Community Mobilization, Organization, Representation and Coordination Strategy

An indispensable practice at the center of participatory, inclusive and locally led upgrading for climate resilience, the community organizational model defines how residents mobilize, coordinate and communicate among themselves and how they interact with their government, civil society and other partners.

Who

Most useful for:

❏ Local Champions
❏ Residents
❏ CBOs
❏ Urban Poor Federations
❏ Federation-support NGOs

Also useful for:

❏ NGOs
❏ Academia
❏ Local Governments

What

The community organizational model is important to multiple phases of the upgrading process, including for political advocacy but in particular the planning and implementation phases as well as for maintenance of new infrastructure and services.

Residents select representatives among themselves using a community-defined process with the goal of engaging all residents in upgrading processes. Selected residents will represent their fellow residents in community planning forums, both receiving and disseminating information on the upgrading process. This ideally includes representation down to the household level.

For example, at its finest resolution, this could mean every household sending one representative to speak for them in a **cell** of ten households. Each cell in turn would then select a representative to speak for them in a **cluster** of up to 100 households. Each cluster would then select representatives to speak for them in community planning forums that could be held at the **segment** level (groupings of one to three neighborhoods). For community planning forums for more contentious issues like housing and roads that require more granular negotiations, "**superclusters**" of 10 clusters (about 1000 households) may be needed.

Each **cluster** should send representatives for each sector or thematic area being planned (e.g. water and sanitation, public health, etc). Residents and partners will need to determine what representation structure best works for them, not copy the example laid out here (see a diagram of this example representation model in How. For the purposes of this Guide, these terms will be used: cell, cluster and segment as well as supercluster).

This representation system can be used for several important activities, including:

- Mobilizing residents to participate in data collection and planning activities.
- Coordinating mobilization, educational and planning meetings.
- Discussing key challenges residents face, their relative priorities and residents preferred solutions.
- Forming and validating upgrading plans across sectors.
- Communicating about planning activities with local government.
- Communicating about plans with residents across the settlement.

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Why

Genuine CO-PLANNING by communities and local governments is enabled by community mobilization and organization initiatives. Unorganized, residents of informal settlements will not have the political power to negotiate with government nor the coordination required to collaboratively plan and upgrade their neighborhoods.

Mobilization and co-planning activities also provide opportunities for multiple other benefits, creating a new group of local change-makers and empowering residents, in particular women and youth who engage in mobilization efforts, data collection activities and horizontal learning exchanges with other communities. They also build new local expertise so that residents can plan for themselves instead of relying on outside 'experts'. The prominent role of mobilizers in the process can also strengthen their positions as local leaders, leading to new opportunities like political leadership or jobs with local or international NGOs.

See COMMUNITY CO-PLANNING for more.

Crafting a locally-grounded **community strategy** is crucial for co-planning. It can ensure the meaningful participation of, sustained engagement with, and ownership to the point of decision-making by residents. Along with building the political and social consciousness of residents and community-led data collection activities, the **community organization model** determines how much involvement and ownership residents will have over upgrading processes.

Whereas other organizing strategies like savings groups are not necessarily place-based, organizing residents geographically based on the location of households and scaling up to cells, clusters, etcetera, creates a system of local representation that favors residents. In particular, if most residents rent instead of own, this system will favor tenants to engage in crucial discussions and decision-making that affect their lives. However, it encourages other residents to participate as well, including small-scale structure owners, caretakers and even informal service providers. It can also serve to reduce the influence of outsiders like large-scale structure owners who live elsewhere and politicians and private investors.

Like many community organizing activities, the benefits are not limited to the obvious goal alone (or its outputs). Through the process, participants also get to know their neighbors. Working together builds greater mutual understanding and community cohesion as well as autonomy and organizational capacity.

