



Effects of Social Regeneration on Economic Growth in Kisumu City, Kenya

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Abstract: This study examined the effects of social regeneration on economic growth in Kisumu City, Kenya. The study adopted Competitive City perspective and Endogenous Growth Theory. A descriptive mixed-methods research design was adopted. The target population was 600 respondents, including county executives, county directors, chief officers, Members of County Assembly, and members of the business community. A sample of 180 respondents was selected using random and purposive sampling techniques. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides, and document review. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment correlation, and regression analysis, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings showed that respondents generally perceived social regeneration practices as contributing positively to economic growth. Education and training facilities, healthcare infrastructure, accessible public buildings, and recreational facilities were perceived to enhance employability, workforce productivity, public service delivery, social stability, and business activity. Qualitative findings reinforced these results, indicating that social regeneration supported human capital development, improved service delivery, and created a conducive environment for economic activity. Pearson correlation analysis established a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between social regeneration and economic growth ($r = .720, p < .05$). Regression analysis further showed that social regeneration explained approximately 54% of the variation in economic growth outcomes. The study concludes that social regeneration is an important contributor to economic growth in Kisumu City. It recommends strengthening investment in education and training, healthcare infrastructure, accessible public buildings, and recreational facilities to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

Keywords: Social regeneration; Economic growth; Urban development; Community participation; Kisumu City; Kenya.

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1. Introduction

Urban regeneration is an important approach to addressing the social and economic challenges associated with urban growth, decline, and inequality (Tallon, 2020). Unlike conventional urban renewal, which has largely focused on physical redevelopment, contemporary urban regeneration incorporates social inclusion, community participation, improved living conditions, and access to urban services (UN-Habitat, 2020). Social regeneration focuses on

strengthening the social conditions and opportunities of urban communities, including their participation, inclusion, and access to essential services. These interventions can improve residents' capacity to participate in employment and other productive activities (Hu et al., 2024). However, the economic outcomes of regeneration are not automatic and may vary according to the nature of interventions and the local context. Albanese et al. (2021), for example, found that urban regeneration interventions in Italy did not produce significant short- to medium-term

local economic growth, although improvements in public spaces were associated with higher property values.

In Africa, social considerations have become increasingly important in urban regeneration as cities experience rapid urbanization, informal settlements, inadequate housing, and unequal access to urban services. Mirzoev et al. (2022) emphasizes that inclusive urban development can improve access to services and opportunities while reducing socio-economic inequalities. In South Africa, urban regeneration has been linked to efforts to address spatial inequality and reconnect disadvantaged communities to urban economic opportunities (Mudzunga, 2022). However, Ntanda and Carolissen (2025) notes that urban transformation must balance economic efficiency with social inclusion to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities. These experiences demonstrate the importance of ensuring that regeneration processes improve the conditions and participation of existing communities rather than focusing exclusively on physical transformation.

In Kenya, rapid urbanization has increased pressure on housing, public services, infrastructure, and livelihoods, particularly in low-income urban communities. UN-Habitat (2020) identifies inclusive urban development and improved access to urban resources as important conditions for achieving broader economic and social benefits. Social regeneration can therefore provide an avenue for improving living conditions, public spaces, social services, and community participation. However, the extent to which such interventions translate into improved economic outcomes remains insufficiently established. This is important because regeneration can create opportunities for economic participation, but interventions that overlook existing communities may disrupt livelihoods and limit the distribution of benefits.

These issues are particularly relevant to Kisumu City, where urban renewal has involved changes to residential areas, public spaces, and commercial activities. K'oyoo and Breed (2024) found that urban renewal in Kisumu has been closely associated with economic investment, while also raising concerns regarding urban memory, identity, and the interests of existing communities. Public participation is similarly important in shaping how residents experience and respond to urban renewal interventions in the city (K'oyoo, 2024). These findings suggest that the social dimensions of regeneration are important in determining whether urban transformation produces inclusive benefits. Consequently, assessing social regeneration in relation to economic growth provides a useful basis for understanding the broader outcomes of urban development in Kisumu City.

