

# **Mbale, a Town Graduated to City Status in 2020: A Cost benefit Analysis: Lessons from Contemporary Citification Experiences**

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## **Abstract**

In Uganda and other parts of the world, there has long been a desire for the graduation of numerous towns to become cities. Towns like Mbale, Mbarara, Arua, Jinja, Gulu, Fort Portal, and Masaka will become operational in Uganda on July 1st 2020, while others like Hoima will follow on July 1st 2021. This makes the process actual. The expanding "citification" process is ascribed to the anticipated advantages that outweigh the disadvantages. It is thought that as cities grow, more people will consider relocating there, making space for skilled yet affordable labor. Through the trickle-down effect, wealthy regions aid rural areas by building roads, schools, and other infrastructure and providing recreational opportunities. Sports fields, theaters, and movie theaters all grow more appealing, and overall there is widespread convenience and an improvement in lifestyles. Therefore, it is up to each person to decide what kind of life and services they should have access to. This is despite the costs associated with the same development, though. Obesity is inevitable as a result of the fast-paced, stressful nature of modern life, the prevalence of fast food, and the lack of time to exercise. Convenience and the desire to live a simple life lead to negative health effects coupled with other realities like traffic and pollution. This casts doubt on the assumption that Mbale will move in a path where costs outweigh benefits, or vice versa.

**Key words: Mbale, Citification, Cost- Benefit, Development, growth, Urbanisation**

## **Introduction**

Modern society has been characterised by a drive towards development of cities and it's a trend that cuts across all societies. Uganda has not been an exception. On July 1, 2020, the Ugandan Parliament decided to upgrade Mbale to a "City" status. Although this is wonderful news, it must be seen with ambivalence in a nation like Uganda. Around the world, cities have been conceptualized differently using a variety of factors. Cities are defined as areas, big or little, where there are lots of people living and working. Cities also serve as public hubs for commerce, government, social services (health, education, industry), and transportation. To this, however, one can concur that while there may be some accepted characteristics, there is no universal definition of a city.

Mbale is a location in eastern Uganda that is accessible by road from Kampala at a distance of around 225 kilometers (140 mi). The average elevation of the city is 1,156 meters (3,793 feet) above sea level. The city is located at 1°04'50.0"N and 34°10'30.0"E. (Latitude: 1.080556; Longitude: 34.175000). The city is also connected to Tororo and Pakwach by train. The city is located around 57 kilometers (35 miles) north-east of Mbale and is home to Mountain Elgon, one of the tallest mountains in East Africa. Mbale is the region that includes the modern districts of Bududa, Manafwa, and Mbale. Three counties from the former Mbale District—Bungokho, Manjiya, and Bubulo—along with the Mbale municipality recently formed the three districts. The area of Mbale stretches from the lower to the upper slopes of the south western slopes of Mt. Elgon in eastern Uganda and share a border with western Kenya<sup>1</sup>.

Cities come to life when citification occurs, although this process is conceptualized in a variety of ways. Some nations state that a minimum population is required before a region may be considered a city, such as 200 in Denmark, 2,000 in Argentina, 5,000 in most Indian cities, or 50,000 in Japan. Some, like China, define a city as having a population of 100,000. In other instances, the city's definition has been tied to its governance and the kind of enterprises that operate there. In several other nations, the provision of infrastructure and services or sectoral employment has been used to categorize a place as a city or not. As a general rule in sociology, those who live in cities must have greater education than

There must be a similar increase in population, and the familial system is more communal than it is in rural areas. Inter and multi-marriages demonstrate more independence, social classes reach their extremes, and social distance results from anonymity and variety.

According to George Simmel, it's clear that,

*“...that the social structure of urban communities is based on interest groups. The circles of social contact are wider in the city than in the country. There is a wider area of interaction system per man and per aggregate. This makes city life more complex and varied. The city life is characterized by the predominance of secondary contacts, impersonal, casual and*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mbale>

*short-lived relations. Man, at any rate, the man in the street, virtually loses his identity being treated as a “number” having a certain “address”<sup>2</sup>.*

In Mbale City, people's status is presumed to be determined by meritocracy, and life is all about materialism, with a focus on acquiring as many assets as possible. There is also a significant amount of logic, with a preference for debate and reason. With enhanced social control brought on by security, people are forced to live in accordance with societal norms.

