

The Mukuru Special Planning Area



This Guide draws primarily on the experience of residents and their government, civil society and university partners in the Mukuru Special Planning Area (SPA) in Nairobi, Kenya. The SPA is an important case study in locally led, inclusive and multisectoral upgrading of urban informal settlements for climate resilience. This section summarizes the Mukuru SPA and its key strategies.

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The Mukuru Story



Starting in 2017, residents of Mukuru – one of the largest informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya – undertook an ambitious, groundbreaking participatory upgrading process known as the Mukuru Special Planning Area (SPA). This is the Mukuru story, as told by Jane Weru, Executive Director of the Akiba Mashinani Trust (AMT) and one of its central champions and stewards.

In 2011, many Mukuru residents came to our office to request loans to purchase the land they lived on. Absentee landowners were requiring them to purchase the land or be evicted. Many evictions did occur and residents, with our support, began to mobilize to resist evictions. With assistance from the Katiba Institute here in Nairobi, we filed a court case to stop landowners from evicting residents. In 2013, women and girls in Mukuru led the “Too Pressed to Wait” campaign demanding better sanitation. Poor sanitation infrastructure posed serious health risks and dignity challenges.

But, we quickly realized that stopping evictions was not enough – the living conditions in Mukuru were terrible. In 2014, AMT with a grant from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and a team of action researchers from University of Nairobi, Katiba Institute, and Strathmore University documented the deeply marginalized conditions residents lived in.

Armed with these findings, we approached the Nairobi County City (NCC) government and requested that they undertake plans to upgrade Mukuru. They agreed and in August 2017, Mukuru was declared a Special Planning Area (SPA). County governments in Kenya can declare an area as an SPA if it has unique environmental and development challenges. We understood that to mobilize public resources for infrastructure and services in Mukuru, we needed an official plan.

At this point, we realized that because Mukuru is such a large, densely populated area, we would not be able to undertake planning alone. So, along with NCC, we formed eight interdisciplinary planning consortia – one for each priority sector. These included housing and road infrastructure; water, sanitation and energy; health; education; environment; and land. We also formed two support consortia, one to mobilize and coordinate residents and another to coordinate financing. The consortia convened expertise from 42 local and international civil society and private sector organizations.

We were also aware that you cannot plan without the people – if you plan without the people, you are planning to fail. Therefore, the community coordination consortium comprised of AMT, Muungano wa Wanavijiji (MWW) and Slum Dwellers International-Kenya (SDI-K) worked closely with Mukuru residents to mobilize people to attend more than 250 neighborhood planning forums and 114 formal consultation meetings held by the different planning consortia.

Throughout the process, alternative, innovative approaches to planning were taken by Mukuru residents and their government and civil society partners. We developed locally-appropriate planning standards that made sense in the context of the vulnerabilities and resource constraints in Mukuru. If conventional, statutory planning standards had been used, 100 percent of residents would have been displaced. Through negotiation and dialogue, the planning standards for the Mukuru SPA ultimately only displaced about 13 percent of residents.

To understand the upgrading process we undertook, you must first learn a little about Mukuru. It is made up of three large settlements called Mukuru Kwa Njenga, Mukuru Kwa Reuben and Viwandani and covers 689 acres of valuable land near Nairobi's Commercial Business District. It is home to over 400,000 people or about 100,000 households, 94 percent of whom are tenants. The land is privately owned by individuals granted long-term leaseholds of about 99 years by the government during the 1980s and 90s. The lease agreements included special conditions that they develop the land within two years of receiving the title. In the event that they failed to do this, the government could reclaim the land. In breach of these conditions, title holders never developed their parcels and today the land is occupied by the residents of Mukuru.

In the IDRC-funded research, we found that basic service provision in Mukuru was very poor. Water is sold by informal service providers using fragile pipes that break easily, resulting in water contamination that causes frequent disease outbreaks. Moreover, residents suffered a poverty penalty, paying 170 percent more for lower-quality service than the rest of the city. When residents were engaged during the planning process, they proposed that informal providers be stopped and that infrastructure be improved to address water shortages, reduce costs and improve health.

Poor sanitation is also a big problem. Community-led mapping of the settlement conducted in collaboration with SDI-K, AMT, and MWW found that there were only 3800 toilets, largely pit latrines, for over 400,000 people. Latrines must be exhausted manually and raw waste, with no proper infrastructure, is dumped indiscriminately. Residents proposed installing a toilet in every plot and connecting toilets to the sewer.