Although existing studies have examined urban renewal, public participation, landscape identity, and economic

investment in Kisumu City, limited empirical evidence has established the effect of social regeneration on economic growth. K'oyoo (2024) focuses on public participation and landscape identity, while K'oyoo and Breed (2024) examine urban memory and economic investment in urban renewal. Less attention has been given to how social inclusion, community participation, living conditions, and access to social services collectively influence economic outcomes. This study therefore examined the effects of social regeneration on economic growth in Kisumu City, Kenya.

1.2 Research Objective

Social regeneration is important for improving the social conditions, inclusion, participation, and quality of life of urban communities. In rapidly growing cities such as Kisumu, interventions aimed at improving living conditions, access to social services, community participation, and social inclusion are important for creating conditions that support residents' participation in economic activities. Given the increasing urbanisation and regeneration initiatives in Kisumu City, examining social regeneration is important for understanding its contribution to local economic growth. Therefore, the objective of the study was to examine the effect of social regeneration on economic growth in Kisumu City, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study was guided by Competitive City perspective and Endogenous Growth Theory. The Competitive City perspective explains how urban conditions, attractiveness, institutional capacity, and economic positioning influence a city's ability to attract and retain economic activities. The perspective is associated with scholars such as Kresl (1995), Porter (1995, 1996), and Lever and Turok (1999). Endogenous Growth Theory, principally developed by Romer (1986) and Lucas (1988), explains economic growth through internal factors such as knowledge, human capital, learning, and technological change. Together, the two perspectives provide a basis for explaining how improvements in the social conditions of urban communities may contribute to economic growth.

2.1.1 Competitive City Perspective

The Competitive City perspective emerged from the literature on urban competitiveness and the increasing competition among cities for investment, businesses, skilled labour, and economic opportunities. Kresl (1995) identified determinants of urban competitiveness and

emphasised the importance of factors that strengthen the economic performance and attractiveness of cities. Porter (1995) similarly argued that the competitive advantages of urban areas are influenced by the conditions that support businesses and economic activities. Lever and Turok (1999) further developed the competitive city debate by examining what cities compete for, how they compete, and the consequences of urban competition.

The perspective is relevant to social regeneration because improvements in living conditions, social services, public spaces, community participation, and social inclusion can enhance the attractiveness and functionality of an urban area. Improved social conditions may create a more supportive environment for residents, businesses, and investors and consequently facilitate economic activities. Turok (2016) similarly emphasises the need to combine economic competitiveness with social inclusion in urban transformation.

In this study, the Competitive City perspective guided the examination of social regeneration in relation to economic growth in Kisumu City. It is particularly relevant because improvements in the social conditions of Kisumu residents may strengthen their participation in economic activities while making the city more attractive for businesses and investment. The perspective therefore provides a useful explanation of how social regeneration may contribute to local economic growth.

A key strength of the Competitive City perspective is that it recognises the importance of urban conditions and local interventions in shaping economic competitiveness. However, its emphasis on competitiveness and investment may give insufficient attention to the development of human capabilities within local communities. This limitation is addressed by Endogenous Growth Theory, which explains how human capital, knowledge, and learning can generate sustained economic growth.

2.1.2 Endogenous Growth Theory

Endogenous Growth Theory was principally developed by Paul Romer (1986) and Robert Lucas (1988). Romer (1986) demonstrated that knowledge can function as an input into production and that endogenous technological change can generate sustained long-run growth. Lucas (1988) subsequently emphasised human capital accumulation, including education and learning-by-doing, as an important source of productivity and economic growth.

The theory explains economic growth as arising partly from factors generated within an economy, particularly human capital, knowledge, skills, learning, and innovation. Romer's (1986) contribution highlights the role of knowledge and technological change, while Lucas (1988)

emphasises the accumulation of human capital as a source of productivity.

