

Housing Seminar ARPL7007

Fieldtrip to Nairobi:

A Perspective on Diverging Approaches to Slum Upgrading

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1. Introduction

Students of the Masters in Built Environment (Housing) at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits), who are undertaking the courses 'Informal Settlement Upgrading' or 'Management of Existing Housing Stock' this year, were given the opportunity to visit Nairobi, Kenya. The fieldtrip was just under a week a long and there were a number of dimensions to it. This included a visit to the informal settlements Kibera and Mathare; meetings with the National Cooperative of Housing Union (NACHU) and UN-HABITAT; as well as a workshop hosted by Pamoja Trust on the formulation of the Slum Upgrading and Prevention Policy of Kenya. It is in the educational space that I, as a researcher, observer, and student of housing and particularly informal settlement upgrading for this course, was looking through the lens of diverging approaches to 'slum' upgrading.

Being in an era of high population growth and rapid urbanisation which far exceeds equal economic growth across the income spectrum and living spaces adequate for human habitation, government, NGO's, international development agencies, human rights activists and local communities have increasingly felt the need to intervene in 'slums' to improve the lives of its inhabitants. Having witnessed a number of 'slum' upgrading, 'slum' prevention and 'slum' eradication projects across the globe, housing 'interventionists' (i.e. practitioners, theorists, governments, organisations, students etc.) have the opportunity, and perhaps responsibility, to critically evaluate the varying approaches taken thus far and the impact that mainstream practices and schools of thought have had on the lives of slum dwellers. It is through this lens that the fieldtrip report will be formulated, highlighting projects, situations, debates, observations and experiences in Nairobi that helped to address the theme: 'diverging approaches to slum upgrading'.

2. Kibera

2.1 *The Bio-sanitation Centres*

On Wednesday the 12th of September, the Wits' masters student group visited three areas of Kibera, namely Kianda Village, Gatwekera Village and Soweto East Village, respectively. Staff of Umande Trust, an organisation working throughout Kenya, provided us with a presentation on the work they are doing, followed by a tour through the above mentioned villages. A presentation, Fred and Fanuel of Umande Trust highlighted that Kibera is just one of the settlements in Kenya where Umande Trust has partnered with the local communities to erect, manage and maintain bio-sanitation facilities. The facilities are two- to three storey cylinder-shaped buildings with toilets on the ground floor and other rooms either on the ground floor or the other floors which are rented out or used for community purposes (Staff of Umande Trust, Kibera, personal communication). The use of these rooms included a lawyer's office, a crèche and a youth centre which I observed during the day and are shown in the pictures below.



Fig. 1: Bio-sanitation centre from a distance in Kibera, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.



Fig. 2: Kidyot bio-centre with a creche in Gatwekera Village in Kibera, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.

The bio-sanitation centres are also known as ‘profit centres’ (Fanuel Ongatu, Kibera, personal communication) whereby each facility has toilets, bathrooms, a bio-gas unit for cooking, a water kiosk and a variety of socio-economic facilities such as libraries or a community hall. Although the construction of the facility is externally funded, Umande Trust invests in communities that already have savings groups in order to work with a relatively established organisational structure (*ibid.*). After completion of the facility the project is handed over to willing members of the savings group to manage and operate. The group members become the beneficiaries of the bio-centre and generate an income from surrounding residents and tenants who pay for using the facility (*ibid.*).

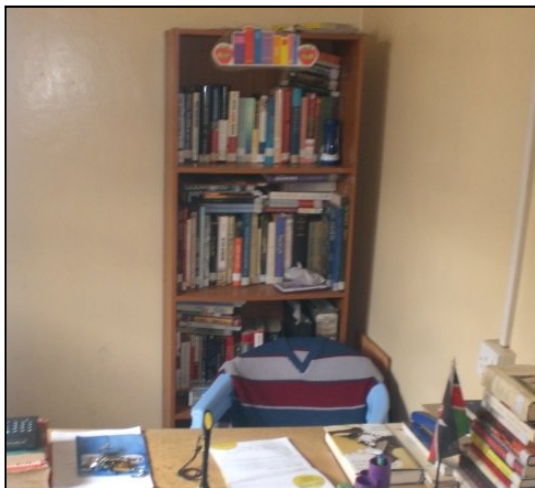


Fig. 3: Rented out office space in the Nicofeli Youth Club bio-centre in Kianda Village, photo by Lene Le Roux, Sept 2012.



Fig. 4: Bio-centre in Kibera with a pre-school facility, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.

