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# The Kibera Soweto East Project in Nairobi, Kenya

Rosa Flores Fernandez and Bernard Calas

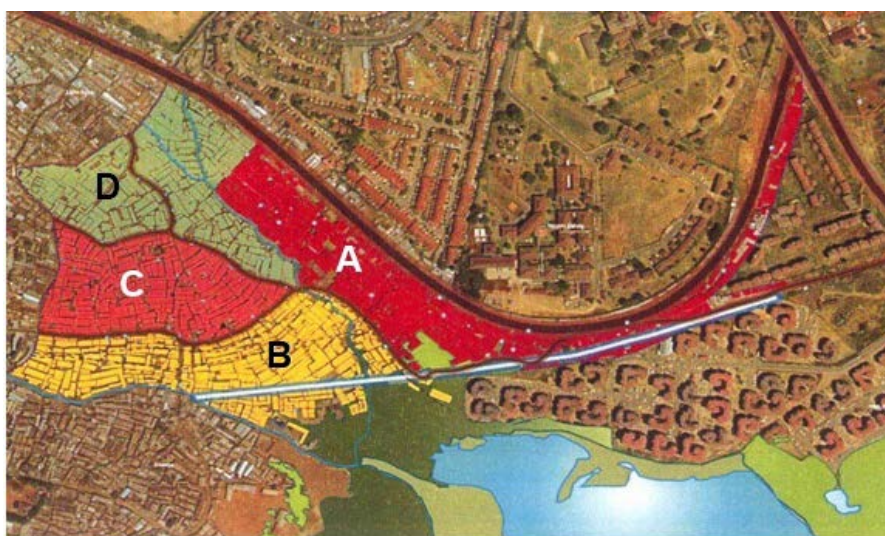
## Abstract

*This article analyses the pilot public housing project in Kibera Soweto East in Nairobi under the Kenya Slum Upgrading Programme (KENSUP), courtesy of a partnership between the Government of Kenya and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT), which began in 2004. The article examines the process of temporary relocation of Soweto East Zone A residents, seven years after the launch of this project, and takes a critical look at the effects of this relocation on the affected population. In order to achieve this, data on Soweto East will first be presented followed by information obtained from surveys conducted on Soweto East residents by Amnesty International and UN-HABITAT. The temporary relocation of residents shall then be analysed with reference to book reviews, interviews and site visits. Finally, the key points analysed within this article shall be presented briefly along with the recommendations derived from this study.*

## 1. The Kibera Soweto East, Nairobi Rehabilitation Project

Until September 2010, Kibera was considered as the second largest slum in Africa with, according to information sources and the media, a population of between one and two million. To everyone's surprise, Kibera has only 170,070 residents according to the Kenya Population and Housing Census of 2009 (Daily Nation, 2010). A UN-HABITAT socio-economic record shows that Soweto East has 19,318 inhabitants spread out in four zones: A, B, C and D (Figure 1 and Table 1). Zone A is the largest in size and accounts for 37% of the houses in Soweto East (UN-HABITAT, 2008).

**Figure 1:** Soweto East Zones A, B, C and D



Source: UN-HABITAT. (2008b). *Soweto East Redevelopment Proposal*.

**Table 1:** Information on Kibera Soweto East Village

	<b>ZONE A</b>	<b>ZONE B</b>	<b>ZONE C</b>	<b>ZONE D</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
Area (Ha)	<b>6.9</b>	6.6	3.6	4.5	21.3 Ha
Population	<b>6,288</b>	4,709	3,256	4,331	19,318
No. of structures	<b>876</b>	522	410	588	2,396
No. of structure owners	<b>945</b>	409	941	551	2,419
No. of tenants	<b>5,545</b>	3,004	4,361	3,989	16,899
No. of physically challenged people	<b>20</b>	18	19	16	73

Source: UN-HABITAT. (2008b). *Soweto East Redevelopment Proposal*.

Looking at Table 1, if the total population of Soweto East is 6,288 and there are 876 structures, it means that on average, each unit is occupied by seven people which is a relatively high figure compared to the average size of a residential unit in Nairobi which has close to 4 occupants. The peri-central location of Soweto East, relatively close to the large industrial area, the hospital sector, the Central Business District (CBD), Upper Hill area and the affluent neighbourhoods of Kilimani, Lavington, Lang'ata or the middle-class neighbourhoods of Nairobi West or South C makes it a sought-after residential area for workers, artisans and minor functionaries. Further studies, that take into account the household structure, certainly bring an interesting perspective on the integration of Soweto East into urban residential strategies. Out of this total population, about 90% are tenants and only 10% are structure owners, who do not live at all in the area but collect a monthly rent from the tenants and use the money to develop housing in other areas of Nairobi.

