Challenges of urban environmental governance. Participation and partnership in Nakuru Municipality, Kenya

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Introduction

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WECD) predicted in 1987 that the future will be predominantly urban and that the most immediate environmental concerns of most people will be urban ones. This prediction has come true and frequent reports on the situation in cities by UNCHS (Habitat) – now UN-Habitat – and other bodies have been examining the different responses and initiatives that are being tried all over the world to meet the urban challenge. This study is about the challenges of urban environmental governance, focusing specifically on participation and partnerships in Nakuru municipality, Kenya. Nakuru is a town with an estimated population of nearly 300,000 inhabitants. In the public/private interface, members of civil society, governments and the private sector are all participants in a joint effort to solve urban environmental problems. People all over the world are searching for new and creative ways of working together to tackle society’s increasingly complex challenges. The partnerships that they are forging represent one of our greatest challenges for a more sustainable future. This dissertation is about such partnerships and about the people and institutions that make them happen. It is acknowledged from the onset that these partnerships are not an answer to all environmental problems, nor that they are easy to form. They require a difficult balance of idealism, pragmatism, creative vision and practical hard work, strong commitment and willingness to compromise (Bennet and Krebbs, 1991).

We argue that partnerships are built through a participatory process. For some societal groups, these partnerships are formed with ease along traditional lines of responsibility. Yet, for others, it requires a lot of awareness creation and training on the needs of working together to achieve a specific goal. We acknowledge that, even though local participation and partnerships have for decades been recognised as important ingredients for successful problem solving, putting the concepts into operation has proven to be a formidable challenge.

Rapid changes and institutional challenges being experienced in urban areas demand that urban managers rely on a new approach to ensure that urban populations, especially in the low-income neighbourhoods, get the desired services. Nearly

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1 In this study, the term “public-sector” refers to all the administrative agents of the government, as well as the services and civil servants of the central or local governments. As opposed to the public sector, the private sector designates the totality of the enterprises and socio-cultural associations who are stakeholders in urban development.
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half of the world’s population live in cities and the rapid increase in urban population is expected to continue, mainly in developing countries. Currently, three-quarters of global population growth occurs in the urban areas of the developing countries, causing hyper-growth in the cities least capable of catering for such growth (UNCHS, 2001). At least 600 million are estimated to live in “life and health threatening homes and neighbourhoods” (Hardoy, et al., 2001) because of the inadequacies in the quality of the housing and the provision of infrastructure and services associated with housing and residential areas. This implies serious shortfalls in the investment in the homes and neighbourhoods of the urban population, such as those in piped water supplies, provision for sanitation, garbage collection, site drainage, paved roads and pavements, schools and health clinics.

Already, Africa’s urban population is growing at an annual rate of 4%, the highest of any world region. For some individual cities, this growth rate is significantly higher. Currently, Africa is still the most rural continent, with only about 38% of its population living in cities and towns (United Nations, 1991). But within the next decades, it is estimated that more than half of all Africans will be living in urban areas. Some of this urban growth is a result of natural population increase, but most comes from rural-to-urban migration. Drought, environmental degradation, rural poverty and wars continue to push many young villagers towards cities in search of jobs and other economic and social opportunities (WRI, 1996).

In most cities and many smaller urban centres, there have been very serious environmental problems, which are a result of the inadequate provision of urban basic services. There has been serious environmental degradation in areas surrounding the cities and damage to natural resources – for instance to soils, crops, forests, freshwater aquifers and service water and fisheries (Hardoy et al., 2001). Hardoy et al. continue to state that environmental problems arise from the demand for natural resources, changes brought to water flows and the air, and water pollution and solid waste generated by urban enterprises and consumers. It should be noted that much of the environmental problems can be prevented or much reduced at relatively low cost (ibid.). In many nations, both central and local governments have failed to appropriately address these environmental problems.

