

Determining Roles

Locally-led, participatory and multisectoral upgrading at scale requires a broad array of roles, drawing leadership, sector knowledge and technical expertise from communities, local government and civil society as well as academia and the private sector. Building partnerships between historically adversarial parties and convening a broad array of organizations is needed to navigate local politics, overcome resource constraints and achieve genuine co-planning between communities and local government.



Who

Most useful for:

- Local Champions
- Local Governments
- Federation-support NGOs
- NGOs

Also useful for:

- Residents
- CBOs
- Academia
- Political Leaders
- Funders
- Urban Poor Federations

What

Upgrading informal settlements is as much a political process as a technical one. There is no formula or neat sequence – it is a complex process and highly subject to local dynamics. You will encounter many challenges and setbacks. Invest in people who can draw on their relationships, resources and creativity to convene the necessary leadership and expertise.

When starting out, the roles and the responsibilities of different stakeholders will not be clearly defined. Indeed, roles should not be predefined; they should instead evolve with the upgrading initiative, as it will be subject to highly local factors like existing networks, relationships, adversaries, available resources and expertise, and political will.

Strong leadership is essential. Leaders in local government know best how to navigate departments to recruit people and leverage resources. Civil society leaders can fill gaps, recruiting needed expertise and mobilizing resources when required. Community leaders know the settlement best and can spread awareness of the initiative and its goals, convince residents of its value, and mobilize them to participate.

A central champion and steward and central leadership team is crucial for holding all the partners together and keeping all the parts of the process moving towards the same goal. Planning is an inherently political process; leaders must articulate a compelling vision and cultivate alliances that will keep the process going through challenges and setbacks.

Assess who has the greatest expertise and will be best positioned to play different key roles throughout the process. This will be important for [Recruiting and Training Community Mobilizers and Co-Researchers](#) and [Forming Interdisciplinary Consortia](#). See [How](#) for more detail.

Why

Upgrading must be locally-led, both from within informal settlements and within local government. Communities know best what challenges they face and what appropriate interventions should include (and exclude). Short of meaningful inclusion and decision-making power, residents will mistrust, resist and even hinder the process. Local governments are obligated, and best positioned, to plan and develop crucial basic services for their citizens. Civil society provides the glue between communities and local government as well as needed expertise and resources for planning at scale. Partnerships between these parties are crucial; strive to build partnerships where the roles of each will complement and support the other.

In addition to convening many institutions and organizations to provide needed leadership, expertise and resources, partnerships are also important for building momentum and spreading out buy-in and responsibilities so that the process can survive inevitable setbacks and challenges

like changes of government and partners dropping out. It is also important not to rely on a single organization for community engagement; informal settlements residents often represent a diverse set of socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Engage with residents as broadly as possible through CBOs and locally-rooted NGOs to include a broad array of perspectives, interests and buy-in across these different groups. Additionally, leverage affiliations with groups in other settlements to learn from their experiences and to strengthen community strategies during the upgrading process.

Broad, inclusive partnerships across interdisciplinary networks create the synergies needed for urgently addressing infrastructure deficits and building climate resilience in informal settlements. Their ingredients cannot be decomposed into discrete pieces and moved from city-to-city. They must instead be locally-sourced to adequately leverage available leadership, expertise and resources.

Finally, because informal settlements are complex development environments, planning is political first and technical second. The required institutional capacities and resources will never be readily available – you must instead rely on dedicated people and the great things they are able to do when working together towards a common goal.



“ We learned from [the Mukuru Special Planning Area that] you don’t need to be perfect in your work. Planning is a process and at one point you need to be satisfied that you don’t have the most perfect processes at that particular time, and it is good enough, you can move on and continue. So, I think sometimes it’s good to be satisfied and not always [seek] perfection and of course continue improving on things as [you go]. But, you just need to be good enough to get to the next step. ”

Jane Weru Executive Director, Akiba Mashinani Trust (Nairobi, Kenya)

Personal communication, 17 June 2022.

Where

Developing an upgrading plan is a highly local process. Partners should be locally-based and offer local knowledge and expertise. It can also be useful to include regional and international players but they should play a supportive role for local institutions and processes, not a leadership role.

