

PARTICIPATORY URBAN PLANNING IN KITALE, KENYA ^(*)

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Introduction

The global urbanisation trend indicates the extent of urban poverty and failure of current approaches to meet the growing need for urban infrastructure services and adequate, affordable housing. Access to urban land is becoming increasingly more difficult due to competing demand for land earmarked for infrastructure, housing, commercial and industrial development in the face of escalating land prices. These problems are being compounded by the "urbanisation of poverty"- the fact that a rapidly increasing proportion of the world poor are now living in cities and towns. This has resulted in the proliferation and expansion of informal settlements characterised by inadequate infrastructure (water, sanitation, drainage, waste management, and access path and roads), poor building and housing conditions and an overall unhealthy and hazardous environment, in which a growing majority in the urban South now live and earn their livelihoods.

The greatest concern is that city and municipal authorities, charged with the responsibility of planning and managing urban growth and delivering services to their citizenry are unable to do so due to inadequate financial, human and technical capacity.

This paper presents how an action research project led to innovative, appropriate and affordable responses to water, sanitation and technology needs of urban poor communities living and working in informal settlements in a secondary town in Kenya through a partnership approach and participatory urban planning. It also relates how the methodologies have been integrated into the wider municipal development agenda and have influenced the municipal approach to delivery of services.

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Project Background

Located about 380 km to the north west of Nairobi, the capital and primate city of Kenya, Kitale Town is the administrative and commercial capital of Trans-Nzoia District. It also serves as a frontier town for the northern Kenya region, which has an estimated 800,000 inhabitants. The Municipality's immediate hinterland is often referred to as the country's 'breadbasket' because of its high agricultural potential. Migration to the town, due to decreasing economic opportunities in the outlying farmlands and recurrent drought in northern Kenya, has overstretched the capacity of Kitale Municipal Council (KMC) to effectively plan the development of the municipality and deliver infrastructure and other services. As a result, 65% of its estimated population of 163, 209, do not have access to secure tenure, decent shelter, safe water, sanitation, health services, employment opportunities among other livelihoods needs, and are compelled to live in Informal Settlements and slums, such as Kipsongo, Shimo-Ia-Tewa and Tuwan. An earlier attempt to improve infrastructure and housing conditions in the latter settlement, under the World Bank-funded Third Urban Project, met with little success.

Project Purpose and Anticipated Outputs

Building in Partnership: Participatory Urban Planning, an action research project funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and implemented in Kitale, Kenya, had as its purpose "to test, develop and disseminate a partnership approach to the planning of urban space with poor men, women and children, community-based, public and private organisations". The overall goal of the project was to "enhance the effectiveness of city and municipal planning". The project, which started in April 2001 and ended in March 2004, set out to investigate whether the creation of formal and informal linkages between community based organizations (CBOs), public agencies and the formal and informal private sectors could build local capacity to assess and meet the needs of urban poor communities. In addition, the project sought to test, develop and disseminate methods and approaches to encourage the active participation of key stakeholder groups in assessing needs and developing neighbourhood plans.

The anticipated project outputs included the following:

- A worldwide review and synthesis of existing knowledge and methodologies applied in participatory policy making and local governance, with a focus on informal settlement development.
- Establishment of linkages and bases for partnerships through participatory baseline surveys and detailed needs assessment in selected informal settlements.
- Capacity building of project partners to plan and manage the urban built environment and influence public sector approaches to planning and implementation of development interventions.
- Participatory recording and media coverage of the project process, and engagement in discussions, debates and presentations locally, nationally and internationally.
- A published methodology for effective partnership formation and working, including tools and techniques.

Project Approach

Project activities in Kitale Municipality were carried out and managed by Intermediate Technology Development Group-Eastern Africa (ITDG-EA), in partnership with other key stakeholders, while overall management responsibility lay with Intermediate Technology Development Group-United Kingdom (ITDG-UK).

