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

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Summary

This study focuses on participation and partnerships in Nakuru municipality, the headquarters of the expansive Rift-Valley Province in Kenya and a politically important town. Its physical characteristics, the location of Lake Nakuru and the rapid growth and composition of the population have implications for the environment. Rapid urbanisation in such a strategic town needs not be seen in a negative way and the implications and consequences should be addressed in a coordinated manner. There have been a lot of interventions by both local and international actors directed at improving the urban environmental management process. Interventions by two international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG) – and the more recent approach in developing a Local Agenda 21 (LA 21) offer examples of collaborative actions. We have observed that such interventions will not succeed if they do not mobilise local resources and embrace community participation. The diversity of communities in Nakuru makes it difficult to have representative community groups. Recently, there have been interests by researchers to undertake studies in the municipality and in the lake’s catchment area covering many disciplines. This study focussed on the roles that different actors could play collaborating with others in attempts to improve the quality of the living environment. Given the inadequacies of the local authority and other related institutions in the municipality, it was evident that new initiatives are being experimented with. There are serious barriers to these new initiatives and at the same time, several opportunities can be exploited. Below, we summarise the major findings based on the research questions.

1. **Who are the actors involved in the urban environmental management process in Nakuru, what problems are they dealing with and under what institutional framework do they operate?**

We have analysed the process of urban environmental management in practice, highlighting the different actors involved and the roles they play. The Municipal Council of Nakuru (MCN) is the major decision-making organisation, although other non-municipal organisations impact on the decisions of the MCN as well. We have observed that there always have been conflicts between the councillors (politicians) and the chief officers (professionals) within the council and that these adversely affect the effectiveness of the MCN in the provision of urban basic services. The politicians have a short-lived vision for the city while the chief officers have a long-term vision, both related to their personal interests. Community par-
participation in decision-making is only through their representatives and direct consultation has not been exercised. However, the MCN has realised the importance of this aspect and is making attempts to have community views taken into consideration by allowing community-based organisations (CBO) officials to participate in some deliberations. However, the decision-making organs comprising of committees and respective departments do not directly involve the communities. The provision of urban basic services in Nakuru is such that the low-income neighbourhoods are under-serviced. The middle-income areas still receive some services while the high-income areas are well serviced. We found a correlation between the level of provision, community action and private sector participation.

Low-income households have several responses aimed at dealing with inadequate service provision. Our initial hypothesis was that most households in the low-income areas participate in community activities aimed at improving service provision. Households respond differently to environmental problems and this is determined by a variety of factors. Some of the factors have to do with, for instance, membership of a household to a community group or organisation. We observed that membership of households to community groups was determined by several factors, including the length of stay, tenure of a household and perceptions about the roles of community organisations. The CBOs that have been formed in the low-income areas cannot said to be representative as house owners dominate them. Most tenants do not belong to community groups that are involved in the improvement of the environmental quality through clean-up exercises. The community groups studied were more involved in solid waste management activities than in water supply or sanitation. The community groups faced a number of problems that affect their functioning. These problems include low participation of households, management problems, leadership challenges and political interference, low financial bases and over-dependence on outside agents.

WWF has been very active in supporting environmental management initiatives in the MCN. The NGO has been working with other actors in the entire Lake Nakuru Catchment basin. It has conducted workshops for CBOs and barazas for residents to raise their awareness on environmental issues. It has also been working closely with the MCN, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and industrialists in areas ranging from planning initiatives to waste reduction. Another NGO that is involved in environmental management issues in Nakuru is the Intermediate Technology Development Group (ITDG), which has been assisting residents in low-income neighbourhoods to upgrade the housing stock using the stabilised soil blocks. The new housing units incorporate appropriate facilities to ensure that the living environment is improved. ITDG also participated in the recent planning initiatives in the town.
In Nakuru, the private sector has been involved in various environmental management activities such as water supply and solid waste management. In connection with water supply, we have the Kenya Association of Manufacturers involved in the rehabilitation and maintenance of some boreholes in the municipality. The informal sector is very active in the area of solid waste management as it is actively involved in recovery, re-use and recycling of waste. The majority of households in the low-income areas where we undertook our household survey indicated that waste pickers collect part of the household waste. Waste picking is very common in the streets and at the dumping site where more than 200 waste pickers earn their living by selling valuables recovered from the dumping site. The role played by the informal sector in urban environmental management and especially in solid waste management has not been officially recognised by the municipal government. We conclude that, although it is not easy to quantify the amounts of wastes recovered by the waste pickers, they are very important participants in the entire process. We observed that there has been a lot of intervention by the external support agencies and their financial support was on a short-term basis. Most of the partnership initiatives, especially those under the LA 21 process, have been supported financially by external donors. This has implications for their sustainability.