The goal of the pilot Kibera Soweto East project is to rehabilitate the area, where the project sponsors would like to provide new permanent housing, equipped with services. Therefore, in 2004, the KENSUP project proposed temporary relocation of residents into new flats built in Athi River, which is 23 kilometres from Kibera (where the Government of Finland, in a debt exchange arrangement with the Kenyan Government, had availed some land). Once Soweto East was vacated and rehabilitated, the temporary Athi River residents would be relocated back to Soweto East, Kibera.

This plan of the temporary relocation of Soweto East residents to Athi River changed through the political intervention of Prime Minister Raila Odinga, Kibera's Member of Parliament (MP). He responded positively to the complaints of the Kibera residents, who were aware of past failures of similar interventions: "We do not want a repeat of what happened in Pumwani, Mathare and parts of Kibera in the 1990's" said a resident of Kibera Soweto (Ithula, 2005; Huchzermeyer and Karam, 2006a, 2006b). Moreover, the new site chosen for the temporary relocation is in Lang'ata (Lang'ata decanting site) southwest of Kibera, near the women's prison which the Ministry of Housing, through the Ministry of Home Affairs, donated to KENSUP.

In 2009, five years after the official launch of Kibera Soweto, two important documents regarding this project were published, one by Amnesty International (2009a) and the other by UN-HABITAT (2009). These documents questioned the process of temporary relocation and echoed the fears and concerns of the residents. Interviews conducted by Amnesty International show that, five years after the project began; the Kenyan government has been unable to guarantee:

- a minimum level of security of tenure for residents (who should not to be evicted as a result of the rehabilitation project);
- necessary measures to ensure access to temporary and permanent housing for the residents;
- provision of adequate information as well as effective consultation with residents.

Again, the respondents perceived the project as having been imposed by high level decision-makers (top-down approach). With regard to residents' participation in the temporary relocation project to Lang'ata, the Amnesty International document also revealed that the residents were not consulted. Out of the 50 interviewees in Soweto East, 45 of them stressed that the project was implemented without effective and adequate consultation. Residents did not have full information on the project, the house costs, the housing construction plans or details on the process of appropriating new houses on the rehabilitated site. Of the 250 families in Soweto East that were interviewed by UN-HABITAT a few days before the relocation, half thought that the relocation was detrimental and therefore should be avoided or minimised. To begin with, the interviewees raised the negative socio-economic impact of the relocation, such as loss of social networks ("I do not want to share the flat with people I do not know"; "I will lose my neighbours and friends"); loss of income sources ("I will lose my job, I will lose my customers") and the increase in money for transportation (because the new site is located far from their work places).

In general, the residents of Soweto East who were consulted do not believe that the temporary relocation process will work. They are concerned about corruption and the abuse of power which they believe characterises previous slum improvement projects. Moreover, according to the UN-HABITAT document, 31% of the 250 families interviewed were fearful

that they would not benefit from the project due to corruption in housing allocation of housing, 27% feared not being able to pay for the new house, 17% feared the lengthy and obscure process and finally, 17% expressed their desire to want to build their own homes rather than be relocated<sup>1</sup>.

When the residents were asked about the site chosen for the temporary Lang'ata relocation ("Is relocation to Lang'ata, to create space for the construction of the new houses, a good idea?"), 51% were not in agreement with this choice, 32% more or less agreed, 15% agreed and only 2% completely agreed with the site chosen for the temporary relocation. According to UN-HABITAT, one must consider that the relocation to Lang'ata is temporary, which means that residents will be moved a second time. Moreover, criticism of the choice of Lang'ata as a temporary relocation site was seen in an ethnic light. Soweto is perceived to be a Kikuyu area, whereas Lang'ata is more Luo. Rumors of potential ethnic conflict at the time of the relocation spread among the residents of 'Raila' village (opposite the Lang'ata site), as they consider Lang'ata "their land".

