



Urban  
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Knowledge

# Briefing

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## Supporting community-led research on risks and creating policy platforms to enhance Nairobi's governance for resilience

This briefing outlines the development of community-led research to promote urban governance for resilience and how impactful partnerships can be created within a research programme. Based on Urban-ARK's work in Nairobi, it explores how detailed data collection on risks provided the basis for renewed community mobilisation, networking across informal settlements, and policy engagement with local officials. Nairobi's informal settlements typically face several risks such as low-quality shelter or infrastructure, fires linked to hazardous illicit electricity, flooding, crime, and unresponsive local governance. The briefing analyses three interlinked initiatives that highlight the aspiration to move from simply providing a database for decision support, to opening spaces for stakeholders' critical reflection and collaboration building aimed at fostering resilience to multiple risks: 1) The 'Demand-Driven Resilience' sub-programme for the Special Planning Area (SPA) in Mukuru and Viwandani, led by the Kenyan slum dweller federation, *Muungano wa Wanavijiji*, and Akiba Mashinani Trust (AMT); 2) Kounkuey Design Initiative's (KDI) training and networking initiative in Kibera; and 3) the Nairobi City Risk Partnership. Findings demonstrate how the research and capacity-building activities strengthened residents' relations with government officials in Nairobi, while bolstering pre-existing initiatives and pathways for evidence-based risk management. Reflections on the approach show that major social and political gains can be achieved using technical processes in which residents not only enhance their skills and data on risks, but also build vibrant networks and advocate collectively for future interventions.

### Addressing multiple risks via the Special Planning Area (SPA) and Urban-ARK's capacity building in informal settlements

Mukuru Kwa Njenga, Mukuru Kwa Reuben, and Viwandani are large informal settlements in Nairobi's industrial area, with 100,000

households facing several risks but receiving few interventions. These settlements are often located in flood-prone areas; they regularly experience fires due to hazardous illicit electricity connections, and can only access highly inadequate water, sanitation, and other vital infrastructure. Partly due to their location on contested private lands, these areas have

## Policy Pointers

- Research programmes can help build the capacities of residents and local organisations to advance inclusive, evidence-based risk management through community-led research and partnerships.
- Multi-level, demand-driven strategies, such as those developed by Urban-ARK and its partners in Nairobi, can reduce risks through strengthening grassroots organisations and networks, collecting data to prioritise key risks, and creating platforms for policy engagement.
- Significant social and political gains can be achieved via technical processes (such as risk assessments) when residents improve their skills, build vibrant networks, and advocate collectively for future interventions.
- Collaboration within and across communities, NGOs, government, and other municipal actors can foster resilience and support more responsive local governance in informal settlements.

**Table 1: Mukuru household and population estimates, 2016<sup>1</sup>**

Settlement name	Number of households (2016)	Population estimates (2016)
Mukuru kwa Njenga	44,344	133,032
Mukuru kwa Reuben	32,611	97,833
Viwandani	23,606	70,818
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,561</b>	<b>301,683</b>

not benefited from risk-reducing initiatives, and 94 per cent of residents are tenants with insecure tenure.

In August 2017, the Nairobi City County government officially declared these settlements a ‘Special Planning Area’ (SPA) and multi-sectoral upgrading plans are being developed.<sup>2</sup> Under Kenyan law, the county government is required to develop an integrated plan to redevelop the SPA within two years of this declaration. Interdisciplinary consortia (with academic, government, private-sector, and civil society participation) have synthesised the data and generated policy briefs to inform planning strategies. These consortia focus on: 1) housing; 2) water, sanitation, and electricity; 3) environment; 4) education; 5) health; 6) land; 7) finance; and 8) the cross-cutting coordination, community organisation, and communication (see Figure 1). The Kenyan slum-dweller federation Muungano wa Wanavijiji is leading the community organisation consortium, with technical assistance from its financial support agency Akiba Mashinani Trust (AMT) and Slum/Shack Dwellers International-Kenya (SDI-K). Like other SDI affiliates, Muungano has extensive experience of gathering data on shelter, infrastructure, and services; mobilising grassroots savings groups; and advocating for improved living conditions and political recognition.<sup>3</sup>

Urban-ARK supported Muungano in data collection and in devising inclusive, participatory responses to risks in these settlements. In light of the SPA’s scale and complexity, Urban-ARK’s collaborations were built

on approaches to mobilise residents; in particular, savings groups and neighbourhood associations were established to create legally-recognised platforms for engagement between residents and Nairobi’s government.