The project trialled a partnership approach that worked with existing local governance structures and involved a range of stakeholders in the participatory urban planning processes that were also tested and used. The term 'participatory urban planning' has become common parlance in planning and development circles. Its focus is on the empowerment of local communities who have traditionally had planning done for them. Participatory urban planning sees communities not as passive beneficiaries or clients, but rather as key stakeholders and active participants and partners in the design, implementation and sustainability of development interventions. The project recognized that partnerships:

- Enable different actors to gain access to each other's skills and resources;
- Provide mechanisms for maximizing returns and spreading risks on investment;

- Ensure that stakeholders have a voice in the development agenda;
- Facilitate the use of participatory approaches and capacity building of partner groups,
- Enhance the achievement of project goals,
- Promote networking and sharing of resources and experiences,
- Minimize the needs/demands gaps in the provision of goods and services, and
- Enable realistic monitoring and evaluation of project activities.

The project partners included local communities and their organizations; KMC; relevant central government agencies and departments; NGOs; professional bodies such as the Kenya Institute of Planners (KIP); and the University of Nairobi's Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP). Project partners supported local communities in implementing and monitoring project interventions.

The project also adopted a sustainable livelihoods (SL) approach, and used participatory urban appraisal (PUA) methodologies and tools and community based indicators to help poor women, men and children living in informal settlement to identify their development priorities, and prepare spatial and settlement specific neighbourhood's plans.

The project worked in three informal settlements in Kitale Town, namely Kipsongo, Shimo-La- Tewa and Tuwan. The three settlements were selected from the 10 civic wards in the Municipality through city-wide ward based baseline surveys. The three sites were used as pilot areas for testing, developing and disseminating partnership approaches that encourage stakeholder participation in assessing real user needs and designing appropriate intervention strategies. The detailed participatory needs assessments that were conducted in each of the settlements informed the formulation and development of neighbourhood plans that integrated gender needs and promoted access to infrastructure and opportunities for micro and small enterprise (MSE) development.

Project Achievements

The project faced a number of challenges, particularly in its early stages following the dissolution of the Council by presidential decree in September 2001. Even so, the project was able to make some notable achievements. These are summarized below.

Contribution to knowledge

A global review of the literature and existing knowledge on participatory planning within the context of informal settlement development was carried out and documented. Case studies were undertaken in the three East Africa countries - Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania and documented. Similar studies were conducted in Bangladesh and Peru by the ITDG offices in those countries, and likewise documented. The literature review and case studies were intended to assist the project team design the participatory methodologies and tools that were to be used in implementing the project. A manual/guide based on project experiences was produced and has been disseminated to local authorities, urban managers and planning practitioners in the region and worldwide.

Participatory surveys

The project provided support to the Council's Department of Housing and Social Services (DHSS) to carry out a city wide preliminary scan survey. The purpose of the survey was to help local communities identify and map their development priorities and planning and funding challenges, in particular with respect to infrastructure needs (water, sanitation, drainage, solid waste management, and pedestrian and vehicular access), shelter, health services and education facilities. The communities were also engaged in governance issues.

In addition to the citywide scan survey, the project has also carried out a detailed household survey and inventory of active CBOs in the town. These were meant to inform the project team of the development activities that local communities are engaged in and the resources that they have at their disposal to address their needs. They also highlighted some of the development and planning challenges facing the Municipality whilst also identifying opportunities that exist for participatory urban planning and development. In addition, they also informed the preparation of micro-level spatial integrated neighbourhood plans and meso-level ward based Local Authority Service Delivery Action Plans (LASDAP).

Neighbourhood planning

Based on the results of the surveys conducted in the 10 civic wards in Kitale Municipality, the project together with KMC, the communities and other partners went through a ranking process to identify the most needy areas. Through this inclusive consultative process, a

consensus was reached on the priority development needs, and in which wards, and more specifically which informal settlements, the project should work. Kipsongo, Shimo- La- Tewa and Tuwan settlements were thus selected as the project sites. Using the information and knowledge gained from the above surveys, the literature and practice review, and the case studies, participatory neighbourhood planning exercises were carried out and plans prepared. Local communities in these settlements were subsequently actively involved in preparing a planning tool kit, aimed at helping communities to identify their priority development needs and formulate plans to address them.

