

# Organising grassroots initiatives for a more inclusive governance:

Constructing the city from below

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## Abstract

The project examines how grassroots organizations and networks providing urban critical services in informal settlements contribute to improve the quality of life of urban dwellers and to more inclusive forms of urban governance, constructing the city from below. The project is informed by the study of Kisumu's informal settlements' Resident Associations, the Water Delegated Management Model, and the Kisumu Waste Actors Network. The study adopted an action-research approach with researchers working with citizens, politicians, officers and entrepreneurs in all stages of the research process and used a combination of methods including document studies, ethnographic and participatory observations, visual ethnography, interviews, focus groups, social media analysis and stakeholder workshops as well as participatory videotaping. The study discusses a) the institutionalization of grassroots organizations for the delivery of critical infrastructure and services and their need to gain, regain and maintain legitimacy; b) their flexible and nested structure facilitating their resilience; c) their embeddedness in the communities' knowledge and assets, and their role as social and institutional entrepreneurs to bridge informal settlements with city governance; d) the redefinition of the roles of the citizen, from passive into active agents, and its transformation into more autonomous and insurgent citizens; e) the blending of civic and material rationales and the construction of more fluid identities allowing citizens to draw pragmatically from a broader repertoire of roles and resources; f) and the creation of grassroots organizations as a collective process that emerge from different directions, with the ability to become gateways but also gatekeepers, or the top of the grass at their communities. It concludes with recommendations to informal settlements' resident grassroots organizations, public officers, NGOs, politicians, researchers and citizens in general, engaged in constructing a more inclusive city governance from below.

## Preface

The mandate of the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy (ICLD) is to contribute to poverty reduction by promoting local democracy in low and middle-income countries. To fulfil this mandate, we offer decentralised cooperation through our municipal partnership programme, capacity building programmes through our international training programmes, and exchange of knowledge through our knowledge centre. ICLD documents and publishes key lessons learned from our ongoing activities, initiates and funds relevant research, engages in scholarly networks, and organizes conferences and workshops. We also maintain a publications series.

With ever increasing numbers of people moving to urban areas, the world is facing increasing pressure on both ecological and human environments. Most of this growth is occurring in unplanned and under-served settlements in low- and middle-income countries. As the authors say, the resources and approaches needed to incorporate people and citizen-led initiatives into a more inclusive governance are lacking. Yet, policy making often ignores how, in the absence of formal infrastructure and services, low-income

citizens in informal settlements have developed assets, resources and valuable practices for the provision of social services such as housing, water, sanitation, energy, transportation, food or waste collection services.

Using a variety of action research methodologies such as ethnographic and participatory observations, visual ethnography, social media analysis and participatory videotaping, this study examined how grassroots resilience initiatives (such as resident associations, women associations, youth groups, self-help groups, community-based organisations, cooperatives, public-private partnerships) providing critical urban services (water, waste, sewage, energy, security) contribute to improving the quality of life of urban dwellers, and to more inclusive forms of urban governance. According to the authors, these grassroots initiatives, intentionally or not, are challenging and reframing the nature of the state, local governments and civil society.

Visby, Sweden, May 2019



Johan Lilja  
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## About the Authors



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### Ester Barinaga

Is Professor in Social Entrepreneurship at Lund University, School of Economics and Management. She is interested in concepts and strategies that may help us better design organizations aiming at social change in general, and the dissolution of the immigrant condition in particular. In 2010, Ester founded Förorten i Centrum, a venture she still chairs based in Stockholm that uses collective mural art to empower communities burdened by stigmatisation. Her current work focuses on community currencies as a method to build more resilient communities and more inclusive cities.



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## Introduction

With more than half of the world's population living in cities, and 95% of the urban growth taking place in low and low-middle income countries, there are more than 828 million people living in informal settlements (UN-Habitat, 2016). A considerable part of this growth take place in Sub-Saharan Africa, where rural food insecurity, capital extraction, climate change, shrinkage of the national governments and the liberalization of international trade all play a role in precipitating massive rural migration resulting in growth of informal settlements in cities. Although informal settlements are 'anything but homogeneous' (Gilbert, 2007, p. 69), they are often characterized by overcrowding, insecure tenure, inadequate quality of housing, and lack of access to basic services. Rapid urbanization is exerting pressure on fresh water supplies, sewage, the living environment, and public health, to mention a few. This global challenge is immense.

Sustainable Development Goal 11 addresses this challenge and aims to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (United Nations, 2019). But how? Most top-down and state policy responses have been inefficient and poorly reflect the opportunity to build resilience by developing and strengthening institutions, mechanisms and capacities particularly at community and local government levels. Policy making often ignores how, in the absence of formal infrastructure and services, low-income citizens in informal settlements have developed assets, resources and valuable practices for the provision of housing, water, sanitation, energy, transportation, food or waste collection services. The activities of youth groups, women-groups, resident associations, and community-based organizations represent citizens changing from passive recipients of policies and services into active citizens (Holdston, 2009) through the co-production of basic services (Ostrom, 1989) and infrastructures in collaboration with local authorities and other actors.

These grassroots initiatives – and the local, regional and global networks emerging among such initiatives – have turned into the new social movement of the urban poor that, intentionally or not, is challenging and reframing the nature of the state, local governments

and civil society (Mitlin, 2008; Samson, 2015, Zapata Campos and Zapata, 2018). Many government agencies and local governments start to recognize the value of citizen participation, local ownership and grassroots innovations in the shaping of public policy, for example through participatory budgeting (Heller and Rao, 2015) or co-production of service delivery (Mitlin, 2016). Nonetheless, involvement of stakeholders is typically introduced top-down in governmental policies. The procedures and structures of public agencies are not adapted to engage seriously with grassroots initiatives. There is a lack of tools, competences and approaches needed to incorporate people and citizen-led initiatives into a more inclusive governance. And when they do exist they often miss the opportunity to strengthen local community leadership, social capital and abilities to participate in local governance process.

All in all, the question of how city governance should be transformed towards more inclusive forms that better accommodate and strengthen bottom-up grassroots initiatives and networks is, to a great extent, unanswered.

This research project contributes to bridge this gap by examining how grassroots organizations and networks providing urban critical services in informal settlements contribute to improve the quality of life of urban dwellers and to more inclusive forms of urban governance, constructing the city from below. The project is informed by the case of Kenya's third largest city Kisumu and its informal settlements, where several grassroots initiatives and networks provide many critical services and build up connections of different kinds with the city and county government, as well as other organizations. Particularly, the study focuses on three examples of grassroots initiatives that foster inclusive infrastructure and governance: the role of informal settlements' Resident Associations, the Water Delegated Management Model, and the Kisumu Waste Actors Network.



Meeting under the bridge between women processing the by-product, brokers and researchers. Fish factories in the background.

## Kisumu

With 600,000 inhabitants Kisumu shows rapid urbanization rates, 4% yearly in 2013 (Kisumu ISUD-Plan, 2013). It is the third largest city in Kenya located at the shores of Lake Victoria. The city has a planned centre and a large peri-urban fringe of unplanned informal settlements. 60% of the population live in these settlements in very poor housing conditions and are exposed to frail service delivery, unclear legalities, and poor policy design. Community toilets and showers are scarce, household waste is hardly collected, unhygienic

living conditions that cause serious health hazards. The city has a very fragile public sector functioning in parallel with a growing informal sector in dire need of infrastructure for basic service delivery. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), and the community at large are left to deliver many critical services such as sanitation, water, waste, food provision or even access to capital and savings. Kisumu is therefore an excellent learning case for bottom-up resilience and socio-environmental entrepreneurship induced to meet societal needs.



## Social and institutional entrepreneurship for an inclusive governance

In the informal settlements of many global South cities, grassroots organizations, often in collaboration with governmental and civil society organizations, are part of emerging processes igniting urban resilience and social and environmental change (Zapata Campos and Zapata, 2012). The literature on social entrepreneurship has addressed this question. Broadly defined as “a process involving the innovative use and combination of resources to pursue opportunities to catalyze social change and/or address social needs” (Mair & Marti, 2006, p. 37), social entrepreneurship scholarship emphasizes the bottom-up approach and collaborative nature of such efforts to achieve social change (Barinaga, 2012). Diverse forms of initiatives and collaborations arise to deliver missing critical public services and goods for deprived residents of informal settlements, some of which emerge as environmental community-based and micro-enterprise initiatives in sanitation, water and waste infrastructure services (MacFarlane, 2011, Gutberlet et al., 2016).