Drainage for frequent flooding is also a major challenge and without roads, fires from dangerous informal electricity connections destroy structures regularly. Without roads, you cannot build drains and emergency services cannot reach fires. Public transport also cannot access the settlements. Residents and planners devised plans that would build this crucial road network while minimizing the space needed and therefore the displacement of residents.

Residents also identified education as a big problem. There are about 100,000 school-age children in Mukuru. In contrast to the national government's duty and commitment to providing universal education, there are only six government schools and 182 informal schools with no government support. Many of the informal schools have poor water and sanitation facilities.

In 2020, NCC and Nairobi Metropolitan Services (NMS), a special agency formed by the national government, began building roads, trunk sewers and water mains for Mukuru. 11 boreholes have been drilled. One public school and three hospitals have also been opened.

On Mosque Road in Mukuru Kwa Reuben, a team made up of NCC's water department, NMS, the NGO Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor and AMT have installed a pilot project with water service points as well as toilets in every plot with sewer connection for 1000 households, reducing costs, shortages and cholera outbreaks. After assessing the pilot project, we will use the lessons learned to extend services to all of Mukuru. The growing road network and storm drains have reduced flooding, fire and disease outbreaks and improved public transportation access in the areas it has been built.

As of the writing of this guide in 2022, the final Mukuru upgrading plan has yet to be ratified by the NCC Assembly. In July 2022, in the lead up to the Kenyan general elections, Mukuru residents wrote a "People's Manifesto" that outlines the goals of the Mukuru Integrated Development Plan 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.

While much work remains to be done, incremental improvements are being made today for the residents of Mukuru. And critically for climate resilience, mobility and accessibility in Mukuru, the upgrading plan is being merged with the citywide Nairobi Integrated Development Plan. The SPA designation has proven itself an effective mechanism for building crucial partnerships and mobilizing state resources. An SPA has been declared nearby in the Kibera informal settlement in Nairobi and a process to declare one in another nearby informal settlement called Mathare is underway as well.

The Mukuru Approach

This Guide draws primarily on the experience of residents and their government, civil society and university partners in the Mukuru Special Planning Area (SPA) in Nairobi, Kenya. Like informal settlements in cities across Africa, Mukuru is particularly vulnerable to climate change due to its environmentally fragile location, high levels of poverty, and political and institutional marginalization, resulting in the absence of risk-reducing infrastructure and support to cope with shocks.¹

One of the largest informal settlements in Nairobi, innovative, locally led informal settlement upgrading² strategies pioneered in Mukuru offer exciting and important lessons for inclusive and integrated planning as well as for enhancing the climate resilience of the majority of the population in African cities.

Underpinned by years of community organizing and protest as well as action research with university partners, Mukuru was declared a SPA by Nairobi City County (NCC) in August 2017. The declaration acknowledged that conventional planning practices were insufficient to address the unique development and environmental challenges in informal settlements. Its application in Mukuru was a novel, innovative interpretation of the SPA provision which previously had only been used for industrial development areas.³

The SPA Emerged Out of Decades of Community Organizing, Political Protest, Advocacy and Action Research

These antecedents to the SPA relied on deep processes of trial, error and learning led by the Muungano Alliance – an association comprised of the Kenyan urban poor federation Muungano wa Wanavijiji (MWW), the Akiba Mashinani Trust (AMT) and Slum Dwellers International-Kenya (SDI-K) – in collaboration with urban poor networks across Africa, Asia and beyond. Largely situated on private land, eviction threats have been the main driver for protest and advocacy in Mukuru. Organizing around anti-eviction campaigns first began in the 1990s and reemerged in 2010 with new eviction threats, resulting in the Jubilee Campaign. In 2013-2014, a new campaign called “Too Pressed to Wait”⁴ emerged, led by women and girls demanding better sanitation. Poor sanitation infrastructure posed serious health risks and dignity challenges.⁵

Advocates (led by AMT and including MWW, SDI-K, the University of Nairobi and the Katiba Institute) took advantage of the strategic political opportunity represented by the 2017 general elections and relationships with local government leaders to push for the declaration of the SPA. Because Mukuru was a significant political constituency, advocates lobbied during the lead up to the elections for the SPA declaration, seeking a political commitment from NCC to intervene in the settlements. The advocates focused efforts on the department directors of Planning and of Urban Renewal and Housing.⁶ They also relied on action research demonstrating a poverty

penalty paid by Mukuru residents for essential services (see more on this below). These efforts secured crucial buy-in from NCC. Without these political champions, the SPA process would have been severely limited in its scope and impact, or never happened at all.



