



Organised Communities:

a key ingredient for successful citizen engagement & participation

An Open Institute Think Piece

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Background

Since September 2015, The Open Institute has been conducting a programme called the Global Goals for Local Impact. The main premise of this programme is that the Global Goals, which were formally adopted globally in September 2015, would best be achieved at hyperlocal level. We took this position, having considered a number of key issues:

1. **There needs to be a review of the ways development is articulated in countries.** For example, it is our view that GDP analysis is not an adequate way to track poverty reduction. Our thinking is that while globally economies have shown massive growth over the final decade of the previous millenium, the poorest 60% of the world, experienced only about 5% of that growth.
2. **Citizens do not think and care about national, regional development efforts in the way they care about local development.** In the process of working with citizens, we found that the geographical space where development happens has an impact on the level of participation by citizens. "I have never touched a million shillings," remarked Wafula (a community member in Kakamega), "so when I see a billion shillings was allocated for a project, I have no way of knowing whether it is value for money." Conversely, we found that citizens pay considerably more attention to development projects that have a direct impact on their wellbeing. Citizens care about issues that directly affect them in their locality. Of course it is necessary to recognise that even while this is the case, citizens still have an interest in national policies as many of their development plans are often blocked by national politics.
3. **"Leave no one behind" is inherently more achievable today than ever before.** When we review technological progress globally - and especially in Africa, we take note that there are numerous advancements that make it possible for citizens to (a) become aware of what development activities there are around them, (b) to engage with policy makers and express their interests in the development activities and (c) to participate in the development activities directly.
4. **Ownership of data driven activities is important for sustainability.** We have found that the tendency for most organisations is to use outside enumerators or consultants for data collection. The challenge that we have identified with this model is that the citizens do not identify with the data or the analysis done thereafter. It is our experience that when citizens have collected data themselves, the data is not abstract and it becomes real in their own eyes since they know the

source of the data and what it means. Also, when they have been involved with the collection and analysis of the data, they are more likely to continue making data driven decisions in future.

Based on these considerations, we felt that ultimately for sustainable development to truly happen, it should be driven by citizens directly and that it should happen at hyperlocal level. Essentially our argument is that for development to be sustainable, then citizens must be the custodians of the efforts and that governments, civil society and other stakeholders must take direction from the citizens. Public policy, we argue, is most sustainable when it is aligned to citizen needs and desires.

Global Goals for Local Impact programme

In September 2015, we embarked on a project in Lanet-Umoja location, together with Chief¹ Francis Kariuki (Famously known as the tweeting chief) to see how the Sustainable Development Goals could be achieved at hyperlocal level. The project involved the following primary steps:

1. **Training and Discovery:** Chief Kariuki works with about 300 community leaders who each represent about 25 households for security and development activity. We sensitized these community leaders on the Sustainable Development Goals and what the relevance of the goals are in their community. We also discussed data and its value to their development efforts. Once these conversations were concluded, the community leaders found that the most relevant SDGs to them were SDG 1: End Poverty, SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing, SDG 4: Quality Education, SDG 5: Gender Equality and SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation.
2. **Data Collection & Analysis:** having understood how data influences their development, we worked with the community to collect data on many aspects of their lives - what is effectively a household mini-census. The community went to each of the 20-25 households that they worked with and collected data from all households. The data covered food and agriculture, housing, water and sanitation, children and education, energy, security, livelihoods and youth among others. The data can be viewed on <http://datalocal.info/lanet>.

According to the Kenya Census (2009), Lanet Umoja had a population of 7,500 households. The most aggressive projections had it that the number of households in Lanet-Umoja were about

¹ A chief is a local administrator for a location, which is the smallest geographical administrative unit of the national government in Kenya. [Read more](#)

8,950 by 2016. When the data collection work was done, we found that there were over 12,000 households in Lanet Umoja.

