

Maximising on Strategic Partnerships for Eradicating Slums and Human Deprivation in Kenya's Cities

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Abstract

The rate of growth of Kenyan cities, in terms of population and infrastructure, is unprecedented. The country is experiencing one of the fastest urban growth rates in Africa. This growth has not been accompanied by an equivalent socio-economic and environmental development. Due to this, many cities in Kenya are fast growing into slums, with more than 50% of the urban population today living in informal settlements. To mitigate the growth of slums in the country, there is a need to implement and practice urban innovative approaches and strategies based on sustainability thinking. This paper proposes and recommends the collaboration of all urban development stakeholders in the national urban development process to eradicate slums conditions in Kenyan cities and towns.

Introduction

By 2050, it is estimated that 70% of all people will be living in urban areas. Africa in particular will have to strategically manage such unprecedented growth in urban population, if integrated urban poverty is to be avoided. The trend in Kenya will not be different. Faced with slum proliferation, the challenges of sustainable urban development in Nairobi and other the emerging county towns will need innovative approaches and strategies based on sustainability thinking, if a resemblance of decent urban livelihoods is to be realized (Mutisya and Yarime, 2011). Inherent in sustainability thinking is systems approach to issues and hence the need for synergistic partnerships among all stakeholders in pursuit of the common (public) good. This explains the focus of this paper on the critical role of

seven key stakeholders discussed within the framework of a “sustainability heptagon” in eradicating slums conditions in Kenyan cities and towns.

Over the years, Kenya’s urban population growth rate has been one of the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Estimates from the 2009 national census indicate that 32% of the current 38 million Kenyans are now living in urban areas. Of this, Nairobi accounted for about 3.1 million people (Republic of Kenya, 2009). Estimates by Kenya’s Vision – 2030 show that 63% of Kenyans will be living in towns by the year 2030 (Republic of Kenya, 2007). A recent report by Matrix Development Consultants (2009) indicates that Kenya’s urbanization is dominated by the five largest towns - Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru and Eldoret, which together account for the bulk of the entire urban population and around 70% of the gross domestic product (GDP) (Figure 1).

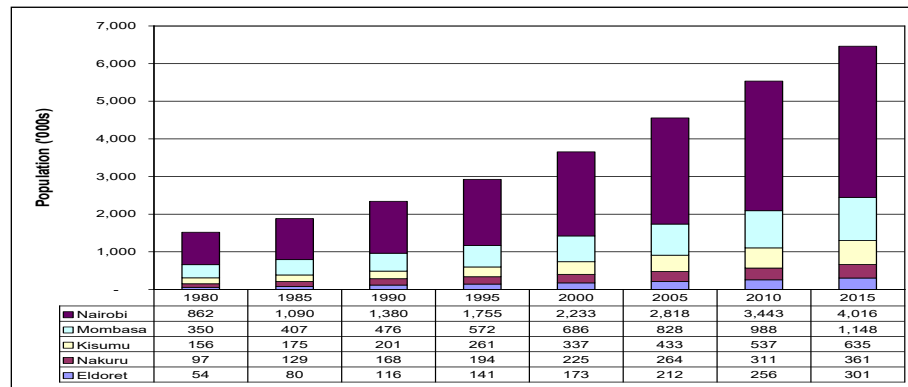


Figure 1: Trends in urban population for the five big cities in Kenya (World Bank, 2008).

Of the five cities, Nairobi being the capital city has the highest population growth rate and exemplifies the reality of slum settlements and their deplorable living conditions. Kibera slum, for instance, is generally regarded as the second largest in Africa after Soweto slum in South Africa. Both are typical examples of the “modern” (elite estates) juxtaposed with the “ancient” (slum settlements). This scenario is a reflection of lack of empathy from the elite, who equally are in charge of government, mandated by the constitution to provide leadership for sustainable urban development. In general, some factors contributing to this unprecedented increase in the population of Kenyan cities and in particular Nairobi are:

Rural-urban migration as a result of multiple push and pull factors respectively; Natural population growth among slum dwellers; Transition of middle income groups to low income groups. This translates into a geographical shift from middle income settlements to slum settlements and immigrant populations, particularly in the Eastleigh area of Nairobi.