Another issue raised in the UN-HABITAT document was that 11% of the respondents complained that they were not on the list of beneficiaries in 2005<sup>2</sup>. The list of beneficiaries was compiled from the names of heads of households, who are mostly men, so that in case of separation (the instability of unions is quite high in Nairobi slums), the man keeps all the documents including the identity card that guarantees the inclusion in the list of those entitled to temporary relocation and the awarding of permanent housing. In June 2009, three months before the relocation, Amnesty International questioned the KENSUP Secretariat with regard to this issue. The response was that the project had not yet developed guidelines to identify "exactly who are the vulnerable categories of people and how to ensure they are not excluded from the project". Despite the fact that, from the start of the pilot project, the KENSUP document had recognised the need to plan for and respond to household members and vulnerable groups, no measures were put in place to ensure they benefit from the project or become landlords or tenants.

Furthermore, respondents criticised the size and cost of each unit. The three-roomed apartments are likely to be unaffordable for most residents. According to Amnesty International reports, insufficient attention was paid to residents who do not want to own houses and instead want to continue renting housing in Soweto. The assumption is that people want nothing more than to become homeowners yet for a considerable number of city dwellers, residency in the city is merely transitional; real investments, especially with regard to housing, are done in the rural area. Insufficient attention has been given to the development of options for community members who only want to rent as opposed to owning homes. Tenants, just like the structure owners, showed their reluctance in accepting the idea of cooperatives and of buying houses

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<sup>1</sup> UN-HABITAT noted that these responses were given mainly by Zone A residents (who were to be relocated a few days after the interview). It is possible that Zone A residents were strongly influenced by the residents of Zones C and D, who do not believe that the relocation will take place soon; that it will never be done at all and that the implementation of such a complex project seemed to be very long (causing lack of confidence and the feeling that it would become another incomplete project).

<sup>2</sup> A condition that affects a number of people (20% of respondents).

because of their lack of confidence in the programme, the difficulty of registering as members of the cooperative or of micro-credit schemes.

Finally, when asked about their new life after the relocation to Soweto (“Will life be better in Soweto after the relocation?”), only 2 of the 10 surveyed believe that the project will improve their living conditions. In fact, most respondents had no idea about their future, especially due to lack of information on the project.

## 2. Temporary Relocation of Soweto East Zone A Residents

The first phase in the Soweto Kibera pilot project began on 16 September, 2009 with the temporary relocation of 5,000 residents out of the 6,288 of Soweto East Zone A Village. Since 5 March, 2010, 1,200 families have been occupying the 600 apartments in 17 buildings (each with around 40 apartments) on five 5 floors in Lang’ata (Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Building in Lang’ata



Source: Rosa Flores, 2010

The project beneficiaries are the tenants and the structure owners registered on a list compiled in 2005, during three months, by the Physical Planning Department in the Ministry of Land, in Soweto East. These residents have an identification card that allows them to temporarily occupy apartments in Lang’ata for a maximum period of 30 months i.e. 2 and a half years. With regard to the community’s participation in this project, Soweto East is represented by 17 elected members, who comprise the Settlement Executive Committee (SEC), whose primary role is to act as a link between the program implementers and the residents.

Out of the 6,288 residents of the Soweto East Zone A, only 5,000 people were relocated to Lang’ata. Several tenants refused to be relocated because they do not want to pay higher rent

than they pay in Kibera. In this case, they were relocated to Zones B, C or D of Soweto East. There were also some structure owners (10% of the population) who did not accept the relocation and consequently, took the matter to court. The court ruled “let the people (tenants) move but the government should not destroy the structures that they occupied.” Despite this court decision, the owners continue to rent out empty houses even if they only charge KShs 100 for each dwelling. Therefore in principle, there are no more people in Zone A. The structure owners’ intention is to continue to exert pressure on the government so as to receive compensation for their homes.

After the temporary relocation to Lang’ata, the people must return to Kibera where they can choose to become tenants or homeowners, under the condition that they join a housing cooperative that was established in 2007 by the Ministry of Cooperatives. Each week, residents who choose to become homeowners have to pay the Cooperative Bank of Kenya<sup>3</sup>. Those who are not interested in this government “offer”, due to lack of money to invest in this cooperative, will continue to be tenants.

With regard to the Lang’ata housing design, the apartments are 50m<sup>2</sup> organised in three rooms (one room is used as a sitting room and the other two as bedrooms); 1 bathroom (sink, toilet and separate shower); a kitchen and a small veranda (where people can wash and dry laundry) (Figures 3, 4 and 5). It is important to note that the surface area of these apartments in Lang’ata is greater than the standard established by the Kenyan standard of housing which is 36m<sup>2</sup> for low-income housing<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> The Zone A – Soweto residents have to pay money to the bank every Monday, Zone B pay on Tuesday, Zone C pay on Wednesday and Zone D pay on Thursday.