Once the data was collected it was digitized and uploaded to the database and the community organised meet ups to analyse the data and to identify their needs and development priorities. In this process, they prioritized their development needs as follows:

1. Whereas they originally believed that their greatest need was water, they clarified for themselves that the actual need was clean drinking water. They found that every household had access to one of the communities boreholes and supplemented their water with trapped rainfall water. They found however that there was a high prevalence of waterborne diseases in the community.
2. There was a large population of older people who suffer from chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, etc. It was found that this group as well as women in need of maternal healthcare needed to travel about 1 hour to find the healthcare. The community prioritised having a health centre in the area as important.

As they worked through the analysis, they also identified the stakeholders that they would work with for the above challenges and resolved to do the following:

- First, they resolved to deal with water and sanitation in the area schools by cleaning up the school toilets and ensuring that the children had water to wash their hands regularly. This they did working with the school committees for the affected schools.
- They engaged with a local NGO who fundraised from their donors and issued every household with a water filter
- They engaged the government and made a formal request for a medical facility to be built in their community. Based on the formality of their strong application and the fact that it was data driven, the county government felt it was politically compelling for them to make the investment. (Watch the full story: <https://youtu.be/4CPkzkbJBhQ>)

Scale up: failing forward fast

Following our success in Lanet Umoja, we turned to the wider Nakuru North sub-county in an attempt to replicate the activities in 5 other locations. We worked together with the Deputy County Commissioner, Nakuru North, Kisilu Mutua and the chiefs of Mereroni, Githioro, Kirima, Dundori and Bahati. In each of these locations we went through the first stage of our process as described above with few hiccups. The

citizens were engaged and in some of the locations we have very young people, participating. (See citizen views: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYehMI_AN_E&t=3s)

We however faced challenges during the data collection exercise in almost all of the locations:

- **Cohesion:** In one of the locations, Mereroni, there was found to be a lack of quorum of the community leaders when the time of data collection came. Upon investigating further, we found that the community leaders did not have a good rapport with their chief and that hampered the “good faith” endeavour that would need to be there. Many said that they would only work with him if they were to be paid. Because of this, we found that the chief did not have the kind of mobilising power that was evident in other administrators in other areas.
- **Money and Politics:** In at least two locations, the work was interfered with because of the political campaigns that were gaining momentum. At the beginning of the community meetings, in which the trainings were happening, a few minutes were given to the prospective candidates for local representative (member of the County Assembly) and the Member of Parliament, for them to make remarks relating to the campaigns. The politicians would then make promises to the people that they would give them “something small” as they did the onerous work of collecting data. As a result, they started to compete with each other as to who would promise the best gifts for the data collection exercise.

The end result is that the data collection exercise was marred with hastily and improperly filled survey forms. As people turned the forms in, we found various problems that ranged from whole sections not being filled, crucial information being improperly filled and many instances where there was duplicate information submitted for one household (to increase amount of money paid).

- **Timing is everything:** We learnt that during the implementation of the activities, we must continually pay attention to the activities that the community considers important. We also learnt that it is important to have shorter bursts of activity with some breaks to ensure that the community retains focus. In this learning, we understand now that it is better for the purposes to break the activities down to small milestones over small periods of time. One thing that we had not anticipated is the level of citizen activity at the elections. What we found in these past elections, is that the communities in Nakuru fell on one side of the political divide and they felt their candidate was threatened. They therefore mobilised heavily even before the elections to shore up support for their presidential candidate. This moved their collective mind away from

development priorities to politics. In some of the farming communities we found that we lost them for a while as they focused and dealt with the army worm scourge that threatened to decimate their maize crop.

The ideal structure for data driven citizen engagement in Kenya (using our model)

As we have continued to work together with Kenyan communities in these experiences, we have tried to learn what a suitable structure for data driven citizen projects at subnational level. In principle, we have understood that the structure that a community adopts largely depends on the community.

That said, from the perspective of working with government - both national and county, we have learnt that the government driven Nyumba Kumi initiative structure at subnational level can be a very effective mechanism for organising the community in an environment of trust for development and improving security.

The Nyumba Kumi (10 homes) initiative was started by the national government as a response to a spate of terrorism that Kenya experienced in the first 12 years or so of this century. The idea was to elicit citizens' participation in improving security - in particular by making sure they know their neighbours. Over time, the initiative was expanded to a citizen driven development mechanism that would enable citizens to work together to solve local and immediate problems in their neighbourhoods, while interacting closely with the government through local administration officials and with the police.