Most of the economic activities in the country are centred around and within urban centres with about 60 percent of the national GDP coming from the major cities like Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu (UN-Habitat, 2008). Despite the huge economic contributions from such cities, most Kenyan urban dwellers live in absolute poverty with a high concentration in slums and informal settlements (Oxfam, 2009). With the increasing challenge of land scarcity, conflicts on the same, official demolition of “illegal” settlements and devastations from frequent disasters like fire hazards, it is becoming increasingly vital to reflect on the concepts of sustainable urban development in Kenya.

Considering the constrained political and socio-economic environment in the country, increasing number of urban population is settling in the already deplorable slum areas. Without progressive urban development policies, new slums could emerge in attempts to absorb this rising population. The trend in the now county capitals like Nakuru, Kakamega, and Garissa is likely to be the same unless the semi-autonomous county governments (introduced following the promulgation of the 2010 national constitution) reverse it (Republic of Kenya, 2010). According to Matrix Development Consultants (2009), over time, urban poverty will overtake rural poverty in scale and intensity. At about 40% and 23% water supply and sanitation service coverage respectively in urban areas (WASREB, 2008), future services delivery is likely to fall behind planned and required targets unless local authorities and other service providers substantially expand their institutional, financial and technical capacity to manage urban growth. Oyugi and K’Akumu (2007) attributed urban development challenges in Kenya to poor land use development and lack of planning for environmental sustainability.

To be expected under such scenarios of poor urbanisation is exacerbation of the following challenges among others: Limited provision of water and sanitation services; “Artificial” scarcity of land for various public utilities like housing, roads and drainage; Accumulation of urban wastes particularly plastic and organic solid wastes; Pollution, eco-toxicity

and increased public health risks; Increased demand for food, drinking water and energy; Increased survival-driven crime and hence security costs at both household and national levels; and more social stratification, disparity, inequity and hence, high socio-political instability. Under such circumstances, the urban elites and urban slum dwellers are not safe and will remain antagonistic to each other, thus undermining national cohesion and development as envisaged in Kenya's 2010 constitution. Proliferation of slums equally undermines the quest for safe and clean environments as provided for in the Environmental Management and Coordination Act 1999, and other best practices elsewhere in the world (<http://www.unep.org/wssd/Vision.asp>; <http://www.unhabitat.org/categories>).

Government Initiatives toward Eradicating Slum Settlements

Until recently, Kenya has not had a national policy on urbanization that ensures proper planning, service delivery and management of towns. With the many challenges brought about by rapid urbanization in the country, an urban development strategy is critical in aiding and supporting national spatial integration, fostering economic growth and complementing other policy measures (Richardson, 1980). The absence of a broad urban development policy negatively impacts on the growth and development of people and environment friendly national urban system with adverse consequences of random and spontaneous growth, weak links between rural and urban development, uncoordinated initiatives, as well as weak regulatory capacity and frameworks at all levels.

Managing urban development is now viewed as a national priority with the need to promote sustainable urbanization by creating well-planned, vibrant and efficient urban centres. To achieve this goal, the government needs a strategy to guide allocation of resources and serve as a framework for governance and management. The government has the constitutional obligation to create the right socio-political and economic environment that would facilitate and support initiatives from all stakeholders towards sustainable urban development. Currently the 2010 constitution obligates the government to ensure that all citizens whether in slums or otherwise have access to basic amenities such as food and shelter as human rights and not privileges (Republic of Kenya, 2010). These provisions in the constitution have the potential to contribute immensely to sustainable urban development if followed-through by relevant

stakeholders. The research challenge would be how to mobilise stakeholders for consistent action against human deprivation.

Through the years, the Kenya government has attempted to address urbanisation challenges mainly through policy initiatives. For instance, national development plans of 1970 to 74 and 1993 to 97 emphasised the importance of urban physical infrastructure, promotion of small towns serving rural areas, improvement of service delivery in the public services sector, and incentives for businesses. These approaches though meant to address the spatially unbalanced nature of development (Obudho, 1984 and Stren, 1972), they never translated to the much needed coherent national urban development policy. In addition, the plans lacked a clear cut response to environmental challenges focusing entirely on socio-economic development.