Fanuel Ongatu (Harriet Wandera, Kibera, personal communication) highlighted some challenges that are faced regarding the local community of Kibera. One being the need to educate communities about the bio-sanitation facilities, another is the need to protect Umande Trust staff from local gangs who see their presence as a threat. And lastly that the facilities sometimes become exhausted with over-consumption as trucks are not able to access the facilities easily in the informal

settlement which causes a delay in collection. This project is helping to relieve the pressure on other toilets in Kibera that are not connected to a proper waste management system, and at the same time has reduced the number of flying toilets (*ibid.*). It is therefore my observation that the bio-centres are a form of incremental improvement to aid water supply, sanitation and basic needs such as cooking food. Without needing the existing infrastructure that is connected to the formal city waste management system, these facilities are providing a very important service and have been able to make optimal use of human waste. It is also a community-driven project which means that income generation and spending power is expected to circulate locally which improves the overall economy in Kibera.



Fig. 5: Bio-centre in Kibera with a cooking facility, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.



Fig. 6: Methane storage containers underground with ventilation pipes located next to bio-centre in Kibera, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.

2.2 KENSUP Phase 2

The second half of the day comprised of a visit to Soweto East where the second phase of the KENSUP (Kenyan Slum Upgrading Programme) is being constructed. On the way to the project the group briefly met with George the Chief Local Provincial Administrator who seems to be strongly involved and was in full support of demolishing the informal dwellings of Kibera to make way for the construction of apartments (Chief George, Gatwekera, Kibera, personal communication). He highlighted that it is the intention of the Ministry of Housing to formalise and develop the whole of Kibera with the apartment blocks (*ibid.*).

Also prior to the actual site visit, I had a short discussion with Lawi Obiya from Umande Trust and a fellow Kenyan student, Miriam Maina. They clarified that the decanting facility, which was intended to be temporarily occupied by residents of Kibera whose dwellings had been demolished for the construction of the apartment blocks, had now almost become a permanent residence of between three and five years (Lawi Obiya & Miriam Maina, Kibera, personal communication). Units in the decanting facility is costs approximately Ksh3000 in rent per month, inclusive of water and electricity, however this is viewed to be unaffordable for many Kibera residents (*ibid.*). At the same time, residents of the decanting facility have been told to start saving in anticipation of the completion of Phase 2 of KENSUP, as units are meant to be sold to members of the community who have formed cooperatives and have the financial capacity to purchase the units (Adira Patri, Soweto East Village in Kibera, personal communication).



Fig. 7: Decanting facility in Kibera for residents who were living in the location where Phase 2 of KENSUP is being constructed, photo by Lene Le Roux, Sept 2012.



Fig. 8: Nyayo Highrise apartment blocks in Soweto East, Kibera, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.

The construction of phase 2 of the KENSUP project, which was put on hold for approximately five years, is currently underway. In this period the key partner of the project, the UN-HABITAT, has retracted from the project (Marie Huchzermeyer, Kibera, personal communication). Adira Patri (Soweto East, Kibera, personal communication), a local government official for Kibera who accompanied the group on site, explained that 21 blocks are being built with a total of 912 apartments. These apartments have between one and three bedrooms (*ibid.*). Because it is anticipated that each household can afford Ksh1000, each room will most likely be rented to an individual family. The Ministry of Housing also want co-operatives to purchase units together, but Adira Patri highlighted that the units could be bought at a subsidised rate (*ibid.*).



Fig. 9: KENSUP Phase 2 apartment blocks in Soweto East under construction, Kibera, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.



Fig. 10: KENSUP Phase 2 in Soweto East located where 'slum' dwellers used to reside, Kibera, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.

When I asked what the density regulations are for the units, Adira said that this all depends on the size of the families (*ibid.*). This indicates to me that the matter has not been thought through as densities which are unplanned for could largely impact on the living conditions in the units. I also observed that other members of the group were concerned

with the lack of a maintenance plan for the future sustainability of the apartments and their communal areas. It seems there is lack of clarity on whether the Ministry of Housing has done adequate research regarding the affordability of Kibera residents to maintain the units. Lastly, the KENSUP project consists of four phases known as Zones A to D. Although the intention of the project is to completely eradicate the Kibera 'slum' and have households live in the apartments, a different outcome has been highlighted in research undertaken by Huchzermeyer (2008). Units in Nyayo Highrise apartment blocks have corruptly been rented out to the middle class, thereby distorting the housing market to favour profit-driven landlords and forcing low-income households, who the units were originally intended for, to simply move back into the informal dwellings of Kibera (Huchzermeyer, 2008). This understandably concerns housing 'interventionists' as to what will happen in Phase 2 or Zone B of the KENSUP project in Soweto East.