The process should also be community-rooted; plans should go beyond investments in infrastructure to cultivate leadership and decision-making power in informal settlements. This helps ensure locally-appropriate plans, better distribution of benefits and more enduring

partnerships between communities and local governments to continue building resilience after initial investments are made in the most urgently needed services.

When

Coordinating locally-led, multisectoral and participatory upgrading initiatives is not a neat or linear process. Determining roles and building partnerships will be an ongoing process. Invest early in thinking about what institutions and organizations are best suited to play different roles and how to enlist their support. Do your best to convene the right institutions, expertise and people to keep the many parts moving together. Continue to build relationships to support the process as it grows and to overcome ongoing challenges and setbacks.

How

Determine Key Roles and Responsibilities

Assess who has the greatest expertise and will be best positioned to play different key roles throughout the process. This will be important for [Recruiting and Training Community Mobilizers and Co-Researchers](#) and [Forming Interdisciplinary Consortia](#).

Key roles are discussed in the following sections.

Advocacy

Community organizers: An upgrading initiative will not emerge from a vacuum; communities must organize around key needs and threats before they will have the capacity to advocate for planning and development at scale. Activists and other organizers play a key role in building communal consciousness and awareness of issues and bringing residents together to find common cause.

Action researchers: Civil society and academia with expertise in action research methods collaboratively undertaken with communities are important for building an evidence base to advocate for upgrading.

Community co-researchers: Community leaders play an important role in action research for advocacy. They facilitate entry into the settlement where residents will likely be distrustful of outsiders and wary of researchers that come and go without producing any tangible benefits for them. They will also play an important role in recruiting and training additional co-researchers and community mobilizers in subsequent phases once there is commitment from government to undertake upgrading.

For more, see [NEGOTIATION AND ADVOCACY](#).

Central Leadership

Central leadership team: Likely comprised of local champions from government and civil society who are dedicated to the process and resourceful in the face of ambiguity and setbacks. The importance of this role cannot be overstated: this team must hold all the pieces of the puzzle together and keep all actors, and their competing interests, moving towards the same goal. Their leadership will be important for navigating political challenges throughout the process, from advocacy and inception to planning, implementation and iteration. Without a dedicated central leadership team, the process will be fallible to becoming overly technical and therefore will likely stall and even disintegrate when it inevitably encounters political hurdles and unforeseen challenges. Because upgrading is a highly political process, there is no technical formula; you must instead invest in people who can draw on their experience, leadership skills, relationships, resources and creativity.

Persuading potential government, civil society and academic partners will require dedicated local champions to steward the process. To start, this leadership team does not need to be formally organized. They should rely on their existing relationships to begin articulating a compelling vision and build momentum. This will be important for both identifying and convincing partners to join.

It is crucial to formulate a clear message of the benefits of the approach and consistently articulate a vision that captures the interests of different potential partners and presents compelling reasons for them to engage in an unknown and ambiguous process. In particular, they must clearly demonstrate the need for community participation and ownership in the process and the value of collaboration between community, government and civil society partners. Core responsibilities include:

- **Champion and steward:** Leaders must consistently champion the initiative and steward the process through its many challenges (such as navigating the inevitable turnover of local government staff and elected officials).
- **Envision and motivate:** Planning is an inherently political process not just a technical one. Leaders must articulate a compelling vision that motivates partners to join and stay engaged throughout the process.
- **Cultivate alliances:** Rely on leaders' knowledge and relationships to identify key players and build partnerships with local institutions, government departments, elected officials, civil society leaders and academics. Each will play important roles.
- **Recruit partners:** Determine what expertise and resources are needed and identify organizations that can provide them.
- **Coordinate partners:** Coordinate inter-consortia collaboration to harmonize sectoral plans. Organize inter-consortia meetings every few months during the planning period where consortia members can present their work and get input from other consortia.

- **Lead technical teams:** In some cases, these leaders will also lead technical teams in each sectoral consortium (or, at the least, help recruit technical leads for consortia).
- **Lobby:** Advocate for resources for planning and implementation, including pilot implementation projects. Lobby for ratification of the upgrading plan.
- **Communicate:** Share pertinent information about progress, opportunities and challenges with different teams and consortia that will be important for their work (and filter out any information that would complicate or confuse them).

