

# *The Community Monitor*

Monthly Newsletter of **Katieno Self Help Group** on the *need for Environmental Health and Conservation for Sustainable Development*

Issue No. 2

November 2003

We are pleased to present to you the second issue of the *Community Monitor*

The first issue was well received by the few of you who read it. We are quite encouraged by your reactions. We shall endeavour to make the newsletter a useful source of information to you. We will however be happier if it becomes a platform for the lively exchange of ideas and information on Environmental Health and Conservation of the Environment for sustainable Development in line with Agenda 21 of Rio, the Earth Charter as well as the partnership initiatives of WSSD in Johannesburg, South Africa in the year 2002.

This can only happen if you make use of it to pass information and exchange ideas. We would like to hear more from you on what you are doing out there, and what you would like to see highlighted here.

In this issue we present to you what we did promise to highlight in our Inaugural issue. We are presenting to you **How to make urban areas work** as well as the **Earth Charter Principle 1**. Agenda 21 initiatives and many more shall be contained in other issues.

## **How can Urban Areas Improve?**

As urban areas in the developing countries become ever more crowded over the next quarter century, governments and citizens will face a growing challenge i.e. how to make urban areas work.

Today a few urban areas are equipped to meet the challenge. In 1987, the World Commission on Environment and Development reported that "in the space of one decade, the developing world will have to increase 65% its capacity to produce and manage its urban infrastructure, services and shelter-merely to maintain present conditions." This goal was not met.

Most developing countries lack the Resources and the ability to solve complex and massive problems of their urban areas. However, many can take steps to address urban problems better. Improving urban governance, upgrading slums, providing alternatives to the creation of new slums curbing pollution and managing waste disposal are among measures that can be taken to improve urban areas.

## **Improving Urban Governance**

**Governance** is more than government. It includes the relationship among government, private institutions and the civil society. It involves working in partnership among different stakeholders.

A new consensus is emerging around the world that national governments should not retain direct control over the planning and management of urban areas. Instead National governments should act as enablers, creating legislative and administrative environments in which a wide range of local governments, private sectors and community organizations can deliver infrastructure and services to the urban areas. Decentralizing power, authority and responsibility from the national to the local government can enhance local participation and encourage democratic practices.

In general three conditions must be met for decentralization to be effective; **First:** National and state authorities need to devolve budget authority to the Municipal level.

**Second:** The administrative capacity of local authorities must grow. Local governments often lack experience of the central government.

**Three:** Decentralization works best when it is inclusive i.e. when the authorities asks about and responds to the community needs and interest and when the community members participate in the decision-making. Community participation helps to ensure responsiveness and accountability in public decision-making. Community knows the problems they face and can suggest effective solutions

### **Upgrading Slums**

The Millennium Summit of 2000 reaffirmed the United Nations commitment to eliminating poverty. However poverty is likely to worsen if economic growth cannot keep pace with the population growth.

### ***What is the role of the community?***

The members of the community must participate in programs to improve slums. The poor improve their power to negotiate with the government for

services when they organize themselves and work together. Community groups can often provide housing and services more cost effectively than government of private developers by pooling their resources and supplying their own labour.

### ***What is the role of the government?***

The government can formulate the “pro-poor” social and economic policies. These may include; relaxing restrictions on the informal labour market so that low-income groups have more opportunities to earn income, supporting small scale enterprises by providing access to credit, creating jobs for people, investing in health and education and reducing gender inequality.

Fundamental to the success of slum upgrading program is extending security of land and housing tenure to those who lack it. Improving slums involves assuring basic infrastructure and services such as clean water supply and adequate sewage disposal.

Granting security of tenure rights motivate occupants to invest double the amount of money the government invests in infrastructure improvements.

### **The Role of the Development Partners**

Development agencies can support better governance and, where government’s institutions are weak, increase funding to civil society to ensure that low-income groups are benefits as intended.

International agencies should work through local partners, both to increase their credibility with the urban poor and because the local partners knows most about local problems and their potential solutions.