3. Huruma, Mathare North

3.1 Tenement Buildings

On the final day of our fieldtrip, the Masters student group visited Huruma in Mathare North, where we were exposed to two diverging approaches to settlement upgrading. The first was the private development of tenement structures in an area where densities are up to 5000 people per hectare (Marie Huchzermeyer, Huruma in Mathare North, personal communication). Hosted by a local resident, Kevin, the group was able to view a typical tenement building of six storeys, whereby a household can rent 3.5m x 3.5m units (although this may vary) and have shared wash facilities of a shower, toilet and basin, and share a narrow balcony which is often used when households need a place to cook (Kevin, Huruma, personal communication). The construction of these tenements has thus far been completely unregulated and built on land that does not belong to, but have been allocated for use by local residents Alison Wilson & Marie Huchzermeyer, Huruma, personal communication).



Fig. 11 (above): Tenement buildings in Huruma, Mathare 4A, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.



Fig. 12 (right): Narrow balcony of multi-storey tenement building with burglar bars used for safety purposes, giving a 'jail-like' feel to the building, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.

I observed that despite the extreme high densities, dark and damp corridors, small communal spaces and almost jail-like appearance of the buildings, upgrading has occurred with regards to waste management, water reticulation and the levelled concrete floors which is not common in slum areas. As highlighted by Marie Huchzermeyer (Huruma, personal communication) upgrading has taken place in a completely privately-driven and organic manner. Because these tenement structures are in high-demand, rent seems to start at about Ksh3000 per month, and therefore households that can afford less than this are excluded from the market.



Fig. 13: Communal 'splash facility' in a Huruma tenement building, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.



Fig. 14: Dark, damp corridor between units in a Huruma tenement building, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.

3.2 Kambi Moto Village, Huruma

The second part of the visit to Huruma ensured that we saw a contrasting approach to settlement upgrading through regularisation, security of tenure and a strong co-operative presence. In 2001 a household enumeration and mapping exercise was undertaken by the Nairobi City Council, in collaboration with Pamoja Trust, for five villages in Huruma, including Kambi Moto (Weru, 2004). From this exercise, the primary need of the community was 'security of tenure of their homes and land' (*ibid.*: 52), followed by the need to upgrade the housing situation, sanitation, and health facilities. With the assistance of Pamoja Trust, residents of Kambi Moto village were able to form a co-operative and mobilise efforts to achieve regularisation of their settlement. Up to date, members of the co-operative have been able to secure tenure and incrementally build houses of up to 3-storeys, depending on people's savings (Peter Chege, Kambi Moto Village, personal communication).

From discussions with Peter Chege and other community representatives, I observed that the co-operative seems to be quite inclusive and participatory in nature. Not only are there various groups that represent different community members, such as the youth, but residents were able to design parts of their own homes (Peter Chege, Kambi Moto Village, personal communication). However the co-operative seems to discourage members from renting out or selling their property as they feel that this defeats the purpose of what they have fought for – secure tenure and regularisation (*ibid.*). In my observation members of the co-operative equate security of tenure to stability and therefore may resist an active housing or rental market where outsiders have access to what has been developed by the seemingly close-knit community.



Fig. 15 (above): House in Kambi Moto Village that is being built and improved incrementally, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.

Fig. 16 (left): Typical appearance of a multi-storey house in Kambi Moto Village in Huruma, photo by Lene Le Roux, September 2012.

4. National Cooperative Housing Union (NACHU)

The National Cooperative Housing Union (NACHU) is one of the leading institutions in Kenya that assist low-income households to afford adequate housing and infrastructure through a co-operative model of financing such projects (Stanley & Shem, NACHU offices in Nairobi, personal communication). A presentation given by Stanley, the financial manager, and Shem Gichuki, the monitoring and evaluation officer, highlighted that NACHU's main focus is upgrading informal settlements or financing greenfield developments in both rural and urban parts of Kenya. Their model is aimed at encouraging households to form co-operatives that have joint savings schemes and enough financial credibility to loan money to for housing developments (*ibid.*). NACHU consist of four departments which make up the core of their practices, namely 'training, projects, housing finance, and finance and administration' (*ibid.*).

During the course of the fieldtrip the MA group became aware that co-operatives are almost a part of the Kenyan culture in the sense that a large proportion of the population belong to at least one co-operative. It is also my

observation that this practice is a vital component of low-income housing provision and especially because there is no public housing subsidy scheme in Kenya, co-operatives provide a good support base in economy for the poor to save and improve their lives incrementally. The most prominent concern of low-income households accessing loans and micro-lending is the exorbitantly high interest rates which are charged, as highlighted by a fellow student with a banking background (Tebelo, Nairobi, personal communication). Never the less, this approach to housing finance and development has proved to make a dent in the high demand for low-income housing and has contributed to informal settlement upgrading in Kenya.

