

"University/City Partnerships: Creating Policy Networks for Urban Transformation in Nairobi"

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Abstract

This paper describes and analyzes one approach to action research that aims to help transform urban planning and policy-making in metropolitan Nairobi. This approach, piloted by the Center for Sustainable Urban Development (CSUD) and its key partner the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) at the University of Nairobi, involves bringing local universities into urban policy-networks as key players. It also involves fostering closer university/municipality partnerships and altered forms of pedagogy in urban planning. In this approach, universities in the global North can play a facilitating role and explicitly empower and support key local knowledge production centers and policy networks for change. This paper describes and analyzes how this approach operates to foster collaborative urban planning and contributes to transforming urban policy in the complex context of metropolitan Nairobi.

Introduction

Kenya's capital city, Nairobi, like many rapidly growing cities in the global South is confronting massive inter-related problems of slum expansion, violence, ethnic segregation, poor service delivery, public health hazards and environmental degradation. These problems, in turn, are deep reflections of a long history of repression, inequitable power relations, democratic institutional failure and skewed, exclusive urban policy and planning processes. Kenya, like many other Southern countries is in a struggle to remake itself and institute a democratic constitutional order.

Within this context of repressive politics, "urban planning" has historically manifested itself as either a theoretical exercise with very little link to conditions on the ground (hence the massive informality) or as a means to mask irregular appropriation of land by elites. Beginning with Nairobi's colonial birth, this form of "planning" has meant that critically important land for public planning and use has been privatized and most often used in counter-productive speculation and

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uncontrolled development.¹ Unless urban planning is transformed to help create public oversight over land use and refashion these inequitable power relations, sustainable urban development will remain elusive.

The problems of urban planning, including how to change polluting, dangerous and inadequate transportation systems, require considerable technical expertise and research. However, increased technical capacity and resources are necessary but insufficient for transformation. A key issue is how to generate an inclusive policy process that also brings expertise into public debates and impacts decision-making and resource allocation. This is even more urgent in countries like Kenya that are emerging from an absence of planning and severe repression. Clear strategies and approaches need to be in place to deal explicitly with nurturing collaborative urban planning processes that are participatory, transparent, democratic and receptive to solid research and technical input.²

This paper describes and analyzes one approach to research that simultaneously aims to help transform urban planning and policy-making in metropolitan Nairobi. The goal in this work is to reinforce forces that are moving planning from a top-down opaque exercise to a more transparent and inclusive planning process that helps cities gain public oversight over land-use and voice and influence within a broader metropolitan planning process. This approach, piloted by the Center for Sustainable Urban Development (CSUD) and its key partner the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) at the University of Nairobi, involves bringing local universities into urban policy-networks³ as key players. It also involves fostering closer university/municipality partnerships and altered forms of pedagogy in urban planning. In this approach, universities in the global North can play a facilitating role and can explicitly empower and support key local knowledge production centers and policy networks for change.

Sustainable Urbanization and the Role of the University

Currently, national universities like the University of Nairobi are under-utilized agents in the struggle for sustainable urban development. While professional

¹ See Mike Davis. 2006. *Planet of Slums* Verso Press. Jacqueline M. Klopp. 2000. "Pilfering the Public: The Problem of Land Grabbing in Contemporary Kenya", *Africa Today*, 47(1): 7-26, Jacqueline M. Klopp. 2008. "Remembering the Muoroto Uprising: Slum Demolitions, Land and Democratization in Kenya", *Journal of African Studies* 67 (3): 295-314, Republic of Kenya, 2002. Commission of Inquiry into the Land Law Systems of Kenya ('Njonjo Commission') Nairobi: Government Printers, Issa Shivji. 1998. *Not Yet Uhuru: Reforming Land Tenure in Tanzania* Dar es Salaam: IIED and Hakiardhi.

² In addition, these processes must involve reinforcing, fostering and in some cases, re-inventing institutions that can do basic procedural planning. See Elliott Sclar's paper for this conference.

³ I define a policy network to be a group of stakeholders with interests in a policy sector and the capacity to influence policy outcomes. For an extended treatment see Sclar's paper.

urban planners in Kenya are trained at such universities across the country⁴, the universities themselves have remained aloof from policy processes. In part, this is because Kenya has only just started to emerge out of highly repressive rule. Expanded political and policy space for broader engagements is new. In the recent past, universities were policed spaces, under constant surveillance by the government.⁵ This repression created an exodus of professionals to other countries and into the private sector. It also influenced pedagogical approaches, which tend to reinforce obedience to hierarchical order, rather than foster questioning and creativity.⁶ In brief, students were typically prepared to be subjects, not citizens.