Achieving scale in participation and broad community-based representation is also crucial for organizational resilience. Whereas a typical government-led participatory consultation process that does not build local capacities and ownership will live no longer than the current planning project, a community-owned process has a much better chance of navigating the

many obstacles of turning plans into reality, including political turnover in local and national governments, skepticism and fear from some community stakeholders (e.g. structure owners), residents moving in and out of the settlement, and evictions. A broad body of participation and ownership also reduces failure points, recruiting many hands to take up the work when some inevitably are pulled away by the many challenges residents face.

> **What I can tell people going to carry out the SPA is that they do it without fear and use the process which we used, involve their whole community and talk with one voice. If they speak in one voice, they'll have power; let them not be deceived and separated by those with money, but the common citizen to fully participate and speak with one voice.**

Mary Nyambura Community Mobilizer Wape Wape, Mukuru Kwa Njenga

This approach can also help meet constitutional or other legal requirements for public participation in planning.

Where

The process does not have to — and likely will not — happen neatly or all at once. It is typically an iterative, concentric process instead of a linear one. Residents will likely encounter greater resistance or fear to the process in some areas. So, it is best to start where there is less resistance to get the process underway and then spread out as possible to new areas.

When

This process can be done after or in parallel to community data collection activities.
Or really any time that it is possible to do it. It can take anywhere from six to 12 months. Ideally, it would be taken up after Settlement Mapping and Settlement Profiling and done concurrently with Household Numbering and Enumeration. This is because the concepts of the community organization model and the upgrading project itself can be introduced to residents while conducting the numbering and enumeration of households across the settlement.

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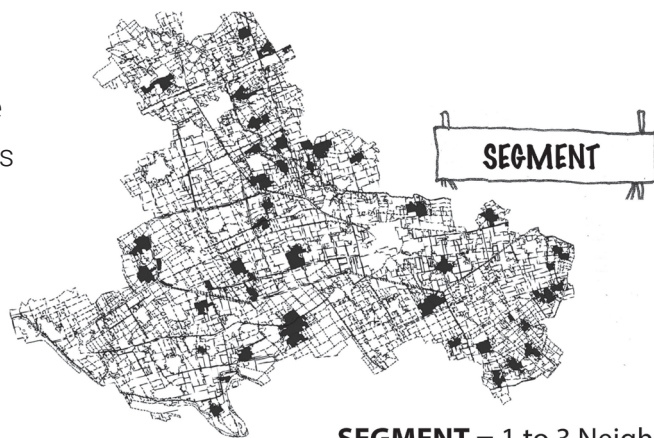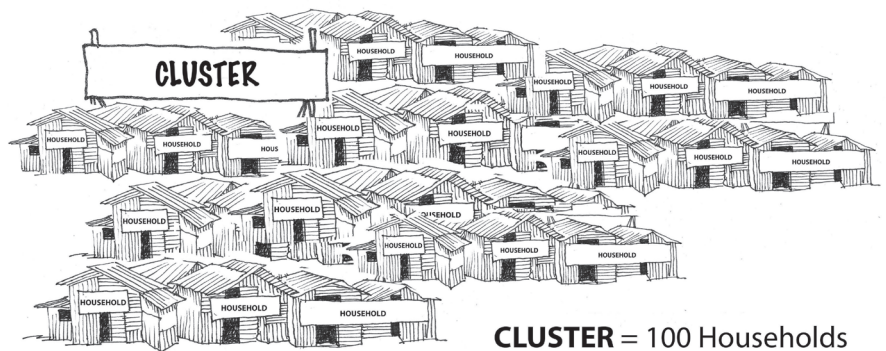
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How

Determine the Representation Structure

First, determine the granularity of representation – ideally, down to the household level but if this is not feasible, down to the cluster or another larger unit. Keep in mind that you do not want to reinvent the wheel — this is often an uphill battle so you need all the help you can get. Therefore, as much as possible, respect and build on existing geographical (e.g. neighborhoods) and leadership structures (e.g. elders, government subjuridictions, etc) as well as former or currently existing community organizations formed for specific projects (or around a certain agenda or set of goals). The structure that ultimately emerges will likely be a product of continuous, iterative discussions among residents and activists as well as local government, civil society, and university partners.