2. What kinds of partnership arrangements in urban environmental management have been developed and what are their major characteristics and outcomes?

In Chapter 6 we have analysed the several kinds of partnership arrangements observed in Nakuru, though some of them were loosely structured. We identified the public sector partnership arrangement made up of actors from the public sector operating at the same level of Government. A good example was the management of the Water Quality Testing Laboratory (WQTL). Public/private partnership arrangements were observed under the Pollution Release Transfer Registers (PRTR) initiative and the now dissolved Nakuru Quality Water and Sewerage Services (NAQWASS). We have examined the private-private partnership arrangement and observed that it differs from ordinary commercial relations since they deal with a public good and the private service providers maintain close links with their clients. Public/NGO/community partnerships were observed in Nakuru in water supply and solid waste sectors. We observed that the CBOs were weak partners in the arrangements because they controlled fewer resources. However, they are good instruments for social mobilisation.

Several outcomes of the partnership process were identified. First, empowerment through partnerships leads to other benefits. There is a multiplier effect. For example, community organisations working in partnership with NGOs and others on waste or water management challenges may turn their attention to income generation, housing, literacy and health issues as well. Second, partnerships can evolve
into long-term relationships. We observed that there are challenges of maintaining the partnership after initial objectives have been achieved, but before longer-term goals are fulfilled. Trust can break down and groups can walk away from the partnership. Third, partnerships can lead to improved accountability of individual sectors and organisations. The partnership modality has the potential to lead to new forms of democracy, where decision-making is shared across sectors.

Authoritative judgements about the extent to which these partnership arrangements lead to the improvement of the process of urban environmental management (UEM) would be premature at this stage. Most partnership arrangements that seek to address a broad spectrum of problems face the difficulty of trying to create a shared vision regarding the way forward that is normally a lengthy process. At the same time, they strive to show short-term results in order to keep the momentum and maintain the interest of participants in the partnership. The MCN should recognise that partnership arrangements do not ease its responsibilities for the provision of quality services. The MCN must be institutionally and financially prepared for the fact that they are no longer the only suppliers of public services. The MCN has to continuously monitor different interventions by different actors geared towards the improvement of the urban environment. Whereas the roles of different actors discussed cannot be underestimated, the role of the MCN is still paramount. In this regard there is a need to build capacities within this institution in terms of training, equipment and management aspects, for the MCN to be able to continue to provide support to the efforts of different actors even after the completion of joint activities. The MCN needs to continue playing the mediating role, brokering popular and private interests and minimising conflicts that may arise in the process of partnering and participation.

3. **What does the LA 21 process in Nakuru entail, to what extent does it utilise the partnership approach and what are its specific outcomes?**