Social entrepreneurs respond to unmet needs of communities by tinkering with available resources not perceived as such before (Barinaga, 2017) by counteracting certain limitations imposed by institutional or political settings, or by filling gaps left by the absence of government (Di Domenico et al., 2010). Often, social entrepreneurial processes involve building collaborations, tinkering with resources, developing social networks, re-framing problems anew, as well as organising spontaneous collective action for rapid responses (Barinaga, 2018; Johannison & Olaison, 2007), all of these from below. Social entrepreneurship, that is, often present interesting cases of grassroots involvement in more inclusive forms of governance in contexts of scarcity and uncertainty.

In underregulated environments of ‘institutional void’ (Weij, 2014) and informal economies, often grassroots organizations can become social entrepreneurs, and generate spaces for experimenting with new infrastructural practices (Chant, 2009). When such novel infrastructures and practices consolidate and become institutionalized, new rules, rationalities and procedures are established (Ostrom, 1996). When this happens, the ambitions of the social entrepreneurs to change

institutional settings link to what has been coined ‘institutional entrepreneurship’, a further development within new institutional theories defined as ‘activities of actors who have an interest in particular arrangements and who leverage resources to create new institutions or transform existing ones’ (Maguire et al., 2004, p. 657). The institutionalization of grassroots practices can involve the extension of their scope of action towards broader communities or markets (Schaltegger & Wagner, 2011), or the replication of basic infrastructural solutions and services to other neighborhoods or cities (Gutberlet et al., 2016) as well as the extension of knowledge networks (Owen-Smith and Powell, 2004).

Through institutional entrepreneurship and the transformation of residents into active and insurgent citizens (Holdston, 2009), it is argued that grassroots networks can contribute to forge new conceptualizations of the public (Samson, 2009, 2015) and, by extension, new forms of deep democracy through what Appadurai has called ‘the politics of shit’ (Appadurai, 2001, p. 37).

In the research project we use a combination of new institutional theories on institutional change, and social entrepreneurship studies, to understand how grassroots organizations and networks contribute to more inclusive forms of local governance, thus building a fairer city from below.

## Methodology

Empirically, the project is informed by case studies (Yin, 2014) in Kisumu. It uses a combination of methods including document studies, ethnographic and participatory observations, visual ethnography, interviews, focus groups, social media analysis and stakeholder workshops as well as participatory videotaping. It adopts an action-research approach where researchers together with citizens, politicians, officers and entrepreneurs have co-produced problem statements, empirical data, analysis and conclusions (Hirsch et al., 2008).

Geographically we have focused on Kisumu and three of its informal settlements: Manyatta, Nyalenda and Obunga. We conducted fieldwork during three periods: November/December 2017, April 2018 and November/December 2018. The research was carried out by an interdisciplinary group of researchers including the disciplines of Urban Planning, Engineering in Water & Sanitation, Business Administration and Social Entrepreneurship, Public Administration and Sociology both from Kenya and Sweden. It also involved transdisciplinary research by engaging practitioners (one entrepreneur and one public officer) as part of the research team.

During fieldwork we conducted over forty interviews with grassroots initiatives at the informal settlements (i.e. resident associations, community-based organizations, women groups), as well as with other grassroots networks delivering critical services in the informal economy or the informal settlements (i.e. Kisumu Street Vendors Association, Kisumu Waste Actors Network, Fish Selling women groups), and with politicians and officers working at the Kisumu City and Kisumu County. Most interviews were conducted in groups, allowing the participation of a representation of members, often followed by individual interviews.

Interviews were combined with four participatory workshops with representatives of the Kisumu City and County and particular grassroots initiatives with the purpose to address a challenge hindering the initiative to expand and grow (fish vendors women groups at the Kambuta Fish Market, and Street Vendors Association meeting), to strengthen the link between grassroots and local government for a more inclusive

governance (Kisumu Waste Actors Network), or to disseminate grassroots practices for a more inclusive economy (Community Currencies).

### Table 1. Participatory workshops

**Recycling Networks Conference,**  
April 2018 and 2019  
<https://gri.gu.se/english/research/managing-big-cities---recycling-networks>

**Street Vendors Association meeting with**  
representatives of the City of Kisumu, April 2018

**Participatory videotaping experiment with**  
fish vendors women groups meeting with inter-  
mediaries and representatives of the Kisumu  
County, November 2018

**Community currencies workshop,** with peer-to-  
peer knowledge development, where members  
of a grassroots initiative together with the sup-  
porting NGO Grassroots Economics shared ex-  
periences with resident associations and other  
grassroots networks. November 2018.

The methods used in the participatory workshops were of a different nature.

The *Street Vendors Association* workshop was arranged as an exploratory meeting between street vendors representatives and City officers in a neutral arena. The approach was of conflict resolution between the two parts. In 2015 the City violently evicted the street vendors who had been informally allowed to occupy a central park in Kisumu. Street vendors resisted the eviction and many protests followed. Having a determined place for trading is crucial as it is difficult to survive financially in the streets. While the City considers street vendors illegal, with no official recognition nor licenses, tax officers walk the streets collecting fees from street vendors daily.

During our initial interviews, street vendors formulated a petition for the research team to mediate with the Kisumu City and County to meet street vendors to try to reach to a common ground. In April 2018, Ana María Vargas, ICLD research director, conducted further interviews and observations and organized a first meeting to bring the City and the Street Vendors Association closer. Further mediation is required in the future to bridge this gap.

The *Recycling Networks Conference* consisted of a set of meetings, workshops and conferences held in Kisumu during one week in April 2018, in connection to the Recycling Networks project. The meeting was attended by researchers and representatives of waste picker organizations and networks in Latin American as well as participants from Tanzania, Kenya and Kisumu. Hosted by the City Manager of Kisumu, the conference served to problematize the challenges and opportunities presented by the collaboration between grassroots networks and local governments. It also served to consolidate the recently founded Kisumu Waste Actors Network (Kiwan) with a strong participation of their members and officers and politicians from the City and the County of Kisumu. Activities combined a one-day international conference, several workshops discussing research results, study visits and workshops between waste pickers from various countries, and between waste pickers and researchers.

The *Participatory Videotaping Experiment* started in April 2018 when, as part of the research project activities, local residents of the informal settlements were trained to conduct videotaping and identify grassroots innovative practices providing critical services and infrastructures in the informal settlements. One of those innovative practices was the existence of a fish-waste market where women groups transformed the fish residuals from large factories into bi-product they could sell. The initial video of the activities to transform the fish residuals into products, filmed and edited by a youth-group part of Kiwan, served to kick off a parallel case study to understand the historical development of fish-waste upcycling groups and the worsening of their working conditions. Subsequent interviews with companies, fish brokers, grassroots

groups, national authorities, county and city council were also videotaped. The original video was also used as the starting point for a dialogue with county officers and politicians as it was shown to them during our interviews. Their reactions to the video were also filmed and displayed in a workshop where members of the women-groups and intermediaries met, which was also filmed and shown in the next round of meetings with the county. In that way, the different actors involved could quickly and accurately get an understanding of the problem, setting and each other's perspectives.

The *Community Currencies Workshop* was held in November 2018, supported by ICLD. Community currencies is another financial grassroots innovation identified by the research team in a research visit to Mombasa and Nairobi in November 2017. The purpose of the workshop was to promote peer-to-peer knowledge development on grassroots financial innovations. It brought together members of grassroots organizations involved in developing community currencies to address the lack of access to credit, with city and county officers and politicians. During a two-day workshop, local actors discussed the potential to develop this grassroots financial innovation in Kisumu's informal settlements in collaboration with local authorities. A separate policy brief has been published summarizing the main findings and learned lessons (Barinaga et al, 2019).

