

Get-to Green - a courageous self-help group in Nairobi

In Nairobi, the capital of Kenya, you can see ultra-modern shopping malls, expensive hotels, numerous (smoky) cars jamming the lanes and well-dressed business people strolling uptown city. At the same time, two-thirds of the city's population are crammed together in slums without basic services like water and sanitation, and without basic rights as education, freedom of expression and security.

Mathare is a slum, located only ten minutes by bus from the vibrant and prosperous business districts in central Nairobi. However, it is like entering another world. The area is approximately 3 km², and somewhere between 300,000 and 800,000 people are living there.¹ By comparison, the population density in the municipality of Copenhagen is approximately 6,600 people per km². Mathare has been inhabited since the 1920s, but the area has always lacked access to basic public services and has not been part of the actual city planning. Still residents regularly have to pay taxes.

Unemployment in Mathare is high, several sources say 40 per cent, but up to 70 per cent of the inhabitants lack a steady income, and the level of education is low. Crime, prostitution and illegal alcohol production is rife and in addition, the police often collect illegal fines and stick them in their own pocket. The harsh life in the slum has motivated some of the young people to organize themselves into self help groups that work in different ways to improve the situation.



The young activists from Get-to Green is not only collecting waste from the slum area, they also made arrangement to collect garbage from several enterprises, so they earn a little money from selling metal and plastic, which they separate from the rest of the waste.

¹ "Humble and Hustling: Youth Struggles in Mathare Constituency, Nairobi." *African Youth Cultures in a Globalized World*. Paul Ugor and Lord Mawuko-Yevugah (Eds.). London: Ashgate Publishers. Forthcoming 2015.

Get-to Green - organizing as a way to a better life

Muchangi Nyaga, who today is 29 years old, grew up in Mathare. He has been in prison for two years when he was very young, because of some episodes, where he helped to conceal weapons for some of his big sister's criminal friends and was accused of a murder he did not commit. In prison, he met some activists who told him of civil rights and political organization and who gave him some books on how the justice system works. It gave him the confidence subsequent to start the self-help group Get-to Green.

The group was registered in 2012, and now there are 34 members. They have organized the group as an association with a democratically elected board. An integrated part of their goal is to strengthen local democracy. They call the group for the Get-to Green because they work to make the slum more green, including planting trees and sorting waste. They do not only sort the slum's own waste, they have also made some arrangements to collect waste from some companies. They earn a little money selling metal and plastic, which they sort out the waste.

However, for them, green also means life. They work to create a good life, and concretely to stay alive! Many young people are being involved in illegal activities, and additionally there are many abuses and corruption in the police. If you are arrested, you risk beatings and not all escape from there alive.

A young person from Get-to Green died in police custody in early summer 2014. The police had detained two of its members, without reason, probably to set an example that you cannot work to ensure people's rights without being punished. After three days of imprisonment one of the young guys was shot. The other escaped and saved his life - he considers himself that it was only because his father knew the police, he got out alive.

Get-to Green deliberately aims to sensitize young people about their rights, and how they can fight against corruption and police brutality through democratic means. They want to make photo documentation of the violence, and they try to enter into dialogue with politicians and authorities to improve legal certainty.

A Danish NGO helps with courses and training

MS / Action Aid Denmark, supported by Danida, offers courses and training for young people who are active in working for a better future on the global platform in Nairobi.

Among other things, young people from Get-to Green and similar groups participate in workshops on rights and courses in social media. Muchangi and other members of the Get-to Green group has e.g. been trained in how the political system is built and how, as a young citizen, you can get in touch with local politicians and officials.

They also learn how to make campaigns, public meetings and debates.

The global platform will also become a meeting place, where young people from the slums can meet young people from high schools and universities, and together create new campaigns.

At the same time, they work to create income opportunities for young people, so they do not come into crime and prostitution. Among other things, they collect waste and sort usable parts from, for example metal and plastic. They can then sell and make a small income. They have an agreement with some private companies and banks to collect their garbage, and they sort this out as well. They also do other things, like washing cars and selling bread to make money to sustain their living. The young people that manage to come out of crime and create a life with legal incomes, call themselves "the reformed youth".



In the slums of Mathare hundreds of thousands of people live closely squeezed together without access to water and sanitation, but also without proper access to education, health and safety.

Kenya's new Constitution of 2010 - giving them hope of a better future?

Kenya adopted a new constitution in a referendum in August 2010. Here the country's 210 districts was transformed into 47 counties, also based on elected representatives. A number of government functions were devolved to the counties.

Mathare now has the status of a county with the right to choose a local member of parliament. In the spring of 2013, there was election for the first time after the adoption of the new constitution, and Kenyans have to consider no less than 6 different lists of candidates (president, parliament, female representatives, governors, county and ward representatives committees).

Mathare County was one of several electoral districts, which may have a re-run due to fraud or error in the process. Therefore, in Mathare there was election again in August 2014, when a representative of the opposition won.

There are still major challenges in implementing the constitution, and many Kenyans are unaware of their new rights as expressed in Article 43 on Economic and social rights, which says:

1. Every person has the right
 - a. to the highest attainable standard of health, which includes the right to health care services, including reproductive health care;
 - b. to accessible and adequate housing, and to reasonable standards of sanitation;
 - c. to be free from hunger, and to have adequate food of acceptable quality;
 - d. to clean and safe water in adequate quantities;
 - e. to social security; and
 - f. to education.
2. A person shall not be denied emergency medical treatment.
3. The State shall provide appropriate social security to persons who are unable to support themselves and their dependants.

The rights-based approach

The Rights based approach (RBA) is based on universal human rights and places the individual at the center.

To achieve a positive change focuses on the unequal power relations between citizens, who feel that their rights are being violated, and the institutions and power brokers who are committed to ensure the rule of law and the welfare of citizens.

Thus in RBA poor women and men in the Global South are key players in the work for a more just and dignified society, and not only as recipients of assistance.

Based on the universal human rights they are supported to organize themselves and be able to hold the state accountable for delivering the services that citizens are entitled.