It is essential that participation be open to all residents independent of affiliation. The representation structure can build on and complement initiatives like savings groups. However, it must be independently formed to avoid any barriers to entry like committing to daily savings or repaying loans.
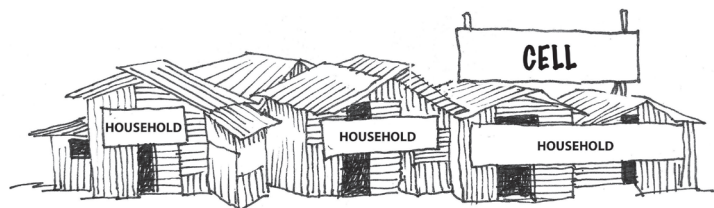

SEGMENT = 1 to 3 Neighbourhoods

Here is a useful model to start with. The names used, sizes of each level, and how many levels you end up using will likely be different; what is important to understand is how these different levels nest within each other to create multiple scales of representation to aid community-led planning efforts and communication throughout upgrading processes. This model, drawn from the Mukuru SPA experience, forms households into groups of ten called **cells** (plots often contain 10 rooms in Mukuru (see page 2); if, say, 8 or

CLUSTER = 100 Households

CELL = 10 Households

12 rooms are most common in your settlement, consider having cells match that number of households instead). Each cell selects a member to represent them in their **cluster**, which is a group of ten cells (100 households). In turn, clusters select representatives to send to **segment** meetings. Form segments based on the largest neighborhood in the settlement to ensure roughly equal representation in planning forums. For example, in Mukuru (Nairobi, Kenya) the largest neighborhood was about 8000 households — mobilizers therefore defined a segment as about 8000 households and grouped other neighborhoods into segments of one to three neighborhoods to form areas of about 8000 households each.

For community planning forums for more contentious issues like housing and roads that require more granular negotiations, **superclusters** of 10 clusters (about 1000 households) may be needed.

Recruit and Train Community Mobilizers

Recruiting mobilizers is an essential step in scaling an organizational model. They know their communities best and, with training, quickly learn how to engage their fellow residents and persuade them to participate. Where possible, rely on leaders and residents with experience in mobilization and community engagement to form a core mobilizer team. In turn, they can help recruit more mobilizers, starting locally in their own cluster and then spreading out across segments. Mobilizers will be in charge of engaging residents and teaching them about the organization model and upcoming upgrading initiatives. The work simply cannot be done without them.

See Recruiting and Training Community Mobilizers and Co-Researchers for more detail.

Engage All Residents

Strive to do household-level engagement to avoid capture by any one group — participation should be representative across gender, age, ethnicity, and livelihood. In particular for upgrading processes, it is crucial that it is inclusive of tenants, structure owners, informal service providers, and other special interests. Not only would barring their entry be exclusionary, it will very likely create conflict whereas patient, sustained engagement of these groups can turn possible adversaries into crucial allies.

Introduce the Model

It can first be introduced to residents via data collection activities. Visits to households for Household Numbering and Enumeration can double as awareness campaigns. It can also be introduced in any community meetings being held for other initiatives taking place in the settlement as well.