Similarly, the National Development Plan of 2002 to 2008 culminated with the launching of the National Urban Development Policy (NUDP) in 2008 by the government of Kenya. The policy focuses on supporting an urban system that equitably serves the country and addresses historically neglected regions. It also seeks to reverse the marginalization of sub-national governments through decentralization and reforming local governance and financial systems as provided for by Kenya's constitution. The policy is expected to improve living conditions in slums, urban safety, and protect rights of marginalized groups. It is envisaged that the policy will be key in guiding urban development, including land use and management, environmental conservation, urban governance and management, urban investment and delivery of services. The government's renewed commitment to the urban sector development is clearly and eloquently stated in Kenya's Vision 2030, Nairobi Metro 2030 and further elaborated in Medium Term Plan (MTP) (2008-2012). Kenya's Vision 2030 envisions Kenya to grow to a middle class country by 2030 while Nairobi Metro 2030 outlines what different stakeholders should do for Nairobi metropolis to grow sustainably by the year 2030. This commitment has been strengthened by the government's enactment of the Urban Areas and Cities Act of 2011 (Republic of Kenya, 2011).

Despite these efforts, the challenges of urban development in Kenya may not be addressed anytime soon under the current policy regime. This is because; the realization of Kenya's sustainable urban development has been hampered by a fragmented approach to planning with different arms

of the government applying their own laws resulting in the duplication of roles and jurisdictional conflicts. The existing legislations thus need to be reviewed, re-engineered and harmonized to facilitate attainment of this goal. There are over 70 existing Acts of parliament or statutes governing urbanization and urban development in Kenya. The existence of these Acts has created a lot of conflict and overlaps amongst the key stakeholders as well as led to lack of proper coordination. There is need to harmonize the existing legal and institutional framework to address urbanization process in Kenya as outlined in the MTP (2008-2012). In addition, the harmonization should have a clear focus on the different dimensions and aspects that constitute sustainable urban development including and not limited to social, economic and environmental sustainability. These goals give credence to a well-designed ecological systems thinking framework for sustainable urban development.

Status and Pointers for Innovation in Urban Community Development

In general, access to piped water in urban areas in Kenya is still below 50%. Only about 15% of households had access to pipe borne water in their dwellings by 2009 (Figure 2).

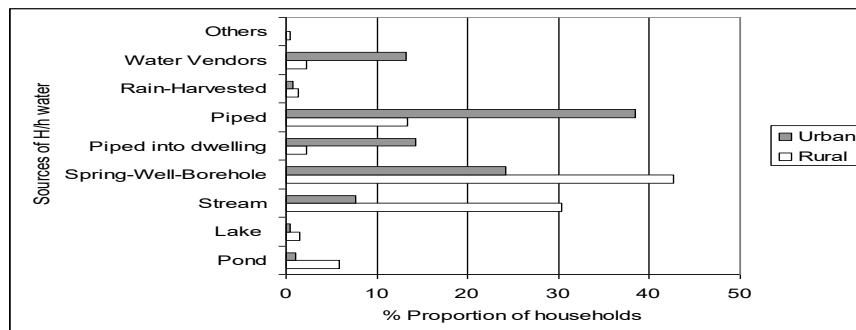


Figure 2: Percentage of household by main source of water (Republic of Kenya, 2009)

Even where piping infrastructure may be available, most households in the middle class experience dry taps most of the time. This explains the relative importance of water vendors, who have taken this opportunity to enterprise water supply, often at rates higher than those of government. This strategy of water supply makes life even more difficult for the urban poor, who may not afford a dollar per day. To be expected

under such circumstances is vandalism of water distribution networks with enormous loss of revenue from the government. Spring-well boreholes though most popular in rural areas seem to be a critical stopgap measure in urban areas. Notably, water quality cannot be guaranteed through this method. In some cases the very poor still tap water from streams, which are unfortunately heavily polluted. This exacerbates the problems associated with water borne diseases.

