This briefing outlines the approach, achievements, and lessons learned from a three-country project exploring community-based approaches to improving the urban environment in African slums and low-income settlements. Specific details about the work done in each country can be found in the accompanying project briefs for Kenya, Zimbabwe and Sudan. The project adopted an integrated approach to building the assets of poor people in a co-ordinated way. It also focused on creating effective partnerships between community-based groups and relevant stakeholders, in particular local authorities. Thousands of people benefited from improved services in waste management, water and sanitation. However, the project’s greater success was in laying the foundations for future community-based delivery. Lessons were learned in terms of community capacity building, and approaches to supporting small enterprises in service delivery.

Introduction
Urban areas in Africa have some of the highest population growth rates in the world. The resources and systems used by Town and City Councils have, for many years, been failing to keep pace. As a result, the urban environment is very poor, services (if available at all) are of poor quality and expensive, and residents feel powerless and ignored. Infant morbidity and mortality rates are often even higher in urban slums than in rural areas.

The situation across Africa is not uniform, as illustrated by the examples from this project. In Kenya, informal settlements are extremely congested and most residents are tenants. The country has enjoyed a period of relative stability and growth, but was rocked by ethnic violence following disputed national election results in early 2008. In Zimbabwe, the economic collapse and political tensions of the last few years have had a profound effect on the urban poor. The cholera outbreak which began in mid-2008 has illustrated the extent to which service provision (water, sanitation, health care) is now completely failing to meet the needs of many residents. In Sudan, over the last 20 years, urban areas have been host to displaced people fleeing the civil war. In Eastern Sudan new opportunities for greater integration of displaced communities opened up with the signing of the Peace Accord between North and South in early 2005.
with funding of £759,446 provided by Comic Relief, and ran from January 2005 to September 2008. The multi-country nature of the project allowed for peer-learning and sharing of lessons.

This project brief outlines the approach and areas of intervention. It points to ways in which the project was implemented differently, according to local circumstances. It focuses on the key areas of learning, and future directions for our work.

Project sites

Kenya: The project worked in three areas: within the city of Nairobi; in Slota settlement in Mavoko, one of Nairobi’s satellite towns; and in Nakuru, a town in the Rift Valley province.

Sudan: The project worked with IDP camps in two state capitals in Eastern Sudan: Kassala (in the settlements of Kadugli and Wau Nur) and Gedarif (in the settlement of Jebel Marco).

Zimbabwe: In Zimbabwe there were three project sites: the Harare suburb, Mbare; the dormitory town Chitungwiza, south of Harare; and Epworth, a peri-urban settlement south-east of Harare.

Approach

The innovative aspect of the integrated approach used in all three countries in this project is its comprehensive nature; addressing multiple elements of poverty rather than focusing on a single one. The model developed out of thinking based on the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (DFID 1999), trying to build people’s assets in a co-ordinated way. The term ‘integration’ also applies to the project’s approach to creating effective partnerships. The work therefore starts with a foundation of community capacity building and engagement with local authorities and other service providers. That allows for actions in terms of service delivery through three channels (although not all of them were present or given equal weight in all countries): small enterprises; management of services by representative community groups; and voluntary groups often involved in awareness-
raising. Other inputs at this level include ensuring technologies are appropriate, and that households and businesses have access to savings and credit systems. The main result we targeted was that large numbers of (sometimes all) residents would benefit from a cleaner environment and affordable services (and in the case of Sudan, affordable housing): an improvement in their physical assets. A smaller group would benefit from increased income (financial assets) from delivering and managing those services. Social assets would be strengthened through the capacity-building activities, and an enabling environment created through work on policies, institutions and practices.

This model reflects a change since our first projects adopted integrated approaches from 1999 onwards. In those projects, a key result was to improve housing or household-based infrastructure (such as individual latrines). We assumed this would require increased incomes, so we also worked to support a wide range of small enterprises. However, fewer people than hoped for were able to benefit, because not all small enterprise work led to increased incomes, and not all increased income was invested in housing. We are now placing more emphasis on improving services which can be afforded at existing levels of income. Recognizing the challenges inherent in any enterprise-related work, we are now more focused, concentrating on businesses in service-related sectors where our teams have greater expertise and knowledge.

**Capacity building of community-based organizations**

A key starting point for this approach is building the capacity of community-based organizations. The project worked with around 20 community-based organizations (CBOs) across the three countries, and by the end most had achieved a ‘step change’ in their capacity. This included changes in their legal status, improved organizational practices, and greatly strengthened relationships with external partners (beyond Practical Action). In each country, the key issues for organizational change were slightly different.

In Kenya, a priority was for the CBOs to change their status to legally registered co-operatives. All the groups received training and support in organization and leadership which helped them to meet the added obligations this status entails. One of the key benefits is the recognition from local authorities it provides, giving the organizations far greater security and bargaining powers.

