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State-Civil Society Partnerships and Sustainable Urban Development: Lessons From Kibera, Nairobi

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Abstract

Development scholars have consistently focused on the role of non-state actors in the development process. In sub-Saharan Africa, this concern became increasingly important due to the inability of many African states to effectively guide the development process. Consequently, non-state actors have progressively assumed a central role in initiating and maintaining diverse development initiatives, particularly since the 1980s. This paper examines the activities of non-state agencies in low-income urban settlements with specific reference to one non-governmental organization (NGO) involved in mobilizing the local community to promote self-reliance in the development and maintenance of community water and sanitation projects in Kibera, Nairobi. The paper advocates the development of models of urban service delivery systems in low-income urban settlements that involve partnerships between governments and non-state agencies such as NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs).

Introduction

Rapid population growth and its associated problems constitute a critical social, economic, and political development issue in the developing countries. Increasingly, theoretical and substantive concerns relating to population and overburdened urban service delivery systems in these countries are drawing the attention of development scholars and policy makers. Among the major problems faced by residents of cities in the developing world is the inadequacy of water supply and sanitation facilities. To overcome these problems, some urban governments have tried to work closely with community groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to improve the water supply and sanitation situation in cities. Due to the essential role

that they play in the provision of diverse services in both rural and urban areas, these non-state agencies have been viewed as pivotal to the attainment of development objectives in developing countries. The focus of many development scholars continues to be on explaining why these non-state actors have become essential in the development process. Among the key reasons advanced by these scholars is the view that the Third World state has become increasingly weak and unable to meet the development needs of the citizen (see Migdal, 1988; Barkan, 1992; Bradshaw, 1993; Zamberia, 1996). Scholars have thus focused on the evolution of partnerships between the state and these actors, highlighting how such partnerships explain development outcomes. Most of these scholars advocate the need to build and strengthen the civil society institutions for the achievement of development objectives.

This paper uses evidence from Kibera squatter settlement in Nairobi, Kenya, to shed light on the workings of civil society institutions that play a central role in diverse development initiatives in the settlement. The paper first discusses the concept of sustainable development and then examines what some development scholars have referred as the African model of sustainable development. This analysis is extended to the discussion of the weak state thesis and the emergence of non-state actors. A case study of community efforts to meet potable water supply and sanitation needs in the informal settlement of Kibera is then explored. From the analysis of this case study and a critical examination of development literature, the paper draws some valuable lessons for sustainable urban development in Kenya and other developing nations.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development has been defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without comprising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987: 43). According to Véron (2001:602), the first part of the WCED definition relates to conventional economic and social objectives of development, while the second part incorporates a long-term view, including consideration of environmental issues. Véron (2001) then points out the four factors that determine sustainable development (natural capital, physical or produced capital, human capital, and social capital), and makes the argument that sustainability is ensured when the total stock of these assets remains constant or is increased in the production process.

Since this paper focuses on issues of sustainability in the urban environment, it is worthwhile to briefly explore the concept of sustainable development

with regard to cities. The maintenance of a healthy environment in urban centres is becoming difficult to achieve especially in developing countries (see, for instance, Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1989). This has created a lot of concern among scholars and policy makers about the sustainability of cities under such circumstances. Hall (1993:22) defines sustainable urban development as "a form of development today which guarantees the continuing development potential of cities and urban populations in future generations, and indeed the continuing potential of the planet in which they lie." In his discussion of the concept of sustainable urban development, Mukoko (1996) states that urban development should, over time, keep the city environmentally livable, economically viable, and socially integrative. He therefore maintains that a sustainable city is not only a clean city, it must also be a city where one can earn a fair income, afford livable shelter, feel comfortable, and devote effort and time to protect the city image. Is this the kind of development taking place in cities in the developing countries? A closer look at the living conditions of the urban poor provides evidence to the contrary.

