

The East African Sustainability Watch Network: World Habitat Day 2009 Supplement

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Kenya SusWatch Network
C/o Kenya Organization Environment Education

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Planning Our Urban Future?: A Civil Society Reflection on the Housing situation in the Lake Victoria Basin (Busia in Uganda / Kenya; Homa Bay in Kenya and Musoma in Tanzania).

“..A troubling trend has emerged in many cities in developed and developing countries alike: the growth of up-market suburban areas and gated communities, on the one hand, and the simultaneous increase in overcrowded tenement zones, ethnic enclaves, slums and informal settlements, on the other.....”

- Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon on the occasion of the World Habitat Day 5 October 2009

Planning our urban future: Where are we?

In December 1985, the United Nations General Assembly declared the **first Monday of October to be “World Habitat Day” in recognition of the state of human settlements and the basic need for adequate shelter for all (UN Habitat). Its purpose is to call attention to the current global state of the human habitat and push towards adequate housing for all.**

The World Habitat Day is a day for grassroots action; A day for people to be united on their efforts towards eradicating poverty housing. This year’s theme: **Planning our urban future is aimed at raising awareness of the need to improve urban planning to deal with new major challenges of the 21st century (UN Habitat).** This is because urban settlements in all parts of the world are being influenced by new and powerful forces. In both developed and developing countries, cities and towns are increasingly feeling the effects of climate change, resource depletion, food insecurity, population growth and economic instability. These factors will significantly reshape towns and cities, physically and socially, in the century ahead. Many developing countries will, in addition, continue to experience rapid rates of urbanization, along with its most serious negative consequences - overcrowding, poverty, and slums with many poorly equipped to meet the service demands of ever growing urban populations (see box 1 below)

Box 1: A typical East African City - Postcards and the shoe-shine boundaries

“..The typical East African city today is a contradictory picture. On the open hand is a formal, postcard section of the city that is geometrically organised, relatively affluent and relatively better serviced in terms of representational, welfare, sanitation and security needs. This part of the city exudes a post-colonial aesthetic that is an eclectic mix of colonial and post- independence monuments, architectural design and gardening concepts or their derelict remnants; inevitably, its ambience is inspirational. This is the domain of the rich – newly arrived, or long-standing inhabitants of the city.

The other side of the city is a ‘disorderly’, unplanned, usually unsafe and under serviced ‘informal’ section, where poor ‘born-cities’ and newly arrived villagers eke out their lives. Houses are huddled higgledy-piggledy, polythene bags are strewn everywhere, as are scrap metal, discarded tyres, open sewers and lots of dust or mud, as the season dictates. Pigs, ducks have the honourable job of inspecting open sewers as a matter of course and survival. The state in this part of the city is not a protector of rights or a provider of services. Rather, it is a perforated apparatus that selectively dispenses law and order....”

Source: The State of East Africa. *Searching for the soul of East Africa* (Society for International Development, 2007).

But the international community has long recognized housing as a basic human right. **The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)** and the **International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1976)** includes housing as part of an adequate standard of living.

More specifically, the United Nations Declaration on Social Progress and Development (1969) calls for the **provision of adequate housing and community services to large families and individuals with low incomes and urges governments to adopt low-cost housing programs in rural and urban areas.** In spite of the extensive international recognition of housing rights, **much work remains to ensure decent, simple housing for all.**

The Housing Gap and the Poverty Trap within the Lake Victoria Basin

The Lake Victoria Basin supports an estimated population of 30 million people with large concentrations along the lake edge and within the Kagera River Basin, which is shared by Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. Although there are a few large cities such as Kampala, Kisumu and Mwanza, most of the population lives in rural villages and fast growing secondary towns like **Busia, Homa bay and Musoma.** Hence, the region has experienced a process of rapid urbanization over the recent past with the towns, many of which are concentrated along the lake edge, growing at rates far in excess of the regional average of 3% per year. The urbanization process has been accelerating under the impact of several factors, including rural poverty, land pressures and lack of job opportunities in the rural areas.

In view of this year's World Habitat Day theme, the East African SusWatch Network commissioned a rapid assessment study in August 2009. This study which was carried out to highlight the status of the housing situation in the fast growing / secondary towns in the Lake Victoria basin, is aimed at reawakening political and other stakeholders' interest to take actions to address the housing gap as an obligation (more so from a human rights perspective).