According to the Nyumba Kumi Initiative blueprint document, the communities at location level are encouraged to establish themselves in clusters of households (approx 30 households per cluster) that appoint a representative. This representative would then interface with their assistant chief at sub-location level on matters that range from community policing and conflict resolution to finding development solutions for their areas. These representatives are referred to as cluster leaders or community leaders.

Why community leaders/village elders are crucial to this process in Kenya.

We have found these community leaders to be the best partners to achieving the goals of the Global Goals at local level. It is our view and experience that where their collective will and commitment is well harnessed, they are able to drive the community development agenda, while mobilising the community at household level. Their roles as they have defined them in practice include:

- Listening to the households that they represent and sharing those views and needs to the assistant chiefs' *barazas*² (a regular meeting that is held at community level to discuss issues of

² Baraza is a local meeting of leaders organised by the chief of the location, as a means to strengthen governance in the area.

development and security). These views are also taken, where needed to the chief's office and channeled onwards to any other government department that may be needed.

- Community leaders are sent by the local government administrators to the households that they represent with messages and instructions from the government.
- Where data collection is concerned, we have found that the community leaders are best placed to collect data from every household in the location, given their proximity to the respondents and the fact that the community members chose them directly. They happen to be well placed to know whether the data they are collecting is factual credible. Given their role as the chief's assistants (sort of like the Sheriff's deputy in American Wild West movies), they have the citizen's trust and credibility. They also are in a unique position to speak on behalf of their communities to the county and national government officials.

In our experience, we have found that where there is a good working relationship between the chief and the community leaders, there tends to be good momentum of development and security measures are considerably stronger. For data, we have found that there is greater uptake in the communities where the chief and community leaders work closely and meet frequently.

Opportunities can be exploited

In engaging with the national and county governments, we have learnt that their participatory budgeting efforts have suffered from lack of participation by citizens, who seldom come to the meetings. We learnt that the reasons for this lack of participation include:

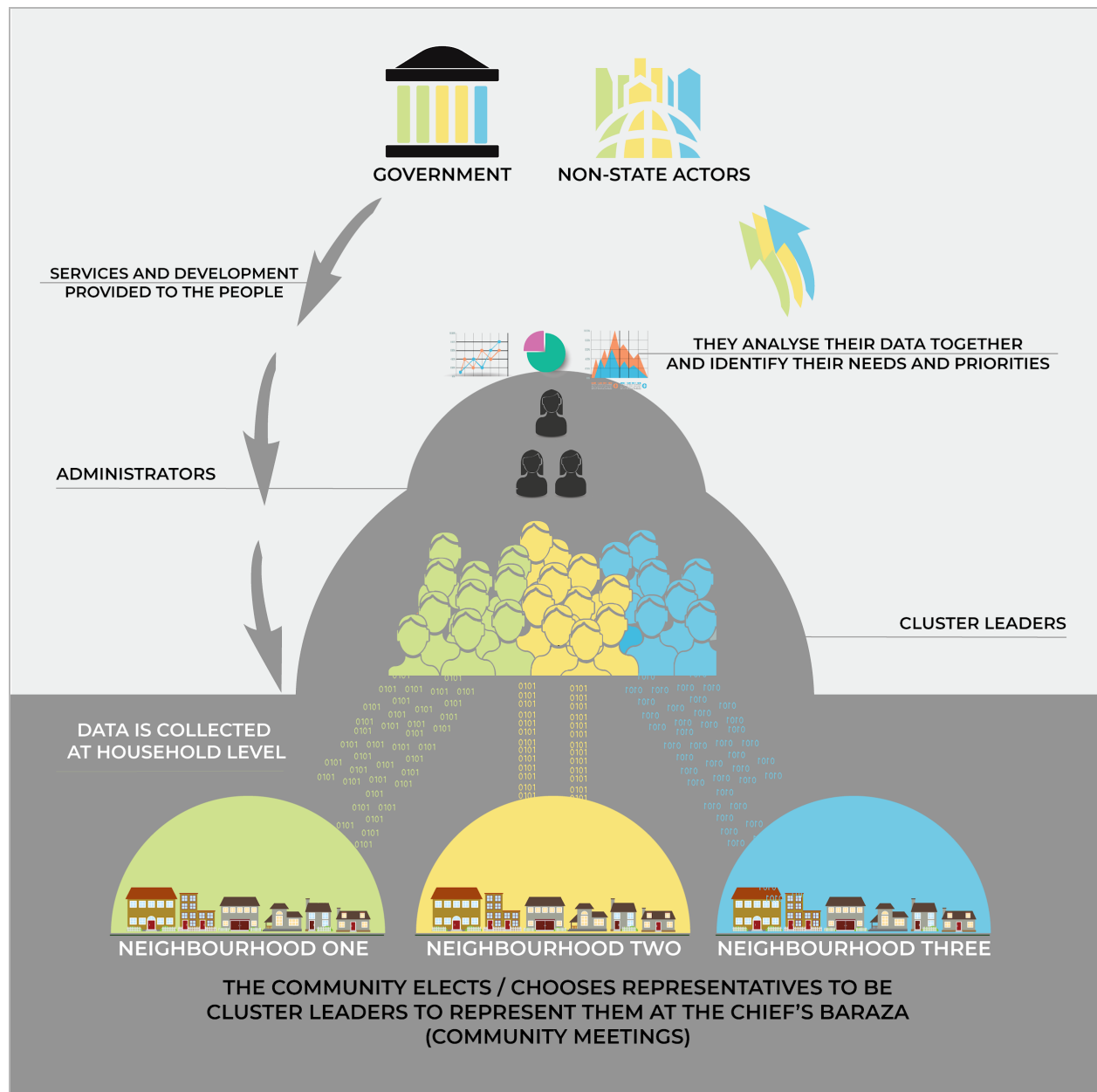
- **Improved citizen mobilisation for counties.** Most county governments simply follow the law and place an advertisement in the newspaper. The challenge with this is that on a very good day for newspapers, their circulation tops out at 450,000 copies nationally. Most citizens do not get to read.