One of the greatest problems facing the urban poor is lack of adequate housing. This has become acute because low-income housing is not attractive to private sector investment since, in comparison to high-income housing, it is not profitable enough. Given that the state cannot provide housing for the urban poor and the private sector cannot venture into low-income housing, many of the urban poor resort to living in slums or in self-help housing referred to in the literature as "spontaneous housing" or informal settlements. Owing to the governments' failure to provide services to these settlements, the poor live in conditions that expose them to serious environmental health problems. The increase in informal settlements, coupled with crowding in preexisting urban slums, is continually leading to environmental deterioration in these cities. According to UNCHS (1989), these environmental problems are likely to increase. They include lack of piped water systems (both for homes and businesses), and inadequate provision for sanitation and the disposal of solid and liquid wastes. The UNCHS further notes that the problems are aggravated by the governments which prove unable or unwilling to penalize polluters and to provide basic services to poorer groups.

Faced with a situation whereby the government cannot provide services to them, the poor exploit such avenues as the informal sector, social networks and safety nets, and the spontaneous provision of shelter and certain urban welfare services (Drakakis-Smith, 1997). Drakakis-Smith identifies a number

of issues as crucial to sustainable urbanization. These include, among others, the quality of life, social justice, empowerment and participation, as well as urban management approaches that are people focused (Drakakis-Smith, 1995; Drakakis-Smith, 1996; Drakakis-Smith, 1997). He draws the conclusion that economic, social and political equity, stability and harmony are crucial for a sustainable urban future (Drakakis-Smith, 1996). He maintains that the poor are not passive; they do try to cope as best they can with what is increasingly becoming a difficult life. He uses this argument as a basis for his assertion that "the strategies adopted by households in, or vulnerable to, poverty must be the basis on which policy responses are formulated" (Drakakis-Smith, 1996:694).

Stren and Polèse (2000:15) contend that to be environmentally sustainable, cities must also be socially sustainable. Their central premise is that for the management of a city to be successful, its policies need to be conducive to 'social sustainability.' They then proceed to define social sustainability as development (and/or growth) that is compatible with the harmonious evolution of civil society, fostering an environment conducive to the compatible cohabitation of culturally and socially diverse groups while at the same time encouraging social integration, with improvements in the quality of life for all segments of the population. They stress that to achieve social sustainability, cities must reduce both the level of exclusion of marginal and/or disadvantaged groups and the degree of social and spatial fragmentation that both encourages and reflects this exclusionary pattern (Stren and Polèse, 2000:16).

The changing role of the state in development: An examination of the Weak State Thesis

Migdal (1988) categorizes states as strong or weak on the basis of their capacities to control other factors in the society, and then describes strong states as those with the capacity to regulate social relationships, and to extract resources and appropriate them in determined ways. For Migdal, strong states are those with high capabilities to accomplish these tasks. In contrast, weak states have low capabilities of penetrating the societies and extracting resources for their use. For a state to be effective, it must be capable of instituting forceful mechanisms of social control among its population. Indeed, Migdal points out that for a state to be seen as effective, it should be able to subordinate its people's own inclinations of social behavior, or behavior sought by other social organizations, in favor of the behavior prescribed by state rules. In this respect, increased state capabilities rest upon increased state control. Further, according to Migdal,

increasing a state's levels of control entails gaining conformance to its demands by the population (compliance), organizing the population for specialized tasks (participation), and making the state's rules accepted as true and right to the population (legitimacy). The higher the compliance, participation, and legitimacy available to the state, the higher the level of social control it can exert, and the higher the state's efficacy in achieving its goals.

To comprehensively understand the issues raised in the foregoing, an account of the reasons for the weakening of the state in Africa seems called for. It has been documented that the 1980s and 1990s posed great challenges to African governments as their capacity to manage political and economic affairs was severely affected by economic crisis and the clamor for political reform from the citizenry (Grindle, 1996). The 1980s have been referred to as the "lost decade", a period when numerous developing countries faced adverse economic stagnation and decline in real per capita income. For sub-Saharan Africa, per capita GDP growth averaged - 0.6 percent for the decade (Grindle, 1980). This economic crisis, according to Grindle (1996) brought about a significant reduction in state leadership in the process of economic development. This process triggered the mushrooming of opposition parties, community based organizations, and voluntary organizations as people sought to fill the leadership vacuum left by the weakening of the state. The structural adjustment programs (SAPs) instituted by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank further eroded the political centrality of the state through policies favoring privatization of public enterprises, liberalization of economic activities, and reduction of other functions of the state. The challenges of this decade created a lot of concern among scholars about state capacity, i.e. its ability to determine the conditions of economic and political interactions, and to effectively execute state functions (Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol, 1985; Migdal, 1988; Grindle, 1986; Grindle, 1996).