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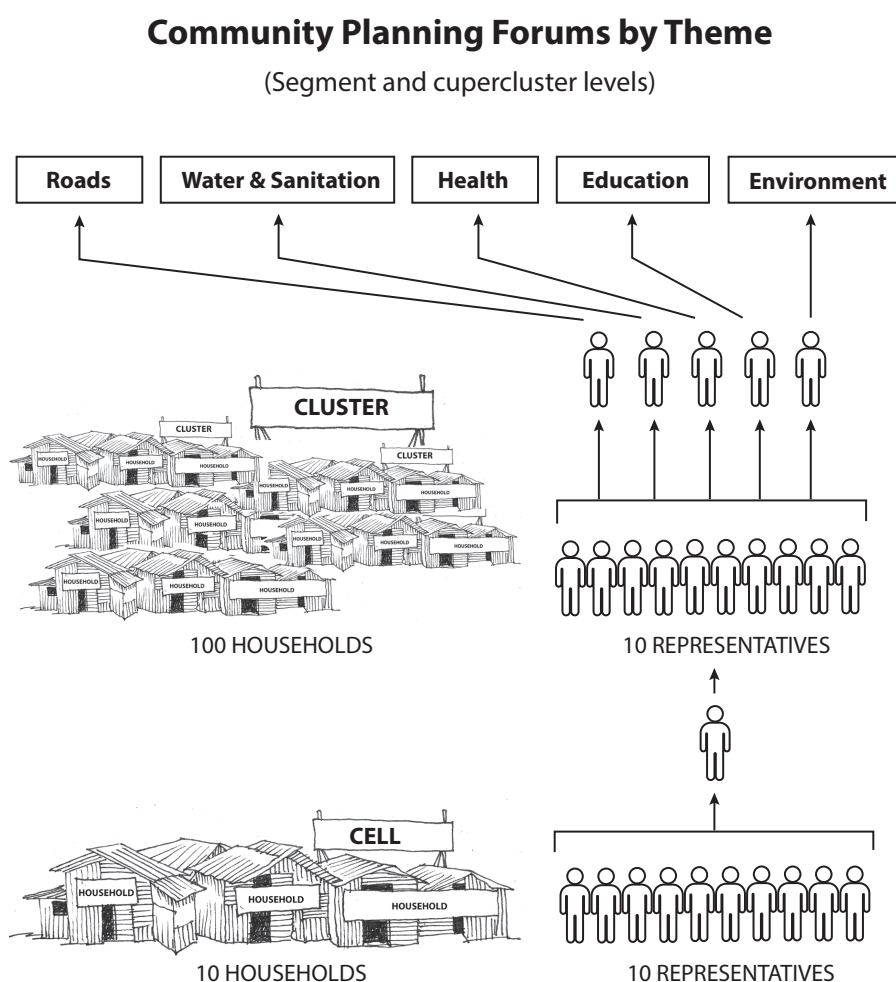## Select Representatives to Form Cells, Clusters and Segments

There is no formula for selecting representatives for each level — the process used will emerge through ongoing discussions among stakeholders. Methods for community decision-making are highly context specific and often deeply embedded in local culture. Be pragmatic and accept that it will be an imperfect process. Do the best you can.

Community mobilizers will identify plots and individual households to group into **cells**. They should inform residents about the the upgrading initiative and what it hopes to achieve for them (both in terms of services and local capacities). They should then ask households to select one person to represent them in cell meetings.

Community mobilizers can then begin to form **clusters** of 10 cells (100 households). In a cell meeting, ask members to select one person to represent them in cluster meetings. At this point, mobilizers should start holding cluster meetings to begin discussing residents' issues and priorities.

In a cluster meeting, ask members to select from among themselves who will represent them at **segment** meetings (one to three areas/neighborhoods). Segment meetings should be held by sector/theme (e.g. water and sanitation or health). Each cluster should select one representative per theme (so if there are five themes, they would select five representatives).

Finally, for contentious issues like roads and housing that may require greater negotiation of scarce space, cluster members should select a representative to send to **superclusters** meetings (10 clusters; about 1000 households).

Community Planning Forums by Theme

(Segment and cupercluster levels)

| Roads | Water & Sanitation | Health | Education | Environment |

CLUSTER

100 HOUSEHOLDS

10 REPRESENTATIVES

CELL

10 HOUSEHOLDS

10 REPRESENTATIVES

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Convene Stakeholder Forums

Encourage residents to use clusters to hold regular forums to discuss opportunities and challenges — it can help move beyond simple community mobilization (to provide input to outsiders leading the process) to community organization (the autonomous capacity to act collectively to lead processes). Meetings at higher levels can be used as forums to inform residents about research findings from settlement profiling and situational analyses of existing conditions prior to beginning the planning process so that they arrive at meetings informed. Make sure that key representatives are present (e.g. elders, leaders of community, youth and religious organizations, etc). In turn, residents can discuss the validity of research findings and enrich them with their perspectives.