“ For a very long period of time the people of the slums have been lacking the basic services that they should be getting from their own government. [...] So due to the problems that the common citizens were facing, it's what made the people to push the SPA to materialize. ”

Elkanah Nyakundi Community Mobilizer – Vietnam, Mukuru Kwa Njenga

Focus group interview on 15 June 2022.

Mukuru is situated on valuable, privately-owned parcels of land near Nairobi's commercial business district (CBD), and land tenure is a contentious issue. Residents are at high-risk of eviction. The SPA planning team did not rely solely on the SPA provision but also on Kenya's 2010 Constitution. Sidestepping the contentious issue of housing, residents and advocates initially focused on infrastructure and services for public health like roads, water and sanitation that the government was required to provide according to the Constitution. The team also researched land ownership and discovered that landowners were in breach of the conditions in their land grants, gifted by the Kenyan state to develop light industries, and had illegally subdivided and sold plots of land instead of developing them. The associated legal cases are pending in the courts.^{7,8}

Building on the momentum for devolution sparked by Kenya's new Constitution and years of community mobilization by the Muungano Alliance, the residents of Mukuru and their university partners presented compelling evidence on a poverty penalty to local government and political leaders, debunking the belief that informal settlement residents were too poor to pay for basic services.⁹

The SPA did not emerge from a vacuum – it was first and foremost a political, not a technocratic, process. The SPA declaration and subsequent Mukuru Integrated Development Plan (MIDP) would have been exceedingly difficult to achieve without this history of organizing, protest and political and legal advocacy. The SPA is as much a political process as a technical planning one (if not more so). Anyone seeking to learn from the SPA should be careful not to lose sight of the critical role political organizing and advocacy played – attempts to replicate the technocratic planning process without connecting it to existing social and political community networks will likely fail to produce the same level of community buy-in and ownership and therefore impair meaningful investment in the infrastructure and services needed by informal settlement residents.



“ Action research had revealed significant shelter deficits and predatory informal service provision: Mukuru residents, with no other option, paid far more per unit for lower-quality shelter and services than residents in nearby formal estates – nearly four times more for water, twice as much for electricity and 20 percent more for rent. Despite these high costs, there was a thriving informal economy estimated at USD 59 million annually, demonstrating that residents could pay for service delivery, a fact that garnered the attention of policymakers and the media. For public utilities, it demonstrated that they could provide services sustainably and at the same time improve public health conditions in Mukuru. It also captured the interest of local representatives as Mukuru represented a significant political constituency. ”

Jane Weru Executive Director, Akiba Mashinani Trust

On-camera interview on 2 August 2022.

The Mukuru Approach Has Taught Us That Improving Climate Resilience in Informal Settlements Requires the Urgent Coordination of At Least Four Key Strategies

1. **The meaningful engagement of residents to make planning decisions.** Participation at scale helps ensure community ownership, essential for moving beyond conventional upgrading to transformative upgrading that builds both infrastructural and social resilience to climate hazards.
2. **A genuine partnership between government, residents, civil society and academia.** Residents, working closely with government and civil society partners, collaboratively produced the Mukuru upgrading plan.
3. **Rethinking conventional planning approaches and legislation** to confront the vulnerabilities and resource scarcity in informal settlements.
4. **Recognizing the interdependent, multisectoral challenges faced in informal settlements.** Improvements in no one sector alone can solve them – it is crucial to develop sectoral plans in tandem, working together across disciplines.

Community Engagement

Meaningful community engagement in Mukuru was achieved by speaking to people’s urgent needs – which included sanitation and insecure land tenure – and mobilizing residents through **data collection activities** and a **novel organizational model** *that ensured household-level representation in the planning process.*

Through mobilization and data collection activities, as well as learning exchanges with other settlements in Kenya and beyond, residents began to better understand their challenges not just

individually but also collectively; share a common understanding of those challenges; and negotiate both among themselves and with government for solutions that would best serve them.

