



PENN IUR SERIES ON INFORMALITY

Assessing Inclusivity in Community Based Organizations in Nairobi, Kenya

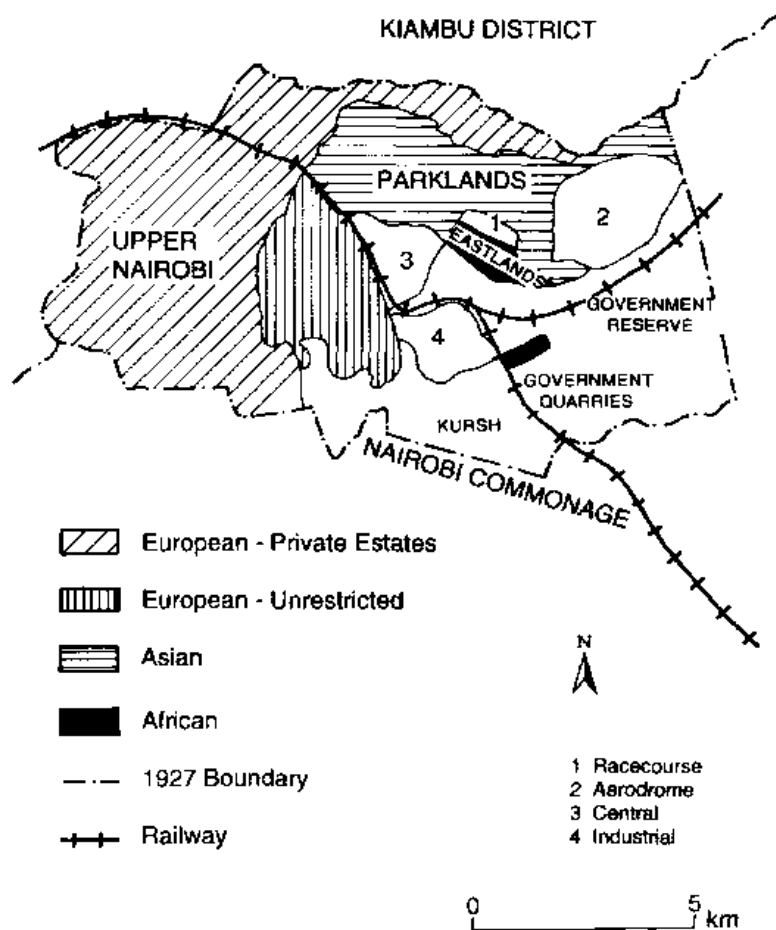
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Photo by M.R. Hasan

FIGURE 1:
Racial Segregation from British



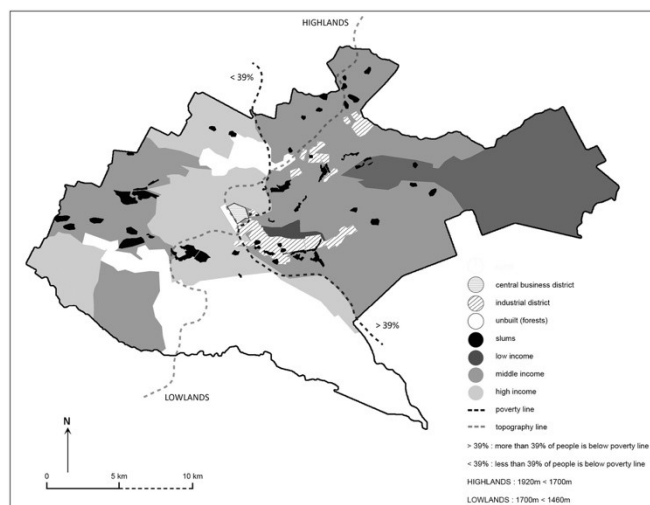
HISTORY

The capital of Kenya in East Africa, Nairobi, has a rich and interesting history. Originating in the 1890s as a city along the colonial railway, it soon became the capital of the British East Africa Protectorate (Nairobi 2019). The colonial rule divided the city into four sectors based on race, as seen in figure 1. As a result of this colonial segregation, the spatial development since has followed the same patterns and has created incongruent density patterns throughout Nairobi (Alam et al. 2005). It was only after independence in the 1960s that the government of Kenya realized that there was a housing shortage. In response, the government called for subsidized public housing in attempts to alleviate the problem (Alam et al. 2005).