**A three-pronged strategy to support grassroots mobilisation and empowerment through Urban-ARK**

Muungano’s inclusive approach and mechanisms ensured that all residents were able to participate in the planning process, thereby building community resilience to several risks. The partners reinvigorated local savings groups, with the potential of bolstering future negotiations with financial or government actors. After training from Urban-ARK led by the University of Mzuzu, Malawi, data collection followed the ‘Action at the Frontline’ (AFL) methodology to prioritise risks and to generate action plans for addressing them.<sup>5</sup> This method improved awareness of shared risks (such as flooding), while also empowering new leaders and fostering social cohesion. Activities significantly enhanced local capacities to reduce risk through strengthening grassroots organisations, improving data collection, and raising awareness.

**(i) Strengthening community organisations**

Comprised of 17 residents, the mobilisation team proved a key asset via ongoing community outreach, data-collection activities, and dispute resolution. Mobilisers are typically local youth or women, and along with conducting door-to-door outreach to residents and creating a detailed household registry, they addressed local concerns about the SPA. They have helped to overcome opposition by structure owners, who are often wealthier residents anxious about losing their assets during the upgrading. In response, mobilisers have explained that owners and tenants will both benefit from the SPA; alternatively, they liaise with the area chief to handle such challenges.

**Savings groups** and **community organisations** also received a boost, in turn helping to support social, political, and financial capital in the settlements. Before the SPA declaration, Muungano only had about 40 savings groups in Mukuru and Viwandani, but 384 savings groups are now active. Savings can help to secure housing or livelihoods loans; they can also strengthen residents’ bargaining position and raise their profile with government or financial institutions.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, savings can foster social cohesion amongst residents who may not have collaborated previously, but are now pooling assets and identifying shared priorities. Finally, multi-level organisations were created to scale up and foster ongoing participation during the SPA process. This innovative strategy aims to ensure that all residents – regardless of Muungano membership – can engage actively in the SPA process, as follows:

**Figure 1: SPA’s multi-sectoral planning consortia<sup>4</sup>**



- **Cells** of ten households are the organisational building blocks (locally called ‘*Nyumba Kumi*’);
- **Sub-clusters** (100 cells) will discuss key issues and develop planning proposals, and sub-cluster forums will create **seven village thematic committees**, in line with the SPA’s 7 consortia;
- **Cluster** forums (covering a couple of streets) will discuss broader community concerns, such as how to improve security or access to infrastructure; and
- Thirteen **segments** across the SPA area, covering about 8,000 households (80 clusters per segment), and representative **neighbourhood associations** will be created for each segment.

Although the SPA’s plans are still being generated, they will unquestionably be founded upon the backbone of vibrant, inclusive community organisations. By working with and beyond Muungano’s longstanding savings groups, this process has reinvigorated the federation and developed mechanisms to ensure inputs from diverse residents in these settlements.

### (ii) Improving data collection on multiple risks

To respond to multiple risks and build upon the formation of neighbourhood associations, Muungano introduced the AFL tool in collaboration with Urban-ARK. In October 2017, Urban-ARK supported a community training on the AFL method led by consortium partners from Mzuzu University, Malawi. The AFL tool helps capture residents’ experiences with a range of threats; the ensuing consequences and individual or community-level actions; and priorities for future interventions. Key threats identified in October 2017 included fires and floods, as well as poverty, disease outbreaks, police harassment and poor governance, inadequate infrastructure, and gender-based violence in Nairobi’s informal settlements. In September 2018, residents from four clusters prioritised creating solid waste management groups, installing water kiosks with the utility, and undertaking regular community clean-ups.