In the next section we present the main findings stemming from the analysis of three of the studied initiatives: the informal settlements' Resident Associations, the Water Delegated Management Model, and the Kisumu Waste Actors Network.

The selection of these three cases for this report responds to the aim of examining how grassroots initiatives contribute to the delivery of critical services and a more inclusive governance, with different entry points: the territory where residents live (Resident Associations), a sectoral activity involving grassroots in the informal settlements but cutting across the city (Kiwan), and grassroots initiatives being instrumentalized for the implementation of water decentralization policies in a delimited territory (DMM).

## Findings

### Resident Associations: building up critical infrastructure from below

In a context of general scarcity and uncertainty, such as in Kisumu's informal settlements, Resident Associations (RA) are created “to find ways of bringing key basic services to the residents of the informal settlement”, to “fight for the rights of the residents” (Interview with a RA member), and to create platforms for dialogue with local government officers, politicians and development partners. Since the creation of the first RA in 2003 in Manyatta, the RA has become the standard organizational form for grassroots to articulate their interests and secure critical services in Kisumu's informal settlements.

The provision and management of critical infrastructure through RAs are characterized by four features, presented below, followed by an analysis of the challenges RAs face when they try to meet the government from below.



The RA task forces at the Resource Centre, Obunga.

### 1. Partial organizations creating the illusion of true organizations

The creation of the RAs was supported and mediated by several NGOs providing training as well as the draft constitutions, which explains why different RAs share similar organizational structures; a phenomenon called “organizational isomorphism” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). RAs give an appearance of highly hierarchical

and formal organizations, with chairman, executive committee, spatial sub-representation of units based on different territories, and heads of thematic task forces (i.e. water, sanitation, waste management, urban agriculture, drainage, energy, table banking). Membership is subject to an entry fee and annual renewal fees, which in some RAs can often remain unpaid.

That is, RAs create a facade of being “true organizations” (Brunsson, 2006) comprising all the elements expected from formal organizations<sup>1</sup>. Sometimes criticized for “not being reliable, never (holding) elections... (and) (being) amorphous” (Kiwasco officer), in their search for legitimacy towards local government and potential donors, RAs respond by striving to look like complete organizations. For example, by using the label “resident association”, even if some of them are not juridically an association, RAs give the impression of covering a broad territory and securing wide representativeness. However, RAs are better described as partial organizations, their organizing relying on “less than all organizational elements” (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011, p. 84). To illustrate, despite membership fees being compulsory, very few members honour them, membership being open and fluid. Members join and leave, not only depending on existing projects that might attract them as potential beneficiaries, but also as the population of the informal settlements itself is floating.

1. While it is common to constrain the concept of organization to formal organizations, Ahrne and Brunson argue that ‘partial organization’ is a broader concept that includes aspects of the organizational environment. Unlike ‘formal organizations’, ‘partial organizations’ comprise only a few of these elements.



## 2. Critical but hidden material/organizational infrastructures

While some formal organizational elements are missing, much of the organizational life at the RAs runs ad hoc, such as fluctuant task forces that become active while external funders provide resources and become inoperative when resources dry up. Nevertheless, in such a loose organizational context, the continuous existence of critical material/organizational infrastructure (e.g. water task forces and emergent table bank groups) provides cohesion, stability and continuity of these grassroots organizations. Two of three RAs were created for provision of water services to the community, in collaboration with the municipal water management Kiwasco. For example, the Manyatta Resident Association was initially created to provide water, but later other task forces were also developed to provide further community services, such as waste management and sanitation.

Similarly, within each of the three RAs hundreds of residents are involved in many small table bank groups. Table banking refers to a collective funding strategy where small groups meet regularly to pool savings and rotate loan-giving to individual members (Geertz, 1962). Membership is based on trust and acquaintance with a group member. Members meet face-to-face every week on a given day. These weekly meetings provide the necessary financial infrastructure for saving and investing in household needs and businesses, and even for the services provided by some RA task forces (such as the water task force in Manyatta). Such community-saving capacity makes them more independent from external actors: “This [referring to the new table bank connected to the water task force in Manyatta] is a big difference. We used to have partners but now we can sustain ourselves” (Manyatta RA). Table banks turn into a critical organizational infrastructure that maintains the RAs alive, where face-to-face encounters promote the necessary cohesion and sense of belonging to stabilize the RAs (Haugh, 2015). Connecting table banking groups to task forces, for instance a table banking group that focus on waste management, another on water, etc, has been an intentional strategy followed by RAs because,

in their own words, “where you keep your money is where your heart is ... now people ask when the meetings are scheduled instead of us chasing them” (Manyatta RA).

Water provision and table banking are critical (and interlinked) infrastructures, both material infrastructures that sustain life in the informal settlement (through the provision of water or savings) and organizational infrastructure for the stability of grassroots organizations such as RAs. As RA members acknowledged: “Water is the mother of others” (Obunga RA) “Water is life. With waste you can throw it away” (Manyatta RA). “Money matters” (Obunga RA). Still, despite the central and vital role of task forces and savings groups, these may remain hidden to outsiders. As Hydén (1983) noted, associational life in Africa remains invisible for the untrained eye of the foreigner, but highly visible for the communities that participate in it on a daily basis. For the grassroots the value is clear: “We are discussing how to include more self-help groups ... some of them are part of the RA as individuals, we now want to bring them together as groups ... so we have a bigger resource” (Nyalenda B). Therefore, while these loose and emergent groups are invisible to those outside the informal settlement, grassroots organizations have the ability not only ‘to see’ them, but also seek to include them into their governance infrastructures and make them visible for other governmental actors.



The RA task forces at the Resource Centre, Obunga.



### 3. Nested and floating infrastructures

A closer look at these grassroots initiatives reveals how groups are embedded in other groups, nested in layers (Ostrom, 1989) (i.e. task forces embedded in RAs), resembling “an amorphous nebula of indistinct shape and with variable density” (Melucci, 1996:114) with semiautonomous groups floating in the organizational flux of the RA without any clear connection to a hierarchy (i.e. table banking groups).

With regard to the first characteristic, the RA functions as an umbrella organization created as an entry point into the informal settlements to connect smaller groups and task forces with the broader institutional environment of authorities and donors and the attached potential resources: “After postelection violence, there was no group supporting the community, no group that could take lead, everything coming to Nyalenda B, if we could not unify ourselves in small units in Nyalenda B we would not enjoy resources” (Nyalenda B RA). The embedded and nested infrastructure is therefore a mechanism to gain visibility, legitimacy and access to resources. This also means that, as an umbrella organization, they need to constantly search for new groups and bring them into their nested structure to maintain or gain strength and therefore legitimacy: “We see new groups, like the boda-boda, and see how to bring them together, how to recruit new groups” (Nyalenda B RA). This is promoted by the organization through autonomous subunits in a nested structure, where the different groups are connected to the RA but operate individually, with their own rules, practices, and activities (Manyatta RA). By joining the RA these smaller groups can become visible to external actors and potentially access future resources.

In many cases, table banking groups were spontaneously created under the organizational umbrella of the RAs and/or using RA meeting space. Being aware of this, RAs develop strategies to integrate these groups into the formal structure, either to strengthen participation in RA meetings (e.g. as table banking requires attending weekly meetings to pool your savings), or to sponsor some of the critical services provided by other task forces (as a new water CBO created in Manyatta from

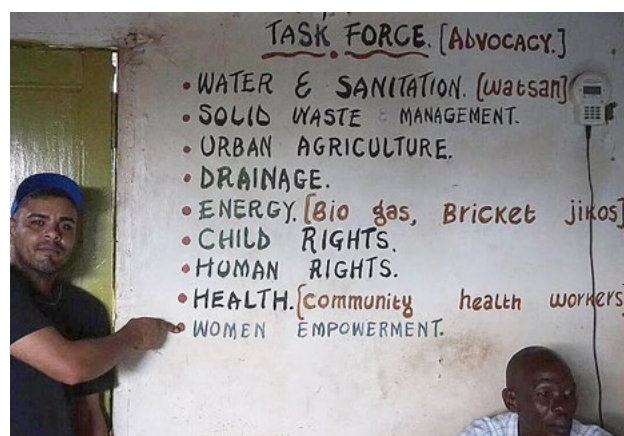
a table banking group). This also applies to other self-help groups in the community, informally becoming part of the organizational umbrella of the RA:

***We have also women, youth and self-help groups (boda-boda), that are not connected as groups but as individuals, and might participate in the activities ... (We bring these groups as) we are an entry point in Nyalenda B, we identify who, what groups are successful ...***

Nyalenda A.