Determine the Consultation Plan

The organization model, as discussed, can serve multiple purposes and provide several co-benefits. Its main purpose, however, is to mobilize and organize residents for co-planning consultation forums with local government and civil society partners. The plan for consultations will be the product of ongoing dialogue between all stakeholders.

A key question is at what level to hold meetings — depending on the theme/sector being planned, this will likely happen at either the segment or supercluster levels. For many sectors like health, education, and water and sanitation, segment-level forums will be sufficient and holding meetings at smaller levels would be both costly and likely produce a lot of repetition — issues in these sectors typically do not vary greatly within a single settlement. However, for housing and road infrastructure, it is likely important to hold more localized forums at the supercluster to negotiate for space which is highly valuable to residents, in particular structure owners. Planning for roads and housing requires navigating contentious space challenges — making way for roads in most cases requires targeted demolitions of existing structures and displacement of some residents. Small-scale structure owners will also likely have many doubts and fears about losing their livelihoods and therefore require more attention.

A default consultation pattern to start with could look like this:

1. **Pre-consultation.** Inform and educate residents about the upgrading process and research findings. This is also an opportunity to engage residents in exercises to assess challenges and opportunities, weigh priorities and propose solutions. Likely held at the segment level.


CHALLENGES   OPPORTUNITIES
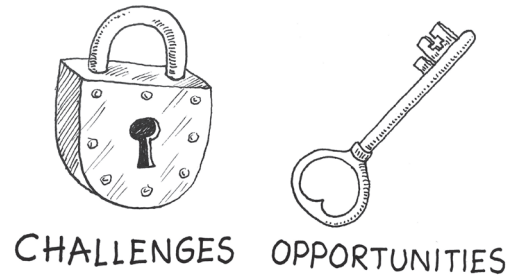
2. **Planning.** Residents to discuss and validate sector briefs or situation analysis reports created by local government planning consortia as well as identify additional needs, challenges and aspirations to inform subsequent sector plans.

3. **Feedback.** Residents to provide feedback and validation of draft sector plans. Planning consortia to incorporate feedback into plans.

4. **Validation.** Residents to validate final sector plans. Consortia to incorporate any final feedback from residents. If tight on time and resources, this consultation can be done at the same time as receiving feedback on draft sector plans.

Once community validation is complete and the final plan adjusted and polished, it can be ratified by the local or national government.