Although rainwater harvesting has enormous potential, it currently plays a very insignificant role in urban water supply. In most cases, construction of modern residential settlements in Nairobi does not factor-in water harvesting from roof catchments. This scenario is ironic given that Kenya is a country prone to water scarcity (that is, a country with annual water supplies of less than 1,000 cubic meters per person), and these areas are settled by educated Kenyans. While water quality may not be guaranteed from pavement catchments, application of roof catchments has potential to reduce pressure on supplied water for many families during the rainy season. This technology should be legally integrated within the urban policy by-laws and enforced accordingly. Since water is very important in sanitation management, a similar picture emerges when it comes to human waste disposal. Although, sewer systems tend to be the main sources of waste disposal in urban areas, covered and uncovered pit latrines are most popular in Kenya's urban areas (Figure 3).

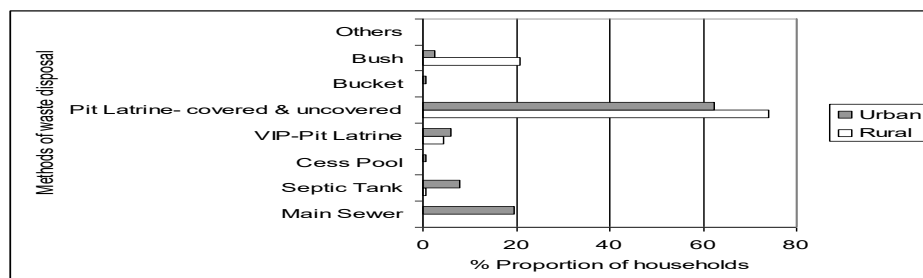


Figure 3: Percentage households by main mode of human waste disposal
(Source: GoK, 2009)

Compared to rural areas, urban areas are not significantly different in terms of the relative importance of pit latrines. Less than 20% of households have access to the main sewer. Due to the limited coverage of entire cities with sewer networks, the use of septic tanks is the emerging

trend in middle class estates in all major towns. The challenges with this option include the potential pollution of ground water, particularly where the water tables are high and the ever decreasing land area as the density of settlements increase. Urban organic waste management should now focus on space saving technologies like Bio boxes. A Biobox sewage treatment plant (Figure 4) treats the effluent on-site and produces clear, odourless and environmentally safe water for such purposes as irrigation of lawns, sports fields, golf courses and agricultural plots. The treated effluent can also be simply returned to the environment in streams, rivers or dams. For slum settlements in Kenya, eco-toilets, bio-domes and bio-boxes are emerging as promising multipurpose and multi-benefit facilities for sustainable urban development.

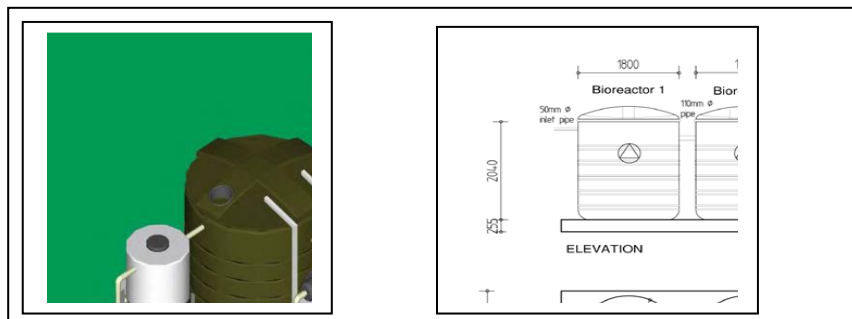


Figure 4: Schematic layout of Biobox technology. [The system is modular in design and can thus be replicated to meet increasing demands for treatment from 2m³ up to 320m³ (320,000l) per day if required] (Source: www.biobox.co.ke)

Urban development policy and planning should thus address the challenge of gradual elimination of slum conditions in favour of enhanced human well-being. This chapter has adopted the definition of human well-being as described in Alcamo *et al* (2003), thus enjoyment of good health, having enough for a decent life, having good social relations, feeling secure, and having the ability to make choices and preferences. How these indicators of human well-being can be realized within slum settlements is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