All of this will actually happen. This clarifies why all regions would wish to be cities in this century. According to UN's, 'The World's Cities in 2018', it was reported that,

*'In 2018, an estimated 55.3 per cent of the world's population lived in urban settlements. By 2030, urban areas are projected to house 60 per cent of people globally and one in every three people will live in cities with at least half a million inhabitants. Understanding the key trends in urbanization likely to unfold over the coming years is crucial to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including Sustainable Development Goal 11, to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'*

This demonstrates unequivocally the rise in local area citification interest. According to the World Urbanization Prospects (2018), it is evident that in the future, the majority of the world's population will reside in a small number of nations, including India, China, and Nigeria, which will collectively account for 35% of the projected growth of the urban population as of the period between 2018 and 2050. India is predicted to have 416 million more urban residents by 2050 than China, Nigeria, and Nigeria would have 255 million and 189 million respectively. Benazeraf D and Alves A (2014) state that China has been identified as participating in large-scale projects in Africa including infrastructure, such as highways. Bunnell T. (2015), who contends that neo liberalism must be broadly examined if one is to comprehend the citification process, partially contests this idea, which is also supported by Bhan G. (2014). TPR (1996), on the other hand, is eager to assert that the neo-liberal era must make room for new types of consumption, employment, housing, and leisure.

Bunnell T et al. (2012) urge new towns like Mbale to learn from Asian cities like Mumbai, Seoul, and Singapore that seem to have surpassed the global modern theorization process.

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<sup>2</sup>[https://www.blackwellpublishing.com/content/bpl\\_images/content\\_store/sample\\_chapter/0631225137/bridge.pdf](https://www.blackwellpublishing.com/content/bpl_images/content_store/sample_chapter/0631225137/bridge.pdf)

Caprotti F et al (2015) assert that Mbale (Uganda) ought to pay close attention to what China did. China has demonstrated "extremely strong political commitment" and "significant financial resources to the development of new-build eco-city projects, reflecting the Chinese government's goals to build a "harmonious society" in which social stability and environmental sustainability are mutually reinforcing." 10 of the 48 cities with a population of 5 million to 10 million in the world in 2018 will have become megacities by the year 2030. Similar forecasts suggest that between 2018 and 2030, 28 more cities will have populations greater than 5 million. Ten of these will be in Africa, and 13 will be located in Asia. In the same year, 2030, 66 cities are expected to have between 5 and 10 million inhabitants.

The subsequent advantages of citification, according to Alvin H. Scaff (1967), have been the subject of discussion for a long time. The argument is valid. Mbale could fall into one of three categories, which include prioritizing economic issues, arguing that social and political considerations come first, and embracing the UN's policy of "balanced social and economic development." Citification is crucial and necessary, as evidenced by the anticipated increase in growth and development, yet there are occasions where the process actually worsens the welfare of the general population, according to some who contradict this claim.(McCord, op. cit., p. 34)

Similarly, according to Max Weber (1921), as cities grow, the likelihood that they will develop realistically increases. However, this does not come at the expense of civic cooperation or the logical minds that go along with it (Max Weber (1958), *The City*, Glencoe, IL: Free Press]. People should anticipate that social structure in a new city (sociologically includes culture, social institutions, groups, roles, statuses to mention but a few). It is expected that many people will consider how they can benefit from the new "city," which will inevitably result in a rural-to-urban migration. However, this migration is accompanied by tainted solidarity, which changes from being organic (firm, cooperative, and communal) to being mechanical (competitive, and individual). It is anticipated that Mbale's traditional beliefs will frequently be challenged.

Regarding its traditional lifestyles and values, it is clear as in the note below; The Bagisu, who are members of the Bantu family, predominate in Mbale's so-called metropolis. The Basogas, Bagwere, Itesots, and Karamojongs are a few others. Male circumcision, which has

an obscure history, is one of the main social practices of the Bagisu. The Bagishu also hold a firm believe in magic. The three traditional Bugishu magic masters were as follows: A witch hunter known as umufumu came first, then the mainstream witch doctor or sorcerer known as umulosi, and finally the medicine man. From a legal perspective, this was complicated by their notion of witchcraft.

Despite frequently being innocent, the accused had no choice but to kill themselves after being identified as a witch. From the perspective of marriage, traditionally, this was done by the boy's and girl's parents, frequently without the girl's knowledge or agreement.

The place of birth was typically the home. In the past, people would cry aloud when someone passed away, and the body would stay in the house for three days before being buried. A medicine man would also be called in to dispense medicine to decrease labor pains.

He Bagishu are mostly an agrarian society in terms of livelihood. The primary crops were matooke (Kamtore), potatoes (Kamapondi), millet, beans (Kamakanda), and peas. Food was produced for sustenance. They also raise some cattle, sheep, and goats in addition to farming.”<sup>3</sup>

Cernea M. (1997) recognizes and concurs with the prospect of forced migrations, new settlements, and resettlements, all of which may call for policies aimed at preventing issues that are anticipated to arise from this influx. According to Choplin A and Franck A (2010), who cite Sassen, the alternative would be (1991).