### 4. Dormant organizational infrastructures

Some of the task forces were described as being part of the formal RA organization but in practice many were inoperative during long periods. These “dormant infrastructures”, as we call them, could remain latent with minimum or no resources, but can quickly be revived and articulated when resources are mobilized from government or donors. Members of dormant task forces shift to other active task forces, avoiding loss of knowledge and capacities. The RA can continue to operate as its critical organizational infrastructures (e.g. water task forces or table banking groups) provide resources and keep the cohesion of this loose organization. From this perspective, grassroots organizations operate in a floating network form (behind the facade of a formal organization), where the lack of strict boundaries supports qualities such as spontaneity, flexibility and adaptability, and therefore resilience (Ahern, 2011) in an environment of scarcity and uncertainty.



Some dormant task forces (e.g. women empowerment or solid waste management) in Obunga Resident Association, yet visible for visitors.

In the following we analyse the challenges that grassroots organizations face when trying to meet the local governance from below.

### **Inclusive governance and grassroots infrastructure**

Many RA members perceive a considerable gap between the grassroots organizations providing critical services to the community and local government: “at times they do not move down to us, we don’t move up to them, then there is a gap” (Nyalenda B) “Bottom and top do not meet but collide” (Nyalenda A). To bridge that gap, RAs try to build up new connections with local government. Latour distinguishes between intermediaries that “merely transport, convey, transfer” (1993, p. 80) and mediators that “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning of the elements they are supposed to carry” (2005, p.39). The grassroots organizations studied in Kisumu alternate between these two forms of connection; they are both intermediaries and mediators depending on needs and opportunities.

On one hand, water task forces are being instrumentalized by local government to expand the water infrastructure in the informal settlements, turning the RAs into transmitters or intermediaries of water (see below on the Delegated Management Model). Mostly, RAs have nothing against this and are willing to be an intermediary in the implementation of county policies in order to improve the provision of services in the informal settlements: “The county can use the RA” (Nyalenda B). Although new reforms to further devolve powers and decentralize local government are being created, such as village councils and village administrators, the ward administration currently represents the lowest tier of the county administration and becomes a boundary spanner, defined as those who adopt the role of linking the organization’s internal networks with the external environment (Aldrich and Herker, 1977) between the government and the community. Constrained by a general lack of resources, the performance of this role depends highly on the person in charge. When working smoothly, Ward Administration and RAs can develop a symbiotic relationship whereby the Administration takes advantage of the mobilization capacity of these grassroots organ-

izations, for example to call for attention at participatory budget meetings: “We use the grassroots organizations to reach out, I use Manyatta RA ... just a phone call to one of them and they disseminate quickly, post it on WhatsApp, with 2000, 3000, 4000 people in the groups” (Ward Administrator Manyatta) and vice-versa. Another example is when RAs contact the county through the Ward Administration for transmitting local problems and needs.

On the other hand, the RA can also adopt the more active role of a mediator when resisting, advocating or negotiating the implementation of local government policies. Obunga RA, together with other actors such as the Ward Administrator, has successfully lobbied for improving the roads within the informal settlement through the participatory budgeting. RAs as Obunga have increasingly gained legitimacy to participate in the participatory budgeting that the county started in 2016, due to RAs’ capability to provide certain services and to represent a large number of residents. Furthermore, the Obunga informal settlement, long being abandoned by local government policies, has received increased attention during the last years, partly through a previous ICLD project and ITP activities bringing politicians and officers to the RA and the settlement, which has contributed to make Obunga and the actors more visible. Although it depends on the situation, RAs generally draw unproblematically between these two roles as mediators and intermediaries, at times even simultaneously. This ambiguity provides them with a wider repertoire of action so necessary in a resource-poor governance environment.



Obunga Residents Association painting, representing their role as mediators between the community and the local government

Despite such good examples, grassroots organizations have criticized the participatory mechanisms that are in place for being more of a token. RAs and other grassroots organizations have articulated strategies to resist one-way processes and demand more genuine participation, for example, by asking the county to provide documents and budgets well in advance of public participation meetings and to hold meetings inside the informal settlements at times when residents can attend.

***We want them to change their attitude. It is not only us implementing the county's ideas, but also ours! (...) We will stop the meeting otherwise", "Even the (Ward) administrator is on our side. There were lots planned, nothing implemented***

Interview Nyalenda A.

***They (the county) see you as an enemy ... (The county) send(s) you a document (in short notice) with 100 pages and say 'can you please pass the document?' when we know we did not do anything (about the document)***

Nyalenda B.

Similar complaints were heard regarding how Members of the County Assembly (MCA) used meetings with grassroots organizations, such as RAs and CBOs, to serve such politicians' own agendas: "these meetings need a formal structure, and not just following the MCAs agenda with punctual meetings as a result of their initiative" (Nyalenda A RA). The same resident complained about corruption when appointing positions, such as Ward Administrator: "things are done under the water ... The village council is extremely politicized, and they will employ the people that have supported them before".

Another example of the role of RAs as mediators is the recent creation of the Kisumu Informal Settlement Network (KISNET) to exchange knowledge between grassroots organizations: "we try to create a resource centre like the one in Obunga" (Nyalenda B RA). KISNET also serves as a communication channel, created by the grassroots, with the city and the county governments: "We have created the Kisumu Informal Settlement Network, we come together ... we have monthly meetings and discuss issues, and we do lobbying, for example when the county government comes with something we take that to the relevant ministry, we share together ... We are very close, not connected yet to national networks ... we are trying that, we went to South Africa" (Nyalenda B).



As mediators, grassroots organizations such as RAs, can create an increasingly functional community infrastructure that includes citizens in parts of the city that are largely abandoned by local government. Still, they can also exclude other initiatives, and even hinder or lock-in the development of innovations (Corvellec et al., 2013). For example, members of a dormant waste task force in a RA hindered the creation of new youth groups to provide waste collection services to the community, showing that also dormant parts of the organization can execute power depending on the local dynamics of each group. Similarly, while the connections these grassroots organizations make can shift power dynamics towards a more inclusive governance, they can also perpetuate power dynamics shaping a “tyranny from below” (Zapata Campos & Zapata, 2015) in which the “grasstops” (Briggs, 2008) and their leadership block progress and control or capture benefits for private interests (de Wit & Berner, 2009). Still, RAs strive to improve their accountability, record-keeping, and transparency. From this perspective, issues of representativeness, clientelism, deep democracy and the necessary rotation of leadership are extremely relevant for building up a genuine inclusive governance from below, and not only from the top of the grass.



DMM Oliketi Women Group

### Kiwasco’s Delegated Management Model: Local government instrumentalizing grassroots

From all the critical services provided by grassroots organizations, water provision to Kisumu’s informal settlements, has been the one that has succeeded to dramatically improve both the coverage and the quality to a moderate price in only a few years. The introduction of the Delegated Management Model (DMM) permitted the decentralization of this service through partnerships between the Kisumu Water and Sewerage Company Limited (Kiwasco) and different community grassroots organizations in the informal settlements operating as semi-autonomous water providers called Master Operators (MO).



Water pipe to house

The starting situation for the DMM was critical. In 2003 only 36% of Kisumu’s population was connected to piped water (Schwartz & Sanga, 2010). The DMM model was brought to Kisumu by the World Bank and the pro-poor public-private partnership program in 2004 with inspiration from similar initiatives in Arusha, Dhaka and Manila. Piloted first in Nyalenda in 2005-2006 (WSP, 2009), the idea caught on well expanding soon after. Since then, the DMM has been framed as a best practice and disseminated in the city as well as nationally and internationally to places like Lusaka in Zambia and South Africa.

