

Mukuru Slum Dwellers in Nairobi, Kenya;  
on poverty, development and self-reliance

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### Abstract

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The United Nations set a global goal to eradicate poverty by 2030. In order to reach the goal, the development field must implement effective programs. Place-based human-centered programs are considered the most effective, though they require administrators to work within the community setting of those they intend to help. The poorest of the poor live in challenging settings. This paper is the result of a pilot study with two focus groups in the slum of Mukuru in Nairobi, Kenya. The purpose is to shed light on the ways slum dwellers are trying to make the leap out of poverty; information that will help shape development programs towards greater effectiveness and impact. This pilot study widens the lenses of development to gain knowledge about Nairobi's second-largest slum community, Mukuru. Home to approximately 825,000, Mukuru residents earn below \$1.90/day and often not consistently. Kenya is one of Africa's rising countries, with Nairobi making the UN Top 4 List of investment cities in Africa. Nevertheless, Kenya is ranked 8th on the extreme poverty list. The goal of this study is to shed light on the perspectives of slum dwellers regarding what they think are effective development programs.

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*Keywords:* Africa, poverty, Nairobi slums, Kenya, Mukuru, informal settlements, UN Sustainable Development Goals, effective development, foreign aid, entrepreneurship

### Introduction

African states began independence at an economic loss. From the 1600s, foreign countries secured a stake in natural and human resources on the continent (Matunhu, 2011)<sup>1</sup>. Kenya gained its independence in 1963 under the leadership of President Jomo Kenyatta. Colonial modernity efforts began but were unsuccessful. As industrial modernization entered rural farming, Africa, like Asia and other developing countries, lost some of the hands-on workforce (Scott, 1985). Kenyans moved into Nairobi, looking for new ways to earn income. Informal settlements (slums) were formed on government land near city dumpsites, with the intention of it being a temporary dwelling place on land where officials would not bother to remove them. The idea was to settle temporarily until permanent work was secured to buy land and build a home. Kenyans continued to move to the settlements, and today the density of Nairobi is highest on 6% of the cities' land where slum dwellers live. Approximately 2.5 million slum dwellers occupy that land in a city with a population of approximately 4.4 million people (NASA, 2016 report).

Africans, like other indigenous cultures, have an affinity for ancestral land. More than a birthplace, it signifies identity (Naidu-Hoffmeester, 2018)<sup>2</sup>, family traditions, culture, and a physical or spiritual connection with nature and life. The land holds significance beyond commodification (Tafira, 2015). It is a place where traditions have been born, knowledge shared (ITC, 2015), and often provided sustenance to a family for generations. For most Africans, land represents a place of family heritage and customary rights to that heritage (Kibera Facts, 2020) (Bourdieu, 1993).

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<sup>1</sup> Diouf, Mamadou. Un-dated. "Modernity; Africa Colonial Modernities."

<sup>2</sup> This information is published by the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. "Indivisible; African Native American Lives in the Americas." It speaks to indigenous peoples as stewards of the land and a cyclical relationship to the land as life sustaining.

In Kenya, land rights or “customary rights” are a part of frequent discussion, mainly when families have not utilized land set aside for the future. All of this to say, the temporary status of living in the informal settlements became a permanent home for generations to come. Some families have lived in the slums for four generations. The indigenous land perspective helps explain why many slum dwellers are attached to living in the informal settlements, regardless of being located adjacent to dumpsites, and on land they do not own.

Poverty reduction and Aid programs began in the 1970s. Development professionals offered to feed the hungry, provide education, provide job training, and more. USAID has worked in Africa for over 50 years providing services. In Nairobi, the organization has provided grants for projects in the slums, including waste-fertilizer conversion and low-cost, hygienic latrines. These programs are a collaboration with a locally-led company, Sanergy (USAID, 2013). However, there has not been a continued effort to carry such programs forward for a more significant impact.

The goal of foreign aid is to “equip people and nations to deliver services and take ownership of programs over the long term,” (Department of State and USAID, 2010)(USAID, 2013). Between 2009 and 2015, the Kenyan government, with backing from the UN, built new dwellings (KENSUP Program) for the slum community of Kibera (Kiti, 2015) (Ngunjiri, 2018). Locals from Kibera benefited from training and employment to build the structures. The UN hoped that the government would continue the construction of more units and hire more slum dwellers. However, at completion, some slum dwellers moved into the new housing, while others did not wish to move. Still, others accepted the new housing but rented it out while

remaining in their Kibera mud or mabati home<sup>3</sup>. There are rumors of some who accepted the new home, moved in, and vacated shortly thereafter.