The Relevance of Partnerships in Creating Sustainable Urban Communities

Inherent in sustainability thinking is long term planning that simultaneously integrates economic, social and ecological objectives so that

intra and inter-generation equity in the use of resources is achieved. As a product of systems thinking, partnership is now a globally acknowledged ingredient in development decision-making and implementation (MDGS). Its relevance in sustainable urban development cannot be overemphasized given the multiple stakeholders associated with urban ecosystems. Systems thinking (i.e. the process of understanding how things influence one another within a whole for mutual survival or extinction) is derived from among others, ecological systems theory as earlier postulated by Odum (1994). In general, a system as applied in ecological perspective represents a group of inter-linked and inter-dependent elements, characterised by self-control and self-regulation, as each element functions to enhance the “common good”. Elements (stakeholders) therein must relate in some kind of synergistic partnership. The system concept thus emphasises inclusiveness, networking, multilateralism in development policy and research.

In the context of sustainable urban development for Nairobi (an urban system) and other towns in Kenya, critical categories of stakeholders that must collaborate and/or partner for eliminating slums are detailed in Figure 5. Mutual development towards enhanced human well-being would require deliberate efforts to negotiate for mutual gains. Each stakeholder would be required to make “painful” trade-offs, with the common good as the shared vision. Each apex of the heptagon represents 100% stakeholder interest. Through negotiations in the direction of the arrow, each of the stakeholders would be obliged to give up their 100% position of self-interest for something less, to accommodate the interests of all.

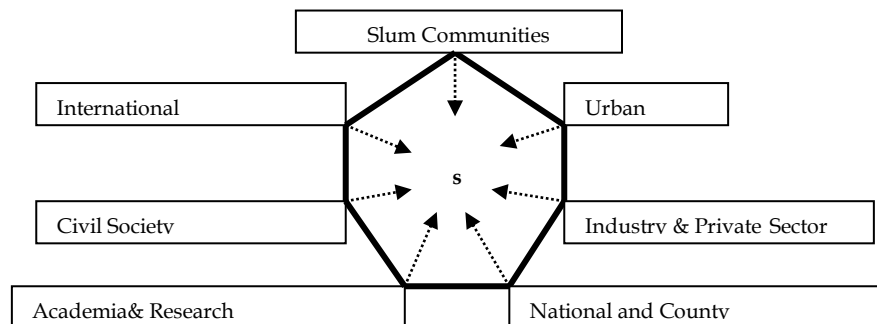


Figure 5: Illustrating mutual gains negotiations using the “Sustainability Heptagon”

Point (S) in Figure 5 would then become a negotiated agreement and could be anywhere within the figure, but must be enforced through appropriate and legally binding memorandum of understanding. In an ideal scenario, point (S) would be in the centre, thus representing equal compromises in absolute terms at 14.3% of the pie for each stakeholder. This position would also represent the metaphoric visualisation of sustainability. In reality however, such a perfect convergence of interest hardly happens. Different stakeholders have different negotiation skills, which would be represented by different lengths of the arrows. In principle, the shorter the arrow, the less compromising is the stakeholder. The slum dwellers would have gained more were point (S) to be closer to their apex in this Sustainability Heptagon.

Taking Nairobi as a case study, some areas of negotiation and intervention among the system stakeholders are summarised in Table 1 and discussed in the proceeding section.

Table 1: Aspects of negotiation among urban system stakeholders

Stakeholder category	Trade-off contribution
1. Slum Dwellers	Positive activism, attitude change, birth control, sustainable urban enterprises
2. Urban Elite	Attitude change, investment-based philanthropy, wealth creation investment in rural areas
3. Civil Society Organisations	Community capacity building, advocacy, innovative livelihoods (<i>Taka ni Pato Project</i> – Somirenec, 2005)
4. International Community	Accountable financial investment, influencing official policy, community capacity building
5. Industry and Private Sector	Employment and wealth creation opportunities in urban, investment in rural industrialization
6. Academia and Research Communities	Problem solving research, incubation of urban and rural development innovations, influencing policy development
7. National and County Governments	All round support, accountable public services (waste management, urban infrastructure, security, slum up-grading programmes, equitable land distribution and decongestion of slums)