The DMM was made possible in the context of the Kenyan Water Act of 2002. This act facilitated the reform of water supply management through the devolution of responsibilities for water resource management and service provision from the state to local municipal companies, where Kiwasco was established in 2003. The DMM system was inspired by the United Nations Public-Private Partnership program brought to Kisumu by a World Bank project. In the DMM system, Kiwasco installs meter chambers on the trunk water supply line at the fringes of the settlements, which are run by MO, typically a registered group from the community. The MOs are responsible for supplying water to water kiosks and individual houses/ compounds, illegal water connections within its catchment area, pipe burst and vandalism, for collecting payments, and for payment to Kiwasco. Water is bought at bulk rate from Kiwasco, providing MOs with the possibility of a viable business. Organisationally, the DMM system either draws from existing organizational forms at hand or when missing, promotes the creation of new ones. MOs have different organizational settings: some are organized as task forces within an RA transformed legally into CBOs (such as in Manyatta or Obunga); others as women groups (such as Oliketi Women Group in Nyamasaria), or clan groups organized through CBOs (such as Koyuga in Nyamasaria); still others are organized as private entrepreneurs (such as some lines in Nyalenda). New groups have also been formed, such as the Simba Koselo Women Group, out of the remnants (the coordinator and some staff) of a previous group.

The impacts of the DMM are significant. Grassroots organizations operating as water MOs have succeeded to supply water closer to many of the city's poorer residents. In 2011, 12% of the residents of Kisumu's informal settlements had access to piped water in their dwelling or yard and 84% from public taps or water kiosks (Maoulidi, 2012). In Obunga, where water provision has been a huge challenge, up to 80% of the residents had access to a water point at a maximum 100 meters distance and at an affordable rate in 2018 (Obunga Water CBO). Also, as residents become concerned about the functioning of the network, the costs for illegal connections and leakages of the water

network have been reduced: "you know all the thieves where you live" (Simba Koselo WO). Low income residents are provided with cheaper water, better payment facilities and more flexibility to pay: "compared to when the service is provided privately or by the municipality, they (the grassroots organizations) have more understanding, for example when the user cannot pay" (Kiwasco interview). Kiwasco has also benefited from reduced costs and the amount of non-revenue water up to 40% (WSUP, 2018). The grassroots organizations operating as MOs also benefit from the profit (10-20%) generated by providing water, which is reinvested in other community activities (e.g. other task forces within an RA). Finally, all these benefits have translated into other types of benefits, such as a reduction of water related diseases (cholera) (Obunga RA) and women and girls getting time for other activities as they no longer have to carry water long distances (Simba Koselo WO).

The success of grassroots organizations providing water services through the DMM implies facing and overcoming a number of challenges, which are developed in the following.

### **1. Low-income residents, included, excluded, resistant?**

Despite achievements, grassroots organizations strive to expand water connections to more low-income residents, as coverage in some low-income areas has stagnated. As MOs argue, one reason is that the profit margins between bulk rates and rates for selling water to consumers is too narrow (Koyuga in Nyamasaria). Conversely, Kiwasco argues that this is not a problem but a matter of proper management (Kiwasco interview). Either way, a particular difficulty for low-income residents is the connection fee and the initial investment necessary to buy the pipes, which hinders the infrastructure expansion, despite Kiwasco's alleged support in initial stages of establishing a new DMM. Buying cheap pipes becomes expensive in the long term as they break down more easily. The risk of all this is a further exclusion of the poorest residents from proper water provision at a reasonable price.



## 2. Trust and social cohesion, cause and consequence

MOs are challenged significantly in their early stages, when they have to gain the trust of the community, “convince the neighbours that it was necessary” (Koyuga WO), negotiate to dig trenches for pipes across the settlements and compounds to connect to the network (Obunga CBO), and break down the businesses of intermediaries selling water at high prices resisting the introduction of a more affordable service (Oliketi Women Group). After a hard start “bit by bit the residents appreciate it (the water service) and they convince other customers themselves and start coming one by one, so we did not have to chase new customers” (Koyuga CBO). The diffusion of the network seems to be easier in communities with higher social cohesion, such as rural settings, as well as when the grassroots organization has already gained the trust of the community. For example, some CBOs based on clan groups, as the Koyuga CBO or the Oliketi Women Group (a majority of them being widows or single mothers), enjoyed trust from the community due to their previous social activities in the Nyamasaria periurban area.

## 3. Outsourcing and individualizing responsibilities

The success of the DMM relies on the outsourcing of sales, network-construction, maintenance and surveillance and collection of payments from Kiwasco to the MO. While the individualization of responsibility for the maintenance of the network explains the success of the diffusion of the water provision, it also generates a burden on the grassroots organizations providing the service and, by extension, on the informal settlements’ residents. For example, the Koyuga CBO complains that in Nyamasaria not all water meters are placed together and, therefore, customers cannot safeguard them. Stealing water meters is frequent, as they can be sold as scrap metal. The same applies to the payment of the bills, as plots with a water connection have to organize to divide the bill between themselves (Obunga RA), which might generate tensions between neighbors. A particular challenge is when new roads and drainages is constructed in informal settlement (usually by state agencies) disrupting the pipes and hindering the installation of local water infrastructure for long time periods (Obunga water CBO). In such

situations, temporary piping also exposes the network to breakages and pollution.



Water meters

## 4. Professionalization of grassroots organizations: inclusive or commodified governance?

Grassroots organizations sprung out of civil society with a community orientation become hybrids (Wijkström and Zimmer, 2011) between a civil society organization and a professional service provider. For all task forces in the informal settlements, becoming a Kiwasco MO has been a profitable activity that has generated revenue supporting the continuity of many grassroots organizations. However, as these community groups become more professionalized and profitable, tensions emerge between them and the RA where they are embedded, or from where they originate. For example, the CBO operating as a MO within the Obunga RA became independent, leaving the RA without this revenue stream. The ambition to gain this profit without paying a fee to the RA, together with the RA weakness in exercising control over the task force, was behind their independence: “All task forces have to support 10% to the RA, following the constitution, the Water CBO in Obunga decided to leave because Obunga RA was weak and could not control it” (Manyatta RA).

Therefore, the transformation of grassroots organizations into profitable and professional service providers implies a risk of leaving other non-profitable tasks behind, such as human rights and women empowerment task forces that remain dormant in Obunga RA, or the housing task force in Manyatta RA who has shifted focus towards becoming a DMM water MO “because that is where the money is”.



Members of the Kiwan Waste Actors Network conducting peer-to-peer technology transfer with actors from other countries.

Furthermore, the DMM model also turns a government-citizen relationship into a procurement-provider-customer relationship, based on economic transactions and performance. Although the DMM is described as a community partnership, it implies the commodification or marketisation of government-citizen relations, transforming low-income citizens into entrepreneurs and critical services into commodities: “Kiwasco considers us as entrepreneurs ... these things (referring to water) are business” (Simba Koselo WO). How these practices redefine what a basic and critical service is, as well as the responsibility of the local government to deliver critical services and infrastructures and, by extension, its relationship with citizens, deserves further exploration.

Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the professionalization and self-production of critical services also has resulted in economic opportunities, and has developed organizational as well as symbolic capabilities, in terms of identity formation. The creation of new connections between informal settlements (i.e.

through the regular meetings that the CBOs from different informal settlements organized by Kiwasco) also serve to exchange knowledge and ideas.

### The Kisumu Waste Actors network: Building grassroots sectoral networks

The Kisumu Waste Actors Network (Kiwan) is an association registered as a cooperative society of micro and small entrepreneurs, community-based organizations, youth and women groups, collecting, transporting, recycling or up-cycling waste in Kisumu. Kiwan is closely linked to several RAs through the participation of groups coming from the informal settlements (e.g. Obunga, Nyalenda, Manyatta) and actively participating in task forces and management positions. Its creation in 2017 is closely related to an action research initiated in 2014 through a previous ICLD project (Combating poverty and building up democracy through participatory and sustainable waste management) and two following projects (the present one and the Recycling Network project funded by the Swedish Research Council 2017-2019, from which Kiwan adopted its name). In 2008, the Kisumu Waste Management Association (Kiwama), was created with the support of the Kisumu Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan (2007-2009), to strengthen collaboration between waste entrepreneurs and to implement a revolving fund. Due to weak financial management, complaints of corruption and non-competitive interests' rates, only a few Kiwama members benefited, making participants lose their trust in the network and leaving it dormant. Notwithstanding, Kiwama occasionally mobilized members for lobbying towards the administration when necessary. A group of members also continued collaborating informally, but it was not until 2017 when, responding to coproduced action-oriented research activities spearheaded by Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and technology (JOUST) through its collaborative research projects, that the network was founded. The research activities brought the otherwise scattered waste actors together to discuss issues, that the actors picked up to initiate the processes of forming an organization.