Most governments do not collect data on informal settlements and it can be challenging for them to gather. Community-led data collection in Mukuru included several practices refined over decades by SDI, including community mapping, settlement profiles and a household-level census. These crucial data provided the means for residents to speak to and negotiate with the Nairobi city government. In addition to providing the necessary sociodemographic data needed to begin upgrading processes, community data collection can also document residents' experiences with environmental hazards to begin assessing their climate change risk.



“ Mapping and data collection and I also knew how data defends people. How the data spoke for us in the government. And also I learned how to bring people together and empower people. I also learned how to talk with these people in these big offices, because I come from the slums, I don't have to despise myself, I have to know that I have information that they don't have. And the other thing I learned is I have also the right as a Kenyan person to have good life and the other thing is, every change to take place wherever I am, it is good for me to participate and to give also my ideas. ”

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

Focus group interview on 18 May 2022.

See [Community-led Data Collection](#)  in [Guides and Methods](#)  for more.

Pivotal to the SPA planning process, the Muungano Alliance pioneered the “Tujuane Tujengane” community mobilization, organization, representation and communication model. Meaning ‘Let's know each other, so we build each other’ in Kiswahili, Tujuane Tujengane was a novel approach that sought to engage all Mukuru residents at the household-level.

Over 450 community mobilizers from Mukuru were trained, the majority of which were women and youth. Along with data collectors that they recruited from their neighborhoods, mobilizers undertook data collection to provide settlement profiles, an address system and a detailed census of all households in Mukuru. More than anyone, these mobilizers organized the community forums and championed the SPA through patient dialogue and the many negotiations the planning process required with diverse community stakeholders.¹⁰

Mobilizers also fostered horizontal and vertical accountability throughout the planning process: they mediated community conflicts and misunderstandings and informed local officials of progress.¹¹ In these roles, mobilizers built new relationships between Mukuru communities and government and gained trust and stature in their communities because of the confidence

the training and mobilization processes gave them to speak out and lead. For some, it also led to new opportunities like jobs with NGOs and even potential nominations as political leaders. At times, however, these elevated roles led to government authorities taking advantage of mobilizers for their own ends.¹²

See [Community Co-planning](#)  in [Guides and Methods](#)  for more.



“ I would say it brought something called bonding, that is good relations among us from SPA, our village elders, tenants, structure owners, tenants, all of us – and we became there is no stranger to one another. ”

Edith Murage Community mobilizer – Kingstone, Mukuru Viwandani

Focus group interview on 18 May 2022.



“ 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

Focus group interview on 18 May 2022.

In addition to the SPA, mobilizers, other residents and the Muungano Alliance leveraged the community organization model for complementary initiatives, including youth groups and savings groups. They also used it to create immediate, near-term benefits to build confidence in the SPA process. Implementation of plans can take years – residents need to see short-term benefits to maintain confidence in the process.

These community strategies ensured meaningful participation in and ownership over the SPA planning process which has led to genuine co-planning between government and residents – and therefore a plan that provides locally-appropriate planning interventions that build climate resilience in Mukuru.



“ I think if SPA was being led by outsiders, most of the things we have got, we couldn't have got them since outsiders don't know what we are going through. They don't know what we need, there is no way a visitor will come in my house and know where my saucepan is, where I put my spoons, where I put my clothes. It is the owner, so we the people who live here we are the one who knows the problems and we raise the problems to them so me I don't support the issue whereby that if it was to be led by the outsiders it would have been better than the way it was led by we ourselves. ”

Priscila Onyango Tenant – Bins, Mukuru Kwa Reuben

Focus group interview on 20 May 2022.



“ According to me, the Special Planning Area belongs to the community. Muungano [and the County government] were just assisting and giving us directions because it's us personally who know the challenges we are facing. ”

Mary Nyambura Community Mobilizer, Wape Wape, Mukuru Kwa Njenga

Focus group interview on 15 June 2022.

Genuine Partnerships

The Mukuru SPA chartered new territory in partnerships for upgrading. Instead of the historically adversarial relationship between community and civil society on one side and government on the other, the SPA provided a novel legal and institutional space for collaboration.