Partnerships

Strong and effective partnerships were forged between local communities and grassroots organizations, KMC, ITDG, other NGOs, the Anglican and Catholic churches and faith-based organizations, and the formal and informal private sectors. Specific partners include Handicap International; ViAgroforestry, Nzoia Urban Family Project, Kenya News Agency, Ministry of Health, Physical Planning Department, and Kitale Business Community. A board based consultative process was thus set up that allows multi stakeholder dialogue on how best to address development issues in the municipality and pooling of resources.

Delivery of services through partnerships

The development priorities identified in the neighbourhood plans were resourced through partnerships between the communities, the Council and the project. Owing to the participatory nature of the process, the neighbourhoods' plans were linked to the town's LASDAP process, leading to joint implementation of the prioritised projects. In Kipsongo, eight communal sanitation blocks with latrines and bathing cubicles were constructed. Prior to the provision of these facilities, the residents of Kipsongo had no sanitary services. In Shimo La Tewa; an 80 metre long footbridge was constructed, with the local community participating actively by providing labour and hard wood timber for the decking. KMC met 30 per cent of the cost of the bridge, while a private sector engineer teamed up with the Municipal Engineer and an engineer from the Ministry of public works to design and supervise the construction of the bridge free. A local businessman supplied building materials at reduced cost. Through these cost-sharing initiatives, communities in informal settlements that had never benefited from municipal services, gained access to the same.

Preparation of Kitale Environmental Development Plan

The project, in partnership with the Environmental Management Unit (EMU) of the (then) Ministry of Lands and Settlement and other local stakeholders, prepared an Environmental Development Plan (EDP) that identified environmental problems experienced in the town, cause-effect relationships and possible remedial measures. The plan also proposed locally based intervention strategies to protect the environment and enhance sustainable urban development. A voluntary action group, the Kitale Green Towns Environmental Group Initiative (KGTEI), was formed and is responsible for:

- Promoting environmental awareness and supporting the conservation and protection of environmentally fragile zones in the town.
- Highlighting environmental concerns to the concerned parties, and
- Implementing, in partnership with other stakeholders, viable and easily implementable intervention strategies highlighted in the EDP.

Information and dissemination

The project created a forum for information exchange and also promoted discussion and debate on topical development issues through the following channels:

- Preparation and publication of Kitale a quarterly newsletter focusing on participatory planning and development. The newsletter provides a forum for the local community to debate and highlight salient development challenges and possible intervention strategies.
- Establishment of a website (<http://kitale.org>) to act as a depository of information, and to put Kitale in the international electronic communication arena.
- Production of radio broadcast programmes on local development issues ranging from community-based income generating activities, water, sanitation and housing to HIV/AIDS.

Other project achievements

The active participation of various project partners organized and strengthened their capacity to not only carry out participatory surveys, but also to plan and manage aspects of the built environment. The project, in addition, initiated discussion on the issue of security of tenure, in

particular for the residents of Kipsongo. There have since been several meetings between community members, KMC and central government officials.

Another notable achievement is the securing of additional funding to improve access to water and sanitation services in the three informal settlements in which the project was working from the Sigrid Rausing Trust under the auspices of the '*Right to a Livelihood: ITOG Working with Urban Poor Women, Men and Children in Kitale, Kenya*', which built on the project.

Lessons Learned and Key Challenges

Lack of adequate legislation for community and civil society engagement

Existing legislation does not adequately recognize the potential contribution of civil society, and in particular informal settlement communities, and the value their participation can add to planning and development processes. Their involvement in municipal decision-making processes is still limited to representation by elected leaders who are supposed to inform them of decisions already made by the council.