Keep Residents Updated

In addition to providing representation in planning forums, the organization model is also an effective communication system — for example, representatives at the segment level return to their clusters to update members on discussions, activities and decisions. Cluster representatives in turn update cell members who carry news to their households. Representatives at each level should also engage residents in ongoing discussions throughout the upgrading process to solicit feedback and ideas to carry up through the representative levels so that information, input and even decision making flow up as well as down.
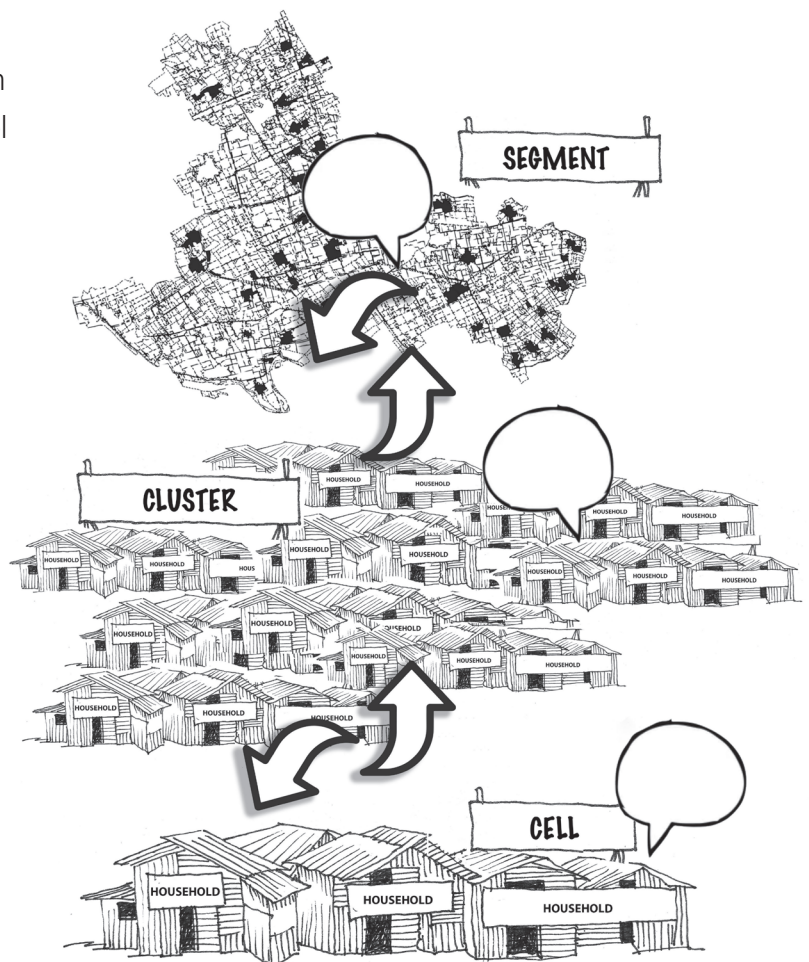
Considerations

Will this model work in our location?

It may not. Instead of trying to replicate its details, you may need to focus on its core tenets of providing representation and engaging all residents, organizing residents to plan for themselves and actively communicating throughout upgrading processes. What approach you ultimately take could look very different — the how is much less important than the what and the why.

What are the most important factors in determining the right model or approach?

The size of the settlement and its geographic pattern as well as local cultural practices around organizing and dialogue. The example model used here was the product of much trial and error in Mukuru — the number of households for each level, number of levels, methods for convening forums and engaging in dialogue and negotiations will all be specific to your context. The laws in your country will also shape the model that ultimately works best.

How should we manage setbacks and conflict?

Setbacks will occur more often than not. Conflict is inevitable. Expect both — it will not be a smooth process. Patiently continue to engage all stakeholders. Approach disagreements constructively, making space for all sides to speak. Where possible, resolve misconceptions by patiently correcting misinformation and clearly and repeatedly articulating the core message — *improved services benefit everyone*. Also make sure to focus on the benefits to specific community stakeholders as they can be different for tenants, structure owners, informal service providers, etc.

Should we pay representatives, mobilizers and co-researchers?

Remuneration can limit how large a population you can reach as it can be expensive. The large financial resource this could require could impede scaling participation. It could also distort incentives for participating, shifting the focus from residents working together to plan and negotiate for upgrading to residents vying among each other for paid positions. Voluntary participation can help align incentives with the larger upgrading agenda of improved services. That said, if possible, you should provide limited compensation for organizing activities so costs like phone calls and time spent visiting households and attending meetings does not fall entirely on mobilizers and representatives.

Should we collect personal information like id and phone numbers?

If possible, phone numbers are valuable for mobilizing and communicating with residents. They can be used in a phone tree or by individual mobilizers and representatives to convene residents for meetings and other activities as well as communicating updates throughout the process. That said, residents may be distrustful and refuse to share phone numbers or provide fake numbers. That is ok, it should not impede the process too much. It is likely residents will be distrustful of sharing ID numbers.

