban development in SSA, it is essential to thoroughly understand the indices of urban livability and social exclusion specific to the region. While there is a growing body of research on these topics, a comprehensive comparative study is necessary to synthesize existing knowledge, identify trends and gaps, and provide actionable insights for policy and practice.

Therefore, this research aims to review the literature and comparatively analyze the concepts of urban livability and social exclusion in SSA cities. By systematically assessing relevant studies, this research seeks to identify the key elements influencing urban livability and contributing to social exclusion in the region.

This approach will elucidate the complex relationships between livability and exclusion, offering valuable insights for policymakers, urban planners, and academics dedicated to creating more inclusive and sustainable urban environments.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) encompasses most of the African continent south of the Sahara Desert. It is geographically located between latitudes 37° North and 34° South and longitudes 17° West and 51° East (World Bank, 2021). The region is bounded by the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the Indian Ocean to the east, and the Mediterranean Sea to the north, extending southward to the continent's southernmost tip. SSA spans a significant land area of approximately 24 million square kilometers (9.3 million square miles), making it one of the world's largest regions (World Bank, 2021). Notable countries within this region include Angola, South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, and Tanzania (see Figure 1).

The region is rich in natural resources, such as minerals, oil, and gas. However, it also faces considerable challenges, including political unrest, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-economic inequality, all of which hinder economic growth. While agriculture remains the most vital industry, employing a large portion of the workforce, mining, manufacturing, and services are also significant contributors to the region's GDP.

Urbanization is rapidly transforming SSA, with many cities evolving into vibrant political, economic, and cultural hubs. This urbanization trend is welcomed for promoting equitable growth, increasing residents' disposable incomes, and providing economies of scale in delivering public infrastructure and services (ADB, 2019). Despite these benefits, many cities in SSA remain relatively poor, with GDP per capita significantly lower than in other regions. Contributing factors include a mismatch between skills and labor market demands, a weak business environment, and the dominance of the informal employment sector.

The region faces numerous challenges, including poverty, food insecurity, inadequate healthcare, limited access to education, political instability, and civil conflicts, which all impede development (World Bank, 2021). Additionally, climate change, environmental degradation, and the prevalence of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and Ebola pose substantial threats to the region (United Nations, 2019).



Figure 1: Map of Sub-Saharan Africa

Methods

This study adopts a systematic approach to ensure a comprehensive assessment of relevant literature. This method enhances the validity and reliability of the data, providing crucial insights for the comparative analysis of urban livability and social exclusion in Sub-Saharan African (SSA) cities.

A thorough literature search was conducted using electronic databases including PubMed, Google Scholar, and Scopus. The search focused on scientific publications published in English between 2010 and 2023. The following keywords were used in various combinations: "urban livability," "social exclusion," "Sub-Saharan Africa," "public open spaces," "individual users," "economic opportunities," "infrastructure," "public services," "safety and security," "environmental quality," "social cohesion," and "urban planning." The search strategy was designed to align with the study's objectives, aiming to identify peer-reviewed literature that provided quantitative evidence of the relationship between these attributes and urban livability and social exclusion in SSA cities. The screening process involved two stages. First, duplicate papers were removed using reference management software. Next, the titles and abstracts of the remaining papers were evaluated for relevance to the study topic. Papers that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded. This screening process was thoroughly followed, and any discrepancies were resolved. During the eligibility phase, the full texts of the selected papers were carefully reviewed to determine their suitability for inclusion. The predetermined inclusion criteria were: (1) publications presenting original peer-reviewed research, (2) publications providing quantitative data on the link between urban livability and social exclusion, (3) publications focusing on SSA cities, and (4) publications addressing topics such as public open spaces, individual users, economic opportunities, infrastructure, public services, safety and security, environmental quality, social cohesion, and urban planning. Review articles, inaccessible publications, and studies that did not fit the primary research requirement were excluded. The studies that met all the inclusion criteria were incorporated into the literature review. Key findings, data, and insights from each study were extracted and synthesized to meet the research objectives of comparing urban livability and social exclusion in SSA. The interactions and impacts of the identified factors on urban livability and social exclusion in the region were analyzed and discussed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section contains the findings and discussion on the comparative study of urban livability and social exclusion in SSA based on the literature survey. The results are grouped according to the specified factors: public open spaces, individual users, economic possibilities, infrastructure, public services, safety and security, environmental quality, social cohesion, and urban planning.