Though the International Community pronounced itself to the Millennium Declaration under **MDG 7 (Target 11) to have achieved by 2020 a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slums,** in Sub-Saharan Africa, half of the slum households suffer from two or more shelter deprivations, lacking a combination of access to improved water, improved sanitation, durable housing or sufficient living area. The recent **UN MDG Report 2009 has pointed out that despite some advances, Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region with the highest prevalence of slums. Both slums and urban areas in this region appear to be growing at an equally rapid pace, and the living conditions among impoverished populations are severe, often involving multiple deprivations. The Lake Victoria basin urban areas (exemplified by Musoma, Homa bay and Busia) are no exception to this appalling trend.**

Summary of the Key findings from the Rapid Assessment Study

General observations about Musoma, Homabay and Busia (Uganda/ Kenya)

- According to the 2005 Household Budget Survey conducted by the Tanzania's Ministry of Planning, Economy and Empowerment, Musoma town has poverty incidence of about 40 per cent of the total urban population.
- Kenya's National Taxpayers Association shows poverty incidence in Homa Bay stand at 61 per cent, while Busia at 65.9 per cent makes it the poorest district in Kenya Western Province with food poverty index of 61.4 per cent. In addition, the 2007 Kenya National Bureau of Statistics ranked Busia Kenya as the fifth most food poor in Kenya in its Basic report on well being.
- In Uganda, Busia Town council's Three-Year Development Plan (2006-2009) puts poverty levels in 2003 at 35.3 per cent.
- Musoma, Homabay and Busia (Uganda / Kenya) have an acute shortage of housing units and infrastructure that are important for the wellbeing of their respective residents. All are saddled with increase in the level of spontaneous unplanned/informal settlements that are temporary, built using weak and temporary materials.

- Indeed, the three towns have recorded a decline in levels of formal employment and a corresponding rapid increase in informal sector activities in many key areas of the urban economy, deterioration in both the quality and distribution of basic services and a decline in urban environment.
- Low levels of revenue generation in the urban councils cannot support urban operations and maintenance of infrastructure – an issue which undermines the institutional and human resource capacities necessary to sustain the delivery of services, whilst protecting local environments.
- Increase in spontaneous or informal housing units in the three local authorities are shockingly similar.
- The state of houses in the three towns shows they experience acute shortage of housing units. This is not helped by the decreasing sizes of land owned due to increased population. This is forcing people to towns to in search of ‘better opportunities’
- Within the few available units, the quality of housing, including their sizes relative to the number of inhabitants, the quality of construction and the extent of provision of such social amenities as water and sanitary and drainage are generally poor.

Busia (Uganda / Kenya)

- Fred Were, the District Housing Officer says the high incidences of poverty in Busia town have militated against the construction of high quality housing units for the growing population. Mr. Were further observes that the spontaneous increase in informal settlement not only reflect inability of the local authority to deliver services to the growing population, but also indicts the national government for lack of a clear Housing Policy in order for areas such as Busia to develop quality housing.
- Lawrence Adungosi, the town’s deputy Mayor admits that deterioration of the town environment has everything to do with the Municipal Council inability to deliver services due to lack of resources. He says the council has very little investment capacity in relation to the growing population. “The council has no capacity to construct housing units, although we wish to do so as part of our obligation,” he says. The land tenure is largely a major impediment. “Informal settlements of Marachi and Burumba are privately owned plots for which the council has no control over. We cannot dictate the kind of structures that come up because we have no legal capacity to do so”, he adds.
- Local governments as well as other private service providers have not been able to manage solid and liquid waste discharge from urban households and business within these secondary towns. Luke Mukoya, the administrator of the Busia Municipal Council attributes this problem to lack of resources and inefficiency in use of the available ones. Mukoya says in March 2009, the town acquired a 6 acre dumpsite in Alupe and hopes the level of garbage collection in the town is bound to change. Although the hurdle has been overcome, the town does not have a waste collection truck. The town has a tractor, but it’s too small and slow to deal with the situation.
- In Busia, Kenya, there are no records on the capacity of the town’s water supply and sewer line. A World Bank-funded programme to rehabilitate the town’s main water upgrading is going on at a cost of Kshs 3 billion. The district water officer Joseph Olubero couldn’t provide the statistics, but says the two-year water and sewerage project is aimed at working on the intake and improving flow of water into the town.

Homa bay and Musoma (in Kenya and Tanzania respectively)

- The land where informal/unplanned settlements take place is Shauri Yako (Homa Bay) and Nyamatara, Kigera (Musoma) are privately owned. This limits the local authorities and the government in planning. Homa Bay District Housing Officer, Mr. John Siro says “accessing land for upgrading the slum is difficult.” He adds that government plans to eradicate the informal settlements of Shauri Yako, Makongeni and Sofia. The poor residing here not only have low incomes, but also live in low quality housing with little or no access to safe water, basic sanitation, drainage and garbage collection. This has adverse impact on their health, productivity which perpetuates poverty.
- One-quarter of households interviewed in the four settlements in Homa Bay town said they had water connections, while a half of them rely on water bought from water kiosks. John Ochieng’, a resident of Homa Bay town says water kiosks do not provide a 24-hour service. Most of the water kiosks are open for three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon and remain closed overnight.
- Musoma on the other hand is also experiencing water supply interruptions. Statistics from the Musoma Municipal Council show that water supply can only caters for 60 per cent of the population and the Musoma Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (MUWASA) has an uphill task of meeting the town’s growing demand.