### **Improving Water Supply**

With Community participation, local authorities can improve water supply and sanitation. Providing an adequate water supply and improving public

sanitation are the two steps most needed to prevent the majority of water related diseases and deaths in urban areas. For better sanitation, constructing sanitary latrines, building sewers and treating waste water to biodegrade human waste will help curb diseases.

### **Way Forward**

Better governance is essential to improve urban living conditions. National governments should move to play the role of enabler while local governments move towards a more direct control over the planning and management of urban areas. Central government needs to devolve authorities and resources to the local authorities in order to for them to carry out these functions effectively.

Local governments also need a stronger capability since they may have less experience than the central governments.

Donor agencies can facilitate this process by re-evaluating the nature of development assistance. They can focus on strengthening the institutional capacities. As the institutional capacities are strengthened, urban areas can adopt a more comprehensive planning.

Urban settlements are more likely to meet the challenges of population growth if planning and action take into account inter-related factors such as land use, sanitation, and waste management.

### **Information Dissemination within Nakuru Municipality**

It is a general knowledge that access to information Communication technology is a powerful conduit to increase participation in a social discourse. However, poverty and the cost of information render community access to information to be minimal and only left to those who can afford.

As katiemo Self-Help Group takes up this daunting task of facilitating information dissemination and exchange at the community level. There are some of the aspects it takes cognisant of and is developing a potential effective system of translating this **Community Monitor** to various ethnic languages to reach the intended beneficiaries on the ground in a language they understand best. Consequently, Katiemo Self-Help Group shall be able to break the barriers to environmental information access by enhancing those systems of communication existing within the communities.

### **The Earth Charter**

In our last inaugural issue we introduced to you the Earth Charter and the Agenda 21 initiative. In this second issue, we are going to highlight more on the principles of the Earth Charter

The Earth Charter is a declaration of fundamental principles for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It seeks to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well being of the human family.

The earth charter has about four main Principles, which includes the following;

- 1). Respect and care for the community of life
- 2). Ecological integrity
- 3). Social and economic justice
- 4). Democracy, Non-violence and Peace.

In this issue however we shall mention only the first principle and the rest shall be contained in the next issue.

## **Principle One Respect and care for the Community life**

This principle is in four different sub-sections. The sub-sections include the following:

- a) Respect Earth and life in all its diversity,
- b) Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love,
- c) Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable and peaceful,
- d) secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations

### **a) Respect Earth and life in all its diversity,**

- i) This recognizes that all beings are interdependent and every form of life has value regardless of its worth to human beings.
- ii) It also affirms in the inherent dignity of all human beings and in the intellectual, artistic, ethical and spiritual potential of humanity.

### **b) Care for the community of life with understanding, compassion and love**

- i) Accept that with the right to own, manage and use natural resources comes the duty to prevent environmental harm and to protect the rights of people
- ii) Affirm that with increased freedom, knowledge and power comes increased responsibility to promote the common good.

### **c) Build democratic societies that are just, participatory, sustainable and peaceful**

- i) Ensure the Community at all levels guarantee human rights and fundamental freedoms and provide everyone and opportunity to realise his/her full potential.
- ii) Promote social and economic justice, enabling all to achieve a secure

and meaningful livelihood that is ecologically responsible.

### **e) Secure Earth's bounty and beauty for present and future generations**

- i) Recognise that the freedom of action of each generation is qualified by the needs of future generations
- ii) Transmit to the future generations values, traditions and institutions that support the long- term flourishing of the Earth's human and ecological communities.

### ***Preserved for your comments***

#### **What others said about our Inaugural issue of the Community Monitor.**

As we said earlier that the Inaugural issue of the Community Monitor was well received, here are some of the comments from those who read it

***"Thank you Maurice, I wish you every best endeavors and support your pledge for networking which is our surest way to making the best of our contributions to change. Will keep you posted on what we do"***  
Patrick Ochieng, Director Ujamaa centre, Mombasa

***'Thanks very much for your newsletter "Community Monitor". Indeed this is good effort and keep us informed on what is happening at Nakuru, CONGRATULATIONS'***. Noah Lusaka, Project Officer Arid lands Information Network, Nairobi

**For more information do not hesitate to contact**

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