Although Muungano already had data on certain risks (such as flooding or inadequate sanitation), the AFL tool’s comprehensive analysis will inform holistic responses. Through detailed analyses of overlapping risks and residents’ prior responses, AFL will considerably enhance local data-collection capacities and provide new evidence to undergird multi-sectoral upgrading strategies. A second phase, currently underway and supported by Urban-ARK, is the roll-out of the Views/Action at the Frontline (VFL) tool in four of Mukuru’s clusters.<sup>7</sup> This activity aims to enhance residents’ disaster preparedness in Mukuru; enhance the quality of grassroots participation in the planning process; and contribute to developing the SPA’s disaster risk management strategies. Key aims are to train 140 VFL community facilitators and to reach approximately 30,646 households across the four clusters.<sup>8</sup>

### (iii) Building awareness and capacities for collective responses

Muungano and its partners are implementing complementary strategies to promote wider understanding of the SPA and the need for collective responses. **Meetings** with residents help raise awareness of shared concerns like floods or fires; grassroots leaders and NGO staff often participate in **community radio** to answer questions about the SPA. There are also **exchanges** with residents of other informal settlements, helping to disseminate lessons. Taken together, such initiatives can strengthen capacities for collective responses and encourage broader learning about this pathbreaking initiative.

### ‘Networking the network’: a training and networking initiative for transformative capacity-building of the Kibera Public Space Project (KPSP) network

Urban-ARK is also supporting KDI’s Training and Networking Initiative for transformative capacity building of the Kibera Public Space Project (KPSP) network. KDI is a non-profit design and community development organisation with a significant presence in Kibera,<sup>9</sup> and the KPSP builds upon KDI’s participatory planning methods to strengthen social ties and connections within the network of productive public spaces. The project has enhanced Kibera residents’ skills via: 1) training in leadership and community-building; and 2) an applied module where trainees can discover connections and propose networked interventions. Through the formal training, residents are expanding their influence and impact across Kibera, thereby fostering the project’s long-term sustainability. Plans are also underway for ‘scaling up and out’ via KDI and Muungano’s collaborations and sharing of risk management practices, creating opportunities for cross-city and cross-community learning. In June 2018, KDI and Muungano signed a partnership agreement and a memorandum of understanding to support each other in their mutual goal of resident-led upgrading in Kibera, Mukuru, and other settlements. While the two organisations had strong pre-existing relations, their engagement through Urban-ARK served as a key catalyst for this agreement. Muungano and KDI are now collaborating to maintain the riparian reserve in Mukuru.

### Nairobi Urban Risk Partnership

Despite notable city-wide risks like flooding, crime, or air pollution, Nairobi does not yet have an urban risk management plan. Nor does the city have a central platform or repository for recording and coordinating municipal risk and climate change-related research initiatives. However, municipal stakeholders recently recognised the need to improve knowledge on risk and to build a community of practice. In May 2017,

the Nairobi Urban Risk Partnership was proposed at an exploratory meeting facilitated by Urban-ARK at the African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC). The partnership was suggested by Nairobi's Urban Planning Department and seconded by the Departments of Security and Disaster Management, and Housing and Urban Renewal, as well as the University of Nairobi. It brings together various stakeholders leading risk-reduction efforts and aims to inform the development of an urban risk management plan, pursuant to Nairobi County's Disaster and Emergency Management Act (2015). A further aim is to mainstream disaster risk management planning in normative programs. The partnership holds considerable potential for strengthening disaster risk reduction and management in Nairobi, as well as improving co-ordination across sectors and actors. However, challenges have arisen due to local government transition, competing political priorities and budget constraints.

