# PLANNING CHALLENGE OF KAREN AND ONGATA-RONGAL PERIPHERAL LOCATIONS

## Chapter 1. Introduction

Whatever its position in its particular urban hierarchy, every urban settlement exerts an influence upon its immediate surrounding area- or areas beyond its boundary- and has to be analyzed an integral manner with its neighbouring area.

In this paper the term 'border' refers to physical, political borders/boundary.

Spatial areas along borders suffer from specific disadvantages related to their geographical location and, conversely, are unable to develop in a sustainable manner or seize spatial-economic opportunities. Further, management of border areas can cause a lot of planning, political and operational concerns.

In terms of how City Council of Nairobi (CCN) and County Council of Olkejuado (CCO) perceive their shared border and peripheral locations of Karen and Ongata Rongai, this paper focuses on lack of planning synergy, institutional fragmentation, lack of multi-agency coordination and their impact on land use planning and infrastructure.

The paper starts with situational analysis of the subject area, identifies challenges and lastly puts forward a raft of recommendations.

## **Chapter 2. CASE STUDY: Background & Context**

Kenya's urbanization process is characterised by one primate city- Nairobi, in which infrastructure /services are concentrated, more than other areas in Kenya. Then, rapid urbanization is making local urban areas undergo explosive transformation, yet their urban economies are not sufficiently dynamic to diversify and create employment opportunities.

Though local authorities are legally mandated to plan, administer and provide services in their areas of jurisdiction, only 30% of urban centres in Kenya are currently planned, with land use plans usually prepared at national, regional and local levels on the basis of predetermined goals.

## The study area.

The above said border areas' development is influenced by Nairobi and Kajiado counties-each with its different legal, administrative, and socio-economic conditions- in spite of their jointly shared political boundary (Mbagathi River). The subject areas share Magadi Road, Mbagathi River and Nairobi National Park which acts as a breather, tourism attraction and a revenue earner. Likewise, they share problems related to rapid population growth, increasing role of market forces in the spatial distribution of development, and multiplicity of their social and spatial structures. In addition, the local authorities under whose jurisdiction they fall are faced with additional demands brought about by virtue of their spatial areas' positions and roles within the national urban system and global urban networks. Yet, the subject local authorities often do not have the authority, or resources to deal effectively with these demands.

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## 2.1. ONGATA RONGAI:

# 2.1.1 Location, Planning & Urban development.

Spanning 16.5 square kilometres with a current population of between 66,042 and 147,000, (CBS 1999), Ongata-Rongai is a fast developing residential urban aggregation within Kajiado County; situated at Kajiado's border Nairobi at latitude (0°-53' 60 S), and longitude (36°25' 60 E. Located 50 Kilometres from Kajiado District Headquarters (the core to which it is subordinate), and 20 Kilometres from Nairobi City Centre on the Langata-Magadi Road, several reasons explain the growth of this area which started in the late 1950's as a stone mining township in present day *Kware* (quarry) area of Rongai.

As a local satellite urban centre, it owes its existence to proximity to Nairobi (locational advantage). Second, Ongata Rongai grew out of a small settlement put up by casual labourers who provided labour to neighbouring affluent Karen.

Ongata Rongai functions as Nairobi's dormitory. Strip and nodal physical development obtaining in the area has not occurred under planning control, with haphazard developments first coming along Magadi Road and then spreading to the interior. Present too is unchecked animal keeping and settlements encroaching/polluting Mbagathi River.

Dominated by economic motive and in total disregard of social, aesthetic and environmental long-term impacts on the areas' inhabitants; private developers dictate pace of physical developments. This has resulted in high densities, overcrowded housing, insanitary conditions, diminishing open spaces, and haphazard peripheral development.

This is precipitated by increasing demand for shelter, physical and social infrastructure, ineffective physical planning systems, informal investment finance and speculative land costs.

# 2.1.2 Geography and Economy.

Ongata Rongai with two administrative wards; *Ongata-Rongai* and *Nkaimurunya*, has mixed population except for lacking upper class in socio-economic terms. Ongata Rongai spatially consists of four areas namely Rongai shopping centre, a commercial area to the north, *Nkoroi*, an upper class area to the south, *Kandisi*, a semi-rural area to the east and *Kware*, a slum to the west. Though predominantly residential, formal and informal commercial developments have come up in an unplanned fashion, and functionally zoning the area along Magadi road.

#### 2.1.4 Infrastructure.

Though characterised by proliferation of road links to Nairobi, Ngong and Kiserian to enable commuter travel, Rongai lacks infrastructure and social amenities commensurate to its population. An example is the acute shortage of public schools.

Rongai's single bitumen standard Magadi Road serves its entire population, while local access roads are narrow and untarmacked.