<sup>4</sup> *The Housing Policy defines urban low-income housing as housing comprising a minimum of two habitable rooms, cooking area and sanitary facilities, covering a minimum gross floor area of 36 square metres for each household with physical infrastructure and services which comply with existing by-laws. See Housing Policy, p.11. Sessional Paper on National Housing Policy for Kenya, Ministry of Roads, Public Works and Housing, October 2003. The policy was approved by Parliament in June 2004.*



**Figures 3, 4 and 5:** The two rooms and kitchen



Source: Rosa Flores, 2010

The apartment rent is KShs 3,000 (32.2 USD)<sup>5</sup> per month, which includes all basic services of which KShs 300 is for electricity and KShs 200 for water. If we take into account that 75% of Soweto East residents do not have formal jobs, this rent is very high for the vast majority who were used to paying an average of KShs 500 per month for a room in Kibera. For these households, the cost of housing has increased six-fold. Aware of this exorbitant increase in housing costs, the Housing Ministry approved the renting out of each of the three rooms to different families who have to share any additional services (kitchen, bathroom and veranda). In this case, the rent for each room amounts to KShs 1,000 per month (11 USD) which totals to KShs 3,000 for a 3-roomed apartment. Each of the families that rent out such a room must pay rent directly to the representative of the Ministry of Housing whose office is located at the entrance of the condominium. However, despite the goodwill of the Ministry of Housing, there are no known cases of apartments which are shared by more than one family, although they have long been known.

Employees of the Slum Upgrading Department (SUD) in the Ministry of Housing, who have closely monitored the Kibera Soweto project, admit that it is middle-class people and students from the University of Nairobi who are currently investing in the Lang'ata apartments: "For students, paying KShs 3,000 for a three-roomed dwelling (with all the basic services) located at a 20-minute walking distance from the University of Nairobi is great!" They said many people in Soweto East who were relocated to these new buildings returned to the slum after sub-letting the housing. Naturally, this statement has been disputed by SEC members who insist that it is only the Soweto East (Zone A) residents who occupy the Lang'ata apartments. If the former were the case, it means that the whole project is like an alternative social project and housing

<sup>5</sup> 1 USD = 93 Kenyan Shillings (September, 2011).



subsidy for the middle class or the wealthy who are the only ones able to send their children to college.

With regard to the economic activities of the Lang'ata residents, this issue was discussed with three Soweto East SEC members. They confirmed that the people's informal activities were not affected by the relocation because they had all agreed on the project requirements from the beginning thanks to the thorough awareness campaign by SEC. Despite this assertion, we found that due to lack of land for economic activities on the site, all the areas intended for recreation and gardens within the condominium are taken up by informal activities; even the little remaining open spaces between the buildings are occupied by kiosks. In many cases, the veranda of the apartments on the ground floor is used to sell products or house informal artisanal activities (Figures 6, 7 and 8). Consequently, SEC members are negotiating with the Ministry of Housing for permission to install temporary kiosks within the condominium so that residents can continue with their informal activities.

**Figures 6, 7 and 8:** Informal activities carried out on the verandas (ground floor), in the open recreational spaces or gardens



Source: Rosa Flores, 2010.

The cleaning of outdoor areas of buildings and trash collection is the responsibility of certain people in Soweto East paid by the Ministry of Housing (Figures 9 and 10). A private Nairobi company is in charge of security.

**Figures 9 and 10:** Young people in the slum in charge of cleaning and garbage collection



Source: Rosa Flores, 2010.

*Kibera Soweto East: Another Typical Case of (Involuntary) Relocation?*

From all the information presented, it appears that Soweto East is a typical (involuntary) relocation project for various reasons. First, the choice of Lang'ata for the temporary relocation of residents was based more on the availability of public land (a donation from the Housing Ministry through the Ministry of Home Affairs) as opposed to the desire(s) of the affected population. Furthermore, there was a delay in implementing both the temporary and permanent housing projects in the affected areas. For example, several houses in Soweto East Zone A have in recent months been (re-)occupied by new people after being left unoccupied (but not destroyed as they belong to the structure owners). Contrary to initial expectations, nothing has been done to rehabilitate Soweto East Zone A, two years after the implementation of the project.

