ACTIVITY 1: DOCUMENTING THE EFFECTS OF FLOODS IN KIBERA

April and May are months experience heavy rains in Kenya, which give the vulnerable urban poor in Kenya slums sleepless nights. We took our time to document the struggle and hardship to cope with flooding in Kibera during this period. About sixty per cent of Nairobi residents live in informal settlements (slums). Most of the settlements are located along the river valleys which are largely outside gazetted areas. Many of these areas are prone to environmental risks such floods, fires and other environmental challenges. While it is generally difficult to govern some of the forces that contribute to environmental risks such as earthquakes, some of the factors that contribute to environmental risk can be managed, thereby reducing environmental risks and vulnerabilities.

In Nairobi, environmental risks and vulnerabilities such as floods in the city are the result of poor management of the watershed from where the rivers that supply the city with water emanate. Over the years, deforestation of East Arbadare ranges, poor farming practices and neglect of water and soil conservation measures have contributed to the intensity of flash floods that eventually flood the city of Nairobi during rainy seasons or lead to serious water rationing during the dry seasons. Looking at the picture above, “people especially women and children who are more vulnerable” move their possessions to higher grounds, hence the loss of many belongings and sometimes loss of life. The challenges faced are experiences of many people living close to the Mbagathi and Ngong rivers that pass through the Kibera Slums.

Currently no one knows precisely how many of the more than 200,000 residents of Kibera are exposed to environmental risks and vulnerabilities. Without this information, it is difficult to even initiate programs that helps the residents mitigate the effects of environmental risks and vulnerabilities facing low income neighbourhoods such as Kibera. Although the government has put in place disaster management committees at the national and district levels, these structures have not been cascaded to the lower neighbourhood levels.

A number of civil society organizations have moved to Kibera to assist people in coping with the challenges of floods. Many organizations come during the time of floods and their efforts are not coordinated. Therefore with the right documentation of the challenges, probably the future adaptation and coping with the challenges of climate change lies in empowering local communities to respond to and organize communities to put in place local institutional frameworks that can prepare urban residents to cope with environmental risks and vulnerability in African cities. We hope to share the findings with the relevant city policy makers and government ministries in charge of disaster management.
ACTIVITY 2. DATA COLLECTION AND COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

We have been working with the Urban Planning class of the University of Nairobi, supervised by prof Ndegwa, in Kibera as a way of moving our project forward. We have made good progress. We have had extensive discussions on the ground with stakeholders including women's groups, community leaders, slum structure owners and youth groups. Students are now analyzing data, after which we shall take the work back to the community for enrichment and validation. Afterwards, together with the community and Nairobi University, we hope to make a model of the Silanga neighbourhood as it is today and as the community hopes/dreams it will be in the future.

The community is looking forward to using the output from this work in preparing community-based action projects for marketing their village to potential well-wishers.

Data collection was focused on:

a) Local ecological and political knowledge of vulnerable groups
b) Mapping links and networks between civil society groups, local and central government
c) Identifying areas needing awareness programs for civil society organizations

Natural events in an increasingly stressed environment

Climate change threatens to:
1. Increase vulnerability
2. Destroy economic gains
3. Hinder social and economic development

Urban poor will bear the brunt of the effects since they live and work in informal settlements that are more exposed to hazards. Currently, urban growth in cities is at the highest risk from the extreme weather events that climate change is bringing, increasing exposure of people and assets. Exposure to risk is not the same as vulnerability.

Adaptation

Adaptive capacity to manage threats is important. If people are highly exposed and have low levels of adaptive capacity, they are very vulnerable. For exposed and vulnerable communities, even non-extreme weather and climate events can have extreme impacts. Reducing the effects of climate change now is important, rather than focusing on anticipating specific hazards. Cities unable to deal with the challenges of today will be unable to deal with the new climate challenges of the future.

Support efforts to strengthen urban resilience

- Take a broader integrated approach addressing both current and future development needs
- Meet the needs of the urban poor
- Increase the adaptive capacity of the urban communities
- Prioritize local planning for adaptation and disaster risk reduction
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- Need to be embedded within the city's institutional and organizational framework

Challenges when working in urban settings

- Community cohesion is often lower in towns
- People (especially the poor) move around much more frequently.
- Difficult to maintain contact with the same group of people over a significant period of time
- Nature of urban life results in a lower sense of collectively than that found in rural areas
- The lack of common interest and mutual help between people can also make it difficult to initiate action.

ACTIVITY 3: TREE PLANTING AROUND THE KIBERA SILANGA SPORTS FIELD AND A RECREATIONAL OPEN SPACE NEAR NAIROBI AND ALONG THE MBAGATHI RIVER.

In March this year we planted more than 500 seedlings (trees) around the Silanga sports field and along the Mbagathi river. We did it together with students from various universities in Korea (60 students) who were coming for our annual Climb, UNEP Nairobi office. Pupils from the school near the sports field are now maintaining the trees. Some seedlings where donated by the City Council of Nairobi, Environmental Department, community leaders, area provincial administration (area chief) and youth group representatives.

CURRENT AND FUTURE PLANS

1. Mapping links and networks between civil society groups, central and local government and NGO’S working in the area of climate change and water governance in Kenya
2. Planning and organizing for a two day community dissemination forum on climate change adaptation
3. Nairobi workshop with other NGO's and Government officers
4. Training civil society groups and NGO's on monitoring and evaluation procedures
5. Disseminating the projects results online and at conferences (Nairobi team)