Slum Communities

Citizens in slum areas should be encouraged to change their attitudes from victim-mentality to responsible development partners. Since they are directly affected by slum conditions, organising themselves into lobby groups and demanding for tax-guaranteed services is essential. Note that the current national constitution provides for decent livelihoods as a human right. To actualise it would however require objective negotiations and resource mobilization to create requisite capital in its diversity. Slum dwellers can help themselves immensely by electing development conscious leaders, who will manage constituency and county resources in their best interest. In addition, awareness creation on the need to have manageable families is critical. Since it is widely acknowledged that birth rates among the poor are naturally high, a key solution against proliferation of slums would include simple, yet practical people-based strategies to free people from poverty ratchets. The urban poor who have agricultural land in their rural areas should be encouraged to re-migrate to rural areas using appropriate incentives. This calls for accurate profiling of slum families, using relevant machinery within government. It may also be appropriate to use coercive means if the ultimate goal would be the common good.

Urban Elites

Since the suffering of slum dwellers also affects the urban elites, they too should be empathetic and through philanthropic principles invest in basic support services in slums (in the short term) such as education facilities, scholarships and general community capacity building in decent survival skills. Their contribution to eradicating slum conditions would be greater were they to channel their philanthropic activities to the rural areas. Having urban-like social amenities in rural areas has the potential to slow down rural-urban migration.

Civil Society Organisations

Instead of making poverty an industry for selfish gain, civil society organisations (CSOs) such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and faith-based organisations (FBOs) should be held accountable for the donor funds they attract for poverty alleviation. It is widely acknowledged that billions of Kenya shillings have been spent in Kibera slum, but observations indicate that

conditions in the slum are not significantly better. Being more grassroots-oriented, CSOs should scale-up their expertise in community capacity building, advocacy and positive activism on behalf of the urban poor. The nation needs more NGOs in rural areas as short/medium-term development hubs. Many unemployed youths would find jobs there and thus not need to migrate to big towns, only to find themselves in slum settlements.

International Community

The international community should demand for proper accounts on all financial investments they channelled to slum communities through CSOs and government. Innovations that shift the conditions of slum dwellers from ill-being to well-being should be given priority and followed through. This will reverse the truism that urban tourism and the intense CSO focus on slums development have experienced have not translated into significant changes in livelihoods. This is particularly true for Kibera slum in Nairobi. Duplication of efforts and poor partnership among international stakeholders in slum upgrading programmes has often resulted in unnecessary competition for visibility at the expense of real development. This paper argues for a community and government driven regulatory body responsible for spatial mapping of slums and zoning them for development intervention.

Industry and Private Sector

The role of industry and private sector in employment creation cannot be emphasised. Government should consider subsidizing or waiving taxes for a period of time for investors willing to target slum areas. Through industrial ecology and life cycle approaches, various slum resources can be turned into wealth and income sources. The 'Taka ni Pato' (Trash is Income) Project within Nairobi slums attempted to create youth employment by building their capacity in waste re-use and recycling of wastes (SOMIRENEC, 2005). Whether the initiative was successful or not remains an open question. The long-term strategic objective should be rural industrialization. The bio-physical and cultural diversity of the country provides excellent opportunities for locality-specific industrial innovations for employment and wealth creation. Rural industrialization would also be associated with urban social amenities, and thus help reverse rural-urban migration. The private sector should be allowed to tap into the

'KazikwaVijana' (youth employment) initiative by government for seed money.

Academia and Research Communities

Academia and research scientists would be handy as think-tanks and creators of innovations that could be incubated into enterprises and businesses for rural and slum areas development. As a centre of higher education, Kenyatta University recently launched the first ever Chandaria Business Innovation and Incubation Centre (C-BIIC) to provide a platform for students and staff to innovate and nurture their ideas into wealth and employment creation businesses (<http://www.ku.ac.ke/c-biic/>). The demand-driven action research (DDAR) of the Horn of Africa Regional Environmental Network (HoA-REN) has potential to play a significant role in similar initiatives (<http://www.hoarec.org/>). Innovations that could add value on slum survival initiatives like bio-domes, storey gardens, and solid waste recycling would greatly improve urban livelihoods. The added benefits of reduced waste accumulation cannot be ignored. Government should however learn to utilise its academic and research expertise than rely on less qualified individuals and agencies, driven more by self-aggrandisement than poverty alleviation. Some government sponsored awards could for instance be pegged on innovations for slum eradication.