Residents obtain water from private boreholes and in the absence of trunk infrastructure, most developments are on conservancy/septic tanks. Residents contract private solid waste disposal companies.

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## 2.2 KAREN AS A SUBURB IN NAIROBI.

#### 2.2.1 Site and location

Karen suburb occupies an area of 56 square Kilometres, and is located to the south west of Nairobi Central Business District (core to which it is subordinate) at Latitude -1.32°, longitude 36.72°, adjacent to the rapidly urbanizing peri-urban areas of Ngong, and Ongata Rongai.

# 2.2.2 Chronology, planning & urban development

Like in the western and Northern ridges of Nairobi which hitherto exhibit planned development typologies informed by European standards, densities and development principles, Karen was initially settled by European colonialists.

Karen's origin can be traced to Karen Blixens' establishment of a coffee plantation, indigenous forest, grassland and farm worker settlement on 6,000 acres in 1913. Later, to foster white domination and develop the colony, the British government between 1918-1945, subdivided and sold Karen to ex-British forces and colonial government officials. In 1963, Nairobi city boundary was extended to include Karen and Langata which immediately became subject to Nairobi city by-laws. CCN's 1988 Structure Plan introduced a Rezoning Ordinance reducing minimum plot size to 0.4Ha to the south of the Langata and Dagoretti roads and to 0.2Ha, north of these roads. CCN's rationale was to avail affordable land to middle income Kenyans, increase areas' population and increase income from rates and water service charges. In 2006, to address development pressure in Karen, CCN, and other stakeholders prepared the obtaining Karengata Local Physical Development Plan

## 2.2.3 Geography and socio-economy.

Spatially, Karen consists of 2 broad areas as stipulated in the above mentioned 1988 Structure Plan, thus 0.4Hectare minimum plot size is allowed to the South of Karen upto Boundary with Ongata Rongai. Karen displays dispersed settlement pattern, where its affluent population inhabits low-density high income housing.

#### 2.2.4 Infrastructure

Karen is connected to Nairobi and outlying areas by Karen, Langata and Ngong Roads which traverse it, whereas, other of its roads are narrow and in need of repairs. Public transport is at low scale.

Although Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company supplies her with Water, Karen is not connected to Nairobi's trunk sewer system, consequently residents are on septic tanks/soak pits. Residents contract private companies for the purposes of solid waste disposal.

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# Chapter 3: CROSS BORDER LAND USE AND INFRASTRUCTURE CHALLENGES

From the foregoing, the subject border is a filter with a degree of porosity, which significantly influences the subject area's character. It is clear that any change in the built environment or in human behavior on one side of the subject border has immediate spillover effect on the other side.

Below are identified planning and infrastructure challenges:

# 3.1 Land use, development and density.

In both areas, many residents are either unaware of land use planning policies, administrative procedures and existing standards, or find them socially and financially inappropriate. For instance, surrender of road widening strips to Government free of cost. Maximum plot ratios, setbacks, and building lines lower densities and raises costs which are passed on to purchasers /tenants. Such costs reduce private sector's ability to serve needs of lower-income groups, thus marginalizing and rendering them vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous developers.

Ongata-Rongai's high densities and uncontrolled growth pattern has its toll on Karen, whereby developers to the South of Karen are pressing for reduction of minimum plot size from 0.4 Hectares to 0.2 Hectares or less. Both areas face challenges of informal commercial activities on road junctions and road reserves, proliferation of collages that attracts unplanned convenience shops, as well as pressure to adapt to new demands for uses and activities

# 3.2 Ineffective planning and/or governance.

Government prioritizing the centre over periphery in planning, provision of infrastructure and services worsens the plight of these locations. Though the two local authorities prepare plans to guide development in their respective areas, the separate plans contain a mismatch in terms of proposals and completely disregard the other side of the border.

Spatial plans relevant to the study areas are prepared at central Government level minus full involvement of implementing local authorities. Such plans neglect the lower level of local development plans resulting to local rather than regional interests prevailing during their implementation.

**3.3 Planning governance, infrastructure provision and local-government evolution.** CCN and CCO, saddled with Planning and infrastructure provision role in their areas of jurisdiction, are controlled and solely rely on central government for resources and political manoeuvrability.

## 3.4 Inadequate, unsustainable Infrastructure.

Division of spatial areas among unit urban authorities affects infrastructure development by way of physical incompatibilities between infrastructure systems, disjointed approach and inability to enforce infrastructure provision related regulations. Further, existing policies don't emphasize maintenance, financial viability and service quality resulting to unsustainable infrastructure systems.