The project also suffers from lack of analysis and consideration of the residents' economic activities as well as the needs of the vulnerable (physically challenged). First, with regard to the residents' economic activities, their informal economy was not considered in the project whereas the rent for three rooms is very expensive for many families. Although the government intended to rent out apartments to different families, this does not apply at all in Lang'ata because residents are reluctant to share *their* space. Moreover, due to lack of space for economic activities, the relocated residents who were engaged in the informal and artisanal sector lost their customers. Second, the apartments were not designed for the physically challenged who have had to be settled on the ground floor of the buildings.

Finally, in the Soweto East project, residents have been treated as second-class citizens despite the existence of SEC and public consultation was limited to a small group (leaders, SEC members and government officials). The relocated people underwent a drastic change in their living conditions and the social costs cannot be measured due to the destruction of social networks. There has been an extreme individualisation that has led to the fragmentation of social ties. Even if people know each other by sight, the neighborhood solidarity has now been broken by the vertical housing arrangement, particularly since the residents have different neighbours from the ones they had in the slum. This social fragmentation brought about by the relocation is accompanied by a high prevalence of psychological disorders.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

In summary, although the project is incomplete (the slum rehabilitation process is not even underway), a provisional assessment can be done. The original goal of KENSUP was to promote a bottom-up approach. Indeed, some KENSUP measures, such as the establishment of the Settlement Executive Committee (SEC), have allowed slum residents, especially of Soweto East, to be heard by national and international institutions. Although the infiltration of SEC by certain notables is a failure of the promotion of participation, the institutionalisation of the representation of the residential community is quite innovative in the context of Kenyan urban policy and credit is due to KENSUP.

The establishment of KENSUP in 2004 marked an important date for the new National Housing Policy in Kenya. Indeed, from this date, the Kenyan Government adopted a more pro-poor approach and stopped viewing slums as areas to be demolished but as areas to be rehabilitated. It is also noteworthy that a specific department, the Slum Upgrading Department (SUD), within the Ministry of Housing was created to specifically address the issue of slums, strengthened by the commitment of this ministry to finance KENSUP.

However, despite these milestones, corruption and lack of political will are still serious obstacles to programmes such as KENSUP. Even at the community level, the actions of some leaders or members of the Committee (SEC) have been challenged by residents who complain about their absence in meetings and lack of communication between the affected community and those responsible for the project implementation. Although in voluntary capacity, SEC officials are the primary beneficiaries of the project.

With regard to the implementation of KENSUP, seven years after its launch, both the quantitative and qualitative results are not very satisfactory, especially in terms of housing for slum residents. Certainly, KENSUP has succeeded in building some schools, roads, clinics and other facilities but when the question was posed to KENSUP employees as to whether they think that the programme has improved the standard of living of people in Kibera and their means of livelihood, their response was: “No I do not.” In general, there is no proof that the KENSUP Kibera Soweto pilot project integrated lessons and recommendations from past experiences, even if these recommendations were made from commissioned government studies and initiatives.

In our recommendations, we first look closely at the role of UN-HABITAT in KENSUP as according to its basic principles, this institution should favour participatory processes in slum upgrading. It is then necessary to question why UN-HABITAT decided to interview people in Soweto East about the relocation project just days before the relocation was implemented? It is also highly recommended that more on-site interviews be conducted with residents in order to find out:

- How do Soweto East residents manage to pay the monthly KShs 3,000 cost of an apartment with a meager salary from the informal sector?
- How do the residents continue to develop their informal activities in a place where this issue was not taken into consideration?
- What other types of rent, other than those officially established by the government, have come up around the apartments in Lang'ata? Who are the people who ultimately reside in the Lang'ata apartments?
- How do the physically challenged people use the apartments which were not built to meet their needs?
- To what extent is it justifiable to construct vertical (more dense) buildings in a place where there are 170,000 residents instead of one million as originally planned?

It is also important to closely observe the issue of security of tenure of new housing in Kibera, especially when people in the community say that the Kenyan government is committed to issuing a communal title for each municipal building. We must not forget the political implications of KENSUP which as we know, represent a significant number of votes for the government. Inasmuch as the purpose of this article was to evaluate the implementation of the Kibera Soweto East project, it was only partially achieved since the project is not complete. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that this research continues in order to explore further the immediate effects of the relocation on the Soweto East residents.

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