5. The UN-Habitat visit and the Pamoja Trust Workshop

This final and concluding section of the fieldtrip report dually discusses policy intervention from two highly influential institutions, although at different levels, but both are likely to impact greatly on Kenya's slum upgrading policies. We had the opportunity to visit the UN headquarters in Nairobi on Thursday the 13th of September to have a meeting with two representatives of the Housing and Slum Upgrading Branch of the UN-Habitat. On Friday the 14th of September the we were also invited to attend and partake in the Pamoja Trust stakeholder conference on the forthcoming 'Slums Upgrading and Prevention Policy'.

As informed by Kirsten Sommer (UN Headquarters in Nairobi, personal communication) the UN-Habitat Housing and Slum Upgrading Branch recently presented their Global Housing Strategy to the Year 2025 at the World Urban Forum. Kirsten highlighted the need for 'National Habitat Committees' to be established in each member country that would consist of various partners from government, the private sector, developmental entities, civil society and the academia (*ibid.*) The reason for this may be to have more involvement, commitment and accountability from the member countries. Some of the outcomes in the presentation by Kirsten Sommer (*ibid.*) also emphasised the need to place housing at the centre of urban economies and as part of urban planning in order to fight against the ongoing global trend of the poor resorting to informal housing and 'slum life' due to the lack of other options. Cross-cutting issues such as housing rights, gender, housing legislation and the youth were identified in the presentations as key components to achieving more 'economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive cities' (Chana Oguzhan & Kirsten Sommer, UN Headquarters in Nairobi, personal communication).

The workshop on the Slum Upgrading and Prevention Policy for Kenya, hosted by Pamoja Trust, was an effort by the NGO to ignite a debate on theories around and approaches to 'slum' upgrading and prevention in order to assist the Ministry of Housing in the formulation of the policy. Presentations and discussions were focused around seven themes, namely 'infrastructure and services; housing and shelter; land tenure and administration; planning, development control and environment; legal, institutional frameworks and governance; safety and security; and socio-economic factors' (Pamoja Trust, 2012). Steve Ouma, the executive director of Pamoja Trust, highlighted the need for 'dignity, rights and mobilisation' to be represented in new approaches to slum upgrading and prevention, while raising a concern for the narrow and normative stance of what modernisation of urban environments means (Steve Ouma, Nairobi, personal communication). In her presentation, Marie Huchzermeyer (United Kenya Club in Nairobi, personal communication),

emphasized the classical meaning of the term 'slum' being a settlement that *cannot* be upgraded and the impact this has on how governments and society react to informal settlements.

6. Conclusion

The visit to Nairobi, was an remarkably well-rounded fieldtrip that exposed to masters student group to a range of organisations, situations and practices which are currently influencing the realm of 'slums' and 'slum' upgrading in Kenya. From my observations during the trip it became clear that initiatives and projects which were run by the local community and local organisations such as Pamoja Trust were benefiting 'slum' dwellers directly. One could also see a real improvement in the quality of life that residents had. This could be seen with the bio-sanitations centres in Kibera and Kambi Moto Village in Huruma. However, these projects received funding from first world country NGOs which shows the need to have initial capital to start up projects which 'slum' dwellers often do not have.

In the cases of NACHU and the tenement flats built by private developers discussions around both cases revealed a sense that slum dwellers may have a better quality of life but the cost of these projects are too high for the poorest of the poor. Those who can afford the units are possibly being exploited with regards to loan interest rates and because the demand for housing which is not a shack is so high. Unlike the other projects which have shown at least some improvements in the lives of 'slum' dwellers the KENSUP project seemed to be the most questionable. This is largely because it is forcing Kibera residents off their land and it is possible that those who will end up living in the units may not be 'slum' dwellers after all due to the costs involved and the evidence that the Nyayo Highrise apartments were sold and rented out to middle-income people not from Kibera due to a seemingly corrupt Kenyan state.

In conclusion it seems that the initiatives with positive results which are underway in Nairobi are still too few to make a significant impact in 'slum' upgrading, especially with high urbanisation rates still expected for many years to come. Political will is vital in curbing the constant deterioration of the quality of life for 'slum' dwellers and therefore a turnaround strategy with real and meaningful implementation should be a priority in Kenya.

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Personal Communications

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