"Most urban.. the widespread construction of skyscrapers and malls in relation to economic expansion, notably in the leading global cities of the developed world, such as New York, Tokyo, and Washington DC."

This is an option, but Mbale City might not choose it at this moment. Instead, the city should plan for it in the future to protect itself from the costs of the aforementioned flux. According to Croese S. (2012), who examined cities as settings that,

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.uganda travel guide.com/bagishu-culture.html>

‘... are often used for resettlement of city centre dwellers, who have been displaced as a result of inner-city restructuring, e.g. also in Addis Ababa. In practice, such satellite cities often end up being more middle-class-oriented’.

Mbale City may not yet be a satellite city, but it is developing, therefore it must be aware of this. It might also consider establishing itself in one of the numerous "smart cities" that are being pushed as solutions to the problems of urbanization and sustainable development, as claimed by Datta A. (2015) .

If this is done, Mbale won't disappear into oblivion as Cirolia LR (2014) observes that a "anti-urban" approach that encourages suburbanization and relies on a specific, unfavorable scenario for urban expansion does. It is predicated on "environmentally deterministic" theories and designs that are depoliticized and deinstitutionalized. In the end, it seeks to flee rather than face the operational, political, and social issues of the city, which devalues planning tools and civic participation. The citification process must not be corrupted in any way.

Infrastructure is another crucial factor to take into account when deciding whether to cite Mbale. This is due to the fact that a city's infrastructure quality has a significant impact on how well social, political, and economic life is lived. It also ensures community engagement and opens up a variety of economic options that can improve people's welfare. It is a test period for Mbale as well because this urbanization process will determine whether the new city will be resilient to global risks and challenges, including environmental risks (global pollution, deforestation, global warming), social risks (refugee influx, labor mobility), health-related risks (epidemics and pandemics like corona virus, Ebola, cholera), as well as economic risks such as extremely high unemployment due to rural-to-urban migration and limited opportunities.

An important factor in the citification of Mbale that must be as fully addressed is the availability and caliber of the current infrastructure. In Mbale, roads totaling 3.142 kilometers have been tried, including Republic Road, Pallisa Road, Mugisu Hill, and Nabuyonga Rise. Since the expectations of the Mbale people are always changing, there is a very high chance that the infrastructure will not be up to par as Mbale assumes a city status. To bridge the gap in social services and infrastructure, Mbale will need an action plan.

The construction of roads, rail roads, and water supplies should be given top attention. By 2030, the OECD predicts that we would need to spend \$71 trillion on water and telecoms. Thus, it is anticipated that Mbale will face difficulties in obtaining the necessary financing and funds to complete such initiatives. Thus, it is anticipated that when Mbale strives to fulfil this social service obligation, the pressure on the federal government will grow.

Given that many governments face severe budgetary constraints and that many developing nations spend a large portion of their national revenue just to cover the fundamental necessities of their populations, this level of financing may not be feasible. Cities are therefore seeking public-private partnerships to include the private sector in the planning, building, and upkeep of infrastructure.

According to the Independent newspaper 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019, it's reported that,

*“Mbale Municipal council has received over 14 billion Shillings for implementation of the second phase of the Uganda Support to Municipal Infrastructure Development-USMID project. This is part of the USD 360 million (1.3 Trillion Shillings) additional financing that the Ugandan government received from the World Bank to implement the second phase of the Program (USMID Additional Financing-USMID-AF) covering a period of five years, effective fiscal year 2018/19. ...The objective of the additional funding is to rehabilitate urban roads and associated infrastructure in the selected municipalities. Under the project, urban transportation terminals for buses, lorry parks and market stalls for vendors will be built alongside urban solid and liquid waste management systems, drainage and storm water management systems. It will also help the development of urban local economic infrastructures such as markets, slaughterhouses, servicing land for industrial and commercial uses, cottage industries and tourism sites ”<sup>4</sup>*

Although these have not yet been fully realized, there is still hope that they will be developed quickly as part of Mbale's citification process. Health is a comparable social service. In order to raise people's standards of living, health services must be upgraded in cities around the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.independent.co.ug/mbale-municipality-gets-ugx-14b-additional-funding-for-usmid-projects/>

world as they grow. In modern economies like Britain, Germany, France, or even the USA, access to emergency medical treatment is too far from the city for it to be available in a matter of minutes or even hours.

The availability of cutting-edge medical facilities that can offer lifelong treatments is also a guarantee. One can only hope that Mbale's urbanization process is quick and well-planned; otherwise, disaster may strike the city in the shape of a growing population, poverty that may be accelerated by a lack of infrastructure, and a space for contagious and infectious diseases. Given that nearly 700 million people live in cities, poor sanitation is to be expected. If Mbale's "city" just has one government referral hospital, it gets troubling. Located in Mbale, Eastern Uganda, the Mbale Regional Referral Hospital has a wide geographic service area.