The theory is relevant to social regeneration because improvements in social conditions can strengthen the human capabilities required for productive economic participation. Abidin (2024) opined that access to social services, skills development, education, improved living conditions, and opportunities for community participation may enhance residents' capabilities and productivity. In this study, Endogenous Growth Theory therefore guided the examination of how social regeneration may contribute to economic growth through improvements in the capabilities and participation of Kisumu City's residents.

A key strength of Endogenous Growth Theory is its emphasis on human capital, knowledge, and learning as internal sources of economic growth. However, the theory gives less attention to the broader urban environment and the ability of cities to attract businesses, investment, and economic opportunities. The Competitive City perspective complements this limitation by explaining how improvements in urban conditions and attractiveness can influence economic activity. Together, the two theoretical perspectives provide a complementary basis for examining the effect of social regeneration on economic growth in Kisumu City.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

This section reviews empirical studies on social regeneration and economic growth. It examines existing evidence on how social regeneration interventions influence economic outcomes and identifies gaps that justify the study in Kisumu City, Kenya.

2.2.1 Effects of Social Regeneration on Economic Growth

Social regeneration focuses on improving social cohesion, inclusion, community well-being, access to services, safety, and community participation as components of urban development (Hu et al., 2024). These interventions can strengthen trust, reduce social conflict, and enhance residents' participation in local economic activities, thereby creating conditions that support economic development (Mardikaningsih, 2021).

Cerreta and La Rocca (2021) examined urban regeneration processes in Cagliari, Italy, with a focus on the relationship between regeneration and urban development outcomes. The study found that participatory planning and inclusive approaches contributed to improved social cohesion and economic productivity. The findings suggest that community engagement and inclusive urban development can create conditions that support local economic activity.

However, the study was conducted in an Italian urban context, limiting its applicability to rapidly urbanising cities in developing countries such as Kisumu.

Similarly, Tallon (2020) examined urban regeneration in post-industrial cities in the United Kingdom, including Manchester and Birmingham. The study showed that regeneration strategies incorporating community-based skills development and interventions addressing unemployment and social exclusion improved residents' capacity to participate in emerging economic activities. The findings demonstrate the importance of combining physical regeneration with social interventions. However, the study focused on mature post-industrial cities whose institutional and economic conditions differ from those of secondary cities in Kenya.

Opoku and Akotia (2020) examined urban regeneration and sustainable development in Ghana, focusing on regeneration initiatives involving social infrastructure. The study found that improvements in educational and health infrastructure generated positive economic outcomes, including improvements in property values and household incomes. The findings indicate that investment in social services can contribute to economic development by improving the conditions in which urban communities live and work. However, the study focused on specific regeneration interventions and did not examine social regeneration as a broader construct.

In Kenya, Muhindi (2019) examined volunteer-driven social initiatives and their contribution to community resilience and economic performance in urban areas. The study found that neighbourhood improvement activities, clean-up initiatives, and youth empowerment programmes strengthened civic participation and interactions between communities and authorities. These improvements created a more supportive environment for local economic activities. However, the study focused mainly on community participation and civic initiatives rather than the broader dimensions of social regeneration.

King'ong'o (2022) examined indigenous entrepreneurship and community-based empowerment initiatives in Turkana County. The study found that interventions supporting local businesses, improving market access, and strengthening community enterprises contributed to improved economic outcomes and livelihoods. The findings demonstrate the potential of socially inclusive interventions to strengthen local economic participation, particularly among marginalised groups. However, the study was conducted in Turkana County and focused on rural and community-based enterprises, limiting its applicability to an urban setting such as Kisumu City.

Oluchiri (2025) examined Urban flooding in the cities of Kisumu, Mombasa, and Nairobi, Kenya: Causes, vulnerability factors, and management. The study found that improvements in education, healthcare, and community development contributed to urban liveability and supported small and medium-sized enterprises. The findings suggest that improved social conditions can create a more favourable environment for investment and local economic activity. However, the study did not specifically isolate the effect of social regeneration on economic growth.