National and County Governments

Ultimately, government has the constitutional obligation to create an environment that would facilitate and support all initiatives from all stakeholders towards sustainable urban development. Plates 1-4 in Figure 6 summarize the vision of this paradigm shift towards eradication of slums. To actualise this vision, government needs to among other factors: Master the political will to enforce laws and policies, particularly on environmental and public health management in settlement areas; provide incentives and subsidies for wealth creation and investments in rural areas to encourage urban-rural migration; proactively address the problem of "artificial" land shortages in order to decongest some areas and provide investment security for others; enhance the implementation of county governments and decentralized development planning for wealth and employment creation at local levels and implement a people and environment-friendly urban development master plan. Inherent in this would be a gradual phase-out of slums through slum upgrading projects and social housing initiatives. Slum

dwellers would then be re-settled based on some appropriate criteria. Priority for re-settlement would be slum communities resident along river flood plains, under electricity cables, on feeder roads, and on designated dumb sites. Once evacuated, these areas should be strictly reclaimed for other non-settlement functions. This way the ongoing slum-grading projects in Kibera, Nairobi will not be exercise in futility.

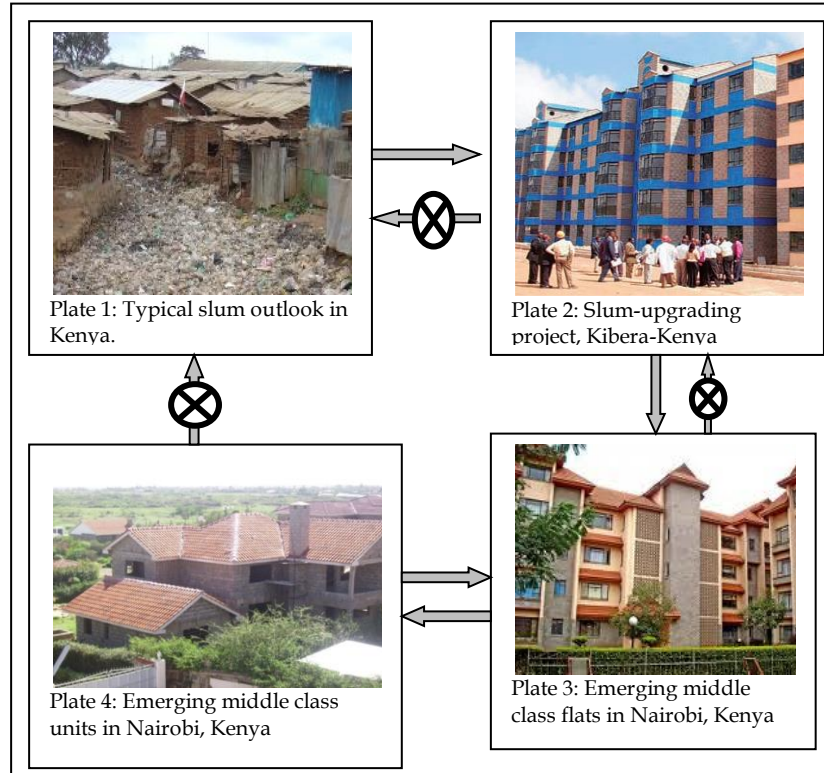


Figure 6: Plates 1-4: Framework for gradual elimination of slum settlements

Gradual shifts from scenarios 1 to 4 would require appropriate application of coercion (law) and incentives in the interest of increased public good. Arrows with a cross indicate shifts that should not be allowed to happen. As such, government should provide the necessary socio-political and economic environment that would help most people graduate from low income to high income categories. The requisite resources for this paradigm shift are available in Kenya; they include a variety of human,

social, physical and financial capital. The challenge lies in effective mobilization and use of these capital forms, and particularly how to overcome factors like negative attitude, retrogressive culture and religion, and poor distribution of the same across the country (Figure 7).