- MUWASA Technical Manager Eng. Boniface Mwitwa says although it had been mandated by the law to provide water and maintain the sewerage system of the urban residents, it had no funds at its disposal to enable it serve the public effectively and efficiently as expected. Due to the handicap, some areas in town do not get adequate water as should be the case despite their proximity to Lake Victoria. He adds that 60 percent of the town lacks proper drainage system, adding that this is a major challenge to the MUWASA, which strives to meet water, sanitation and sanitary needs of the Musoma residents. He also adds that the population has grown considerably in the past, which is overstressing the water pump and the available sewerage system.
- According to Musoma Municipal Council 60 per cent of the housing units in urban centre are informal. For example, the informal settlements of Nyakato, Kigera, and Nyamatara stand at 62 per cent, 53.6 and 88 per cent, respectively. This is so because ownership of this land is by private individuals.

Proposals to better *Plan Our Urban Future in the Lake Victoria Basin*

In light of the above findings, the East African Sustainability Watch Network, that is *working to catalyze and mobilize civil society in Eastern Africa to exert accountability from governments and International development institutions to achieve a socially and environmentally sustainable world*, makes the following proposals to the respective actors to address this dire housing situation:

- Urgent **practical actions from the local and national governments and other stakeholders** to arrest the deplorable state of housing in the informal settlements in line with United Nations resolutions is urgent. One way is through exploring and promoting workable **public and private sector partnerships to construct quality and affordable housing units**.
- With the challenges of modern housing and the rising demand for cheap affordable housing, the national governments in collaboration with the **civil society, research institutions and other international agencies should initiate research and develop technology based on local, affordable and environmentally sound materials**.
- **Urban planners and Politicians** should devise innovative approaches to regularly consult and involve local communities, civil society; youth and women groups; cultural, religious and other interest groups in both formal and informal settlements in urban planning. This will **secure ownership, minimise social exclusion and multiple deprivations** (that motivate the existing poverty levels).
- **Politicians and planners** in these fast growing towns urgently need to gazette industrial, residential and commercial areas that should be strictly observed by all, to **avoid unplanned infrastructure** that affects social amenities and overall urban environment.
- The on going **Ministerial process** on the East African Community **Regional Framework on Social Development** should **prioritize ‘quick impact’ initiatives in urban development** especially in the Lake Victoria region due to its fast growing population, with no commensurate and coherent regional medium- and long-term plans to provide housing and other social amenities (affordable, clean and safe water provision; schools and health facilities; day care centres; vocational institutes; community learning centres, etc).
- **The International community should support national governments** to scale up support for housing for the urban poor in these fast growing Lake Victoria urban areas. This should be in **fulfilment of the commitment in the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit for Sustainable Development** (see Box 2 below) that spells out specific actions on slum dwellers (and **more specifically to cope with the surging population in the Lake Victoria basin**).

Box 2: World Summit on Sustainable Development Commitments on Slum Dwellers

By 2020, achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100million slum dwellers, as proposed in the *Cities without slums* initiative. This would include actions at all levels to:

- **Improve access to land and property, to adequate shelter and to basic services** for the urban and rural poor, with special attention to female heads of households;
- **Use low-cost and sustainable materials and appropriate technologies for the construction of adequate and secure housing for the poor**, with financial and technological assistance to developing countries, **taking into account their culture, climate, specific social conditions and vulnerability to natural disasters**;
- **Increase decent employment, credit and income for the urban poor**, through appropriate national policies, **promoting equal opportunities** for women and men;
- **Remove unnecessary regulatory and other obstacles** for microenterprises and the informal sector;
- **Support local authorities in elaborating slum upgrading programmes** within the framework of urban development plans and **facilitate access, particularly for the poor, to information** on housing legislation

Source: http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/WSSD_POI_PD/English/POIToc.htm

About the East African Sustainability Watch (SusWatch) Network

The East African SusWatch Network comprises Tanzania Coalition for Sustainable Development (TCSD), the Kenya SusWatch Network (c/o KOEE), and Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development (UCSD), that have been working together as a loose network since 2005. They are currently implementing *The East African Civil Society Watchdog project (2006 – 2009)* supported by Sida / LVI, whose overall aim is to build capacity of CSOs' of the three networks in collective advocacy and lobbying activities aimed at supporting / enhancing sustainable development policies within the Lake Victoria basin at local, national and regional levels

This Project focuses on Mainstreaming citizen participation in policy development, implementation and monitoring of sustainable development objectives and poverty reduction outcomes; Strengthening the capacities of participating organizations to effectively undertake advocacy and lobbying on sustainable development issues in the Lake Victoria basin; **and Scaling up networking and information sharing on sustainable development** in the Lake Victoria basin in order to build synergies with other stakeholders.

To learn more about the East African SusWatch Network and its views on a range of sustainable development matters in the Lake Victoria Basin, please contact the following:

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This supplement has been produced with generous support from Swedish Agency for International Development (Sida) / Lake Victoria Initiative (LVI)