Communities will remain interested only in the expectation of tangible results

Planning is largely about resource allocation. Participatory planning processes consequently often raise communities' expectations, and should ideally lead to tangible results. If not, they could result in disillusionment and disappointment. There should, therefore, be an investment plan that outlines the resource requirements, the expected contribution of each actor/partner and completion targets.

Poverty remains a major challenge to participatory urban planning and development.

Participatory urban planning requires an understanding of community needs and priorities and the assets they possess, in order to ensure that development interventions are appropriate and within their means and ability to manage them.

Participatory planning remains an elusive concept to many local authorities and leaders

Local leaders normally misunderstand partnerships and participatory planning to mean failure on their part to deliver services or interference in established decision-making processes by "outsiders". There is therefore need to build the capacity of civic leaders and local authority staff in participatory urban planning.

Community awareness

Contrary to popular belief, amongst planners and other development specialists, that poor urban communities in informal settlements are unable to prioritize their needs, it emerged that they are well aware of their development priorities. However, their latent potential and dormant talents often need to be awakened and the scarce resources they possess mobilized.

Additional lessons learned with respect to the viability and effectiveness of partnerships and participatory urban planning include the following:

- Partnership building requires establishing common areas of interest and benefits and negotiation.
- Dialogue is key to effective partnership formation and working
- Contentious development needs are best identified and resolved through localised participatory planning processes.
- Use of local knowledge and resources is critical in preparing an effective plan that can deliver development interventions for which the community will assume ownership.

Sustainability

Project ownership was created from the onset through the active involvement of the beneficiaries and other stakeholders in planning, prioritization, implementation and cost sharing, training in participatory urban planning, as well as in appropriate water and sanitation and shelter technologies, was imparted to both local communities and municipal staff. They also received training in operation and maintenance of the services delivered through the project. The formation of strong community-based village health committees, linked to ward LASDAP committees, will further enhance sustainability.

The Way Forward

The immediate intention is to take the work forward by scaling up the experience gained in implementing participatory planning processes at the settlement neighbourhood level to ward level. Thereafter, the aim is upscale to municipal level and ultimately share the lessons learned with other municipalities in the country and the region.

In Kenya, the ward is both a political and planning unit. Local authorities are required to develop LASDAPs, which central government then use as a basis for allocating funding. The LASDAP formulation process is often *ad hoc*, politically driven and lacking in transparency. In Kitale, as in other local authorities in the country, some of the LASDAP funds are redistributed to the lowest political level, the ward. Local counsellors are then free to use the funds at their discretion. Quite often, the poor lose out in the allocation of LASDAP funds for a variety of reasons, including lack of voice. However, if they were better organized and capacitated, they would be better able to access such funds, as the *Building in Partnership: Participatory Urban Planning* project has demonstrated. It is evident that the active participation of local communities resulted in the implementation of priority projects. What is needed, therefore, is a more inclusive, systematic, and transparent planning process that allows the voice of the poor to be heard. The challenge is to replicate this approach at ward and municipal levels, and to get other local authorities to follow the same processes.

The participatory planning approach that was successfully trialed in the project will be replicated first in four wards and thereafter in the other remaining wards, thereby covering the whole of Kitale municipality. The next level of up scaling will involve dissemination and replication of the good practice experience acquired in Kitale in other municipalities in Kenya. Six towns are targeted in the first phase. This process will include capacity building of stakeholders and development partners in participatory planning and partnership formation and working. In each town, this will initially be in one or two wards. Regular sharing of experience between wards and towns is envisaged, and national forums will be established for this purpose.

To further promote participatory urban planning, professional associations and learning institutions will be encouraged to adopt the approach and include it in their curricula. Finally, multiple media channels (radio, TV, print, web) and seminars/workshops/conferences will be used to reach wider audiences from the grassroots, through local, national, regional and international levels.