This concern by scholars about the effect of deepening economic crisis and the impact of austerity measures generated an interest in the upcoming civic groups and their attempts to substitute for the state. Some of these scholars examined the African state and pointed out a pattern of disengagement from the state. Disengagement entailed withdrawal from or avoidance of interaction with state representatives or organizations representing the state by individuals, households, or groups. Disengagement could occur through the development of, for instance, the informal economy and black markets (Chazan, 1988). Grindle (1996) observes that there were other less well-

documented forms of political disengagement. These included the development of "parallel governments" formed by local communities through which they sought to provide themselves with social welfare services following their being abandoned by state institutions that had previously offered these services. This paper looks at this form of disengagement, but goes further to inquire into the fact that these communities do not get totally 'disengaged' from the state, but rather take advantage of whatever assistance government agencies can offer. Making the state allow non-state actors a share in responsibilities previously carried out solely by the state would necessitate negotiations between the state and civil society. But what exactly is the civil society, and what form does its participation in urban development assume? How are state-civil society relations structured? These and other related questions are the subject of the next section.

The state and civil society

The notions of the civil society are as varied and contested as those of the state (Aina, 1997: 417). In an attempt to offer a more Africa-relevant and non-Eurocentric application of the concept of civil society to contemporary Africa, Mamdani (1995:3) poses a number of questions regarding the concept: "What is civil society? Does it exist or is it emerging? Is the problem solved by making a distinction between "modern civil society" and "traditional civil society"? Mamdani includes a few other questions but the core of his argument regarding the concept has been aptly captured by Aina (1997:416) who states that the response to this questioning links the concept politically with the notion and practice of social movements in terms of their contribution to democratic politics, the defense of people's rights and livelihoods, popular participation and empowerment. Cohen and Arato (1990) have viewed civil society as the sphere of social interaction that comprises the intimate sphere (family), associational life, social movements, and forms of public communication operating in the arena of organized non-state, non-market sector with origins in both the modern and traditional bases of society. This view is particularly relevant to this study since it concerns the intimate sphere (poor households), and the dynamics of associational life that link these to the organized non-state sector in joint efforts to improve the quality of life in informal settlements.

Hadenius and Uggla (1996:1624) assert that organizations constituting the civil society should be autonomous from the state, and they should seek to influence state policy as well (even if that is not their primary aim). They further maintain that this influence does not work in just one direction.

Stating that the relationship between civil society and the state is of a mutual (or recursive) nature, the authors conclude that total independence of the civil society from the state is incompatible with political influence. They emphasize that the state should not treat the organs of civil society as hostile phenomena, or as something to be disregarded if its purpose is to acquire a real capacity to implement policy. They, therefore, suggest that public agencies should seek to cooperate with the civil society through the establishment of partnership.

A closely related view of state-civil society relations is what some scholars (e.g. Putnam, 1993; Nugent, 1993) have referred to as synergy. Synergy implies that state-civil society relations strengthen state institutions and effective state institutions, in turn, create an atmosphere that allows civic operations to flourish. Evans (1996:1034) argues that the actions of public agencies facilitate forging norms of trust and networks of civic engagement among ordinary citizens. These norms and networks can then be used to attain developmental ends. He adds that engaged citizens are a source of discipline and information for public agencies as well as on-the-ground assistance in the implementation of public projects. To effectively implement development policies and programmes in cities in the developing countries, both the state and the civil society are essential. The literature documents the need to have both a strong civil society, and an effective state. Specifically, the civil society's involvement in policy formulation at the national level by providing alternative analysis of development issues and policy recommendations is critical. This is especially called for in view of the "weakening" of the state in the developing world.