From the 1960s to 1990s, the Kenyan government continued “land grabbing,” taking land that the urban poor were living on, to build subsidized housing. The problem with this was that this new public housing still was not affordable enough for the poorest population of Nairobi. This led to conditions worsening in informal settlements, or slums, and thousands of people feared the loss of their homes and communities. This became even more prevalent in the 1990s, which has often been described as the most volatile period for informal settlers in Nairobi (Alam et al. 2005). Because of the unstable nature of this time period many community-based organizations (CBOs) began to form as a way for the urban poor to band together to vocalize their opposition. This paper will explore the role of three major federations of CBOs and the work they do in Nairobi,

Kenya. It will assess the issues and opportunities of their work and mission and offer policy recommendations to make the networks they create even more effective.

FIGURE 2:
Spatial development of Nairobi, today



WHY NAIROBI AND WHY COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS?

Although Nairobi is the capital of Kenya and a growing modern metropolitan city, the housing conditions for over half of the population remains very poor (Weru 2005). Today, Nairobi covers a total land area of 269 square miles and has an urban population of 3.5 million (Review 2019). Following the rural to urban migration trends seen worldwide, Nairobi is growing at a rate of over 4% annually, making it one of the fastest growing cities in the world (UN-Habitat 2007). As a result, the city is facing serious problems, with the housing stock not keeping up with the demand (Weru 2005). Today, nearly 60% of the city's population lives in informal settlements that occupy less than 5% of the land area of Nairobi, as seen in Figure 2 (UN-Habitat 2007). This is because in the last 30 years the physical area of informal settlements has not grown, while the population living in them has nearly doubled (Lines and Makau 2017). This rapid population growth has overwhelmed the capacity of the city and national government to meet the housing demand and their ability to offer basic services to migrants (Talukdar 2018):

The lack of low-cost housing has led to the growth of informal settlements, however the informal sector in Nairobi is arguably less affordable than the formal sector. Many of the “landlords” in the informal settlements charge up to 16% higher rent than in formal areas of the city (Talukdar 2018). In many cases, informal dwellers are paying more to get less than the basic amenities they have a right to, in addition to living in poor conditions. This is where CBOs are most important. These local groups are working to empower slum dwellers to unite and participate in self-conducted upgrading projects to build better housing conditions for themselves.

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS?

CBOs are registered, non-governmental, non-profit, and non-political organizations. In Kenya, to be formally recognized by the government, organizations must be registered with the Department of Gender and Social Development. This requires having meeting minutes, a signed list of members, by-laws and rules of the organization, an amalgamation-memorandum of understanding, and a registration fee (Njuguna 2016). However, this is all a part of a very formalized process. CBOs, in their intent, can vary in structure, size, and focus

and can do important work without being formally recognized by the state. But their main purpose is to be representative of the community (Muraya 2006). There are around 40,000 registered CBOs in Kenya (Wanjohi 2013). These organizations function as the middle-man to bridge the gap between the informal and formal dwellers, representing the informal in the formal sector

WHO ARE THESE ORGANIZATIONS? WHERE DID THEY FROM?

Many of the most active CBOs in Nairobi formed in the mid-1990s when informal settlements were under the greatest threat of clearance. Today, there are thousands of local groups that are focused on improving the conditions in their settlements and to keep out the threat of evictions. This paper focuses on the larger organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that provide overarching support and guidance to the local CBOs in the settlements. Groups like Slum Dwellers International, Muungano wa Wanavijiji, and Pamoja Trust are larger, more formalized federations that support, empower, and promote participatory upgrading projects in informal settlements.