Environmental problems can be broadly divided into two major categories: those directly affecting the state of the global and local natural and physical environment and those that are related to human health and living conditions. The first kind of environmental problems, which affect the global and local resource base, increases with growing levels of development. The second kind of environmental problems refers to unsatisfied human needs for basic services, so may decline with economic wellbeing and also socio-political development. The problems arise due to the gap
between the rate of population growth and the environmental and public health services necessary to maintain a healthy and clean living environment. A great range of problems within the urban environment can therefore be categorised under three broad headings: urban pollution (air, water, soil and waste); urban basic infrastructure (roads, sanitation, water supply and solid waste management); and natural resources (ecosystems, groundwater, green spaces and wildlife within the city). There is a complex combination of the above issues and, given this context, it is almost impossible to solve the problems of environmental deterioration by adopting a sectoral approach. Effective management of the urban environment requires that urban managers adopt a strategy based on an overview of the urban system as a whole and that they also look beyond the city boundaries.

Rakodi (1999) indicates that economic liberalisation and structural adjustment programmes may have improved urban economic growth prospects in many countries, but that they have undoubtedly widened the gap between the rich and the poor. The conditions for the urban poor have worsened in many cases, particularly in Africa. Structural adjustments, privatisation and deregulation have reduced the scope for government intervention on behalf of the poor, or have made the intervention more indirect. Rakodi further observes that the range of actors and initiatives has increased, with NGOs, community-based initiatives and the private sector playing more significant roles. The poor have had to find ways to survive, often in the face of increased pressure, whether official or unofficial, from both governmental institutions and the private sector. There is now some understanding of the characteristics and roles of NGOs, community-based organisations (CBOs), local government and the private sector in the improvement of the quality of life in the urban environments. However, until recently, there has been little understanding of how such institutions could undertake joint activities and what challenges they face to improve the urban environment.

The debate on the transition to sustainable development in cities has been going on, particularly since the Earth Summit in 1992 and its demand for Local Agendas 21 (LAs 21). Various approaches have been tried to achieve it. Attempts to achieve sustainable development in urban areas tend to involve actors from the public, the private and civil society sectors. The present study examines participation of these sectors in partnerships as one of the approaches currently getting a lot of attention in both theory and practice. Participatory approaches, co-management, partnerships, participatory planning and social networks are some of the concepts that have been gaining ground in the area of urban environmental management. Examples can be drawn from all over the world where collaborative working arrangements have succeeded in improving the urban environment and paving the way towards sustainable livelihoods in these areas.
Solutions to many of the problems of African cities critically depend on the legitimacy, competence and capabilities of municipal governments and institutions. As UNCHS (2001) points out, efforts to achieve secure tenure for poor residents and to include as many urban actors as possible in upgrading programmes require local government institutions that are efficient, open and transparent. Observers note that in most African countries, political and administrative power is highly centralised. Though some countries have moved towards decentralisation over the past decades, this has not always been followed by the necessary fiscal power to enable local governments and communities to raise the revenues needed to finance investments and meet other costs (Africa Recovery, United Nations, 2001).

The problems outlined above can also be found in Kenya. At the time of independence in 1963, Kenya had less than 10% of the total population living and working in the urban areas. This situation has since changed much. Currently, the figure is approaching 30%. With such a change, Kenya’s position represents an uncomfortable high position in Africa in terms of rising rates of urbanisation (see also Gilbert and Gugler, 1992). The overall urban population is increasing at a rate two to three times that of the rural population. In the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1986 on Economic Management for Renewed Growth, population growth rates were estimated at 7.1 and 8.0% per annum. Later, the National Development Plan 1989-93 projected that the major towns, including Nakuru, had their growth rates at 7.5% per annum as a result of rural-urban migration, while 0.6% per annum accounted for a natural growth rate between 1979 and 1992 (DURP, 1999). This trend in urbanisation was foreseen in 1994 in the 3-year National Development Plan (1994-1996). At that time, the Plan pointed out that the rural-urban migration alone would contribute to urbanisation at an average growth of 6.5% per annum during the planning period (DURP, 1999). This trend is presenting serious challenges to urban planning and management. The unprecedented rapid urban population increase has come with a corresponding increase in the demand for basic services and infrastructure. In addition, urban populations are spilling out into areas outside the municipal boundaries, thereby posing a constraint to orderly urban development. Consequently, the capacity of the local authorities to provide services to the urban populations is stretched to the limit, and in most cases a larger portion of the urban population lives in substandard housing with no basic infrastructure or services such as water and sanitation.