Storing sorted waste

### Building up internal trust

The failure of Kiwama undermined the trust of self-help groups, CBOs and microentrepreneurs, which obstructed the creation of city-wide networks that could serve as a governance bridge and as an empowerment tool. As a consequence, the foundation of the new network had to show that the actors had learnt from their previous mistakes. When a group of them started calling for the first meetings they experienced “it was difficult since the majority of Kiwan members who had joined KIWAMA (...) were very skeptical” (Kiwana). Working with a strict and transparent financial reporting has been crucial to start building up trust and regaining legitimacy in collective action (Suchman, 1995, Deephouse & Suchman, 2008, Deephouse et al., 2017). Similarly, trust has been built by promoting better knowledge among members:

*we did not know each other, and it was difficult to understand the other members, from the beginning each person had a different idea, and even to set a day for a meeting was difficult” (Kiwana). Mutual learning was also encouraged through meetings where they could explain their recycling activities and strengthen the links between them. It was also supported through physical visits to their working places. Another way to build trust was to establish a closer relation between the top and the bottom of the network: “I was not a member of Kiwama but I heard stories, the actors were strong but the challenge came from the management, they were not fair enough to their followers, we need to come back to the ground to share ideas that have been discussed in the executive*

Kiwana.

Another venue has been the creation of a table bank whereby shares are paid when attending each meeting. Money is used, as in other grassroots organizations, to strengthen meeting attendance, build trust and develop a savings culture, making sure that members act responsibly and participate in the network. Money acts as a glue, generating mutual obligations and organizational cohesion, tightening and retaining individual members to the network not to lose their saved shares: “Table banking brought us together and it is a boundary that cannot be broken. My money is there, so you have to be there yourself” (Kiwan).



Constitutive meeting of Kiwan, December 2017

### Gaining legitimacy externally

When forming Kiwan, it was important to gain legitimacy internally as well as externally. Kiwan members perceive that the county and the city “have recognized us” as the legitimate interlocutor for waste management. This recognition comes, to start with, from the representativeness of the network. Not in vain, an important initial task for all members was to enrol new members, expanding the network, in order to gain representativeness towards the city and county government. This also served to map new groups working with waste, constructing a more inclusive membership. Such is the case when youth groups in Obunga enrolled women groups working with fish waste. Two years after its conformation Kiwan is still expanding its membership beyond the city boundaries in order to gain representativeness from each subcounty.

Kiwan members also observed how they in a very short time had gained a power position due to their knowledge, capacities and assets (including human resources) in the informal settlements, where the City has no capability to provide waste collection services. “There is nothing they can do without us”, said one Kiwan member, referring to the implementation of the new waste transfer stations in the informal settlements. The City Director of Environment acknowledges this relation of interdependency and with regard to the imminent construction of these infrastructures confirms that “if we do not bring in the community ... the project will not work ... we don’t have the capacity to manage all these waste transfer stations”.

Another example is when the county employs locals for clean-ups through Kiwan as “it is easier to control them because they are Kiwan members”. Kiwan members perceive that “for now the relationship has changed, the county, there is nothing they can do without consulting the Network. And we as the local actors know how to interact with residents and other participants, better than county government. When the resident sees a county officer, starts running, they know they will come with enforcement. We know however how to interact. The county has realized that they have to go through the networks. They already respect us” (Kiwan).



A youth group member of Kiwan collecting waste in Obunga informal settlement



The rhetoric used by Kiwan members regarding their 'local' condition responds to their role as social and environmental entrepreneurs, increasingly recognized by local government for their knowledge and assets, their recycling and economic activities embedded in relations of friendship and kinship in the territory. This socioeconomic embeddedness is indispensable to build up an inclusive governance and bridge the gap between informal settlements and the city. The embeddedness of governmental activities in the social, economic and institutional ties of the informal settlements (e.g. self-help groups, CBOs or resident associations) become fundamental processes (Granovetter, 1985) to policy implementation and local governance and transforms the grassroots organizations into institutional entrepreneurs (Gutberlet et al., 2016).

The heterogenous composition of the Kiwan network facilitates the establishment of connections with local governance as it is supported by well-known and respected entrepreneur members of Kiwan. It also facilitates the connection between the grassroots of the informal settlements and the municipal dump, that is, with the social entrepreneurs that can enable implementation of local environmental policies: "We have called city environment department on board in our meeting. Through the network we should share the information to the informal settlement ... We are the bridge between the informal settlements and the county government" (Kiwan).

The support provided by other actors like local and international Universities and other international organizations such as ICLD; the close connection between Kiwan and the research project; and other related events such as conferences and workshops organized in Kisumu and its informal settlements inviting officers and politicians from the region, have also strengthened the legitimacy of Kiwan. This confirms the important role that intermediaries as universities and other institutional actors have in supporting grassroots networks to build up a more inclusive governance. They also highlight that constructing the city from below not necessarily responds to a typical process from the bottom-up, but it is better described as a movement that comes from different directions (Holt and Littlewood, 2017).



International Conference and field visit to Obunga hosted by the Swedish International Centre for Local Democracy in 2016, with the participation of politicians and public officers from local governments in East African cities



International conference hosted by the Recycling Networks project with representatives from waste picker networks in Latin America and East Africa and with the City Manager as guest of honour (2018).

### Maintaining legitimacy

However, legitimacy must be constantly maintained and regained, particularly in unstable environments. A few months after the City Manager had participated in Kiwan activities and visited waste pickers working at the dump, some Kiwan members were put in jail. After three years of disposing waste at a transfer point in Obunga (established by the clean-up activities organized by the research group in agreement with the City in 2015) the city banned waste disposal at that point without previous notice and youth groups were put in prison for illegally dumping waste.



Kiwan had to negotiate with the city to liberate the waste pickers: “The county is harassing our members and as Kiwan we had to intercede with county and city to release members that had been set up in prison for violating new norms”.

Apart from the newly gained powerful position of the network, this shows how the connections and agreements between city and local groups providing critical services are unstable and must be constantly revisited and consolidated (Zapata Campos and Zapata, 2015). The institutionalization of new practices and infrastructure co-produced by grassroots organisations and local governments calls for regular, long-term relationships and arrangements (Mitlin, 2008). Far from being formal, these arrangements can remain flexible “undefined, informal and renegotiated almost continuously” (Joshi and Moore, 2004), most often from the government side. Policy arrangements can break down and community organizations may need the help of intermediary organizations (as Universities, NGOs or development agencies) to “help stabilize these undefined and vulnerable connections” (Zapata Campos and Zapata, 2015, p. 238). Grassroots networks like Kiwan can also serve to the purpose of stabilizing these unstable governance connections between the City and the informal settlements.

### **Grassroots networks, identity and change**

For the most stigmatized members of this network – the youth working at the dump or at the informal settlements –, participation in Kiwan was transformative, turning the stigma of working with waste into pride: “Kiwan has helped us to be identified ... we are recognized by the county, if they do clean-ups they come here and pick us up for the work ... most people fear us street boys, people think we are going to rob from them, it’s good if somebody understands you” (Kiwan). Gaining the acknowledgement and support as members of Kiwan, achieving legal recognition from local government, gaining “a culture of working hard, with loans and savings”, or being able to speak freely within the network contribute to shape waste pickers’ self-perception and sense of belonging: “No one speaks for us, it is open ... Kiwan is interested in your views ... you are meant to be active, you are free, there is freedom” (Maenga Youth Group at the Kachok dumpsite).