Another set of issues stems from the problematic nature of global linkages to the university system. In particular, local faculty members typically engage directly in urban policy as consultants for the international donor community or as secondary partners in research projects of foreign universities. This raises two main problems. First, it means faculty have been confined and constrained by external logics and priorities that do not always correspond to key needs and demands from local municipalities themselves. In fact, externally driven technical assistance has a very poor record of success.⁷ Secondly, while such consultancy work can enrich the classroom, it also draws faculty away from locally formulated research agendas, the university and teaching. The net result is that this kind of North-South linkage can diminish the critical role of the local university as producers of contextually specific knowledge on urbanization.

The CSUD-DURP collaboration aims to address these problems. CSUD largely sees its role as facilitating DURP's efforts to become a dynamic centre of new research, pedagogy and national expert voice.⁸ Key to the new approach within DURP is active partnerships with local municipal stakeholders from city government to NGOs and the media. This helps DURP generate locally relevant research and position itself as an expert within policy networks. DURP can also

⁴ Six major urban planning departments exist in different Kenyan universities. While we have primarily worked with DURP at the University of Nairobi, we have plans to replicate this at Maseno University in Western Kenya and also bring the departments together for a broader discussion.

⁵ Maurice N. Amutabi, 2002, "Crisis and Student Protest in Universities in Kenya: Examining the Role of Students in National Leadership and the Democratization Process" *African Studies Review*, 45 (2): 157-177, and Jacqueline M. Klopp and Janai R. Orina. 2002. "University Crisis, Student Activism, and the Contemporary Struggle for Democracy in Kenya", *African Studies Review*, 45 (1): 43-76.

⁶ Mwangi Chege, 2006. "Old wine" and "new wineskins": (De) colonizing literacy in Kenya's higher education. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Bowling Green State University, Ohio.

⁷ See Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart 2008, *Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World*, Oxford University Press. They note on pg 102 that "tailoring ... guidance to context and the patient process of nurturing growth of local institutions through firsthand familiarity are not usually part of the culture of technical assistance."

⁸ Recently the Rockefeller Foundation gave CSUD and DURP separate grants to continue this collaboration, which includes building a centre at DURP for sustainable urban development. Note that DURP is also a member of the Centre for Cities in Africa and we hope a more detailed jointly written case study will contribute to their networks of learning and advocacy.

serve as a node where global researchers connect into policy relevant work and agendas and avoid diverting research, resources and attention away from local knowledge production. CSUD is working to generate legitimacy for such a process, insert comparative perspective and send students and researchers to directly build upon the centre's work. Overall, this should facilitate more focused, context specific, and efficient knowledge production that is inserted directly into policy processes.

CSUD and DURP are still in the early phases of evaluating the concrete impacts of this strategic approach. However, in the next section, we review the basic narrative focussing on how the collaboration and conceptualization of strategy and approach is evolving within the context of concrete work in the Municipality of Ruiru, a small satellite town, northeast of Nairobi and in the broader public dialogue about metropolitan planning.

The University as Part of Urban Policy Networks: DURP and the Municipality of Ruiru

In 1971, the University of Nairobi established the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) with a mandate to train physical planners. Since that time, it has produced most of the urban and regional planners in Kenya including those in key government positions. DURP now administers a four-year undergraduate program as well as post-graduate program. The Masters in Planning consists of four main components: 1) an Introduction to planning and planning theory, 2) Techniques 3) a Studio- which involves choosing a site, developing a plan, analysis, formulation and presentation-and 4) Research Project.

While this training produces technically sound young professionals, once in the workplace they face highly complex problems that demand inter-disciplinary collaboration and attention to problems of politics and governance. Until recent innovations, the existing curriculum, which is shortly to undergo review, did not explicitly prepare students for the magnitude of these challenges. Similarly, young planners at Columbia University hoping to work in the global South are not typically exposed to the complexity of the politics that determines urban policy in places like Nairobi. Further, they also need training on how to properly engage with networks of partners in the South, particularly to avoid the kinds of problems discussed earlier.