The partnerships formed in the LA 21 in Nakuru have been analysed in Chapter 7. UNCHS selected Nakuru among two other priority towns in Morocco and Vietnam to implement the programme ‘Localising Agenda 21: Action Planning for Sustainable Development’. The Localising Agenda 21 programme was implemented by the UNCHS in partnership with a wide range of international, national and local partners. The Government of Belgium provided the core funding for the programme. Additional funds were generated through cost sharing with various partners, for the implementation of specific action plans in the priority towns. Our observations are that the LA 21 in Nakuru is a programme introduced by external intervening agencies and the local actors co-opted into the programme. We observed that the majority of residents in Nakuru know nothing about the process and find it difficult to relate the initiatives therein with their daily struggles. We argue that for the LA 21
to be seen as local, the process needs to incorporate the local level initiatives and should deviate from the traditional planning process. This, we observed, did not happen in Nakuru. Communities and their organisations, through their representatives, were involved in the consultative meetings where prioritisation of actions was done. Marginalised groups, women and youth, were not really given a good chance to participate. Real community participation and developing the Local Agenda from the bottom up did not happen. The local authorities and external support agencies dominated the process.

Though attempts were made to form partnerships between different actors in the municipality, these partnership arrangements were loosely structured and weak. This raises the question of how to sustain these partnerships. A critical issue that should make partnerships effective and sustainable is institutional reform and mobilisation of local resources. The implementation of the strategic structure plan requires that specific resources, both human and capital, be availed and allocated. This is not the case in Nakuru. Other critical issues revolve around legal frameworks and political will.

The LA 21 in Nakuru has been embraced as a programme and a process rather than a project. This gives it some sense of continuity as some of the actions are being implemented step by step. However, it also causes a lot of apathy to people who are and have been expecting immediate benefits. The programme has continued to emphasise stakeholder rather than popular participation. The notion of ‘stakeholders’ covers those who have a stake in urban development. This include representatives of community groups, NGOs, the private sector, training and research institutions, state agencies, local, regional and national authorities.

The programme emphasised the creation of partnerships between these stakeholders to undertake joint activities. However, to initiate a partnership requires a reason for existence, a felt need, a scope of action and a set of operational tools to realise its objectives. Only then can a partnership become operational and effective. The focus on partnership building should not be restricted to inducing the efficiency of the individual partners, but also pay attention to the ability of the partners to ‘manage’ collaboration, conflict and coordination for productive ends.

122 The author had a chance to participate in a workshop organised for the youth as partners in urban environmental management and what was worrying is that out of 45 participants, only six knew something about the LA 21 process, two years after it was started!
4. What are the process and substantial outcomes of each of the various partnership observed in Nakuru?

We have made an ambitious attempt to examine the process-outcomes and substantive outcomes of each of the partnerships discussed in this study. This assessment is not comprehensive since it is too early to undertake a definitive assessment. We noted that though the concept of partnerships has been promoted internationally as a way towards sustainable development, assessment criteria of their performance do not exist. Based on the literature survey and our fieldwork findings, a simple criterion was designed to undertake an assessment. Due to unavailability of enough information for an adequate assessment, we recommend this as an area for further development and research. Our conclusion is that although there have been emerging partnership arrangements in Nakuru, some of them have undertaken concrete activities that have had some outcomes while others, especially those involved in developing action plans, are at the early stages of implementing the prioritised actions.

A major factor that affects the successful implementation of partnership initiatives has to do with the availability of financial resources and the existence of political will. None of the partnerships studied had clear budgetary provisions for the activities being undertaken. Partners controlled their budgets. Our observation is that any partnership arrangement requires adequate financial resources and provisions for their allocation to specific activities. Partners have to agree on the same. In Nakuru’s LA 21 proposals, there were mere commitments made by partners, but they were very silent on financial commitments. Some partners have not honoured the commitments made and this will affect the implementation of the strategic structure plan, one of the products of the LA 21 partnership initiatives. Political will, too, is very crucial for the implementation of partnership activities. Our findings indicated that the NAQWASS partnership initiative in water supply failed because of lack of political will from the local politicians and the central government. We conclude that there is need to build capacity for all partner institutions to enable them to participate effectively in the partnership initiatives. There is need to develop new skills and capacities for all actors to enable them undertake the tasks that partnerships require. As far as the LA 21 initiative is concerned, there is need for the national government to give guidelines and allocate resources for the implementation of the proposed actions. The implementation of the strategic structure plan remains a major formidable task that requires national commitment.