The role of the civil society in the improvement of water supply and sanitation in Kibera

Kibera squatter settlement[1] is located about seven kilometers south-west of Nairobi City Center, and it is the home of over 400,000 people, according to the National Cooperative Housing Union's (NACHU) report for the year 1991/92 (*Daily Nation,* June 23, 1994). The Nairobi City Council puts Kibera's population at 467,967 (NCC, 1995). Kibera comprises nine villages namely Gatuikera, Kianda, Kisumu Ndogo, Lindi, Soweto, Laini Saba, Silanga, Mashimoni, and Makina. It covers an area of 110 hectares. The area

[1] This study utilizes survey and qualitative data collected from Kibera squatter settlement in Nairobi between May 1996 and July 1997. Two return visits to Kibera by the author in June and December 2001 yielded data to update the initial analysis with some additional observations.

currently occupied by the settlement was traditionally Maasai pastoralists' grazing land. During the colonial period, it became a Kenya African Rifles (KAR) military reserve. Between 1912 and 1928, the reserve was allocated as an area of temporary residency for Nubian (Sudanese) soldiers who had served the KAR for a period of over twelve years. The temporary residency permits bore the provision that houses constructed on the reserve should be semi-permanent and residents were made aware that they could be required to move if the government intended to use the land for other purposes. Simon (1992) observes that during the 1950s the Nubians, perhaps in return for their loyalty during the Mau Mau rebelliom against colonial rule in Kenya, were allowed to construct additional rooms for rental at great profit. He adds that the rental sector continued to operate on only a limited scale until the local administration gained effective control over land allocation in 1974 and was henceforth able to intervene informally, despite Kibera's irregular or unauthorized status (Simon, 1992). It is important to note here that temporary residency implied that the government, or more specifically, the Nairobi City Council was not under any obligation to provide the necessary infrastructure such as water and sewerage systems to the settlement.

The state's inability to provide basic services has prompted the civil society to devise various solutions to the problem of inadequate service provision in the informal settlements. Without any hope of their settlements getting upgraded in the foreseeable future, residents of informal settlements have formed self-help organizations to improve their neighborhoods. In the post-colonial period in many African countries, the formation and operation of many of these groups has been supported mainly by NGOs and other external support agencies. The success of these external agencies can be attributed, in part, to the prior existence of these community based organizations that have for a long time played an instrumental role in the organization and mobilization of community members. Kunguru and Kariuki (1996:28) state that in 1992 about 60% of Kibera residents belonged to at least one community organization.

The NGOs and other agencies that have come up with projects and programs in Kibera have endeavored to incorporate the aims and aspiration of the membership of these CBOs, especially in the areas of water supply and sanitation. The following section will discuss the role of these organizations in Kibera with specific reference to the provision of water and improvement of sanitation. One major organization operating in Kibera, the Kenya Water for Health Organization (KWAHO), will be examined with the objective of highlighting the contribution of the civil society in the water and sanitation

sectors in cities in the developing countries.

The case of Kenya Water for Health Organization (KWAHO)

There are many organizations working in the informal settlements in Nairobi ranging from relatively large NGOs to small community based organizations (CBOs). Since CBOs are viewed as directly representing groups of residents and offering an organizational basis for community participation in projects, they have benefitted from the support of donor agencies. Most of these NGOs do not provide direct financial assistance for development projects, rather they strive to mobilize the residents through the formation of self-help groups so as to enhance self-reliance. This is precisely the approach taken by KWAHO in Kibera and other areas. KWAHO was started in 1976 as UNICEF/NGO Water for Health by the National Council of Women of Kenya.[2] In 1983, KWAHO was registered under the Societies Act as an indigenous Non-Government Organization. It was registered under the NGO's Coordination Act in 1992. The implementation of KWAHO's programs is made possible through funding received from a number of foreign donors. These include UNICEF, DANIDA, SIDA, UNDP, Water Aid, and UNEP.