Figure 2 depicts the relationship between the key drivers of social exclusion in SSA cities.

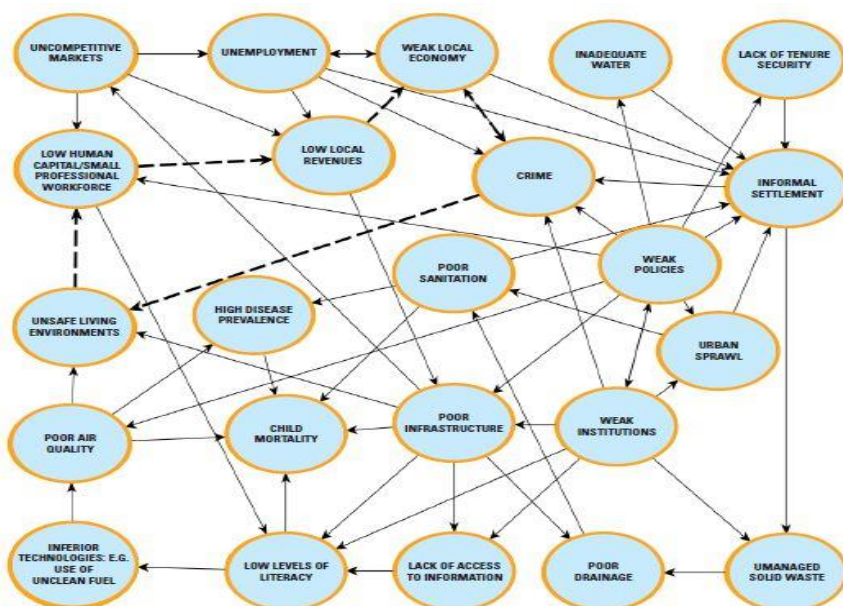


Figure 2: Interplay of drivers of social exclusion in African cities (Source: UN-Habitat, 2020)

Public open spaces

Several studies have highlighted the importance of easily accessible and well-designed public open spaces in improving urban livability and reducing social isolation in SSA cities. For example, green spaces, parks, and recreational places have been shown to improve inhabitants' physical and mental well-being, enhance social connections, and develop a community feeling (Akbar et al., 2017; Aydin et al., 2019). According to Akbar et al. (2017), well-maintained public parks in metropolitan areas can contribute to greater physical activity, better mental health, and stronger social relationships among inhabitants. Similarly, Iyande et al. (2018) stressed the significance of well-designed public open spaces encouraging social contact, physical activity, and community participation. Aydin et al. (2019) also discovered that public open spaces (such as squares and gardens) are important in enhancing social integration and reducing social isolation among various socio-economic levels. However, Bako et al. (2021) argue that insufficient investment in public open spaces, particularly in low-income districts, limits the potential advantages they might provide to inhabitants. The lack of green areas and recreational amenities creates social isolation by defining leisure and community gathering possibilities. These findings highlight the need to prioritize the supply and upkeep of public open spaces in SSA cities to improve urban livability and social inclusion.

Individual users

The comparative studies showed that social exclusion and urban livability are affected by the experiences and behaviors of individual users within the urban environment. Income level, gender, age, and education were discovered to play a significant impact in defining individuals' access to resources, opportunities, and social networks (Chigbu, 2016; Owusu et al., 2018). According to Chigbu (2016), persons with higher earnings and education have more access to work opportunities, housing, and basic services, increasing urban livability. The wants and preferences of individual users are critical in designing inclusive and livable urban landscapes. According to Chen et al. (2019), engaging and incorporating residents in decision-making can generate a sense of ownership and empowerment, leading to increased livability.