For the nearby districts of Busia, Budaka, Bukwa, Butaleja, Manafwa, Mbale, Pallisa, Sironko, and Tororo, it serves as the referral hospital. Its ability to manage the health influx following the citification process is in question. With more obstacles, slums will inevitably grow worse. Namatala is a significant slum. .it is said that,

*“Like other slums in the world, Namatala is inevitably occupied by poor people and families who have nowhere else to live. It is a squalid area comprised of cheap, dilapidated structures and streets are narrow and blighted. The living conditions are deplorable, with landlords often failing to maintain the structures... because of the nature of houses built and pit-latrines, sanitation standards are wanting, right from the leaders to the residents... The pit-latrines are in a poor state and yet they cater for more than 30 people since many landlords construct more than five single rooms that house an average of five people in each”*

*(Extracted from daily monitor 17<sup>th</sup> 2016)<sup>5</sup>*

The second anticipated legislation relates to climate change.

Most of the urban populations in Mbale would be extremely vulnerable to the harmful consequences of climate change as a result of the city's citification. The likelihood of rural-

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.monitor.co.ug/artsculture/Reviews/Namatala-haven-poor/691232-2916856-kwt3hlz/index.html>



urban migration is too high as people move from nearby communities (Sironko District to the north, Bududa District to the northeast, Manafwa District to the southeast, Tororo District to the south, Butaleja District to the southwest, and Budaka District to the west), but the concentration in Mbale will result in instances of flooding. According to UNDP, it's reported that,

*“There is evidence that climate in the Mbale region is changing, with expected continuing changes in future projections of temperature and rainfall. There has been an increase of between 0.4 and 1.2°C in monthly temperatures in the Mbale region... Reduced rainfall during the December to February period... will likely increase water stress for crops and may lead to scarcity of water for domestic use during that period... expected to increase erosion, especially on steep slopes, as well as flooding in valleys and siltation of streams and rivers, especially if it is associated with increases in rainfall intensity”*

According to McSweeney et al. (2010), a temperature increase of roughly 1.0 to 3.1°C must be anticipated nationwide during the next 40 years, along with a low to moderate increase in precipitation in a larger portion of Uganda. Since most people try to live in cities, which produce more than 80% of the world's gross domestic product, the urbanization of Mbale may boost global growth. While this is somewhat true, it also has its own issues, particularly for those moving to Mbale from other regions in search of better economic prospects. This is due to the fact that urbanization will lead to a high cost of living and increased competition for social and economic opportunities, both of which will lead to poverty.

It is anticipated that the citification of Mbale will open up new opportunities for social discontent and urban violence. It is anticipated that instances of growing social and economic inequality will be more evident than ever. The timing of this raises the possibility of violence and a potential collapse in law and order at a time when inequality, rivalry for limited resources and opportunities, legal impunity, and inadequate city governance (due to rising population) all contribute to the likelihood of violence. This is anticipated as it is clear in many other places, such as San Pedro Sula, Honduras, which had 169 murders per 100,000 people in 2011. The city must prepare for property disputes in the new "Mbale," with a lack of affordable homes resulting to social marginalization and pushing people to slums. The question is whether this will not create economic and social instability.

In order to make sound and trustworthy judgements that will move the city ahead, the process of Mbale citification will need proper strategic and thorough planning, as well as good governance and administration.

As soon as Mbale city is operational, it is anticipated that conversion and adaptability would both likely be crucial skills needed because people will need to constantly move with the times. Major road and railroad stations, city streets, highways, and market centers are only a few of the new structures and services that are anticipated to significantly alter the behaviours and social structures of city dwellers. From local buildings and street corners to entire city districts and the global level, this is present everywhere. Effective change and transformation shall make the entire citification process beneficial.

In light of the above therefore, the mitigation process becomes crucial from the outset if the advantages of the citification process are to outweigh the drawbacks. The citizens of Mbale must be highly informed, socially included, and involved because these factors will determine whether the costs surpass the advantages or not. Stakeholders including the government, local authorities, business, the donor community, and the general public must work closely together. It is necessary to adopt new technology that can assist Mbale solve its challenges in order to save money, manage pollution by reducing and managing carbon emissions, manage traffic flows, and benchmark by studying what may or may not work in other countries' "smart" cities. Additionally, city officials in Mbale could need to join new networks and engage with corporations through corporatism. As Mbale develops its potential for independence, the government's influence must also be seen there.

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