

URB.IM – For just and inclusive cities - <http://urb.im/>

urb.im

for just and inclusive cities

Gendering development planning to address persistent quality of life challenges

Hilary Nicole Zainab Ervin, Nairobi Community Manager

Nairobi's rapid urbanization has created some concentrated pockets of vulnerability with respect to quality of life, income, and **access to basic services such as clean water and improved sanitation facilities**. In 2010, Kenya passed a new Constitution. Under this revision access to clean water, adequate housing, and reasonable standards of sanitation were codified as inalienable rights of the citizenry. **Actual realization of these rights** in the daily lives of millions of individuals inhabiting informal tenements, however, is a much more



complex undertaking.

The gendered impact of inaccessible hygiene facilities and affordable clean water in densely populated urban settings has direct impacts on overall public and environmental health. As

Sydney Gray, leader of the organization **Mama Mmaji**, points out, "water is a women's issue." Women slum dwellers face both socially constructed and economic barriers in their ability to secure housing contracts, negotiate fair prices for clean water, and access improved sanitation facilities. They are **five times more likely to be unemployed** than their male neighbors and live in a context where a nighttime trip to the bathroom is a significant **risk marker for rape**.

In Mukuru, a 450-acre slum in Nairobi's south eastern industrial corridor, under the umbrella group **Muungano wa Wanavijiji**, a collective of **8,000 women have organized to sue the current land holder for ownership** of the area to address this among other issues.

Inadequate lighting and long distances to public bathrooms have increased the use of **flying toilets** by women, as a **protective measure** from traveling alone, down unlighted alleyways at night.



In Kibera, the Wise Women microfinance collective developed a community approach for building sustainable water and bathroom facilities for residents. With funding from the **Kenya Water for Health Organization**, and underground metal piping from **Nairobi City Water and Utility Company**. The collective has succeeded in building a **sustainable alternative** to

the **jerry can** supplying **water cartels** while also providing small-business opportunities to a landless class of Kenyans.

According to the **Pamoja Trust**, two million people live in Nairobi's informal slums and settlements, which are jam-packed onto only one percent of land in the capitol city. Constituting over half of the cities population these individuals inhabitant only five percent of the city's residential land area. Covering an area of 5sq miles (2.5sq km), Kibera alone is home to over one million individuals, who account for nearly one fourth of Nairobi's population.

Takataka Solutions, a social enterprise providing "affordable and environmentally sustainable waste management solutions to Nairobi residents" and **M-Maji** a mobile platform for **accessing information on water prices** are exciting examples of this kind of innovation with citywide impact.

Water expenses for urban poor residing within informal settlements are estimated to be higher than the cost burden faced by wealthier city residents due to a number of factors. Reports indicate that **highly impoverished households** spend roughly **20 to 30 percent of their monthly income** on obtaining clean water. The **Africa Water Facility** recently announced a 730,000 euro grant for developing social businesses to provide sanitation services that will specifically target women in the informal Nairobi settlements of **Mukuru Kwa Reuben, Mukuru Kwa Njenga and Viwandani**.

Indeed, **slum-upgrading** and **grassroots resilience approaches** to addressing quality of life issues on captured public and private lands in Nairobi continue to evolve as does the landscape of policies and citizen responses to them. It is likely that the most successful initiatives will continue to be those that incorporate economic, social and environmental human rights approach that engages residents of informal settlements at the core of their design. **Close.**

*Photo: **Colin Crowley** and **Engineering at Cambridge***

Permalink to this discussion: <http://urb.im/c1411>

Permalink to this post: <http://urb.im/ca1411nre>