The organization has four main objectives: 1) to support and promote government's effort of realizing water for all through mobilizing local NGOs and communities for self-reliance; 2) to provide safe water within reasonable distance and promote health through improved sanitation; 3) to improve the capacity of the communities through training to manage their own water and sanitation initiatives; and 4) to promote the collaboration and partnership with all other agencies in the water and sanitation sector. KWAHO specifically aimed at supporting and promoting government efforts of realizing water for all through mobilizing the local community and encouraging self-reliance in implementation and coordination of projects. Provision of safe and clean water within a reasonable distance and promotion of health through better and cleaner sanitation thus became a key goal of the organization. The organization has provided water kiosks in all the nine villages, and also encouraged income-generating activities related to water. The organization also provides training in construction and maintenance of water kiosks and ventilated improved pit (VIP) latrines.

Alongside the water supply projects, KWAHO also trains the women groups

[2] Information on KWAHO's activities was obtained from in-depth interviews with the organization's Project Coordinator and the projects' beneficiaries from the nine villages, as well as KWAHO's annual report (KWAHO, 1992).

and community health workers on how to facilitate the local community's interest in projects aimed at providing access to clean and safe water. This has been done by helping people in each village develop 20 groups, comprising 20 members each. Although financial and accountability concerns might have been central to determining the group size, the smaller size might have accounted for the success of the projects: Group size matters mainly in organizational sense. Collaboration and compliance become difficult as groups get larger and relationships among members become less personal. If group size is reduced, intragroup enforcement of rules becomes less expensive. Moreover, it is also a way of ensuring face-to-face interaction within communities. KWAHO then developed water kiosks for these 20 groups. So far 15 water tanks have been supplied to women's groups. The community's role in these projects was to provide labor, while KWAHO, in partnership with WaterAid and UNICEF, gave technical and financial support. These water point centers have helped reduce the distance which women have to walk to collect water. The water kiosks also act as income-generating activities for the women's groups.

KWAHO has also initiated many projects and programs, not only dealing with water supply, but also proper sanitation. The organization initiated a ventilated improved pit latrine (VIP) construction project aimed at helping the landlords understand the need for hygienic toilets. The principal advantages of VIP latrines are: 1) their extremely low cost; 2) ease of construction and maintenance; 3) minimal water requirements for successful operation; 4) low level of municipal involvement for operation; and 5) potential to be upgraded. The main disadvantages are that 1) they are not suitable for high density settlements, and 2) when full, the pits require emptying. By 1995, KWAHO had built 41 VIPs altogether throughout Kibera. However, further construction of VIPs was hampered by lack of space and increased use of the existing VIPs from a growing population. To alleviate this problem, the organization started a latrine-emptying service. A vehicle for this purpose was acquired with funding from NORAD.

From the above case study, it can be concluded that KWAHO has the capacity to promote local participation, working with community groups as partners, and emphasizing local self-help initiatives. However, it needs to be appreciated that sustainability of community based initiatives in the post project phase remains a complex and difficult activity, particularly in urban communities that are largely tenant oriented and lacking security of tenure. These findings can be viewed from the standpoint of the villagers' perception of the responsiveness of the Nairobi City Council (NCC) to the water supply

and sanitation needs of the residents of Kibera. On the one hand, the villagers recognize that lack of water is a serious problem in the settlement while, on the other hand, they realize the futility of relying on the NCC to resolve the water supply and sanitation crisis. Indeed, respondents were keen to point out that NCC officials are not responsive to the water and sanitation needs of the residents of informal settlements. Two reasons provided by the respondents clearly illustrate this lack of concern on the part of the NCC. First, the NCC officials never visit the villages to see the conditions in which the people of Kibera live. The worsening state of environmental health thus goes unnoticed by those in charge of ensuring that residential areas in the city have proper sanitation. Obviously, the NCC would explain this as a problem emanating from the illegal status of the informal settlements, which technically implies that the NCC is not duty-bound to provide essential services to such settlements. To Kibera residents, the officials are only concerned about the welfare of other residential estates in the city they have reason to claim that Kibera is not under the jurisdiction of the NCC. Second, the respondents stressed that water in the village is, for the most part, provided by individuals and CBOs. NCC workers only come into the village to do the meter reading for billing purposes to individuals and groups operating water kiosks.