Residents know best what problems they face, their relative priorities and what solutions will best serve them. Local governments provide the necessary resources and institutional legitimacy for upgrading, as well as the coordination of stakeholders. Civil society, working closely with both government and community, can facilitate successful collaboration. And academia helps turn data collected by communities into the actionable knowledge critical for evidence-based planning.

See [Negotiation and Advocacy](#) → in [Guides and Methods](#) → for more.



“ In the County government, we worked closely with Mukuru residents and their civil society and university partners to collaboratively produce the Mukuru Integrated Development Plan. The SPA put the community at the center of every step of the planning process. And while planning has traditionally been left to the planning department alone, for the Mukuru SPA, every County department was engaged in the planning process. ”

Lilian Kieni Deputy Director of Urban Planning, Nairobi Metropolitan Services

On-camera interview on 1 August 2022.

Rethinking Conventional Planning Approaches

Acknowledging the unique developmental and political challenges in Mukuru, planning partners adopted an unconventional planning framework. Enabled by the SPA declaration, it prioritized immediate needs and incremental, iterative improvements and adopted alternatives to conventional planning standards to minimize the displacement of Mukuru residents without sacrificing security, health or resilience considerations.



Informal settlements pose complex challenges for planning. Unlike greenfield sites, people already live there; homes, businesses and local institutions already exist; structures are one and two story but densely built; and existing social networks are crucial for residents' resilience. In short, the entry points for development are different. While conventionally it has been evictions, demolitions and even environmental hazards, it can also be government or community-led engagements. Space is limited – the large majority of it is already taken up by semi-permanent or temporary structures. The context requires alternative, even radical, approaches to planning with deep processes of community engagement, strong political will and professionals trained for their unique environments. Mukuru provides a model for this type of brownfield redevelopment.

The Housing, Infrastructure and Commerce consortium, along with Indian partners, used iterative scenarios to model the space required according to different planning standards. Modeling done using conventional standards found that conforming to planning regulations used for public infrastructure in formal estates would displace all households in Mukuru. The alternative standards ultimately adopted instead optimized for the needs and proposals of residents while minimizing the fragmentation of community cohesion by limiting the displacement required (about 13 percent of residents) to accommodate new infrastructure and services (e.g. a 12-meter-wide road instead of the conventional 48-meter road). In particular, the alternative standards prioritized non-motorized transport as few residents own vehicles.¹³

Beyond minimizing displacement, the new standards upheld key objectives agreed on by residents: prioritizing “public health, safety, dignity, and convenience above individual interests or ownership” and the mitigation of environmental risks and vulnerabilities. As a whole, these discourses among residents and local government and civil society partners formed a loose framework for navigating

various competing priorities among stakeholders, balancing pragmatism and incrementalism with ambition and a groundbreaking scope for both participatory planning processes and subsequent investments in crucial infrastructure and services.¹⁴

The SPA also explored alternative service delivery models and technologies. As a pragmatic compromise between the small, informal water vendors and piped water to every plot, water pre-paid dispensers (PPDs), also known as “water ATMs”, were chosen as a pragmatic solution for clean water provision. Low-cost, easy to install and maintain simplified sewer systems (SSS) were also chosen for last-mile sanitation infrastructure (see the Mosque Road Pilot Project below for more). Yet to be tested, a model that would rely on informal energy providers as last-mile entrepreneurs with needed local expertise (instead of excluding them as predatory cartels and therefore adversaries) was also explored.

See [Assessing Planning Standards and Negotiating Alternatives](#)  in [Guides and Methods](#)  for more.



“ Planning today largely abandons informal settlements. Statutory planning standards deny residents access to crucial infrastructure and services. The Mukuru SPA powerfully questioned and challenged the legitimacy of formal planning standards in the context of the vulnerabilities and resource constraints present in Mukuru and other informal settlements. For the Mukuru SPA, we evolved and retrofitted standards to meet the huge need and at the same time minimize the huge social cost of applying statutory standards. ”

Professor Sejal Patel CEPT University, India

On-camera interview on 26 August 2022.

Addressing Interdependent, Multisectoral Challenges

To address the interdependent, multisectoral challenges in Mukuru, interdisciplinary planning consortia were formed, convening expertise in key sectors including housing and road infrastructure; water, sanitation and energy; environment and natural resources; and health and education services. Local government departments, along with leading civil society organizations in each sector, led the consortia planning process to formulate sector plans and ultimately an Integrated Development Plan for Mukuru. Civil society, academic and private sector partners provided needed expertise and additional capacity for local government departments.