There is an opportunity identified in some of the counties that we work in where the county government works closely with the local administration officials (County Commissioners and Chiefs), who are national government staff, to organise their communities in the Nyumba Kumi initiative and to then make use of that structure for better citizen mobilisation.

- **Better data for service delivery.** We identified the opportunity that as the community leaders develop the capacity to collect household data, the county government and the national government are able to access the relevant data that can help them to make better quality decisions for development. More importantly, the structure of working with the community leaders would improve the listening mechanism of the county and national governments for purposes of budget and policy making.
- **Community Information System.** Learning from the Ugandan Bureau of Statistics, there is an opportunity in Kenya to implement an improved evidence-based decision making system that provides the government, not only with the statistics that it normally collects but also data on citizens needs and priorities.
- **Strengthened intergovernmental relations.** Since the advent of devolution in Kenya in 2013, there has been general creative tensions between the national government during the teething phase as the two levels of government learnt to work together. As county governments work closely with national government offices - the administrators, the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and others, bolstered by citizens, we believe that coordination of development activities would significantly improve as the creative tensions that have been experienced in many localities subside.

Organising the community

To exploit these opportunities, we hypothesise that organising the communities at hyperlocal level is a crucial exercise for implementing data driven projects and for enhancing citizen voices in governance. It is our considered belief that this organisation would have to start at the households level in neighbourhoods, and percolate upwards through sublocations and locations and the outwards to national and county governments as well as to relevant Non-State Actors (NSAs) who could work with the community.



INFOGRAPHIC 1: THE COMMUNITY DRIVEN SUBNATIONAL DATA REVOLUTION

Key Considerations

There are a number of key considerations that we found are necessary to make during the implementation of a data driven project at hyperlocal level:

1. **Motivation for sustainability:** “What is in it for me” is a common question in many community driven activities. To be a community leader is often a voluntary function that demands quite a bit of commitment from the leader in terms of time and often resources. How the specific community leader benefits from this sacrifice (aside from the communal benefit of a better society). In one location, the chief there and a non-state actor who was helping the community to collect data paid the community leaders a nominal amount per household they collected data from. As we described above, we had politicians in yet another location commit to paying the community leaders for collecting data. We quickly understood that this was a mistake as it was unsustainable. The purity of the voluntary spirit would be crucial for them to maintain if the data driven development projects are to be sustainable.