### Conclusions and reflections

Throughout the interventions described in this briefing, there were risk-related initiatives already established, and Urban-ARK supported developments to further promote evidence-based risk management and collaborative partnerships for practical and policy impact. In particular, it focused on creating inclusive decision-making spaces and generating evidence to assist policymakers, but with local actors continuing to drive the initiatives. Central to the success of KDI and Muungano's partnerships are efforts to build on existing strong relationships or networks between civil society and government actors in Nairobi. For the Nairobi Urban Risk Partnership, maintaining momentum was a

greater challenge, particularly during the Kenyan elections, which resulted in several leaders and initial champions leaving their posts. As such, the new county administration was approached for continued uptake, using a lead co-ordinator in Nairobi to facilitate engagements that successfully fostered governmental support. The aim is for each initiative to continue its momentum beyond Urban-ARK's lifecycle.<sup>10</sup> Urban-ARK thus provided facilitation and networking support, as well as technical assistance with data collection, all in the hope of fostering lasting reduction in risk across Nairobi.

From their initial partnerships, local actors placed urban resilience building within larger agendas of self-determination using inclusive, demand-driven strategies for collecting data and grassroots advocacy. Findings also show that collaborations within and across communities, civil society organisations, NGOs, government and other municipal actors are critical to enhance governance and address multiple risks in Nairobi. As a SDI-K community organiser cogently explained: "When there are many partners, it helps if the community can organise themselves before dealing with many players... It helps also the county government because the county can work in a more coordinated way with consortia and build one programme together...The community realises that they all need to work in the same direction...it's the community thinking, 'Who are we leaving behind?' and having its own meetings".<sup>11</sup> Finally, the partnerships indicate that significant social and political gains can be achieved via technical processes (such as risk planning or vulnerability assessments) when participants can improve their skills, build vibrant networks, and advocate collectively for future interventions.

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### Notes

1. Based on Corburn, J. *et al.* (2017) Situational Analysis of Mukuru Kwa Njenga, Kwa Reuben & Viwandani. Technical paper. UC Berkeley, University of Nairobi, Muungano Alliance, Strathmore University, and Katiba Institute, Nairobi. p. 3. Available at <https://www.muungano.net/publicationslibrary/2018/1/22/mukuru-spa-situational-analysis-phase-2-report-mukuru-kwa-njenga-kwa-reuben-viwandani>
2. See [www.urbanark.org/special-approach-slum-upgrading-special-planning-area-mukuru-nairobi](http://www.urbanark.org/special-approach-slum-upgrading-special-planning-area-mukuru-nairobi) and [www.muungano.net/browseblogs/2018/9/3/report-from-the-mukuru-spa-water-sanitation-and-energy-consortium-reaching-out-to-the-community-through-data-return](http://www.muungano.net/browseblogs/2018/9/3/report-from-the-mukuru-spa-water-sanitation-and-energy-consortium-reaching-out-to-the-community-through-data-return)
3. Lines, K and Makau, J (2017) Muungano nguvu yetu (unity is strength): 20 years of the Kenyan federation of slum dwellers. IIED Working Paper, IIED, London. Available at: <http://pubs.iied.org/10807IIED>
4. See <https://www.muungano.net/browseblogs/2018/8/16/planning-mukuru-reporting-back-from-july-quarterly-gathering-of-the-special-planning-area-consortiums>
5. See <https://www.gndr.org/programmes/action-at-the-frontline.html>
6. See note 3.
7. See note 5 above.
8. VFL activities will continue throughout 2018.
9. For more information visit [www.kounkuey.org](http://www.kounkuey.org)
10. Visit [www.urbanark.org](http://www.urbanark.org) for additional briefings and accounts of Urban-ARK's impact.
11. SDI-K community organiser, 6 April 2018.

[www.urbanark.org](http://www.urbanark.org)

### Urban Africa: Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK)

breaking cycles of risk accumulation in sub-Saharan Africa

A three-year programme of research and capacity building that seeks to open up an applied research and policy agenda for risk management in urban sub-Saharan Africa. Urban ARK is led by 12 policy and academic organisations\* from across sub-Saharan Africa with international partnerships in the United Kingdom.

\* Abdou Moumouni University; African Population and Health Research Centre; Arup; International Alert; International Institute for Environment and Development; King's College London; Mzuzu University; Save the Children; UN-Habitat; University of Cape Town; University College London; University of Ibadan; University of Portsmouth

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