Muungano wa Wanavijiji, which means “United Slums Dwellers” in Swahili, formed in 1996 to protest the forceful evictions of slum dwellers from their homes (Lines and Makau 2018). The original Muungano members were fighting the government through unity, protests, activism, and legal battles to protect their livelihood, but mostly to get recognition as a community of people living in these settlements (Lines and Makau 2018). In 2000, when forceful evictions became less of a threat, the group moved away from protesting slum clearance and towards developing models and different financing schemes to transform slums into decent low-cost neighborhoods (Lines and Makau 2018). Muungano was able to do this, in large part, because of the success of Slum Dwellers International in India.

Slum Dwellers International (SDI) began in 1996 in Mumbai, India, and soon expanded to become a global movement. SDI is an advocate for change, to encourage inclusive cities where informal settlements are acknowledged as engines for development strategies (Skoll 2014). SDI is most focused on supporting bottom-up practices, as the Vice President of SDI, Rose Molokoane, has said: “do not do something for us, without us” (Molokoane 2019). SDI serves as a network that “facilitates, and sometimes resources, horizontal exchange and information sharing programs amongst member federations” (International n.d.). The SDI network has been influential and essential to creating a voice for the urban poor, and serves as their representative at the international scale. SDI works to make partnerships work between communities, governments, and other stakeholders through a toolkit which is used by federations, like Muungano, at the national level.

Pamoja Trust (PT) is a non-profit organization that believes community participation is the key to success for long-term commitment and ownership of slum improvement projects (Alam et al. 2005). Its mission is to “promote access to land, shelter and basic services for the urban poor.” PT takes an incremental approach and works to “build people before they build houses” (Trust n.d.). PT partners with Muungano, using them as the middle man to bridge the gap to the community. PT focuses mainly on the technical side of the savings groups and enumeration process, providing skills-based training and support for the community members (Alam et al. 2005). PT takes a less hands-on approach to dealing with the local groups, allowing Muungano to do a lot of the work at the ground level with the local groups.

HOW DO THESE ORGANIZATIONS WORK IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS?

The work of Muungano and PT has been made possible because of the SDI toolkit. Beginning in the early 2000s, Muungano and PT emphasized using the women-led, community-driven savings group approach. Much of their involvement in slum communities revolves around supporting these savings groups. This gives them the

ability to identify the goals of the community and to work out how to build the capital to achieve those goals (Lines and Makau 2018).

Most people living in informal settlements also work in the informal sector and save only when they can. Savings groups provide a structure and process for slums dwellers to save under. Many families using these savings groups are involved because they do not earn enough to save the large amounts that formal institutions require as a minimum. Savings groups, however, can and will monitor the smaller amounts (d'Cruz and Mudimu 2013). In Nairobi, Muungano and PT set up knowledge exchanges between different community groups so that savers can learn from other localities about what they have learned from the process. PT provides basic training on bookkeeping to help savers track and manage money so that they can learn to trace and identify discrepancies for people saving with them while Muungano helps to provide spaces for these groups to meet (d'Cruz and Mudimu 2013).

Savings groups, however, are much more than just a way to build capital for the community. SDI has found that the most effective way to mobilize communities is by having a majority of the savers and managers be women. Savings groups give women a space to come together to talk about the problems each faces individually, while also spotting where there is overlap to identify the collective problems of the community (d'Cruz and Mudimu 2013). This allows for the savers to work together to find solutions to these problems, which can vary from the collective threat of eviction to personal daily difficulties like paying off bills and debts (d'Cruz and Mudimu 2013). The savings groups can work together by offering consistency in savings schemes that will help members repay loans or set up structures to save. The savers, with help from Muungano and PT, are trained with basic bookkeeping skills that will help them track and keep records of savings, loans, and credits as well as what the community needs in order to qualify and apply for funding from external sources. While the federations facilitate this, trust is critical for savings schemes to move forward, and it is important for the savings groups to be managed and collected by local residents who other community members trust (d'Cruz and Mudimu 2013).