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# 3.5 Administrative & institutional ability

Though land use planning and infrastructure related policies ought to have similar objectives, in practice are formulated by functionally separate agencies with different focus. In addition, rapid growth is exerting pressure on administrative and institutional ability to plan for, and control development.

# 3.6 Lack of coordination amongst agencies.

Development programmes are confined to either Nairobi or Olkejuado's urban boundaries rather than used to stimulate region's public goods.

Planning and Infrastructure related projects in the area depict disjointed duplication and lack of co-ordination leading to non-improving operations.

### 3.7 Financial and technical considerations.

Donors financially and technically facilitate plan preparation and infrastructure provision in both areas. However, this has created dependency syndrome and adoption of strategies that do not emphasize on sustainable solutions.

Inadequate fiscal and human resources, and bureaucratic planning systems, makes Planning structures and processes in both areas incapable of dealing with scale of planning and infrastructure problems confronting them.

# 3.8 Legal and institutional framework.

The failure of Kenya's over 70 urban development related statutes can be attributed to handicaps on provisions and sanctions to deal with flouters, weakness of related agencies and unwillingness to enforce such laws. These statutes also create conflicts, abet role overlaps, foster poor coordination, discourage information sharing and hamper development of institutions necessary to manage urban growth. Lack of multisectoral collaboration and information sharing has led to unabated encroachment on wildlife habitat, and development typologies in both areas polluting and silting Mbagathi River.

#### 3.9 Citizen participation.

In Ongata-Rongai, while predominant middle class population prefer a well-organized settlement, the poor prefer the area being friendly to informal business which leads to disorder even with reasonable planning.

Limited involvement of civil society, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in plan/policy formulation, implementation as well as operation and maintenance of infrastructure facilities is a salient aspect of planning and infrastructure management in both areas.

## **Chapter 4: RECOMMENDATIONS.**

Bearing in mind that Kenyan cities and towns need sound infrastructure to function efficiently and develop competitive economies, and that there is need to promote land use patterns that respond to demands of the post-carbon age and provide a high quality of life for future generations, the following are necessary for the subject border area;

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## 4.1 Inclusive regulatory framework

For regulatory frameworks to be closely related to what can be achieved for all sections of society on a long-term, sustainable basis; decisions should be made at the lowest administrative level, to include community groups, private sector and Non- Governmental Organizations (N.G.O).

Formulation of focused and appropriate planning regulatory frameworks requires auditing of socio-economic cost of planning policies, standards and administrative procedures with a view to identifying bottlenecks.

# 4.2 Continuous change in type, organization and nature of systems

Land use and infrastructure related policies should have similar objectives, and be integrated with environmental agenda. On infrastructure, there is need to shift from 'predict and provide' paradigm to approaches emphasising on demand management. Major pressures on Infrastructure, service and utility systems not only call for a qualitative increase in supplies but a change in the type, organization and nature of the systems themselves.

**4.3 Resource mobilization** through infrastructure bonds, encouraging private sector infrastructure provision through planning gain, embrace improved site value rating and private-public partnerships in such areas as street lighting, landscaping of frontages and periodic surveillance of civil drains.

# 4.4 Enhancing infrastructure functionality

This would include Integrated public transport schemes, junction improvement, evaluation of junction performance, self actuating traffic lights, providing link roads, instituting guidelines on public-private partnerships on frequent surveillance of infrastructure and related facilities like termini, lay-bys and civil drains can help ease traffic congestion. Solid Waste and waste water recycling should be done near generation points rather than disposing them Kilometres away.

# 4.5 Innovative forms of cooperation & planning

Common planning, realisation and financing of the development programmes by authorities on both sides of the border is may provide an optimal solution to the identified challenges.

Our planning paradigms, methods and techniques require reinvention if they are to face challenges ahead. Thus, it is imperative to harmonize planning policies and procedures in the border area, as a step towards cross-border policy-making. Cross-border cooperation should be combined with private participation.

**4.6 Identification of problems and interests as common:** Cooperation between areas falling under different authorities is motivated by identification of common problems and interests and the conviction that a coordinated approach, is necessary to address problems and articulate common interests.

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# 4.7 Intersectoral collaboration/Role adjudication

Preparing inventory of all involved stakeholders, legally defining their roles, and governance systems, with an overarching institution coordinating all agencies may mitigate against multiplicity and lack of coordination.

Instituting participatory monitoring and enforcement would curb pollution of Mbagathi River, and ensuring adherence to development regulations. Upward review of fines/penalties is necessary to make them deterrent.

**4.8 Regional and interdisciplinary management** of problems is necessary in areas of Land use planning and infrastructure development.

However, we not only need to emphasise a more regional approach to infrastructure development but also greater participation by private sector and local communities with the state concentrating on facilitation and regulation rather than provision.

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