

## **Reconsidering Kenya's approach to Development: A Holistic Perspective**

By

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### **Abstract:**

This article questions the government's approach to housing the majority of Kenyans without homes and emphasizes the need for a holistic perspective on development. It argues that focusing solely on housing is insufficient and suggests empowering individuals through better employment opportunities and a conducive business environment. The article highlights the importance of meeting broader development goals, reducing poverty levels, and ensuring access to basic needs like education and healthcare. It further emphasizes the need to address the slow economic growth caused by factors like corruption. In addition, understanding the causes of rural-urban migration is crucial, and efforts should be made to make rural areas attractive by resolving socio-economic challenges. By adopting a comprehensive approach, the government of Kenya can achieve sustainable development and improve the lives of all Kenyans.

**Key words:** Holistic perspective, empowerment, corruption, rural-urban migration, Kenya

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### **Introduction**

In addressing the pressing issue of housing, the majority of Kenyans without homes, the principal secretary for Housing and Urban Planning, Mr. Charles Hinga, proposes a large-scale construction of houses to accommodate the increasing rural-to-urban population. However, it is essential to evaluate the viability and sustainability of housing every Kenyan, while considering the broader objectives of development. This article aims to offer a holistic perspective on development and suggest alternative approaches for the government to empower its citizens to improve their lives.

### **Background**

In Kenya, the government has historically played a crucial role in providing statutory social welfare services, with housing for the majority of the population being a longstanding agenda since gaining independence. This article aims to explore the background of social welfare services in Kenya and highlight the government's role in addressing the housing needs of its citizens.

Since independence, the Kenyan government has recognized the importance of social welfare services in improving the well-being of its citizens. Over the years, various policies and programs have been implemented to address social and economic challenges, including housing. The government's involvement in social welfare services reflects a commitment to uplift the living standards of the population and reduce poverty levels. Housing has consistently been an important agenda for the Kenyan government. Recognizing the need for adequate and affordable housing, the government has implemented initiatives aimed at providing shelter to the majority of Kenyans. This has included the construction of housing projects, slum upgrading programs, and policies to improve access to affordable housing finance.

Statutory social welfare services encompass a range of programs and interventions provided by the government to address the welfare needs of the population. (Ethiopian Council on Social Welfare Addis Ababa, 1971). These services include healthcare, education, social protection programs, and housing initiatives. The government's role in providing these services is essential for ensuring social equity, promoting inclusive growth, and improving the overall well-being of Kenyans. While the government has made efforts to address the housing needs for the majority of Kenyans, challenges persist. Mugo (2020) argues that, the urban housing challenges in Kenya, particularly in Nairobi, are characterized by a significant housing gap, high levels of unaffordability, and inadequate infrastructure. These challenges highlight the need for comprehensive approaches that go beyond housing construction to address the broader issues affecting urban areas.

Rapid urbanization, population growth, limited resources, and inadequate infrastructure pose significant hurdles in meeting the housing demands of the populations in Nairobi city. In addition, affordability, accessibility, and the quality of housing remain critical issues that require attention. Despite these challenges, the government has achieved notable

progress in advancing housing initiatives since independence. Public-private partnerships, the involvement of development agencies, and innovative approaches such as slum upgrading programs have contributed to positive outcomes. Kimani, (2020) study on social justice and housing rights in Kenya sheds light on the case of slum upgrading in Nairobi. The article emphasizes the importance of inclusive approaches that address the specific needs and rights of residents in informal settlements. This highlights the need for policies and programs that promote social justice and provide sustainable housing solutions for all Kenyans.

There is therefore need for continued commitment, adequate funding, and effective implementation to address the housing gap comprehensively. The government of Kenya has recognized the significance of addressing housing needs and has made housing for the majority of Kenyans a longstanding agenda. They have implemented various policies and programs aimed at providing adequate and affordable housing to the population. The government's commitment to addressing housing challenges is reflected in its efforts to provide statutory social welfare services, with a particular focus on housing. These services aim to ensure that all citizens have access to safe, decent, and affordable housing options.