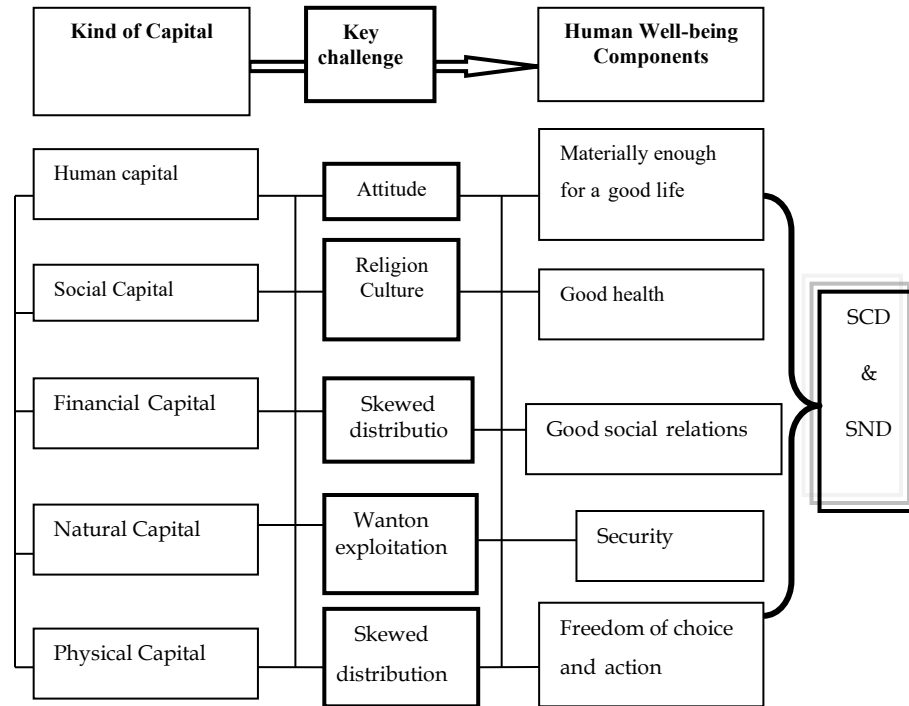


Figure 7: Capital model concept and sustainable community development (Where SCD: Sustainable Community Development; SND: Sustainable National Development)

Conclusion and Recommendations

Through synergistic partnerships among key urban stakeholders, gradual reversal of slums to environment-friendly settlements is possible. Since short-term specific projects have yielded only little positive effect, an integrated and comprehensive approach towards slum eradication in the medium to long-term should be the next level of intervention. The missing factor in the realization of this vision remains to a large extent the lack of political will on the part of government to provide effective and results-based leadership, and particularly enforcement of guidelines against illegal settlements and proliferation of slums in cities and towns.

Use of incentives and coercion to encourage rural industrialisation and *terminal* urban-rural migration should be considered as appropriate options. Through the land commission, options for population re-settlement through a judicious land redistribution and re-settlement programme should be pursued. Further, new innovations in urban services delivery focusing on slums and the middle class are urgently needed. In particular extending reliable tap water into dwellings and expanding the sewer system to all and up-coming middle class residential areas are critical. In addition, success stories around promising innovations such as bio-domes, solar disinfection of drinking water, urban agriculture as a form of urban greening, energy alternatives and more access to clean water, should be maximised. The merit of the social housing concept as opposed to slum upgrading should be explored.

Limited investment in poverty eradication, diseases management and practical education in the rural areas has the effect of catalysing rural-urban migration and thus undermine efforts towards creating sustainable urban settlements. Through the county government system, Kenya now has the opportunity to attract resources to the local levels and create urban-like conditions there. Academia and research communities can contribute positively to slum eradication through strategic capacity building of the other six stakeholders of the Sustainability Heptagon.

In sum, a participatory approach modelled along ecological systems concept will promote; a) urban economic prosperity through poverty alleviation measures and job creation; b) social inclusion, and equality; c) urban environmental sustainability; and d) good urban governance and institutional reform with special attention to improvement of public services like water supply, sanitation and solid waste management, housing, institutional integrity, accountability, strengthened collaborations, partnerships and network structures.

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