Central champion and steward: While participatory upgrading at scale requires leadership across government, civil society and community, and partnerships are crucial to its success, even a central leadership team will at times need sustained leadership from one person who can own coordination of all the moving parts. This person should have deep experience working in the settlement and extensive relationships across government, civil society, academia and the private sector. Other leaders must know and trust her or him and s/he must be able to stay on message and consistently and tirelessly persuade different factions to stay true to their commitments and the goals of the process.

Constituency Leadership

Local government leaders: Leaders in local government know best how to navigate internal politics to manage staff and leverage resources. Their leadership also provides institutional legitimacy and access to public funding. Crucially, enlisting local government departments enables scaling of planning and development so that it goes beyond the small, piecemeal interventions typical of community and civil society projects.

Leadership from within departments is also important because staff and elected leaders who oversee departments can manage their own colleagues. And civil society can set aside its traditionally adversarial role for driving government action.

Local government leaders should also help lead technical, sectoral planning consortia. While they may not lead technical work, they need to champion the work of technical consortia members within internal government processes to ensure they have the time and resources required. They should also convene public meetings in the settlement to demonstrate to disbelieving residents that the upgrading initiative is an official government process.

Local elected and administrative leaders: A settlement can fall within multiple, overlapping jurisdictions [e.g. ward chiefs (national government); elected members of county assembly and county and subcounty administrators (local government)]. Because upgrading is a political process as much as it is a technical one, you must ensure they are aware of the initiative and its goals and secure their buy-in. They can help build greater trust in the process for residents. Their awareness and participation also helps deter their opposition to or even direct sabotage of the process.

Civil society leaders: Civil society leaders should help build a coalition across stakeholders from government, community, civil society, academia and the private sector. They can also fill gaps, recruiting needed expertise from civil society organizations and mobilizing resources when required. This leaves government free to focus on government while civil society leaders can focus on civil society and their traditional community and academic allies.

Community champions and stewards: Like other constituencies, communities also require central leadership to champion the initiative and steward the process through its many challenges. These will likely be residents with experience talking to fellow residents and working with civil society organizations and other external groups. They could be local elders, CBO leaders, leaders within grassroots social movements like urban poor federations, savings group leaders or any other resident with the capacity, experience and commitment to lead. The upgrading process will provide opportunities for new leadership within the settlement, in particular by those who have not traditionally held local positions of influence, including women, youth and disabled people.

These leaders should also provide oversight of the technical planning process by forming part of the consortia planning teams and working closely with partners.

Community

Community mobilizers and co-researchers: Central to a community's capacity to co-plan with local governments, mobilizers undertake data collection and mobilize other residents to participate in the planning process. More than anyone, they will champion the process through patient dialogue and the many negotiations required with diverse community stakeholders.

Mobilizers are important for ensuring household level participation and representation as they will recruit and train household representatives to participate in community planning forums. They also play an essential communication role, spreading awareness, answering questions, and combating misinformation. Using their local knowledge and the trust they have with their fellow residents, they start and guide dialogues among residents and patiently engage residents to overcome misunderstandings, resistance, fear and hostility. Finally, they facilitate the negotiation of scarce space and access to benefits by building community ownership throughout decision-making processes.

Mobilizers do not need to have prior experience engaging in settlement-level activities. Women and youth can make good candidates (they may be available at different times of the day to undertake data collection, especially those without permanent employment). To provide diverse representation, they should be selected considering residence location, gender, age, ethnicity and a proven commitment to the process.

Mobilizers can also foster horizontal and vertical accountability throughout the planning process by mediating community conflicts and misunderstandings and informing local officials of progress. This can serve to build new relationships between communities and government. It can also lead to mobilizers gaining trust and stature in their communities because of the confidence the training and mobilization processes give them to speak out and lead. For some, it may even lead to new opportunities like jobs with NGOs and even potential nominations as political leaders.