Challenges

Residents' Lack of Awareness

> ❝ I think the challenges we got at that time is that the residents didn't have the knowledge; they did not understand what it was and that's why they were bringing chaos in meetings. But when we sat down and explained, it necessitated that we go from door-to-door so we can explain to them the advantage of this thing. They later on came to understand, what was on their minds was that their village was being finished, but they came to understand and we explained to them the benefits of SPA and the life we would live as compared to the life we were having that time and even now we are living, but they later came to understand. It was just lack of knowledge. ❞

Veronica Nthenya Mutiso Structure Owner – Vietnam, Mukuru Kwa Njenga (Nairobi, Kenya)

> ❝ At first I did not understand it well and the time I got the trainings bit by bit I completely understood its importance. I was able to get views from [...] my fellow tenants. [...] their views are the most important in improving our area. Saying that their views are important made them happy and were able to contribute in saying what they need and what they do not need because at first they were taking it as negative. Maybe it's the doubts of what people have come to do in their plot. Later on they came to realize that their views are what contribute a lot in improving our area, and from there work became easier and we started collaborating. ❞

Dominic Mulinge Tenant – Vietnam, Mukuru Kwa Njenga (Nairobi, Kenya)

Conflicting Interests and Misinformation

Perhaps the biggest challenge you will face is mobilizing all community stakeholders that will likely have conflicting interests. Structure owners, for example, may think you are coming to steal their plot and informal service providers may see better access to services as a threat to their business and question your motives. Strive to explain yourself clearly, stay on message about the benefits of upgrading for everyone (not just tenants) and include all residents. Patiently engage residents to combat misinformation and turn potential adversaries like structure owners and informal service providers into allies by including them.

> ❝ I as a mobilizer and I know even the other mobilizers encountered challenges, when we went on the side of structure, the people who attacked us most were the landlords. They said that we wanted them to lose their houses. [They] would follow us even in our houses, saying that we are contributing to them losing their houses. Same applied with water and also electricity. But because they knew that we are residents of the area and we have brought many developments in the area that is what saved us. We went through a lot of challenges but through explaining to them, we say information is power; when we gave information it saved us. ❞

Mary Nyambura Community Mobilizer Wape Wape, Mukuru Kwa Njenga

> **We were called for the first SPA meeting on matters concerning electricity. Most of us feared because we did not know what we were going to do there, maybe we could go there, you do some research and give us out to the government, so we had fear, but when it was explained to us we understood what SPA matters meant and we accepted and we were in agreement.**

Joseph Odhiambo Informal Electricity Provider – Wape Wape, Mukuru Kwa Njenga (Nairobi, Kenya)

You can also combat misinformation by making common cause with residents; for example, if they fear evictions, make it clear that you would also be evicted.

> **So as a mobilizer I was convincing my people because I am also a tenant that if it is eviction, the government will carry us with our land where we have been dwelling for more than thirty years. So I was making efforts to convince them that if they will be evicted I will be the first person to be evicted so we held together and said our strength is our unity so nobody should tell us that we are going anywhere.**

Pastor Elizabeth Mijeni Community Mobilizer – Mukuru Kwa Reuben

You can also build trust in the process by demonstrating the local government's involvement; this may alleviate people's fears that this is land grab by opportunists looking to develop the land for their own profit. Convene meetings with the local administration officials in the settlement as well as with local government staff in their department's offices.

Providing Incorrect Information to Mobilizers

Residents distrustful of the process may provide incorrect information (for example, phone numbers). You can overcome this by patient engagement with all residents, inviting them to informational meetings. If possible, invite local government officials and other authority figures in the settlement so that residents can ask them questions themselves to begin trusting the upgrading process.

Examples from the Field

Mukuru, Nairobi (Kenya)

The model used in Mukuru, which this Guide is largely drawn from, was called Tujuane Tujengane (Kiswahili for '*Let's know each other, so we build each other*'). The community mobilization strategy was developed between 2015 and 2016 through ongoing discussions between community activists and the Muungano Alliance. It was also informed by national and county statutes.