Beginning in April 2005, DURP and CSUD began a dialogue of how they might work together and the most obvious intersection was in the planning studio. Typically, studios on both ends are academic and research oriented. Students travel to a site, gather information and devise plans that they then present to their

university community. The report then would be part of a university archive. This model does not tend to create a deeper partnership with local institutions or circulation and exchange of information with the relevant policy actors and stakeholders. In addition, the question of how to actually affect policy changes is not typically part of the analysis and theoretical approach in this form of studio.

Fortunately, fortuitous circumstances and a DURP-CSUD dialogue gave birth to collaboration that is leading to a reformulated model of pedagogy and university-municipality engagement in Nairobi (and New York). In an earlier dialogue the then CEO of the Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company and the Chair of the Athi Water Services Board and resident of Ruiru asked us look into working with the municipality of Ruiru, a small satellite town Northeast of Nairobi. They gave two reasons: 1) Ruiru has serious water and sanitation problems that involve both the Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company and the Athi Water Services Board as stakeholders and 2) a need existed to work on the broader metropolitan area to deal with Nairobi's problems which were putting enormous pressures on and spilling over places like Ruiru.

On April 8, 2005 we arranged a joint CSUD-DURP visit to the municipality of Ruiru to talk directly to the elected councilors and key administrative staff about their concerns. Out of this visit, we learned that 1973 was the last time a plan existed for Ruiru. Yet, according to council officials Ruiru faced serious problems of rapid population increases, uncontrolled growth, mushrooming slums, environmental hazards and inadequate resources and service delivery. Another central issue, linked to the absence of land reform and Ruiru's history, as a town embedded in settler owned coffee farms, is the lack of affordable land for public use and planning. At the time the council members were especially keen on help with uncontrolled dumping of sewage from septic tanks, water contamination and the threat of diseases like typhoid.

Out of this dialogue, we agreed to work directly with Ruiru Municipal Council and other stakeholders on the problems they identified as most urgent. DURP would become the key link to the municipality, facilitating stakeholder meetings, a participatory planning process and the drawing up of a new local physical development plan as well as advising on the broader metropolitan planning process under way in the form of a "Metro 2030" plan. CSUD would provide key research support for DURP's efforts and also assist in expanding DURP's global and even local networks.

The pedagogical and research mode naturally shifted in response to the challenge. In the past, DURP conducted studies in Ruiru but typically after an initial approval from the council, the study would ensue with limited engagement from stakeholders. The research report would be given at the university and then archived. In the modified approach, the University of Nairobi, with CSUD as a partner, would now engage its faculty and students in a close partnership with

the council, community organizations, private sector, civil society and relevant national government institutions as well as global players like UN-Habitat.

This approach also involved teaching through practice participatory and collaborative planning which aims to help transform relations of power and produce better policy through inclusion of new players in numerous complex interactive, public processes.⁹ Planning was now explicitly re-conceptualized as a way to empower local residents to gain control over land use for the public interest and also support processes and institutions leading to what Appadurai has called “deep democracy”¹⁰ through what Pieterse has called “radical incrementalism”¹¹. Through research that directly involved local residents and other players¹², engagement with the media, as well as broader stakeholder meetings to widely disseminate findings, technical work flows back to the municipality and its residents. Infusing more detailed technical knowledge into these interactions creates alternative ways of viewing and prioritizing problems, challenging simplistic narratives that too often reinforce the status quo. In brief, collaborative planning could actually help catalyze and build some level of public vision and consensus on key issues and hence constituencies for targeted changes.

This conceptual shift was already in circulation in the broader development and planning academy and community of practice. However, while much has been written about “action research” and participatory approaches, many of these insights have not translated into practical pedagogical approaches that stress the importance of co-production of research knowledge as constituency building for change.¹³ Few approaches emphasize “strategic awareness about power and networks”¹⁴ and give students tools to manage complexity.

It took time to develop a relationship with the Municipal Council of Ruiru and various local actors, as well as broader stakeholders, but the ongoing action

⁹ Patsy Healey 2003, “Collaborative Planning in Perspective” *Planning Theory*: 2: 101-123.

¹⁰ Arjun Appadurai 2002 “Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics” *Public Culture* 14 (1): 21-47.

¹¹ Edgar Pieterse 2008 *City Futures: Confronting the Crisis of Urban Development*. Zed Books, .