Reviewed studies show that social regeneration can contribute to economic outcomes through improved social inclusion, community participation, access to services, human capabilities, and urban liveability (Roberts & Sykes, 2017). However, existing studies have largely examined individual social interventions or broader urban regeneration programmes rather than social regeneration as a distinct construct. Moreover, limited empirical evidence has examined its effect on economic growth in secondary cities in Kenya. This gap provided a basis for examining the effect of social regeneration on economic growth in Kisumu City, Kenya.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive mixed-methods research design to examine the effects of social regeneration on economic growth in Kisumu City, Kenya. Quantitative data established the relationship between social regeneration and economic growth, while qualitative data provided contextual explanations of the findings.

3.2 Sampling and Sample Size

The target population comprised 600 participants drawn from county executives, county directors, chief officers, Members of the County Assembly (MCAs), and the business community. A sample of 180 respondents was selected using random and purposive sampling techniques. County officials were selected randomly, while participants with relevant knowledge of social regeneration were purposively selected.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interview guides, and a document review template. Questionnaires assessed social regeneration and economic growth, while interviews obtained detailed views on social regeneration initiatives and their economic

implications. Relevant county plans and policy documents were also reviewed. The instruments were pilot-tested in Kakamega Town using 18 respondents. Validity was enhanced through expert review, while reliability was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, with 0.70 as the minimum acceptable threshold.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The researcher obtained ethical approval, a NACOSTI research permit, and authorisation from the County Government of Kisumu. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Questionnaires were administered to business-community respondents, while interviews were conducted with selected county officials and MCAs. Relevant documents were also reviewed to complement the primary data.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 24.0. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used for descriptive analysis. Pearson correlation was used to establish the relationship between social regeneration and economic growth, while multiple regression was used to determine the effect of the

dimensions of social regeneration on economic growth at $\alpha = 0.05$. Qualitative data were analysed thematically, and the findings were integrated with the quantitative results.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval and institutional authorisation were obtained before data collection. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, and participants could withdraw at any stage without penalty. Data were securely stored and used solely for academic purposes.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 165 out of the 180 targeted respondents participated in the study, yielding an overall response rate of 91.7%. Of the 175 questionnaires administered to members of the business community, 160 were duly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 91.4%, while all five key informants participated in the interviews. The high response rate provided sufficient data for analysis and enhanced the credibility of the study findings. According to Saunders et al. (2023), a response rate above 70% is considered adequate for social science research. The descriptive results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Social Regeneration Practices

n=160

Statements	SD F %	D F %	N F %	A F %	SA F %
Expansion of education and training facilities increases employability hence higher purchasing power leading to an increase in number of businesses	5 (3.1)	12 (7.5)	18 (11.3)	70 (43.8)	55 (34.4)
Equipping of health care facilities reduces death cases thus increasing labour force	4 (2.5)	10 (6.3)	16 (10.0)	72 (45.0)	58 (36.3)
Accessibility of public buildings improves government service provision thus increased county revenue	6 (3.8)	11 (6.9)	17 (10.6)	68 (42.5)	58 (36.3)
Provision of recreational facilities has reduced crime hence an increased impetus to business risk taking	7 (4.4)	13 (8.1)	19 (11.9)	66 (41.3)	55 (34.4)

Source: Field Data, 2026

The results in Table 1 show that respondents generally perceived social regeneration practices as contributing positively to economic growth in Kisumu City. Regarding the expansion of education and training facilities, 70 (43.8%) respondents agreed and 55 (34.4%) strongly agreed that such facilities increased employability, purchasing power, and business growth. Only 17 (10.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 18 (11.3%) were neutral. This suggests that investment in education and skills development was perceived to enhance human

capital, employability, household incomes, and entrepreneurial activity. The finding is consistent with Cerreta and La Rocca (2021), who emphasise the contribution of education and skills development to employability, productivity, and economic participation.

Similarly, 72 (45.0%) respondents agreed and 58 (36.3%) strongly agreed that equipping healthcare facilities reduced deaths and increased the available labour force. Only 14 (8.8%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 16 (10.0%)

were neutral. The finding indicates that improved healthcare infrastructure was perceived to support a healthier and more productive workforce, thereby contributing to economic activity. This is consistent with Tallon (2020), who links investment in urban health systems to improved workforce capacity and economic performance.