In Zimbabwe, as in Kenya, formal registration was important. The Zimbabwe Environmental Lawyers’ Association advised the groups on the options for registration as a private company, trust, co-operative or association, with the choice depending on their capacity and objectives. In all cases, the groups were given initial ‘Training for Transformation’ to build their confidence, team working and management skills. This often had benefits beyond the functioning of the groups themselves. The economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe had profound impacts, and some members dropped out of the groups over time if they found that the activities were not yielding the daily incomes they needed to survive. Groups that were already better established at the start of the project were more likely to continue to function and maintain their levels of active membership.

Poor waste management and drainage: a common street scene in Nakuru, Kenya
In Sudan, we helped to build the capacity of Community Development Committees in each settlement whose role was to represent the interests of all residents on matters of development. Underneath this structure, we helped establish specialized groups to deal with specific issues such as Self-Help Groups for Housing. These proved to be dynamic and successful, with one winning an award from the local office of the World Bank. We also gained valuable insights into the social dynamics of displaced communities. Perhaps surprisingly, the most ethnically diverse community, Wau Nur, was the most successful in creating consensus and avoiding conflict, owing to a clearer distinction here between the role of the CDC and traditional leaders.

**Influencing local policies and practices**

Effective partnerships are a second basic foundation of this approach. We sought to strengthen partnerships between community-based groups and local authorities or other relevant stakeholders such as national environmental management agencies, or local water companies. The project did not aim to change policies, but to help all stakeholders understand existing legislation and the opportunities it already provides for pro-poor service provision.

In Kenya, we focused on environmental policies which, although potentially pro-poor, have failed to be implemented for a lack of understanding at most levels below the national ministry. Our project partners prepared a summary of the relevant Act in English and Kiswahili, and trained the cooperatives, and municipal and provincial government staff on the content. In Nakuru, this resulted in a new set of environmental by-laws which allowed for the licensing of community groups for waste collection.

In Zimbabwe, the project created support for community involvement in waste management at local and national levels. Building on relationships with the local authority in Epworth, we persuaded them to allow a CBO to collect waste in one ward (1,014 plots). They are paid 50 per cent of the waste collection tax levied by the local authority. The demonstration effect of this success changed mindsets within the target municipalities, and also on a wider national level.

In Sudan, before this project started, links between the community groups in the IDP settlements and the local government were weak. We succeeded in creating links and improving relationships. One major achievement was the work done by the Community Development Committees together with Practical Action to persuade the Local Water Corporation to install water networks in the two settlements in Kassala.
Businesses in service delivery

A range of businesses were supported in service-delivery sectors. In Kenya and Zimbabwe, these were mostly in waste management. In Sudan, they were mostly construction-related. The scale of the businesses was different in each case. In Kenya we worked with co-operatives whose members were individual entrepreneurs and small community-based groups involved in particular sectors of waste reclamation and processing (organic materials, paper and plastics). These co-operatives involved several thousand people. In Zimbabwe where the sector and organizations are less well developed, we worked directly with small group enterprises. In Sudan we worked with associations of builders and brick-makers bringing together individuals and small groups (but on a smaller scale than in Kenya).

We provided the businesses with support in terms of business management and financial training, advice and equipment/protective clothing to improve health and safety, administrative support and running costs (in Kenya), start-up materials (Zimbabwe), and the introduction of new technologies and processes (all countries). In Sudan, one of the demonstration houses was given to the Sawa Sawa group to use as their office. In Zimbabwe, we helped the groups to acquire leases on business plots. Some of this support was in the form of short training courses, as well as on-going mentoring and advice. In Kenya and Sudan, we continued our support (begun in the previous project from 2001) for small-scale savings and credit schemes which give loans to small enterprises.

In all countries, our support included developing, adapting and introducing technologies. In Kenya, this was in partnership with universities which supported us, for example, in producing machines processing plastics (grinding, pelletizing, washing); and producing organic fertilizer (sieving, mixing and granulating). In Sudan, we trained local artisans in woodless roofing, and in building designs which would be affordable but also flood resistant. In Zimbabwe, we introduced tricycles for use in waste collection.

As a result, the groups have been able to generate and increase incomes. In Kenya, the co-operatives employ a handful of people but more significantly, have helped to boost the incomes of their members. In Sudan, 60 builders were given on-the-job training, and links were made with the Brick Makers’ Association leading to the purchase of 72,000 bricks. The construction of latrines alone has injected around £10,000 into the local economy. In Zimbabwe, around 100 people were earning incomes from project-supported businesses by the end of the project.

Inevitably, the performance of the businesses was linked to the external economic environment. In Zimbabwe, enterprises dealing in plastics struggled as more households began to use plastics as a fuel for cooking. Also the demand for products produced by the groups (such as cleaners and floor polishers) reduced as households struggled to survive and feed themselves. In Kenya, the global economic crisis led to soaring prices for chemical fertilizer and therefore more interest in NAWACOM’s more competitive organic product.