¹² For instance, the team that worked on a household water and sanitation survey worked closely with FORCUS, a local youth group and another team worked with the Ministry of Water works on the water analysis. This collaboration allowed access to coffee farms, which would usually be closed to researchers.

¹³ Particularly, at the time a Kenyan NGO called Practical Action (formerly ITDG) was working on a “Building in Partnerships-Participatory Urban Planning Project” in a city called Kitale. This approach involved a direct partnership with the Kitale Municipal Council and an inclusive participatory planning exercise that aimed to involve the poor in informal settlements. This model became the methodology for the participatory planning process in Ruiru. See Michael Majale 2008 “Employment creation through participatory urban planning and slum upgrading: The case of Kitale, Kenya” *Habitat International* 32: 270-282.

¹⁴ Lisa Schweitzer, Eric Howard and Ian Doran. 2008, “Planners Learning and Creating Power” *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 28: 50-60. I am grateful to Celeste Alexander for pointing this out.

research work and stakeholder meetings helped create more solid relationships and trust and also useful documentation and analysis for the council and its work. Specifically, CSUD/DURP conducted a studio in January-May 1996 with the Ruiru Municipal Council as the direct client.¹⁵ Further through CSUD, the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University conducted three successive policy workshops addressing the initial water, sanitation and solid waste concerns.¹⁶ DURP also conducted further research through Masters theses and studios including a careful study of the local market that brought traders into the dialogue.

During this interaction, a joint learning process was taking place. At one memorable point, a year after discussing the plan, the mayor and councilors felt comfortable enough to ask Professor Peter Ngau of DURP to explain what an urban plan really entailed. In turn, we were beginning to see the sheer scale of the problems faced by municipalities like Ruiru and the detailed nature of some of the constraints that needed addressing. These included the fact that Ruiru had no planning office and faced unusually high land prices, to the lack of central government support for needed action. We discovered many of the interactions with key Ministries were punitive without offering technical help. For example, the Ministry of Health sued the Municipality because of its unhygienic dumpsite. However, to move the site and manage it properly required sophisticated technical assistance. It also costs a lot of money since land was expensive and a landfill site requires proper location, construction and management. Attempts at relocating the site were blocked by the National Environmental Management Agency, often for good reasons, but there was little assistance in the way of helping find a proper site. This led to some very unpleasant problems that exacerbated the public health problem, including dispersed illegal dumping.¹⁷

Regardless of the magnitude of the problems, some municipal officials were also learning about the value of planning and research as part of a strategic approach to finding solutions. In principle, they appeared to accept the notion of stakeholder consultation. As a sign of this, the council offered to fund the participatory planning process. From 12-19 October 2006, DURP facilitated stakeholder planning meetings and focus group discussions in all five wards in the municipality. This was followed by a joint Stakeholder Planning meeting, which took place at the Ruiru Catholic Hall on November 25, 2006. In December

¹⁵ See "Nairobi: Metropolitan Expansion in a Peri-Urban Area" Nairobi Studio Report, Columbia University 2006.

¹⁶ See EPD 2006 Team. (2006). Meeting Basic Needs in a Rapidly Urbanizing community: A Water, Sanitation, and Solid Waste Assessment in Ruiru, Kenya. SIPA, Columbia University. EPD Team (2007) Building Community, Building Rujuwasco: An Integrated Water, Sanitation and Health Strategy for the Municipality of Ruiru, Kenya and EPD team (2008) Opportunities in Waste: From Cape Town to Ruiru Available at <http://www.sipa.columbia.edu/academics/concentrations/epd/workshop.html> .

¹⁷ On the positive side, water analyses and careful studies on the need for water/sanitation and solid waste upgrading in conjunction with the Athi water Services Board may have facilitated the recent approval of an infrastructure upgrading project in Ruiru and neighboring Juju.

2006, DURP, the councilors and senior officials discussed the input from these meetings. Based on both the consultations and accumulated research, DURP put together a Local Physical Development Plan for Ruiru and is currently working with the council to get final approval from the Ministry of Lands.