Furthermore, Iyande et al. (2018) emphasize the significance of inclusive design principles that consider the accessibility needs of various social groups, such as those with disabilities and older adults. On the other hand, individuals with poor incomes and inadequate education experience higher degrees of social exclusion due to limited access to resources and services. Furthermore, Owusu et al. (2018) observed that gender disparities might contribute to social exclusion since women face additional hurdles and limitations in accessing jobs, education, and public spaces. These findings highlight the need to address inequities and provide equal opportunities for residents of SSA cities to improve urban livability and minimize social isolation.

Economic opportunities

This study highlighted the importance of economic opportunities in determining urban livability and social inclusion. Access to work, entrepreneurship opportunities, and income-generating activities are significant determinants for decreasing poverty and increasing social integration in SSA cities (Ogden & Heynen, 2017; Smit & Watson, 2018). Several studies underline the need to address socio-economic gaps within SSA cities (ECA, 2017; ILO, 2018). According to Ogden and Heynen (2017), economic possibilities such as job development and income production help to improve living circumstances, access to services, and overall urban well-being. Similarly, Smit and Watson (2018) highlighted the favorable relationship between economic development, poverty reduction, and increased social inclusion. The World Bank (2020) has emphasized the need for inclusive economic growth and creating job opportunities for all populations. Economic opportunities typically aid in reducing poverty, fostering social cohesion, and improving overall city well-being. The findings imply that policies and actions to

increase economic possibilities, encourage entrepreneurship, and lower unemployment can greatly enhance urban livability and reduce social isolation in SSA cities.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure has a significant impact on the livability of cities. Inadequate infrastructure, such as transportation, water, and sanitation, impedes social inclusion and exacerbates inequality. Consequently, the availability and quality of infrastructure are critical to defining urban livability and minimizing social isolation. Access to vital services and opportunities has been an essential impediment, particularly for marginalized populations (Debela & Melese, 2020; Haase et al., 2017). UN-Habitat (2020) underlines the need for infrastructure investments that benefit everyone, especially those living in informal settlements. According to Debela and Melese's (2020), insufficient housing, unreliable transportation, and restricted access to water and sanitation facilities can contribute to social marginalization and lower urban livability. Similarly, Haase et al. (2017) stressed the need for investments in sustainable and resilient infrastructure to improve the quality of life, promote social inclusion, and provide equal access to services among urban people. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive infrastructure development and investment in SSA cities to increase urban livability and minimize social isolation.

Public services

Access to high-quality public services (e.g., healthcare, education, and social welfare) has emerged as a critical aspect of urban livability and social inclusion in the SSA region. Disparities in service delivery and a lack of basic facilities have been noted as difficulties that perpetuate social exclusion and impede overall urban development (Oyekale et al., 2018; Sarfo-Mensah et al., 2021). According to Oyekale et al. (2018), unequal access to healthcare, education, and social welfare services can result in social exclusion and discrepancies in urban livability. Sarfo-Mensah et al. (2021) stressed the need for inclusive policies and public-sector expenditures to promote fair access for all communities. ECA (2017) emphasizes equal distribution of public services to guarantee that all inhabitants can access necessities. According to UN-Habitat (2020), inclusive service delivery approaches that meet the unique needs of excluded populations are also critical. These findings highlight the need to enhance the supply and accessibility of public services in SSA cities to improve urban livability and minimize social isolation.

Safety and security

Creating livable and inclusive urban settings requires ensuring safety and security. According to the literature assessment, safety and security concerns substantially influence urban livability and social exclusion in SSA cities. High crime rates, insufficient law enforcement, and social instability have all been recognized as factors limiting citizens' access to public areas and eroding their sense of security and belonging (Kakembo & Hein, 2018; Oyedele et al., 2020). According to Iyande et al. (2018), crime and violence harm social inclusion and quality of life in SSA cities. UN-Habitat (2020) underlines the need to ensure community safety via methods that include inhabitants and address the core causes of insecurity. Kakembo and Hein (2018) revealed the negative consequences of crime on urban livability, such as increased anxiety, limited mobility, and decreased social contacts. To increase safety and security in metropolitan settings, Oyedele et al. (2020) emphasized the need for competent law enforcement, community policing, and crime prevention initiatives. These findings emphasize the necessity of building safe and secure urban settings to improve livability and minimize social isolation in SSA cities.