The present study focuses on three major areas of urban environmental management in Nakuru town, Kenya, viz. solid waste management, sanitation and water supply and will analyse the existing institutional procedures in addressing these issues. Nakuru town is the fourth largest town in Kenya. The rapid and dramatic increase in population implies that the available basic facilities are overstretched.
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and inadequate and this may lead to various environmental problems. The physical location of the town presents some limitations to its expansion, as a consequence of which there is a lot of land-use conflict. Several industrial investments, most of which are agro-based, provide employment for Nakuru’s residents. Some industries emit toxic effluents, which find their way to Lake Nakuru in the South, thus creating an important environmental problem. The town’s standards of urban services and infrastructure have fallen rapidly, hence compromising the quality of the living environment. The contradiction between the need for urban expansion and the need to protect the fragile nature results in a complexity that poses vast challenges to urban sustainable development. Various interventions have been experienced in the town aimed at improving the service provision and conserving the fragile ecosystem. Until recently, these interventions were not coordinated and their impacts were hardly felt. The process of creating the LA 21 that was introduced in the town in 1995 gave a new impetus to collaborative working relations and there is evidence of emerging partnership arrangements between different actors.

This study examines the forms and functions of different partnership arrangements and aspects of local participation in the municipality. The study contributes to the current debate on urban sustainable development through partnerships. Little is known thus far about the working of participation and institutional partnerships in the process of LA 21 in developing countries. What exist are macro-descriptions of cases where success can be recorded. These descriptions fail to address the challenges, risks and obstacles that such relations may encounter, especially in the areas of water supply, sanitation and solid waste management in a specific locality.

Organisation of the book

This book consists of eight chapters organised in the order of introduction, theoretical framework, methodology, background information, empirical findings and, finally, the conclusions, recommendations and areas for further research. In the first chapter, we examine the central concepts that are critical in this study. Here, we critically examine the challenges of the urban environment, urban management, urban environmental management and urban governance and the concept of sustainable development as it is applied in urban areas. Urban environmental management and urban governance are also discussed. In this chapter, we further explore the meaning and challenges of collective action, as well as the concepts of partnerships and participation. Information on the various types of institutional partnerships and the prospects they hold for successful formulation and implementation of urban environmental policy will be presented. Finally, the Agenda 21 concept and the LA 21 process are examined, with a focus on the formation of new partnerships.
In Chapter 2, the background to the research problem is set. The research problem, objectives and the central research questions are presented, as well as the methodological framework adopted for this study and the rationale of this study. Chapter 3 examines the present local government institutions and environmental management issues in Kenya. It concludes by examining emerging initiatives in the field of environmental management throughout the country.

Chapter 4 presents some background information on the study area. Issues examined include the historical background of the municipality, the natural environment, population dynamics, economic activities and settlement structure, which all influence the process of urban environmental management examined in the preceding chapter. It also introduces the current environmental initiatives within the framework of developing a local agenda 21.

The empirical findings are presented in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Chapter 5 discusses environmental issues and problems related to water supply, sanitation and solid waste management. It also discusses the roles played by the local authority, the central government agencies, the private sector and non-governmental organizations in urban environmental management. Further, the factors responsible for urban environmental problems are analysed before examining the household responses to environmental problems. Finally the role played by community-based organizations (CBOs) is presented and conclusions drawn.

The emerging partnerships are examined in Chapter 6. The different partners in each arrangement are identified, as well as partnership activities, levels of intervention, arrangements and the challenges faced by each arrangement. The LA 21 process has been going on in Nakuru and it emphasises the use of the partnership process. Chapter 7 introduces the application of the partnership principle under LA 21. The innovative activities of the process are presented and their possible impacts assessed. The lessons learnt are distilled and an evaluation of the process done to examine its possible contribution to sustainable development. Chapter 8 presents a summary, conclusions, recommendations and areas for further future research.