To achieve this goal, the government has implemented initiatives such as the National Housing Development Fund, which mobilizes resources for the construction of affordable housing units. They have also introduced programs like the Affordable Housing Program, which aims to provide affordable financing options for Kenyans to purchase or construct their own homes. Collaborative efforts have been instrumental in the progress made in the housing sector. The government has partnered with various stakeholders, including private developers, financial institutions, and international organizations, to address housing challenges collectively. These partnerships have brought in expertise, resources, and innovative solutions to tackle the housing shortage and improve housing conditions in the country. In spite of the progress made, challenges still exist in the housing sector.

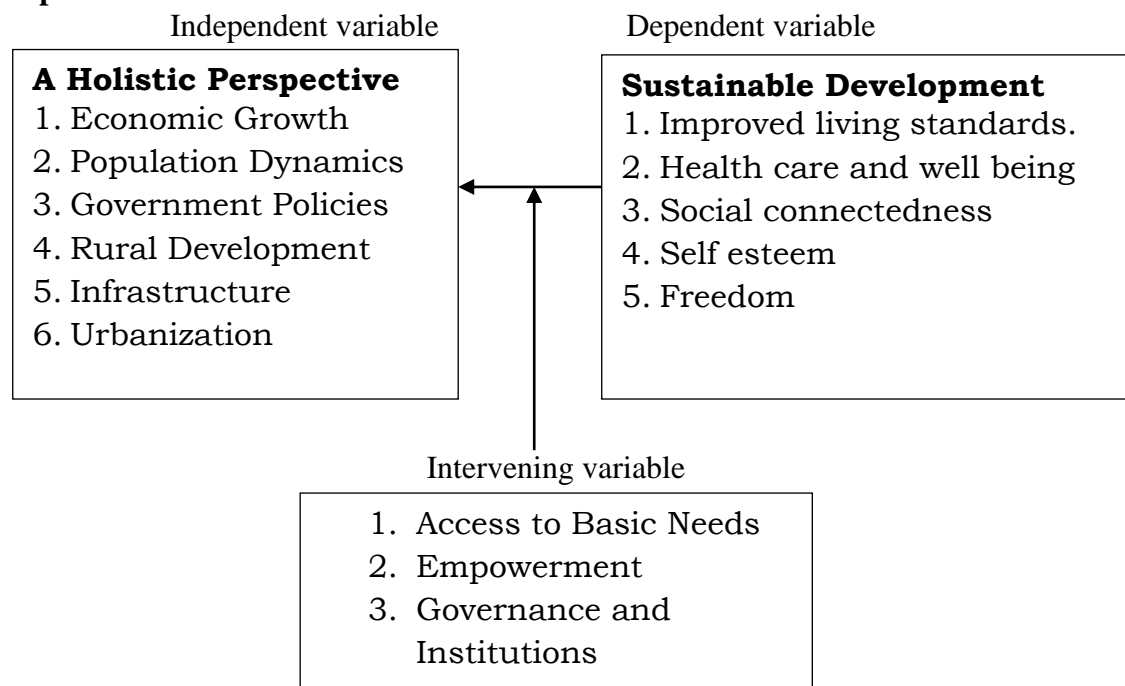
The demand for housing continues to outpace supply, resulting in a significant housing deficit. Issues such as land availability, infrastructure development, financing constraints, and urbanization pose obstacles to the government's housing agenda. To address these challenges effectively, continued commitment from the government is crucial. This involves allocating resources to the housing sector, both in terms of funding and land allocation. It also requires the effective implementation of policies and programs, ensuring transparency, accountability, and equitable distribution of housing resources. By prioritizing social welfare services, including housing, the government can contribute significantly to the well-being and improved quality of life for its citizens. Adequate and affordable housing is not only a basic human need but also a catalyst for socio-economic development. Access to safe and decent housing enhances the overall living conditions, health outcomes, educational opportunities, and social stability of individuals and communities.