Partnerships with the state

The projects carried out by NGOs and CBOs in Kibera are facilitated by the central government through the local administration. The local administration is charged with the responsibility of registering and enabling the activities of the NGOs and CBOs. The Nairobi City Council, an agency of the Ministry of Local Government, has played a central role in the implementation of projects by providing water connections and access to solid waste disposal facilities and the sewerage system. KWAHO has continually enjoyed a close relationship with the Kenyan government since its inception. In 1992, for instance, the Ministry of Land Reclamation, Regional and Water Development led other government ministries in ensuring that the communities in KWAHO project areas received health education. The Ministry of Culture and Social Services, and the Health Ministry also collaborated with KWAHO in diverse initiatives, while the Provincial Administration assisted KWAHO to reach the communities at the grass-root level through public *barazas* (meetings).

Obviously, the government will need to rethink the role of local authorities, and introduce measures to encourage city council workers to improve their performance. The foregoing account has demonstrated that working in

partnership with the civil society does not in any way remove or reduce the need for local government to be fully responsible for ensuring that services are provided in an efficient and equitable manner. The government needs to strengthen the capability of the local authority, allowing it enough autonomy to enter into long-term agreements with NGOs and CBOs. This would require the development and maintenance of professional staff to negotiate and enforce contracts with the civil society.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper moves beyond the state-centered urban management approach, and explores some of the non-formalized urban management strategies using the case of Kibera as a basis for understanding the strategies employed by the poor in meeting their urban service needs in informal settlements. It shows that cooperation among residents (through the formation of CBOs) and working with other organizations such as NGOs and public agencies can be effectively used for the promotion of developmental ends. Thus, the paper makes a strong case for policy makers concerned about improving the conditions of the urban poor in the Third World to prioritize the creation of strong state-civil society partnerships. The paper has demonstrated that once the state allows for self-organization, the communities explore the available options, basing their actions on preferences, available opportunities, and the possibilities for support from non-state actors.

The study demonstrates that it is the lack of institutional capacity at the city council level to support the provision of affordable and effective services that has been a key obstacle to development in informal settlements. This has been worsened by the failure or reluctance of bureaucrats to develop and accept alternative local innovations. The main conclusion to be drawn that has great overall policy relevance is that states and communities need to recognize the limits of the conventional model of direct state-delivery systems. Additionally, municipal staff are reluctant to go into a poor neighborhood to seek community participation (Wegelin and Borgman, 1995:140). In this respect, the study advocates the development of models of urban infrastructure management that involve the government and NGOs working in partnership with the low-income households and CBOs. The paper provides sufficient evidence of the logical compatibility and complementarity of households, CBOs, NGOs, and the state.

Making these partnerships feasible requires the removal of some key constraints faced by the poor in dealing with their environmental health

problems. A major hindrance to the development of infrastructure in informal settlements is the illegality of the settlements. The situation of the poor can be improved by the government agencies' radical shift in the way they regard informal settlements. Even without necessarily legalizing the settlements, these agencies can work with low-income groups and their CBOs to provide improved services in ways consistent with the existing structure of informal settlements. As Arrossi *et al.* (1994:9) argue with reference to sanitation, there are many different methods of providing adequate sanitation at a cost significantly lower than that of investing in conventional water-borne sewerage systems. The success of projects supported by NGOs in Kibera amply support this assertion. The approach needs to be tailored toward forging partnerships especially because state agencies lack the financial capacity to directly fund projects in low-income settlements.

NGO and CBO activities in Kibera examined in this paper suggest two possible changes that can be implemented to streamline the financing and urban management problems that plague informal settlements: First, the ability of the poor to provide some of the basic services themselves without recourse to government funding calls for the need to recognize the hidden potential in low-income settlements. This would require channeling the limited external resources to activities that the communities themselves consider a priority and are, even if to a very small extent, engaged in. Second, and closely linked to the first, participation of the local people in the entire project implementation is necessary. The management of KWAHO projects in Kibera suggest that successful and sustainable approaches require the involvement of residents in the design and implementation of projects. This involvement is vital regardless of whether or not the poor have their own financial resources because funding from external sources could be secured and the involvement of the poor would ensure the maintenance and sustainability of development projects.

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