“ I as a mobilizer I was used to mobilize those participants as she has said because we have seen what the problem is and who is involved with water, education and who is also involved with the houses also, so we came together and talked, we encouraged each other that we must walk and see that Mukuru has been declared as an SPA because it's us who need it. All these planning if we don't do it like that, there is no way we will be included in the planning. The money from the government does not reach to us because there are no plans. So the plans are for us to push the government so it can understand us, our problems to reach them so that we can benefit from the services from the government. ”

Joseph Mwenja Community Mobilizer – Riara, Mukuru Kwa Njenga

Mukuru Kwa Njenga community, personal communication, 15 June 2022.

Household representatives: Representatives will form cells, clusters and segments to provide household-level representation in the planning process. They will be drawn from a plot or grouping of about ten households to form cells. In turn, cell representatives will select one person to represent them in clusters (of about 10 cells / 100 households). Cluster representatives then select from among themselves to send people to represent them in community planning forums at the segment level (one to three areas/neighborhoods). To learn more about the community representation model, see [Community Mobilization, Organization, Representation and Coordination Strategy](#).

Representatives can be any resident – tenant, structure owner, service provider, etc (but should not be outsiders). Household-level representation plays a crucial role in the planning process – for the majority to have influence over planning decisions, broad scale mobilization is necessary. Importantly, broad representation counteracts the special interests and hidden agendas of minority stakeholders. For example, a small-scale informal service provider may want to steer planning decisions during meetings in his favor so that it is less disruptive to his business. While this might benefit service providers, it would be detrimental to the majority. If all households have a voice in planning forums, it becomes much more difficult for these types of minority interests to influence plans. The majority households will speak in their interest when given adequate representation.

Local media: While community mobilizers (and the community engagement and coordination team from civil society) play the most important role in spreading awareness about the

upgrading initiative across the settlement and educating residents, local media can also provide an effective medium for communication. This could be in the form of a local radio station or newspaper in the settlement. Assess what local media is available and if residents actively consume it or not.

For more, see [COMMUNITY TRAINING](#) and [COMMUNITY CO-PLANNING](#).

Civil Society

Community engagement and coordination: A pivotal role, people with extensive experience working in the settlement are needed to coordinate the engagement of consortia with residents and other co-planning activities. This team will also likely play an important role in [COMMUNITY TRAINING](#) and [COMMUNITY CO-PLANNING](#) activities, in particular the [Community Mobilization, Organization, Representation and Coordination Strategy](#). They can also serve as a critical interface for communication between residents and local government and civil society stakeholders. Members will likely be community leaders, CBO and federation leaders, federation-support NGOs and other locally-rooted civil society organizations. Responsibilities include:

- Interfacing between planning consortia and residents.
- [Recruiting and Training Community Mobilizers and Co-Researchers](#).
- Supporting data collection for technical sector plans.
- Supporting the mobilization and organization of and communication between community stakeholders.
- Coordinating community planning forums.
- Reporting to planning consortia what is happening in the community planning process.
- Signaling when conditions are ready for planning consortia to begin engaging residents in planning.
- Managing negotiations between residents and planning consortia.

Perhaps most importantly, this team facilitates debate among residents, mediates disputes and guides residents while they make planning decisions. They also support community mobilizers to navigate community politics.

Academia: Professional researchers can support the process by providing oversight and validation for sectoral data collection. They can also provide broader perspectives to leaders during the process, sharing key case studies and other useful information from other cities and countries. Importantly, they can also lend legitimacy to the process by supporting evidence-based planning.

Technical Planning Consortia: Staff from Local Government, Civil Society and the Private Sector

Once the planning phase begins, central leadership will quickly realize that participatory planning at scale cannot be achieved by one party alone. It requires coordinated effort and resources from communities, local government and civil society. In particular, neither local government nor one civil society organization will have all the required technical expertise in-house to undertake necessary planning activities.

To solve for this, leaders should recruit experts from leading civil society organizations in each sector to contribute their specialized knowledge to consortia and provide additional capacity for local government departments (they may also provide links to sources of development financing to complement local government resources).

Consortia also provide opportunities to minimize competition between civil society organizations that might otherwise undermine the process. Partners can also pull and pool more resources for planning. Finally, local governments partnering with civil society leaders can link local government to broader processes of governance.