The government of Kenya has recognized the importance of addressing housing needs and has implemented policies and programs to provide adequate and affordable housing for its citizens. However, Collaborative efforts, continued commitment, resource allocation, and effective implementation are crucial to ensuring the provision of housing for all Kenyans. By prioritizing social welfare services, including housing, the government can contribute to the well-being and improved quality of life of its citizens, ultimately fostering inclusive and sustainable development in the country.

### **Statement of the Problem**

This study questions the government's current housing-focused approach to addressing the housing needs of Kenyans and advocates for a more holistic perspective on development. It aims to assess the viability and sustainability of the housing-centric strategy in meeting the needs of the majority, while emphasizing the importance of empowering individuals through better employment opportunities and a conducive business environment. Beyond housing, the study seeks to evaluate the government's efforts in reducing poverty, improving access to education and healthcare, and addressing slow economic growth intensified by corruption. In addition, the study aims to understand the root causes of rural-urban migration and suggests making rural areas more attractive by resolving socio-economic challenges. The goal is to promote sustainable development and improve the overall well-being of all Kenyans.

### Conceptual Model



**Source: Author 2023**

**Development Objectives:** The conceptual framework of this article begins by highlighting the fundamental objectives of development, which include raising living standards, reducing poverty levels, and enhancing access to basic needs and services. These objectives form the foundation for evaluating the government's approach to housing and urban planning in Kenya.

**Amartya Sen's Core Values:** The framework incorporates Amartya Sen's core values of development, which encompass life sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom. These values emphasize the importance of addressing not only the housing problems in Kenya but also broader aspects such as employment opportunities, a conducive business environment, and individual empowerment.

**Holistic Perspective:** The framework emphasizes the need for a holistic perspective on development, beyond housing alone. It recognizes that sustainable development involves considering social, economic, and environmental factors comprehensively.

**Economic Growth and Population Dynamics:** The framework addresses the relationship between economic growth, population dynamics, and urbanization. It highlights the importance of economic growth outpacing population growth to ensure the provision of essential services, including housing, education, healthcare, and other facilities.

**Root Causes and Rural Development:** The framework explores the underlying causes of rural-urban migration and emphasizes the need to focus on rural development. It advocates for creating socio-economic conditions that make rural areas attractive, thereby reducing the pressure on urban centers and addressing the socio-economic challenges faced by the growing urban population.

**Role of Government:** The conceptual framework emphasizes the government's role in creating an enabling environment for development. It suggests that the government should focus on combating corruption, promoting economic growth, and providing better employment opportunities to empower individuals to improve their own lives.

**Sustainable Development:** The framework underscores the importance of sustainability in development efforts. It advocates for a balance between economic growth, social well-being, and environmental preservation to ensure that development initiatives have a lasting positive impact.

By employing this conceptual framework, policymakers can evaluate development strategies and make informed decisions that prioritize the holistic well-being of the population, address root causes, and foster sustainable development in Kenya.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The best theories that align with the arguments presented in this article is the Capability Approach developed by Amartya (1933) on development as freedom, and the theory of power developed by various theorists, Morgenthau (1948) being one of them.

### **The Capability Theory**

The Capability Approach emphasizes the importance of enhancing individuals' capabilities to lead lives they value and have reason to value. It focuses on expanding people's freedoms and opportunities to pursue a range of valuable functioning, including access to basic needs like education, healthcare, and housing. The theory recognizes the multidimensional nature of development and the significance of addressing socio-economic challenges and empowering individuals to improve their own lives. By adopting the Capability Approach, the government can prioritize the expansion of capabilities, provide better employment opportunities, reduce poverty levels, and ensure access to essential services, ultimately fostering sustainable development and enhancing the well-being of all Kenyans.

### **The Power Theory**

In the context of this article, the nature of power is an underlying factor that influences the decisions and actions of the government. The ability of individuals or political parties to exercise power can significantly shape the direction and outcomes of development initiatives such as housing initiatives. Power is divided into three dimensions; According to Morgenthau (1948), power is defined as an aim of international politics, without power there is no ability to pursue life or achieve freedom.