Mukuru residents and the consortia collaborated to co-produce the Mukuru upgrading plan through a series of community consultation forums held with representatives throughout Mukuru. This included plan formulation and plan validation meetings for all the key sectors. This co-planning process resulted in sector plans for all the thematic areas, bundled together as the MIDP which is currently being finalized for ratification by the Nairobi County Assembly.

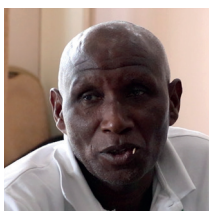
Production of an official document, a plan, was crucial for moving the gears of local government and bringing momentum to the planning process.



“ The County government worked closely with the Muungano Alliance to bring 42 partners on board from leading civil society organizations and universities. County departments led each consortium and coordinated the partners. The consortia model proved itself an effective strategy for collaborating closely with communities and building a coalition among historically adversarial parties. The consortia also enabled members to contribute different types of expertise to develop an inclusive, locally-appropriate and integrated upgrading plan for Mukuru. We believe this model of consortia, of having different consortia, is a good model that would be able to ensure that other settlements also benefit just as Mukuru has done. ”

Marion Rono Deputy Director of Housing and Urban Renewal, Nairobi Metropolitan Services

On-camera interview on 1 August 2022.



“ The top leadership was able to buy-in because people on the ground had developed a document that actually even the President bought into. If we did not have a document actually it was very easy for our project to be thrown out. So, I think what I want to underline is the initial [SPA] initiative and whoever came up with the idea that in Mukuru there is something that can be done – people can come together, they involve all the stakeholders in Mukuru, even the political ones, develop a plan and now use that plan as a sailing point for the project. That made things easy because I remember when the President was hearing that there is a plan, actually he was ready to take it up. ”

Stephen Githinji Engineer in Environment, Water and Sanitation, Nairobi Metropolitan Services

Focus group interview on 27-28 April 2022.

Given that the planning process was something new and therefore ambiguous, a defining challenge for the consortia was assuring members had adequate resources and institutional support. County departments and civil society partners worked together to identify resources for planning activities. It proved challenging to maintain the involvement of some consortia members as they largely worked on a pro bono basis.¹⁵

Planning to date has focused on public infrastructure like roads and services like health centers to address the urgent, immediate needs of residents who suffer from dire public health conditions and frequent floods, fires and other climate-related hazards. These interventions act as enabling infrastructure, improving health and social inclusion, that will be iterated on to provide other needed but more contentious improvements like better quality housing.

Particularly important for climate resilience, the plan has also been integrated into the larger countywide Nairobi Integrated Development Plan, providing an example of how to include citizen participation in citywide planning processes.¹⁶

See [Integrated Planning](#) in [Guides and Methods](#) for more.

With the Initial Planning Phase Complete, the Nairobi City Government Has Begun to Implement the Plan

As of the writing of this Guide in December 2022, Mukuru residents and civil society, academic and local government partners have completed an ambitious two-year planning process. Land tenure issues remain unresolved and the government has relied on its mandate from the Constitution to provide public infrastructure and services for public health to proceed.

While the Covid-19 pandemic has delayed official ratification of the MIDP, starting in May 2020, Nairobi Metropolitan Services (NMS)¹⁷ and NCC — with support from President Uhuru Kenyatta — began to strategically implement the plan. This included the construction of roads, drainage, several hospitals, a school and a pilot water and sanitation project. The Mosque Road Pilot Water and Sanitation project — undertaken by the NCC department Nairobi Water and Sewerage Company, the international NGO Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor, and AMT — is an important step towards full-scale implementation of the MIDP, testing key designs co-produced by residents and their government and civil society partners.

While the SPA is already a statutory obligation, official ratification of the plan is required to create dedicated public funding from the county government to build infrastructure and services. Partners have explored several other financing strategies, including from the national government and aid agencies.

Residents were employed to build new infrastructure and services — in addition to providing income for residents, local hiring also supported continued community ownership of the process and provided cost savings for local government.