The ‘traditional’ package of NGO support for small enterprises provided by this project created some problems of on-going dependency. The groups come to expect that Practical Action will support them in identifying markets, linking with suppliers and...
sources of credit, providing training and so on. Through exposure visits and exhibiting at national shows, some are now building their own partnerships and business relationships. It is too early to tell whether this will lead to real sustainability and growth in the future.

**Improving services, housing and the urban environment**

The extent to which these businesses, together with the lobbying work of community-based groups, were able to improve services for residents varied between the three countries. The largest numbers were reached in Sudan through the water networks and construction of toilets. The waste collection services in Zimbabwe, and to a lesser extent in Kenya, also reached thousands of people. The two key challenges for the future are: how to link the enterprises in waste processing with collection systems that create a cleaner environment for residents; and how to encourage further uptake of latrines and new housing designs.

*Waste management:* In Epworth, the community-run waste collection service operates in Ward 5, an area with 1,014 household plots. An impact survey found they were managing to serve 61 per cent of households. In Nakuru, waste collection zones now cover low-income areas, and 6 licences have been issued to community-based groups with some services now reaching poor neighbourhoods.

*Sanitation:* In Sudan, a total of 366 toilets were constructed, serving 6,126 people. This provides greater dignity, security for women, and potentially health benefits. In Zimbabwe, four eco-san toilets were built as demonstration models. Perhaps the greatest benefit is that UNICEF is now working with Practical Action to construct another 700 of these toilets in Epworth.

*Water supply:* In Sudan, water networks were constructed in both Wau Nur and Kadugli, serving 3,719 and 2,898 people respectively. Thanks to the water point at the community centre in Mavoko 300 residents (especially women) can now access clean water closer to their homes. The community centre also offers other services such as battery and mobile charging.

*Housing:* The project only worked on housing in Sudan, where we supported two self-help groups to manage credit for housing, and the construction process using new, affordable designs. 21 people have benefited from loans either for building a new house, or improving an existing building. In addition, a new design was created for school classrooms which maximizes the use of ventilation and natural light, while reducing costs.

**Awareness-raising campaigns**

Campaigns were run in all three countries. In Zimbabwe, 27 people from Epworth were trained as peer educators in Participatory Health and Hygiene Education. Overall they have reached more than 17,000 people. The network of trainers had a large role to play in bringing an outbreak of cholera under control in early 2007. In Kenya and Zimbabwe, campaigns involving art, songs and public
speaking were run in 76 schools in Zimbabwe and 75 primary schools in Nakuru.

In Sudan, a national workshop on low-cost housing alternatives was organized. The workshop was attended by government officials, university academics, contractors, engineers, NGOs, journalists and financial institutions. Similarly, in Zimbabwe, ‘thematic dialogue’ sessions were organized to debate key issues raised by the project between community members and other key stakeholders.

In all countries, the project was featured in newspapers, radio and television. In Kenya in particular, the co-operatives took part in several national and regional shows and exhibitions.

**Lessons learned**

This project gave us an opportunity to reflect on the assumptions inherent in our approach. Annual international meetings and other exchange visits helped project staff to consider and debate these issues.

A large part of the success in changing patterns of access to services has been based on the foundation of capacity building and effective partnerships. Community-based organizations have become more effective in lobbying authorities for their needs, and in using existing legislation to achieve more pro-poor outcomes.

Not all community groups have the same mandate or claim to represent the same constituency. The CBOs in Kenya, for example, represent the interests of their members (e.g. small enterprises in waste recycling). The CDCs in Sudan, in contrast, seek to represent the interests of all residents of their settlement on matters of development. Understanding this distinction has been important in setting expectations about what the groups will
achieve and what role they can play in creating a cleaner environment for the urban poor.

The project approach hoped to achieve twin goals of improving services for poor people (physical assets) and generating incomes for businesses providing that service (financial assets). We have learned that, in waste management in particular, there is not always a direct connection between the two. Not all of the waste dumped on the streets in poor neighbourhoods is usable or valuable to these businesses, and indeed, the best sources of waste may come from elsewhere. There is more to be done to connect improved collection systems with these businesses. It has also become clear that we need to adopt a more business-oriented approach from the outset when supporting these small enterprises; to understand the market systems more broadly, and identify potential sources of support from within the market systems (rather than trying to provide it ourselves).

Conclusion
The project’s final evaluation concluded that it was ‘a success in many areas, while in others, a work in progress; part of the on-going work of Practical Action and the international community in finding ways of engaging local people to deliver local services’. The most significant achievements were in the capacity building of CBOs, increasing their legitimacy and formal recognition. A second key achievement was in ‘the process of engaging, sensitizing and forging links with government bodies’. There have been key changes in policies and in the implementation of existing policies which we can take some credit for, and which are likely to have lasting benefits.

Services for poor residents in urban informal settlements have improved, with the greatest impact felt in the IDP settlements in Sudan. Elsewhere, the project has done more to create an enabling environment for future change.

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References

Further reading