Waste picker groups also redefine their role within their communities and start monitoring, educating and policing residents in terms of their environmental misbehaviour. Youth group members, to their own surprise, start adopting roles that traditionally would be attributed to the government: “we clean all places, people think we are the county “don’t put that waste there!”... but we are from here!”. Bottom-up networks as Kiwan can contribute to make citizens re-imagine the role of the public (Samson, 2009, 2015), and the role of the citizen in critical service delivery and environmental protection, contributing to forging a more inclusive governance from below.

Strengthening trust through the network, and the acknowledgement of the power of working together has also reinforced a sense of togetherness (Marti & Fernández, 2015, Fernández, 2017): “Being waste operators we are scattered and the city does not recognize us, if we bring ourselves together we can have power to negotiate... the network has brought us together.” (Kiwan). Networks bring relational power to their members. They also transform the identity of these vulnerable groups from passive policy beneficiaries into active agents of change within the city, providing critical services, such as waste collection, to the residents of informal settlements. This is a new form of the deep democracy that Appadurai calls ‘the politics of shit’ (Appadurai, 2001, p.37).

### **Learning**

The network also serves as a conduit to circulate resources and knowledges of different kinds (Owen-Smith and Powell, 2008). Kiwan members share business ideas and innovations and identify complementary services and materials that members can buy and sell from each other: “We used to burn polyethene, but some women make baskets out of them. So now when we pick them we sell them to these women groups” (K Maenga youth group). They also share knowledge from senior to junior groups regarding for example issues of security: “I have learnt working with more security, hazardous waste, broken bottles ... scavengers we need gloves and boots, as well as help for offloading (K youth group).

But even more importantly, the network also enables the development of knowledge regarding other aspects beyond waste management and recycling, such as finances (through table banking), associative life, and even governance: “This is my first table banking being in Kiwan. I am learning so that I can educate my fellows ... I am also learning how the sacco [a savings and credit co-operative] works, I would like to have a management position in the future” (I, Kiwan). This financial and governance literacy, characteristic of grassroots movements, remains one of the most important gains for Kiwan members. As Holdston has observed in informal settlements in Brazil, residents have “converted their violence into law talk, their belligerent reactions into the proactions of citizens using rights strategically” (Holdston, 2009, p.251). From this perspective, “a more autonomous sphere of self-interested and competent citizens” (Holston, 2009, p. 258) has emerged from the informal settlements. Similar processes of ‘insurgent citizenship’ are observed in Kisumu’s informal settlements where expert knowledge moves from city officers to the informal settlements and its active citizens, mobilized through grassroots networks such as Kiwan.

### Inclusion versus Exclusion

Kiwan is characterized by its heterogeneity and the combination of big and small groups, operating at the informal settlements and all over the city. There is a principle of equity in the constitution of the network: “We have signed a MOU whether you are big or small, we assume we are all equal ... Women are represented equally, older people and young people” (H, Kiwan). Small groups, women and youth interviewed felt their voices were heard: “the Chairperson empowers groups”, “they listen to us [women]. In fact, they give us many priorities in the meetings because they feel the ideas we have help a lot in the management of the meetings and the registration (K, women group); “None speaks for us, it is open” (K, youth group)

Kiwan as a network also serves to trickle down ideas from the members attending Kiwan meetings to their respective groups and working places. For example, business ideas or innovations are disseminated among waste pickers working at the dump, or at the informal

settlements, by the participation of these youth groups in Kiwan. The heterogeneity and combination of big and small participants in the networks permit reaching the bottom of the most vulnerable communities and connecting them with higher governance levels. The participation in the network strengthens the social capital of the participants to the network who can draw from the new relations (either with members of Kiwan or by extension with the city and the county) and the associated resources for their activities.



Female members of Kiwan standing up for the election of the management board during the foundational meeting



A member of a youth-group working as waste collector in the Obunga informal settlement asks a question to the Kisumu City Manager during the Recycling Networks Conference in April 2018.

However, these groups are not equally represented yet. Executive positions are predominantly held by men from more powerful groups. Similarly, established mechanisms to encourage meeting attendance, such as the payment of the shares, are discouraging weaker groups to attend such as youths working at the dumpsite: “I am planning to attend the meetings, they are meaning to empower us ... but sometimes it is difficult for some members to save to pay the minimum share to attend the meeting” (I Youth Group).

Furthermore, despite efforts to better connect residents of the informal settlements with waste collection services, the number of households served is still low, and has not yet translated into a generally better quality of life in the settlements. The challenge for the co-production of waste management services in informal settlements is still huge. Lessons learned from DMM could be useful for future actions.

## Concluding discussion

The aim of this research was to examine how grassroots organizations and networks providing urban critical services in informal settlements contribute a) to improving the quality of life of urban dwellers and b) to more inclusive forms of urban governance, constructing the city from below. Informed by the study of Resident Associations (RAs) in Kisumu's informal settlements, of the water Delegated Management Model, and of the Kisumu Waste Actors Network we provide an answer in the following:

### **Institutionalization of governance arrangements in the informal settlements and the need to gain, regain and maintain legitimacy**

In the harsh and uncertain conditions of many informal settlements of Global South cities, such as Kisumu, a variety of forms of associational life have developed to address the basic needs of citizens. After almost two decades, RAs together with nested organizations, such as CBOs, self-help groups, youth-groups, women groups and other community groups, have become the main organizational form, both for the co-production of critical services and for the governance of informal settlements in Kisumu.

However, these institutionalized grassroots organizations need to continuously gain, regain and maintain internal and external legitimacy. They devote much of their energies in constantly scanning, identifying and enrolling new members since representativeness through a broad membership (both spatially and deep down to the grassroots of the communities) remains their main source of legitimacy. This associational life can be rendered invisible or hidden to the eyes of public officers, development aid organizations and researchers like ourselves. Yet, being an integral part of the community, grassroots organizations have the ability 'to see' these floating, loose, and almost invisible networks (Hydén, 1983) and make them visible for governmental actors to be integrated into formal governance structures. Simone (2004) also points out the difficulty for the untrained eye to see the complexity of African cities' organizational life, assuming them to be 'incomplete'. Simone describes the everyday work

to produce an infrastructure that is as important as any physical or institutional urban structure, i.e. "people as infrastructure" in allusion to the key role played by these hidden, and apparently incomplete, forms of organizing.

Local governments can benefit significantly from working together with grassroots organizations and the nebulous organizational landscape that they offer access to, as the DMM successfully did. Acknowledging the existence of this landscape, with its strengths and weaknesses, can help reduce the current gap between policy design and policy implementation. Mediators, as international agencies and NGOs can let ideas and innovations travel to (and from) the community. But to make such ideas and innovations work requires framing and anchoring them to existing local practices and grassroots infrastructures (Kain et al., 2016). In the process of translating global ideas and innovations into practice, grassroots organizations are fundamental for their ability to see existing needs, practices, capacities, resources and structures that can feed and sustain policy implementation.

### **Embeddedness and nested governance**

Grassroots organizations such as RAs, CBOs and other networks, are flexible organizational landscapes inhabited by numerous nested groups (Ostrom, 1989) that remain loosely coupled to their organizational structures. Their flexible and nested structure enables them to maintain their activities in the contexts of uncertainty and scarce resources in which they operate, turning them into extremely resilient forms of organizing. It also enables them to construct a city governance from below. Through regional and national networks (e.g. Kisnet or Kiwan), these organizations are able to connect the diversity of activities, communities and settlements to local governance and beyond. At the same time, in their pursuit to gain external legitimacy and resources, these grassroots umbrella organizations strive to present an impression of a formal hierarchy, of being 'true' and 'complete' organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011) rather than just a loose network.

Their strength and capabilities thus come from simultaneously being both loose and formal organizations.

### **The role of social and institutional entrepreneurship in building the city from below**

As social and institutional entrepreneurs, the local knowledge, assets and competences of grassroots organizations provide them with the keys to access the informal settlements. If understood well, local governments and other actors can leverage these resources, or even instrumentalize them for top-down policy implementation, as the DMM case shows.

Grassroots organizations create their own vehicles and bridges to connect with local governance. Despite their relative position of power, provided both by their local conditions and the creation of their own networks, governmental arrangements created with local government tend to be loose and unstable (Zapata Campos and Zapata, 2015). They require constant processes of stabilizing connections, and of maintaining and regaining legitimacy.