“ There were houses which when it rained the water would flood in the houses but now they have connected such that when it rains the water goes to the toilet. [...] If we look on the issue of the road system, it has helped us on the issues to do with fire because if fire incident occurs, it's easy for firefighters to get here. Before it was very difficult, a lot of houses could be burnt down before firefighters arrived because we didn't have good road access. But as at now, when fire emerges and fire fighters are called, they arrive immediately. ”

Catherine Nduku Pilot Project Chairlady – Mosque Road, Mukuru Kwa Reuben

Focus group interview on 5 May 2022.



“ We had a lot of problems, toilet problems, 24/7 it blocked. But since they came and laid the pipes and connected our toilets to the sewer, it now flows well. Water also came along. We used to encounter difficulties in the plot, being told to buy water to flush the toilet, when it has become extremely dirty and blocked. But now water is available and we are using it, at least our environment is okay, inside the plot and outside is okay. Secondly, people who used to live in Mosque zone earlier knew how the place looked, these water-borne diseases were very rampant. Like myself, I feared taking water from the area because I used to see that the water in Nairobi is just sewage. I could use the water, I get a stomach ache, children in the plot were diarrhoeing, but now those diseases have reduced completely. Water is available and the environment is clean, no bad smell, now people are okay. ”

Mwanarabu Kwetu Pilot Project Cluster Leader – Mosque Road, Mukuru Kwa Reuben

Focus group interview on 5 May 2022.

New infrastructure and services have substantially reduced climate risks related to flooding, fires and exposure to diseases like cholera.

These early implementation efforts — along with the relationships formed between Mukuru residents and the local government during the initial planning phase of the SPA — provide a strong foundation for continued planning efforts to further reduce residents’ vulnerabilities and build their resilience to climate hazards.

In July 2022, in the lead up to the Kenyan general elections, Mukuru residents worked with Reuben Centre and AMT to create a **People’s Manifesto** that outlines the goals of 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.



“ [In the **People’s Manifesto**], the Mukuru people have now demanded for their rights, I think according to me that is actually a power, it’s actually a force, the community is actually a force to reckon with, yes because they understand, they have been part of the process and now they are actually putting the aspiring political leaders to task and saying whoever wants to be a leader here this SPA must be approved, we must see development, I think they’ve actually demanded for change. ”

Marion Rono Deputy Director of Housing and Urban Renewal, Nairobi Metropolitan Services

Focus group interview on 29 July 2022.

Beyond Mukuru, the Approach and Strategies Used Hold Promise for Locally Led, Inclusive and Multisectoral Upgrading for Climate Resilience

Upgrading informal settlements reduces climate vulnerability. The risks faced by those living in informal settlements are often not catastrophic or even episodic, but “everyday” – associated with poverty, informality, inadequate basic infrastructure, weak governance, and exclusionary planning.¹⁸ The Mukuru approach shows much promise for locally led upgrading for climate resilience. Its integrated approach addresses multiple intersecting challenges and is appropriate for the complex, challenging environments common in rapidly urbanizing African cities.



“Mukuru as a model of community-government [partnership] to solve problems in informal settlements can be applied in many places. And Mukuru has very hard conditions, which means, if it can work in Mukuru, it can work anywhere else. [...] It has also told us that government can actually build infrastructure [on] land which even belongs to private because it is their duty in terms of the Constitution.”

Professor Peter Ngau Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Nairobi

Focus group interview on 29 July 2002.

Although more can be done to assess and anticipate future climate-related risk, addressing existing gaps in service provision has already reduced residents’ climate vulnerability. Mukuru’s experience demonstrates a locally led and inclusive pathway towards climate resilience that can inform similar efforts in cities around the world.

Key Resources on the Mukuru SPA

- The [Guides and Methods](#) → in this Guide
- [The Muungano Alliance’s Mukuru SPA webpage](#)
- [Achieving Scale, Social Inclusion, and Multifaceted Shelter Solutions: Lessons from the Special Planning Area \(SPA\) in Mukuru, Nairobi](#)¹⁹
- [Scaling participation in informal settlement upgrading: A documentation of community mobilization and consultation processes in the Mukuru Special Planning Area, Nairobi, Kenya](#)²⁰
- [Enabling participatory planning to be scaled in exclusionary urban political environments: lessons from the Mukuru Special Planning Area in Nairobi](#)²¹
- [Mukuru Special Planning Area: Integrated Development Plan Report](#)²²
- [Mukuru Integrated Development Plan](#)²³

Notes and Sources

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