The model leveraged the national government's 'Nyumba Kumi' anti-terrorism program which are made up of ten households; these formed the cells that were the foundation of the nesting, multi-level community representation structure. Ten cells (100 households) were grouped into neighborhood forums called *barazas* or sub-clusters (which in this guide are simply called clusters). The *barazas* were also intended to be formalized as official Neighborhood Associations but this was to be for implementation, not planning, which has yet to officially begin. Sub-clusters were grouped into clusters of about 1,400 households (called superclusters in this guide) and finally 13 segments of about 8000 households (also called segments in this guide). Segments covered about one to three villages (i.e. neighborhoods).

The model engaged all residents at the household level independent of any affiliations. It also allowed local government planning consortia to engage and interact with the community without having to go through potential gatekeeping mechanisms like the urban poor federation's community savings process.

The participation of leaders, mobilizers, representatives and co-researchers was voluntary. Initially, some small compensation was given for mobilizing activities but funding ran out quickly so those costs were largely borne by mobilizers themselves, demonstrating that the strategy can work on a purely voluntary basis.

> **SPA has taught us one thing as a community, it has taught us about skills that is communication skills, listening skills and teamwork. Because if you want to succeed in something, you can't succeed alone, you must be in a team and a team that is focused and understands each other.**

Emily Wanyama Community Mobilizer – Rurie, Mukuru Kwa Reuben

In total, 5,370 people participated in the cluster and segment-level community planning forums, representing about 100,000 total households (and over 400,000 people). A series of three planning forums were held for each of the five main sectors/themes — housing and road infrastructure at the cluster level (called supercluster in this guide) and the remaining four in ten of the 13 segments. The three meetings were:

1. A pre-consultation to inform residents about research findings.

2. A planning meeting based on briefs for each sector.

3. A final meeting to validate sectoral plans that were packaged together as the Mukuru Integrated Development Plan (MIDP).

> **"** Our work was to also give information. Because they also say information is power. It was to inform the community that there is SPA coming and it has been gazetted Mukuru as a Special Planning Area. Number two was also to do door-to-door campaigns to sensitize people that this thing is there and it involves us community members. So that was also our work. Number three was also to organize those home cells and educate them that SPA is coming and it will help in this and that in the community. **"**

James Musembi Community Mobilizer – Sinai, Mukuru Viwandani

The organization model has been used for multiple other complementary initiatives and recently, in July 2022, in the lead up to the Kenyan general elections, to create a People's Manifesto that outlines the MIDP and asks local candidates to publicly pledge support to its official ratification and comprehensive implementation. Many local candidates, including for Governor of Nairobi City County, have publicly signed the Manifesto, testament to the importance of community-led planning processes for upgrading. If the planning process had instead been undertaken using conventional means with outside consultants conducting 'participatory' planning consultations, it is likely that no such manifesto would exist today and that the Mukuru upgrading plan would be collecting dust in a government office with little chance of being fully implemented.

> **"** I used to mobilize people in the community and before we bring the people to meetings, we started forming home cells and every cell was of ten families and from the ten families, we came to make a baraza which was formed of a hundred families. And we could not just tell people this is a cell, we used to walk inside our settlement, tell the people we are bringing them together and educating them that we need a change and we do not want outsiders to come into our settlement and to tell us what we are supposed to do. We told them it is high time to stand and speak what kind of changes that we want. So I was mobilizing, I was bringing the community together forming those meetings and I was also working with the local government. **"**

Christine Mwelu Community Mobilizer – Lunga-Lunga Centre, Mukuru Viwandani

Related Components

Methods

- Recruiting and Training Community Mobilizers and Co-researchers

- Settlement Mapping

- Settlement Profiling

- Household Numbering and Enumeration

- Risk Profiling: Identifying Risks, Assessing Solutions and Determining Community Priorities

Sources

Coordination, Community Organisation and Communication consortium (2022). Focus group interview on 17 June. Mukuru SPA documentation 2022, Gracehouse Resort, Nairobi, Kenya.

Horn, P., Kimani, J., Makau, J., & Njoroge, P. (2020). *Scaling participation in informal settlement upgrading: A documentation of community mobilisation and consultation processes in the Mukuru Special Planning Area, Nairobi, Kenya*.