The first dimension of power according to Joyce (2015) involves the ability of individuals to alter the behavior of others by forcing them to do things they may not agree with. This article has adapted the above dimension of power in explaining the promises made by the Kenya Kwanza ruling party during the general elections in the year 2022 in which Kenyans voted in their fifth president but immediately the new regime got into power, it set aside many of the pledges made to the people. The Kenya Kwanza political party vigorously campaigned on the ideology of the 'hustler-economic bottom-up approach' which won the hearts of many Kenya's who voted for the party. The above indicates that political parties often use persuasive tactics and make commitments to gain support and secure power. In the case of the Kenya Kwanza party, their promises, such as reducing taxes and implementing the bottom-up approach, were aimed at appealing to the interests and aspirations of the



electorates which they did it so well that the majority of Kenyans voted for the party overwhelmingly.

The second dimension of power, focused on manipulating the political agenda. When governments get into power, they begin to see their ability to prioritize certain issues and exclude others from the decision-making process. In the context of housing and urban planning in Kenya, this article suggests that the current focus on housing initiatives by the government of Kenya may not adequately address the broader needs of the majority of Kenyans such as education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

The above suggests that the government's power in setting up the new housing agenda may not be accommodating the policies and initiatives pledged to the people during the elections campaigns in Kenya in the year 2022. The majority of Kenyans seem not be happy with the direction the government is taking especially in charging the new housing levy on employees to cater for the construction of houses for the entire 50 million Kenyans. This has led to the opposition parties demonstrating and rioting on the streets of Nairobi.

The government is blamed for not successfully implementing the 'hustler-bottom-up economic approach,' which the people of Kenya believe could have been implemented to raise the standards of living of the majority poor. The ruling party coined the concept 'bottom-up' which in their explanation was meant to empower the 'downtrodden' by assisting them with capital to improve their businesses with the purpose of getting them out of the poverty line. But upon getting into power, nothing much has changed in the lives of the poor. Instead, the new regime has come up with a raft of new taxes where the poor mostly referred to as 'Bodabodas' and 'mama mboga' are all required to pay 3% tax on their turnovers at the end of year.

The third dimension of power involves non-coercive means such as ideological control which may be observed in the government's ability to shape public opinion and garner support for its initiatives. By presenting its policies as solutions to pressing issues and aligning them with the needs and preferences of the people, the Kenya Kwanza government gained legitimacy and endorsement, even if those policies could not directly address the root causes of socio-economic challenges.

Overall, the concept of power is relevant to the analysis of this article. It helps us understand how political parties and governments exert influence, shape agendas, and make decisions that impact the lives of citizens. By critically examining the exercise of power, we can assess the effectiveness and failure of policies and initiatives put forth by the Kenya Kwanza government.

### **Redefining Development Goals**

Development encompasses societal progress and the advancement of social systems towards a better life. To achieve true development, it is crucial to embrace major economic and social objectives and values that societies strive for. According to Amartya (1933), the core values of development include life sustenance, self-esteem, and freedom for individuals to pursue their own benefits. While housing is not a life-sustaining necessity that can directly cause harm if absent, it is essential to focus on providing better employment opportunities and a conducive business environment to enhance self-reliance and personal growth.

### **Empowering Kenyans for Self-Improvement**

According to Oketch (2018), empowering Kenyan youth for employment is a critical aspect of development. Oketch's article highlights the challenges and opportunities in youth employment and emphasizes the need for creating a conducive business environment, reducing barriers to entrepreneurship, and providing skills training programs. By focusing on empowering individuals through better employment opportunities, the government can enable Kenyans to improve their own lives and contribute to sustainable development. The government should prioritize freeing Kenyans to improve their own lives. By facilitating better employment opportunities and reducing taxes to encourage entrepreneurship, individuals can save and invest in their own housing solutions. A critical objective of development is to raise living standards by reducing poverty levels and meeting basic needs. However, the current housing projects fail to address the majority of Kenyans' fundamental needs, such as access to quality education, healthcare, and other essential facilities.