Efforts to consolidate new governmental arrangements, practices and rules result from institutional entrepreneurship processes driven by grassroots organizations, even if intermediaries – such as NGOs, universities, national governmental programs or development agencies – can facilitate the growth, stability and diffusion of such governmental arrangements (Hargreaves et al., 2013). Institutional change is therefore a collective, not an individual, process (Barinaga, 2018; Zapata Campos and Zapata 2018), as it occurs as a result of the coalition of grassroots organizations, intermediary organizations and local governments. The institutionalization of grassroots structures and practices involves, in the case at hand, the replication of successful organizational models and services from one informal settlement to others (e.g. the DMM or RA models), even beyond Kisumu (e.g. the DMM). The creation of city-wide networks (e.g. Kiwan, Kisnet) and their further connections beyond the city provides an additional layer of institutional entrepreneurship whereby local practices

expand beyond the specific scope of action towards broader communities (Maguire et al., 2004).

### **Redefining the roles of the citizen**

Grassroots networks are pipes that facilitate a circulation of knowledge and resources, but they are also prisms (Owen-Smith and Powell, 2008) that frame, transform and make sense of roles and norms in the relationship between informal settlements and local government.

On one hand, as knowledge networks, grassroots organizations can serve as conduits through which knowledge is shared, co-produced and circulated. Of particular interest for building up a more inclusive governance is the generation of financial, democratic and governance literacy, transforming residents into more autonomous, competent and ‘insurgent’ citizens (Holston, 2009).

On the other hand, as prisms, our findings show how belonging to grassroots organizations and networks can transform passive recipients of policies and donor programs into active citizens. Through their everyday practices – what Scott (1990) has called the *infrapolitics* of small acts, such as waste collection or water provision – residents of informal settlements redefine their roles and their responsibilities in the production, maintenance and governance of critical infrastructure and services; roles that traditionally have been attributed to government. They also reimagine themselves as citizens with rights (Holdston, 2009). This ability to imagine alternative futures, becomes a precursor of new forms of deep democracy through what Appadurai calls ‘the politics of shit’ (Appadurai, 2001) where expertise and power, is shifted from city officers and experts into the hands of residents of informal settlements and their organizations. Yet, the empowerment process is uneven and has to be situated in the context of each organization, as for example certain MOs might remain purely instrumentalized and little power has shifted from experts to residents.





### Hybrid grassroots: blending civic and material rationales

Grassroots organizations respond both to the societal and civic concerns of the communities where they are active and to their economic and material needs. This socio-material form of hybridity generates conflicts and paradoxes (e.g. Wijckström and Zimmer, 2011).

Grassroots networks redefine the role of informal settlement dwellers as active citizens, an expression of a deep democracy (Appadurai, 2001). Still, this redefinition of roles risks reducing governance into service delivery, critical resources (such as water) into commodities, and citizens into entrepreneurs. Other commentators have observed how the transformation of the interaction between government, civil society organizations and citizens into a procurer-provider-customer relationship is an expression of New Public Management reforms and an entrepreneurial developmentalism paradigm, whereby citizens are transformed into entrepreneurs to solve their own problems (Thieme, 2010).

Critical voices question whether the promotion of such mixed models for providing critical services is institutionalizing and perpetuating the privatization of basic services in informal settlements (Gutberlet et al., 2016) and the retreat of the public (Roy, 2005). The co-production of critical services by community

entrepreneurs can also frame a system dominated by market and efficiency rationalities that can leave low-income residents in the poorest parts of the city unattended or end up being provided with lower-quality services at higher rates. Similarly, other critics argue that the instrumentalization of grassroots for a professional provision of services could also erode values of transparency, stewardship, civicism and community participation (Alexander and Weiner, 1998). Yet another contradiction is how the pursue for financial sustainability and the professionalization of the services provided by these grassroots can lead to collective action on profitable activities, but leave non-profitable, but critical, activities behind.

Acknowledging these tensions and conflicts is important. However, grassroots organization members do not perceive such clear distinctions between profit vs professionalized and non-profit vs voluntary activities. Instead, they seem to adhere to more fluid identities (Zapata Campos et al., forthcoming), in which citizens can draw pragmatically from a broader repertoire of ambiguous roles. Sometimes an activity is framed in the name of the community, sometimes it is about profit and business, and sometimes it is about both. In this way, grassroots organizations are liminal spaces (Turner, 1967) between state and market that are porous and permeable, thus allowing their members to shift between fluid and malleable roles empowering them to take action in highly messy and complex contexts.

## **Grassroots, grasstops and intermediaries: Who is governing from below?**

We have argued that grassroots organizations and networks build up the city from below. But what does ‘below’ mean? And do grassroots build the city alone and by themselves? The case of Kisumu and its informal settlements shows how local NGOs, international donor agencies, universities and other external actors, act as mediators bringing in their repertoires of knowledge, experiences and convictions as a source of ideas, either to initiate grassroots to organize or to bring in organizational innovations. They also perform as a source of normative isomorphism by diffusing these structures among informal settlements and other cities. Differently expressed, an inclusive governance constructed from below is the result of collective efforts (Zapata Campos and Zapata, 2018) rather than of individual organizations. It is a process that is affected from different directions, where external actors move inwards to mobilize and empower grassroots innovations according to their interests (Smith et al, 2017, Holt and Littlewood, 2017).

Finally, grassroots organizations can be important gateways to a community if they are broadly and deeply embedded in the large and diverse territories of their informal settlement, and fluidly circulate information and knowledge from grassroots upwards, and vice versa. Yet, they can also be gatekeepers and perpetuate power dynamics shaping a tyranny from below (Zapata Campos & Zapata, 2015) executed by grasstops (Briggs, 2008). From this perspective, issues of representativeness, transparency, accountability, clientelism, real democracy and rotation of leadership are extremely significant for building up a genuine inclusive government from the roots of the grass, i.e., that does not get hijacked by the tops of the grass.

## Recommendations

Based on our research, we list a number of recommendations to informal settlement residents' grassroots organizations, public officers, NGOs, policy makers, politicians, researchers and citizens in general, engaged in constructing a more inclusive city governance from below:

- Local governments should learn from well-functioning practices to develop and improve other policies or sectors. For example, in the case of Kisumu, the DMM model brings fruitful lessons for improving other critical services in informal settlements, such as waste and sanitation.
- Include existing grassroots organizations and networks in policy design, participatory budgeting and policy implementation.
- Bring local governmental structures closer to the local communities where grassroots practices take place. This will support the social, economic and institutional conditions for grassroots organizations and help their innovations to grow. By strengthening the lowest tiers of local governments (e.g. through resourcing and professionalization) the growth of innovations and ideas coming from below is sustained. Additionally, these low tiers of government act as boundary spanners, ensuring the reach of grassroots innovations into the local government.
- Grassroots networks and organizations are loose and nested organizational structures, and very resilient forms of organizing. However, they need to be nourished with resources from local government or from intermediaries – such as NGOs, universities, national governmental programs or development agencies – to avoid that they lose their human capital and knowledge.
- Facilitate the creation of grassroots financial infrastructures (e.g., community currencies and table banks) as these provide grassroots with material resources increasing their financial independency.
- The support of local governments and intermediary organizations in processes of further democratization and transparency of grassroots organizations is fundamental to strengthen the representativeness and inclusion in grassroots organizations, avoiding clientelism and corruption.
- Community learning takes time but empowers communities and contributes to active and insurgent citizenship. Grassroots organizations might not be perfect, and they need time and resources to learn and stabilize. Do not discard them because they do not seem to be 'complete' or fully reliable. Support them instead, since they constitute the most stable part of the very local governance. Officers and politicians will change, but grassroots remain.
- Make sure grassroots organizations can devote time not only to material needs, but also to non-profitable activities that are fundamental for the well-being of communities.
- To strengthen grassroots and the co-production of services and infrastructure is also to strengthen the local government. Far from encouraging the retreat of the public sector, it strengthens capacities and structures both in the civil society and the local government as it makes the city more inclusive.



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