The challenge will now be to make sure the Local Physical Development Plan is just the first step in galvanizing coalitions for change. In the past, plans typically would sit on shelves. The next phase of the engagement is to bring the plan to the wide array of stakeholders, including residents' associations, community-based organizations who are typically excluded from 'planning'. Since the process was done collaboratively a constituency already exists to circulate and engage. We will also be putting the plan online¹⁸ and through a more thorough community mapping process create a more complete directory of civic associations, businesses and NGOs in the area and use this to circulate the plan (or an abbreviated version) even farther. This is to move forward with more inclusive dialogue on the plan.

The idea is that the plan is a living document that can trigger coalitions and help raise focused questions on progress on key priorities. It can serve as a benchmark for accountability and to raise the quality of public discussion. Ideally, more inclusive public dialogues will also build recognition that solutions require cooperative effort and dispersed responsibility. For example, better solid waste management will not just involve a new landfill site. It also requires community engagement in trash separation and collection and litter prevention as well as recycling efforts. This process will also be a way to bring in powerful stakeholders, like the coffee farmers,¹⁹ and raise questions about their role within a less threatening process about "planning".

Overall, this form of collaborative planning allows students and faculty to learn skill at navigating the dense relations between a complex array of actors and the way power operates in these relations. Part of this collaborative planning process explicitly involves thinking about using public consultations and research to help develop a policy network supporting a plan and the changes it proposes. The question of how to impact broader policy-making is now more explicit and central to the theory and practice of the planning process within the university and hence among future planners.

Metropolitan Planning

¹⁸ We are also exploring ways to make this interactive. We are aware that more marginalized groups are less likely to access online resources. However, we have already engaged with groups like the Theta Zone Residents Association that found us online!

¹⁹ For example, the research revealed that the coffee farms are polluting the local river that the poor use for drinking and bathing. Further, there is the issue of large landholders selling off agricultural land for rapid and problematic subdivision for housing without services. All these issues require a forum for engagement with these stakeholders and the planning process provides this.

Another dimension of this work involves DURP as a node in the circulation of information and dialogue about a broader metropolitan planning process. Currently, another key DURP/CSUD partner, the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA), and the newly created Ministry of Nairobi Metropolitan Development have produced a new plan for the greater Nairobi region, called Metro 2030. According to this plan, the greater metropolitan area will incorporate 15 municipalities including Ruiru. DURP has helped explain the concept of metropolitan planning to Ruiru Municipal Council and in return listens to their concerns and problems with the plan and the process so far. This creates a deeper understanding of local perceptions and concerns around the plan and in turn helps these to be heard in high-level policy dialogues.

Metro 2030 is a constructive step in so far as it raises the importance and profile of the need for a metropolitan planning process. However, the impoverished level of dialogue and consultation between the municipalities, the Ministry and other key stakeholders jeopardizes the value of this initiative. If the plan is formulated and implemented in a top down, opaque manner, it can do worse than fail. It can discredit badly needed metropolitan planning. It may also trigger the expansion of land speculation and accumulation in newly designated metropolitan areas. This already appears to be happening in the Southern arid Maasai lands of Kajiado, and the local council has publicly declared its opposition of the plan.²⁰ The lands in Kajiado are vital to the health of the livestock and tourism sectors, and accelerated uncontrolled development in these areas is likely to trigger deeper problems, including violence.

By working within the satellite cities as well as the core of Nairobi, DURP becomes an institution through which much needed information, technical input and dialogue can be inserted in the current metropolitan planning process. Through a strategic partnership with KIPPRA, which is the lead technical agency for the plan, DURP and CSUD are working to influence this process and move it into a more collaborative planning mode and address the genuine concerns of municipalities like Ruiru and Kajiado Town Council. The long term relationship with Ruiru and the budding relationships and exchanges with the other satellite cities, means that this policy network is strategically positioned to push for a more transparent and democratic process that will be the key to a fruitful metropolitan planning process in this complex city.

Conclusion

The success of the CSUD-DURP-Ruiru collaboration so far provides some evidence for the importance of local universities as critical nodes in policy networks, as sources and producers of local expertise and knowledge and as

²⁰ Lilian Aluanga "Maasai leaders oppose expansion" *East African Standard* March 22, 2009 Available at <http://www.eastandard.net/specialreports/InsidePage.php?id=1144009489&cid=259&>

strategic partners to cities and their residents. We argue that long term engagement of local universities in collaborative urban planning and policy dialogue can help move places with severe urbanization challenges like Nairobi closer to much needed sustainable urban development policies.