Consortia also provide an effective way to involve departments across local government instead of just the planning and housing departments.

For more, see [Forming Interdisciplinary Consortia](#).

Technical leads: Each consortium will need one leader from local government that understands the inner workings of the department to meet institutional requirements and one lead civil society organization with expertise in the given sector to lead technical planning work.

Spatial planners: Manage spatial considerations of sectoral plans; through the community coordination team, negotiate space with residents; and coordinate other technical aspects of sector plans (in particular housing, circulation infrastructure and associated services like water, sanitation, storm drains and electricity). Likely comprised of urban planners from government and civil society as well as community leaders.

Sectoral planners: Co-design data collection tools with residents to fill gaps in sectoral information, participate in community planning forums, develop sector briefs and technical sector plans, work closely with the spatial planning and leadership team to harmonize sectoral plans and their coordinated implementation. While the other primary roles likely only require one team each, sectoral planning teams should be organized into consortia by themes, such as the Water and Sanitation Consortium, the Public Health Consortium, etc. These will be likely comprised of engineers, urban planners and professional researchers from government, civil society and academia.

Engineers: Develop detailed infrastructure designs for implementation of sector plans. Ideally, each consortium will include organizations with technical engineering expertise. If not, the consortium should pull and pool resources to hire consultants.



Build Partnerships to Fill Key Roles

Building partnerships will not be a linear, formal or one-and-done process. It will be ongoing and partnerships and roles will shift as the upgrading process evolves. The central leadership team should use their networks to identify candidates for different roles. To persuade them to join, they should speak to their interests. However, the team should also clearly and consistently articulate the vision for the process, its primary beneficiaries and main goals. Where they diverge, organizational commitments should serve the agenda of the upgrading initiative instead of their own agendas.

For more on recruiting and building organizational capacities to undertake locally-led, multisectoral and participatory upgrading work, see these Guides:

- [Recruiting and Training Community Mobilizers and Co-Researchers](#)
- [Forming Interdisciplinary Consortia](#)

Considerations

What if needed expertise does not exist locally?

Look beyond your city or even your country if need be. But be selective — only enlist organizations that will contribute tangible expertise and resources and that will commit to the process. Otherwise, enlisting them will not provide meaningful input or outcomes and make already challenging coordination work even more difficult.

Challenges

Sustained Leadership

An undertaking as complex and politically challenging as participatory upgrading at scale requires persistent champions and dedicated stewards. However, if the responsibility for carrying the project forward is placed in few hands, this can compromise a project's momentum, longevity and ultimate success if these few stewards do not continue to play their crucial roles. This is more likely to happen than not, as stewards encounter challenges navigating political turnover, in their personal life, or simply grow tired. To overcome this, spread out the entry points for participation, buy-in and responsibilities as much as possible from the start so that the project is less dependent on a few people and possibly even gain some institutional momentum in the local government.

Unknown, Ambiguous Process With no Precedent

Given that this approach to upgrading will be unfamiliar to many and therefore represent an ambiguous process with little precedent, you may encounter skepticism, misunderstanding and lukewarm commitment (if not outright dismissal). And because many organizations will be involved, each may seek different outcomes that best serve their vision for, and interests in, the project. Civil society organizations and local government departments may also be unaccustomed to working together. They may also be uncertain what outcome the process will have. This can all add up to a risky proposition for potential partners. You can overcome this by persistently repeating the project vision and sharing examples from successful projects. Also look for small wins to demonstrate tangible outcomes as you go.

Lack of Community Networks Organized At Scale

Without social movements like urban poor federations, mobilizing residents at scale will likely prove challenging and perhaps even impossible. In this case, start small to learn. During this period, invite experienced practitioners from other cities and countries for learning exchanges. Once you have gained sufficient experience in mobilizing residents to co-plan and convening interdisciplinary expertise, you can attempt greater scale.

Different Interests of Partners

Partners will have a variety of interests. You can minimize this by recruiting organizations that are already doing work that aligns with the goals of the upgrading initiative so that their contribution helps them achieve their own organizational goals at the same time. Also ask stakeholders to openly discuss their interests so that you can provide opportunities to serve their goals without compromising the goals of the overall initiative.