Savings groups are also an important first step in creating a collective governance structure (d'Cruz and Mudimu 2013). Savings groups begin the process for identifying problems that the community faces as a whole and working towards goals to fulfill them. Positioning women at the center of these groups redefines the power in the community. It allows for women to break down old power structures, and places them in more leadership roles (d'Cruz and Mudimu 2013). In the past most leadership roles have been held individually by men, who represent only small fractions of the population. But savings groups set a precedence of a collective voice and create a tier of leadership positions. This allows for a collective of women to be better representatives of the community.

While savings groups create space for leaders of the community to grow and a way to build capital towards participatory upgrading projects, the enumeration process provides the data and information needed to understand what the community needs. Enumeration is community driven census data collection designed specifically for informal settlements (Alam et al. 2005). It is an especially important exercise because many informal settlements do not have the data about how many people live in the settlement, the size of households, the number of units, etc. Enumeration is an important process to understand the community and a way for residents and CBOs to take the information gathered and present it to outside resources and government officials. Enumeration is also done completely by the residents of the community, because as Jane Anyango has said, "no one knows our community better than we do" (Anyango 2019).

While conducted entirely by the community, enumeration is supported by Muungano and PT who begin the process. Muungano starts by leading community meetings to describe what enumeration is and why it is important for the community. Once the community has decided to go through the process, PT works with the community to compile a list of questions based on what they are seeking to gather. Once the survey is created,

the community nominates who will conduct the survey while PT and Muungano will bring in enumerators from other communities to provide the training on how to enumerate their settlement (Alam et al. 2005).

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF THIS WORK?

The federations' and local groups' work have led to more upgrading and improvements in many informal settlements in Nairobi. The Mukuru Special Planning Area (Mukuru SPA) project is one of the largest participatory slum upgrading projects and is a direct result of the work of Muungano and PT (Wanavijiji n.d.). It was the savings groups which identified the main problems the Mukuru settlement was facing collectively, which led to the enumeration process. The enumeration collection yielded results that Muungano representatives were then able to take to local and national leaders as well international partners (Wanavijiji n.d.). This has resulted in a now multi-year collaboration with the residents, SDI, Muungano, Strathmore University, Katiba Institute, UC Berkeley, and IDRC Canada to develop a highly participatory upgrading project that aims to "offer a baseline of living conditions in Mukuru and to inform collaborative planning moving forward" (Wanavijiji n.d.). Extra attention was drawn to this specific settlement because of the work that the community-based organizations encouraged and did through supporting local leaders and groups.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS FACE?

The work of community-based organizations has led to many improvements for the settlements and the residents. However, there are still many challenges that these organizations have to overcome in order to achieve their mission. The first is the issue of tribalism that plagues the entire country of Kenya. As seen with the violence that erupted after the 2008 national presidential election, where informal settlements were the hardest hit with the violence (Gnecchi 2008). This is because, with most of the population living in the smallest amount of land, there are over 40 different tribes that are forced to live in close proximity (Al Jazeera 2008). This leads to not only violence but also keeps the CBO federations from being as inclusive as they would want to be. Muungano has officially stated that they are a group that has no tribalism (Wanavijiji n.d.), but that does not mean it is not affected by tribalism. Muungano, PT, and SDI all act as federations that guide the local groups through the tasks, allowing for tribalism to continue to occur within local groups. Savings groups are the initial first step for federations, the local savers could set up obstacles to keep members of different tribes from joining their group. Keeping savings groups exclusive to certain tribes. Another way is between the tenant and landlords. As noted earlier, oftentimes renters in informal settlements pay a higher rent, this may be due to landlords up charging tenants from different tribes. During the enumeration process, there have also been reports of landlords restricting their tenants from being enumerated because they wish to exclude them (Alam et al. 2005). Tribalism is something that most of Kenya has to deal with and is something that CBOs have to work hard to fight in order to be truly representative of the entire community.