### **Meeting the Demands of Growing Urban Centers**

Urban migration in Kenya is driven by the concentration of social services and employment opportunities in cities and towns. However, the rate of population growth in these urban areas surpasses the expansion of services, including housing. To minimize associated problems, such as increasing anti-social activities, the government must tackle the root causes of urban growth. Merely focusing on housing is insufficient. Instead, emphasis should be placed on stimulating the Kenyan economy, which is hindered by factors such as corruption in both the public and private sectors. Onyango & Nyairo (2021) study on the political economy of urbanization and informality in Nairobi contributes to the understanding of the complex interplay between economic, social, and political factors in urban development. His article highlights how political factors influence urban growth, the prevalence of informality, and the provision of housing and basic services. This underscores the importance of addressing the root causes of urbanization and creating favorable socio-economic conditions in both urban and rural areas.

### **Addressing the Slow Economic Growth**

According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2021) on Economic Survey 2020, Nairobi Kenya, in order to foster a sustainable economy, there should be a faster growth rate relative to population growth. This would enable improved healthcare services, education systems, and housing initiatives. Enhancing remuneration from employment and encouraging lucrative businesses would empower individuals to take charge of their lives and make positive contributions to society.

### **Understanding the Rural-Urban Migration**

Insufficient data currently exists regarding the causes of migration to urban centers in Kenya. It is important to ascertain whether rural-urban migration is the primary driver of population growth in cities. According to Mugo (2020), if the reverse is true, the government must address the lack of development in rural areas, which contributes to migration. The minister should focus on resolving socio-economic challenges such as housing, unemployment, water scarcity, and inadequate healthcare facilities in the country. By creating favorable socio-economic conditions in rural regions, the government can make rural lives meaningful and attractive thus curbing the migration to urban areas.



## **Conclusion**

It is imperative for the government to adopt a comprehensive approach to development in Kenya. While housing is a crucial aspect, it is vital to prioritize empowering individuals to improve their own lives through better employment opportunities and conducive business environments. By addressing the root causes of urban growth and focusing on holistic development, the government can effectively tackle socio-economic challenges and create a sustainable future for all Kenyans.

## **Recommendations**

**Diversify Development Goals:** The government should redefine its development goals beyond just housing and focus on providing better employment opportunities, promoting entrepreneurship, and improving the business environment. By prioritizing economic growth and self-improvement opportunities, individuals can actively contribute to their own well-being and development.

**Implement the Capability Approach:** Adopting Amartya Sen's Capability Approach can guide policymakers to focus on enhancing individuals' capabilities to lead lives they value. This involves ensuring access to education, healthcare, and other basic needs, which are essential for overall development.

**Address Root Causes of Urbanization:** To curb rural-urban migration, the government should invest in rural development, including infrastructure, healthcare, education, and job opportunities. Making rural areas attractive and conducive for living can alleviate the pressure on urban centers.

**Combat Corruption:** To foster economic growth and development, the government must prioritize the fight against corruption in both the public and private sectors. Transparent governance and accountability are crucial to ensuring resources are utilized efficiently and effectively.

**Sustainability and Environmental Preservation:** Development initiatives should take into account environmental preservation and sustainability. The government should promote eco-friendly housing solutions and urban planning to ensure long-term benefits and minimal negative impacts on the environment.

**Consult and Involve Citizens:** In the decision-making process, involve citizens, especially those directly affected by housing and development policies. Consultations with communities, stakeholders, and experts can lead to more effective and inclusive development strategies.

**Strengthen Social Welfare Services:** In addition to housing, the government should strengthen other social welfare services such as healthcare, education, and social protection programs. This will contribute to improved living standards and overall well-being.

**Monitor and Evaluate Progress:** Regularly monitor and evaluate the progress of development initiatives to ensure that they are on track and effectively addressing the needs of the population. Data-driven decision-making can lead to more impactful policies.

**Foster Public-Private Partnerships:** The government needs to collaborate with private developers, financial institutions, and international organizations to leverage resources, expertise, and innovative solutions to address housing challenges and other developmental objectives.

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