Interests of Minority Community Stakeholders

Stakeholders like structure owners and informal service providers will likely oppose and even hinder the upgrading process as improved housing and services can undermine their businesses. To counteract this, be strategic with what plans include. For example, you may not want to start with housing so that structure owners do not become adversaries from the start. In general, engage all stakeholders and stay on message. Highlight how they can still benefit from the process. And be prepared to negotiate with them as needed.

Hidden, Unspoken Agendas

If not accounted for, hidden agendas can become landmines that will derail the process. Counteract this by mobilizing as broadly as possible to bring out the majority. If all households have a voice in planning forums, it becomes much more difficult for special interests and hidden agendas of minority stakeholders to influence plans. The majority households will speak in their interest when given adequate representation.

From Planning to Implementation: Diminished Roles for Communities and Civil Society

While local government and other partners may value community inclusion and participation during the planning phase, there will likely be a risk of this being lost when implementation begins. Including communities in implementation may be less of a priority for government and may not be required in public participation laws. Government may minimize the community's role to unskilled or semi-skilled labor. Counteract this by co-developing an implementation framework with residents, continuing to hold community meetings to provide forums for feedback, and carrying out participatory monitoring and evaluation activities.

Examples from the Field

Mukuru, Nairobi (Kenya)

The Mukuru SPA broke new ground on partnerships between local government, communities, civil society and other institutions. Its success is in large part due to these partnerships. Testimonies about the importance of involving a broad array of actors in the upgrading process are recorded below.

“ Unless we put together the different stakeholders, and the different actors that were required to address the complexities in Mukuru [we would not be able to plan at scale]. So, part of the planning process was identifying all the actors within Mukuru; the health sector, education, we appreciated that [several organizations had] a long history in working in the informal settlements, so, we realized we needed the expertise that exist within the villages and also the knowledge that exist within Mukuru; the various organizations that were working within Mukuru so we could all be able to address the complexity within the area. That is something that we had not done before, with so many institutions across so many disciplines, and across so many groups, from NGOs to civil society, to private sector to county government and within its different departments. ”

Jane Weru Executive Director, Akiba Mashinani Trust

Personal communication, 17 June 2022.

“ I think also how the SPA was organized; it had a lot of tolerance, so, organizations joined the sector they were working in, the expertise that were there, so, they just saw SPA as a way of continuing supporting their work because they had expertise in that area, so for them is a continuation of their work, even if they do it for free, they are also trying to advance the interest they have in that sector. They saw SPA as a way of trying to make it easier for them to project the area they have interest in. ”

Patrick Njoroge Program Manager, Akiba Mashinani Trust

Personal communication, 17 June 2022.

“ WSUP’s initial motivation was to see improvement in water and sanitation especially in low-income areas and so the SPA came as a partner and we joined to partner with the same sanitation specialists because that is what we were doing, and when we came in we sat and saw that, yes, this is aligning with what we are doing and already we were working within the same area, we were working within Mukuru, so it was a big opportunity also for us to improve on what we were already doing. ”

Nancy Wanyinyi Project Manager, Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP)

Personal communication, 27-28 April 2022.

“ Following the gazettement of the SPA coming out from the previous government, we were involved, it was our duty to give water and sanitation services as its part of our work, we are the leads of the county government in water and sanitation so it was our goal to improve the water and sanitation aspect of the SPA. ”

Kagiri Gicheru Manager of Informal Settlements Region, Nairobi County Water and Sewerage Company

Personal communication, 27-28 April 2022.

Related Components

Guides

- [Recruiting and Training Community Mobilizers and Co-Researchers](#)
- [Forming Interdisciplinary Consortia](#)

Sources

Coordination, Community Organisation and Communication (CCOC) consortium. (2022, June 17). [Focus group interview by B. Hicks]. Mukuru SPA documentation 2022, Gracehouse Resort, Nairobi, Kenya.

Water, Sanitation and Energy (WSE) consortium. (April 27-28 2022). [Focus group interview by B. Hicks]. Mukuru SPA documentation 2022, Gelian Hotel, Machakos, Kenya.