The other challenge CBOs face is exclusion due to entrance fees. Savings groups are the initiator for most of the work that Muungano, SDI and PT do in informal settlements. However, there is a registration fee that is associated with joining. The fees are used for various group activities that are beneficial for members, like setting up community hall spaces for the members to meet in. However, the fees have gone up from 50 shillings to 200 shillings or more in other communities (Kirui 2018). This is a significant increase and can lead to excluding the poorest and more vulnerable part of the population. While average incomes for slum dwellers is difficult to find, based on the surveys done by the Mukuru SPA, an estimated 18% of the working population earn between 4,530-9,000 shillings per month. However, average monthly expenses average around 7,118 shillings (UC Berkeley 2014). This puts those who earn the lowest amount in debt every month.

Also important to note is that this estimate only accounts for 18% of one informal settlement, this figure could vary from settlement to settlement, and those who earn less could have declined to answer the question.

This is something else that CBOs have to overcome. One survey taken in Kambi Moto, a smaller settlement 7 kilometers north-east from the central business district, showed that around 52% of the villagers participated in a savings group and 90% of them felt secure in their homes (Alam et al. 2005). However, only 53% of the non-savers felt the same. This is likely due to non-savers feeling unrepresented and not having access to the work and mission of the federations. Many residents interviewed who were not involved with any CBO said that they did not know the goals and objectives of Muungano and PT (Alam et al. 2005). This is a problem of information dissemination, Muungano leaders believe that everyone in the community knows what they stand for, but those who are not involved in the daily savings groups or other programs have no way of knowing what work is being done in their community. This could be due to a number of reasons, one being tribalism and members of different tribes purposefully excluding other tribes. Another being the high cost of joining savings groups discourages the non-savers from seeking to join any other activity put on by CBOs.

WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES THAT CBOS HAVE?

At the core, CBO Federations like Muungano, SDI and PT are working to create better living conditions for slum dwellers. They all strive to do this by empowering the residents to take the initiative for slum upgrading projects. Past projects have shown that work done by the formal sector have failed to engage the community resulting in many residents being unhappy with the results. All three federations have a strong presence in Nairobi's slums because they focus on community engagement and learning from other case studies with similar situations. The work of the federations is more about support than execution. However, the work they support is crucial for the community to execute the operations.

By facilitating horizontal learning exchanges with other slums, CBOs allow for different communities to learn from past mistakes and successes. This allows for communities to build off of other models already made and to be involved in the process to see what would actually work in their communities. This is also possible because of the enumeration process that Muungano and PT facilitate. Because there is no formal census that is taken in these communities, and the distrust of the dwellers for the formal institutions, enumeration allows the federation CBOs to gather the data and take that information to the formal sector, acting as the middle man. SDI has been so effective in the work they do because they support the local groups, but they also have the ability and representatives in the formal sector to advocate for the slum dwellers.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE INCLUSIVITY

While the work and mission of all three Federation CBOs examined in this paper are well-placed and well executed, there are still issues with inclusivity. While the federations cannot do much about the tribalism that may be occurring amongst the slum dwellers, it can be more proactive in ensuring that more of the community is aware of the work it is doing. Currently, Muungano relies on a few of its own team to work in each community where they identify local leaders to pass along the mission.

The first recommendation is to find ways to battle tribalism. This could be done by appointing Muungano officials of various different tribes in each settlement to ensure that all residents have equal access to the information and work of the CBOs.

The second recommendation is to lower entrance fees. While the current fees do go back to the members, this high fee could also be a major discouraging factor keeping residents from joining. While it is hard to know exactly what the median household income is within each settlement, Muungano and PT should look at lowering entrance fees or having it be a percentage of each member's monthly income. This would ensure that the fee is fair and would not keep the poorest of the population from joining.



These recommendations, in addition to the work that Muungano wa Wanavijiji, Pamoja Trust and Slum Dwellers International are already doing will only strengthen the networks created by the CBO federations. It will allow for Muungano, PT and SDI to continue to have a strong presence in the informal settlements of Nairobi and keep growing, all while raising awareness about the conditions and residents living in these settlements. Most importantly, these recommendations will allow community-based organizations to continue doing their important work in creating better, more inclusive communities.

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