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PROVINCIAL

New urban reform project to offer hope to slum families



Kaptembwa slum in Nakuru is one of the areas targeted in the Municipal Programme to improve urban areas. Photo/JOSEPH KIHIERI

By EDDY NGETA
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IN SUMMARY

- About 25 per cent of Kenyans live in towns, many in congested areas

Stonemason Joseph Nyongesa and his family share a tiny bedsitter in one of the most densely populated urban areas in Rift Valley Province.

This family of eight is among 140,000 people in the sprawling Kaptembwa slums in Nakuru, sharing a toilet with a hundred other people in unsanitary conditions that pose grave health risks.

They are also among the millions of people the government is targeting in a countrywide municipal reform programme to uplift the living standards of the urban poor.

The government has published a national policy paper on municipal development ahead of a countrywide roll-out of the project dubbed the *Kenya Municipal Programme*.

The Environmental and Social Management Framework Report provides general policies and guidelines, codes of practice, and procedures for the management of environmental and social issues to be integrated into the implementation of the programme.

If it succeeds, the programme could offer hope to multitudes of urban poor, such as Mr Nyongesa and his family.

Impoverished

According to the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida), impoverished informal settlements house 30 to 55 per cent of urban populations. Of these, 94 per cent do not have access to proper sanitation.

Mr Nyongesa, 35, lives with his wife, Natalia, and six children aged between two and 12 years. Natalia sells fruits and vegetables in the neighbourhood while her husband works at a quarry.

“We take home combined earnings of Sh500 on a good day and just manage to get by, providing food and clothing for the children as well as the Sh700 rent,” says Mr Nyongesa.

The building which houses their living quarters, like many in the area, is made of mud and wattle, plastered with cement, and roofed with rusty iron sheets.

“We have to share toilets with a hundred other people. It’s unpleasant and dirty,” says Natalia, flicking flies away from the bunch of *sukuma wiki* (kale) she is shredding for a customer at her stall.

The Nyongesa children, like all the neighbourhood’s youngsters, attend an overcrowded public school nearby.

The motley of hovels and tin shanties that make up their neighbourhood squat together in unkempt rows.

Overcrowding is the catchword here. The National Coordinating Agency for Human Development in a 1999 survey lists Kaptembwa as more heavily populated than the whole of Molo town, which has 35,312 people, and Gilgil Division, with a population of 101,649.

With an estimated 137,317 people, the slum has a population density of 974 persons per square kilometre, compared to 599 and 96 for Molo and Gilgil

respectively.

Residents of Kaptembwa, Kwa Ronda, and Ponda Mali slums in southwestern Nakuru constitute more than 50 per cent of the town's population yet occupy less than 10 per cent of the total residential land.

Nakuru's population has in the past three years increased from about 500,000 to almost a million, presenting many infrastructural challenges in the town.

The Kenya Municipal Programme aims to overhaul crucial services such as health, sanitation, and transport. It will also seek to move the function of regional and urban development planning from the Ministry of Local Government to individual municipalities.

Security threat

The Rift Valley regional chairman of peace committees, Dr Solomon Wanguro, says the rapid growth of slums in Nakuru poses a security threat.

"Industries are slowly dying and the remaining ones cannot keep up with the increased population. Unemployment has gone up. Slums such as Kaptembwa and Ponda Mali are growing daily. This will result in rise in insecurity," he says.

According to municipal engineer Julius Mungai, Nakuru will be at the forefront of major changes planned for municipalities.

"Nakuru is a rapidly expanding town whose population growth is yet to be adequately factored into the overall planning objectives," says Mr Mungai. "We have just one fire engine serving the whole town."

Lack of planning, rural-urban migration, bad governance, and poor infrastructure have been singled out as contributing factors to poverty in urban areas.

There are 175 local authorities in the country; 67 county councils and 108 urban councils.

The Kenya Municipal Programme will address core issues that have curtailed "the development potential, efficiency, equity and competitiveness of Kenya's urban areas."

Government estimates say 25 per cent of people in the country live in urban areas. This figure is likely to shoot up to 32 per cent by 2012.

The World Bank-supported Kenya Municipal Programme will run in tandem with the Slum Upgrading Project and the Nairobi Metropolitan Services Project.

Two phases

The programme will operate in two phases, with the initial phase targeting 15 select municipalities, including the Nairobi City Council, to develop integrated urban investment projects.

However, only about four to six of the better performers will be eligible for large-scale finance and investment. Phase Two will build on the experiences, lessons, and achievements of the first phase.

The municipalities have been asked to choose three projects from a five-choice investments menu. The menu lists such options as motorised and non-motorised transport, fire safety, and building of bus parks, drainage, and sewerage systems.

Municipalities have already forwarded their proposed projects to the Ministry of Local Government for approval.

Among the municipalities chosen are Thika, Eldoret, Machakos, Nyeri, Naivasha, and Malindi.

Others include Embu, Kisii, Nakuru, Kakamega, Garissa, and Kericho, as well as Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu.

The goals of the Kenya Municipal Programme are linked to medium and long term strategies outlined in the Vision 2030 initiative.