Environmental quality

The quality of the urban environment has a considerable impact on the livability of cities and the well-being of their citizens. Various studies have emphasized the importance of environmental quality in determining urban livability and social inclusion. Residents' health, well-being, and general quality of life are affected by air and water pollution, waste management, and access to green infrastructure

(Macharia et al., 2019; Oloruntoba & Dara, 2021). Macharia et al. (2019) stressed the detrimental health effects of pollution and the importance of long-term environmental management measures. According to UN-Habitat (2020), sustainable urban development techniques that promote environmental protection, waste management, and pollution control are essential. Green infrastructure, such as parks, gardens, and tree-lined avenues, has been shown to improve urban livability and social cohesiveness, according to Oloruntoba and Dara (2021). These findings highlight the need to foster environmental sustainability, lower pollution, and increase access to green areas in SSA cities to promote urban livability and minimize social marginalization.

Social cohesion

Promoting social cohesiveness is critical to inclusiveness and livability in SSA cities. Promoting social cohesiveness has emerged as an essential aspect of improving urban livability and decreasing social isolation. Several studies have underlined the significance of community participation, social networks, and inclusive governance systems in fostering cohesive and inclusive urban settings (Eskandarpour & Jalili, 2019; Magigi et al., 2021). According to Eskandarpour and Jalili (2019), community engagement in decision-making processes and building inclusive urban areas are important. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) emphasizes the need to promote social integration and minimize discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic class. Magigi et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of social networks and supporting interactions in increasing social cohesiveness and decreasing social isolation. These findings imply that community participation and inclusive government may improve urban livability and reduce social exclusion in SSA cities.

Urban planning

Effective urban planning is critical in influencing urban livability and social inclusion. The importance of urban planning in determining urban livability and social exclusion is a recurring issue in the literature. Integrated planning techniques, participatory procedures, and sustainable urban development strategies have been highlighted to improve livability, address disparities, and promote inclusive cities (Kulsum et al., 2020; Mutambirwa et al., 2021). Kulsum et al. (2020) stressed the significance of incorporating social, economic, and environmental issues into urban planning procedures to promote inclusive urban growth. Mutambirwa et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of participatory planning techniques that engage communities in decision-making and meet their requirements. Likewise, the UN-Habitat (2020) underscores the need for inclusive urban planning procedures that consider the needs and aspirations of all inhabitants, especially excluded groups.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the importance of a multifaceted approach to urban development that considers the interconnectedness of livability and exclusion. By focusing on SSA cities, the study provides context-specific insights and recommendations that are crucial for addressing the unique challenges faced by these rapidly urbanizing regions. Discussing the implications of the empirical findings in the study area, this study emphasizes that improving urban livability and reducing social exclusion in SSA cities requires a holistic and inclusive approach. The unique socio-economic and environmental contexts of SSA cities must be considered to develop effective and sustainable urban policies and interventions. This research contributes to the broader understanding of urban development in SSA and offers valuable insights for creating more livable and inclusive urban environments.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis of urban livability and social exclusion in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) highlighted the importance of factors such as public open spaces, individual users, economic opportunities, infrastructure, public services, safety and security, environmental quality, social cohesion, and urban planning. These factors collectively influence the overall livability of cities and the degree of social inclusion experienced by their residents. By focusing on infrastructure development, affordable housing, comprehensive urban planning, environmental sustainability, accessible public spaces, public safety, economic opportunities, social amenities and services, community engagement, and the

implementation of smart city technologies, cities can significantly improve the quality of life for their residents. It is crucial to consider the unique context and challenges of each city when implementing these strategies. Collaboration among government entities, community organizations, and private-sector stakeholders is essential for successful implementation and ensuring that the needs and perspectives of residents are addressed. By fostering economic growth, social inclusion, and an improved quality of life, SSA cities can pave the way for a brighter and more prosperous future.

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