Based on this, we felt that a different personal motivation mechanism would need to be tested and adopted. We chose to ensure that the community leader position, while voluntary, would have prestige attached to it. This is akin to the community leaders in the old days

2. **Like-mindedness at clustering:** It is important to evaluate the community’s synchrony in matters of development. Communities that share similar issues tend to work together better. In one of the communities, we found that the socio-economic disparity of the residents caused them not to gel and work together very well - even though they were in the same cluster. The solution that was found in that situation was to segment them to two separate clusters and then there was movement and better understanding.
3. **The benefit of having a local administrator as a focal point.** Different localities globally have different public servants serving the public at hyperlocal level. In Kenya, we have two - the Chief (national government civil service official, representing the president at the location level) and the Ward Representative (an elected politician who is the Member of the County Assembly). While the ward representative is a politician who has to seek re-election, the chief is a civil servant who is appointed to the position and who tends to remain in that position often for decades. Because citizen generated data is produced on the basis of trust, having the chief as the focal point is one of the contributors of enhancing trust - he lives in the community and he represents the government.

Going forward: Actualising the organised community at location level

We are working with the Nakuru North sub-county,, with the leadership of the Deputy County Commissioner (DCC) there, Mr. Kisilu Mutua as well as his six assistant County Commissioners and twelve chiefs to organise the communities of the 12 locations for data-driven development. What we are aiming for is to develop the enabling environment for a data driven approach to development such as the Global Goals for Local Impact programme.

The current population estimates have it that there are approximately 83,300 households. Based on these estimates, we anticipate that there are likely to be more than 2500 community leaders each representing approximately 30 or so households.

Together with the DCC and his team, and in keeping with the Nyumba Kumi policy, we have designed a programme of activities that we feel confident will lead to having a sustainably organised community - not just for data driven development work in the locations but also to work better with the chiefs to improve security and improve their lives. At the end of this process, we expect that there shall be a more consistent and easier route for government to engage with citizens and for citizens to amplify their voices on their needs.

The process that we are implementing is derived from the lessons that we learnt - first, working with Chief Francis Kariuki (famously the tweeting chief) and his well organised community, which we contrasted with some of the other communities that we worked with. Secondly, we took lessons from the Nyumba Kumi Initiative blueprint. It is a three step process:-

- 1. Segment locations to clusters.** The 28 assistant chiefs are going to work with their communities at sublocation level to identify the appropriate clusters of households and to identify the potential leaders of these clusters. Each cluster will be encouraged to identify three people who are willing and can be good representatives of their cluster.
- 2. Training on Nyumba Kumi and how to be a good cluster leader.** The DCC himself accompanied by the Assistant County Commissioner of the area and the chief of the location, will meet the nominees in each of the 12 locations and train them on what Nyumba Kumi is and is not, what the responsibilities of a cluster leader are and expose them to the government departments that they would be dealing with regularly - these include, the Police, the Children's Officer and The Agriculture Officer, etc. The DCC would emphasise that:

- a. Being a cluster leader is a voluntary position that will demand much time
 - b. That it is a position of responsibility and would require much commitment from them
 - c. That there is a code of conduct (which we have developed) that each cluster leader will commit to adhere to.
- 3. Formal Commissioning of the cluster leaders.** Once each of the cluster leaders have expressed willingness and they have been ratified (again) by their communities in a baraza at sub-location level, the DCC will organise a public ceremony at which each cluster leader will be awarded a badge, which they will use as a mark of their prestigious service. It will give them such perks as front row seat at public functions in the area, priority handling at local government offices etc.

What comes after?

The activities around this effort started in January 2018 and are ongoing in the locations. We expect the formal commissioning to happen sometime in March 2018. We shall then start working in those locations in which we failed forward to engage the leaders, collect data and work with them to advocate for their highest priorities.

Ends.