Regarding accessibility of public buildings, 68 (42.5%) respondents agreed and 58 (36.3%) strongly agreed that improved accessibility enhanced government service provision and increased county revenue. Only 17 (10.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 17 (10.6%) were neutral. This finding suggests that accessible public infrastructure can improve administrative efficiency, facilitate service delivery, and support local revenue mobilisation. The finding concurs with Opoku and Akotia (2020), who note that accessible public services can reduce transaction costs and contribute to improved local economic performance.

With respect to recreational facilities, 66 (41.3%) respondents agreed and 55 (34.4%) strongly agreed that such facilities reduced crime and encouraged business risk-taking. In contrast, 20 (12.5%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 19 (11.9%) were neutral. This finding indicates that recreational spaces were perceived to promote social cohesion, improve urban safety, and create a more favourable environment for investment and entrepreneurship. This is consistent with Muhindi (2019) and King'ong'o (2022), who associate safe and socially vibrant urban environments with increased economic participation and investment.

The qualitative findings reinforced the quantitative results. Key informants reported that education and training facilities enhanced employability and entrepreneurial skills, while improved healthcare supported workforce productivity. Accessible public infrastructure was associated with more efficient service delivery, whereas recreational facilities were perceived to reduce social vices and strengthen community cohesion. Collectively, these findings suggest that social regeneration contributes to economic growth through improvements in human capital, workforce productivity, public service efficiency, and social stability.

The inferential results further supported this relationship. Pearson correlation revealed a strong positive association between social regeneration and economic growth ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.05$). Regression analysis indicated that social regeneration explained approximately 54% of the variation in economic growth. The findings therefore demonstrate that social regeneration was a significant predictor of economic growth in Kisumu City. This evidence reinforces the argument that investments in education, healthcare,

public infrastructure, and recreational facilities can create social and economic conditions that support urban economic development.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The findings established that social regeneration had a significant and positive relationship with economic growth in Kisumu City, Kenya. The descriptive results showed a generally positive perception of social regeneration practices, particularly the expansion of education and training facilities, equipping of healthcare facilities, accessibility of public buildings, and provision of recreational facilities. These practices were perceived to enhance employability, labour productivity, public service delivery, social stability, and business activity, thereby contributing to economic growth.

The qualitative findings reinforced the quantitative results by demonstrating that social regeneration initiatives contributed to improved human capital, workforce productivity, efficient public service delivery, and community wellbeing. Key informants indicated that education and training enhanced employability and entrepreneurial skills, healthcare investments supported workforce productivity, accessible public infrastructure improved service delivery, while recreational facilities strengthened social cohesion and encouraged local economic activity.

The inferential findings provided further evidence of the relationship between social regeneration and economic growth. Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between social regeneration and economic growth ($r = .720$, $p < .05$). Regression analysis further established that social regeneration explained approximately 54% of the variation in economic growth outcomes. Accordingly, the findings demonstrate that strengthening social regeneration practices can make an important contribution to economic growth in Kisumu City.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Strengthen education and training facilities

The County Government of Kisumu should strengthen investment in education and training facilities to enhance skills development, employability, and entrepreneurial capacity. This would improve human capital and support employment and business growth within the city.

2. Improve healthcare infrastructure

The County Government should continue investing in and equipping healthcare facilities to improve access to quality healthcare services. Improved healthcare infrastructure would support a healthier and more productive workforce, thereby contributing to economic growth.

3. Enhance accessibility of public buildings

The County Government should improve the accessibility and functionality of public buildings to facilitate efficient delivery of public services. This would enhance administrative efficiency, improve public engagement, and support effective revenue mobilisation.

4. Expand recreational and social facilities

The County Government should expand and maintain recreational facilities and public social spaces to promote community cohesion, reduce social vices, and create a conducive environment for business and investment. Such facilities can contribute to local economic activity and improve the overall quality of urban life.

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