Some slum dwellers made claims that government rent increased from \$10 to \$15/month just before move-in<sup>4</sup>. With an average income of less than \$1.90/day (World Bank, 2019), the average income in the slums is approximately \$28/month inconsistently. Rent of \$10 will leave \$18 to pay for food, school fees and bus fare. With a household size of three, this leaves \$6/month to live on per person. A 50% increase in rent to \$15 leaves each household member with \$3 to live on for a month.

Other slum dwellers noticed that foreign nationals (Sudanese and Ethiopians) were moving into the homes instead of Kibera residents as well as middle-class Kenyans to avoid Nairobi's ever-increasing metropolitan rents. A mixture of cultural ties to land and corruption were factors in the KENSUP housing project. The failure of KENSUP indicates that programs with the best intentions are not sustainable without an appropriate structure in place for success. New housing was delivered, but without a template for distribution and operations.

This pilot study was conducted to gain knowledge directly from slum dwellers regarding which kinds of development programs they perceive to be effective, and which programs offer little to no benefit. Unfortunately, the current statistics show that the number of Africans living in poverty has increased from 278 million in 1990 to 413 million in 2015, with an expected increase of 90% by 2030 (World Bank, 2019). The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have made poverty eradication the top goal for the year 2030 (UNfoundation.org). In 1993, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

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<sup>3</sup> mabati homes are one room dwellings usually 8ftx10ft and made of corrugated tin with wood framing.

<sup>4</sup> This supports the lack of structure needed for projects to be successful for improvements in the informal settlements. The article is from a local journalist, Fhiani, Pumza. February 23, 2015. "Kenya's Kibera slum gets a revamp."

Development (OECD) created a policy that calls for ordinary citizens in the communities receiving aid to participate in program development that impacts of their lives (Goldsmith, 2001). In 1998, the UN Economic Commission for Africa called for the same (Goldsmith, 2001). This pilot study is an effort to maintain the DAC and OECD goal of having ordinary people shape their lives and meet the UNSDGs. It is an effort to share knowledge gained from those living in poverty regarding programs they perceive to be most beneficial to them.

### **Literature Review**

The literature focuses on the value of place-based human-centered development model. This approach requires development professionals to seek answers about potential programs from within the community they intend to serve. The purpose is to assure that approaches, methods, and the structure of the programs are appropriate for the community.

Early scholarship on human-centered development was written by Michael Cernea, *Putting People First* (1991). His work was influential for the inclusion of locals in program planning. A UNESCO think-piece written by an unknown staff writer was additive in terms of emphasizing ethical development. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)<sup>5</sup>, written as “Vision 2000” goals (UNDPfoundation.org) did not encompass the breadth of variables related to poverty. Cernea’s people-centered ideology was bolstered further by the UNDP Administrators Report (2010) titled, “*People-centered Development; Empowered lives. Resilient nations.*” The report begins by acknowledging research in the late 1980s, which clarified that links between economic growth and human development demonstrated no automatic correlation. Therefore, income does not equate wellbeing. The report findings were the foundation for developing the 17 SDGs to target poverty from a variety of directions other

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<sup>5</sup> Un-authored. 2012. “Advancing a human centered approach to development: Integrating culture into the global development agenda.” A UNESCO think piece.

than income, directions that were multi-dimensional, and human-centered. In the most recent data published by USAID (Center for Innovation and Impact Brief 2018), human-centered design supports the scale for impact. This approach has become central to development programs<sup>6</sup>.

Global poverty is measured from household surveys (World Bank Group, 2019). That, in and of itself, is problematic for gathering accurate data on informal settlements. Slum-dwellers have no “registered” home to speak of; they erect shanties on non-tenured land (Kibera Facts & Information online 2020). Retrieving data is logistically challenging without engaging help from within the community. The Kenyan National Bureau of Statistics census organizers use this method to count the slum population and marginal communities on the outskirts of the country (KNBS, 2019). Data remains questionable despite the World Bank’s call for better data when strategic initiatives were underway in the year 2000 (Madavo et al., 2000 IMF).

According to the World Poverty Clock<sup>7</sup>, Kenya is off-track to reach 2030 poverty reduction goals along with the majority of Sub-Saharan Africa. Kenya’s poverty level, as of February 21, 2020, is approximately 8 million people<sup>8</sup>. According to the Kenyan government census, 4.4 million people<sup>9</sup> live in Nairobi, with over 1 million living in the slums/informal settlements (Kenya-Nairobi Government Census Statistics, 2019). However, the figure of 1 million living in the slums is inconsistent with statistics in county and sub-county reports within

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<sup>6</sup> The importance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform is that poverty shifted to an approach that sought knowledge from those in poverty versus outsiders thoughts about poverty.

<sup>7</sup> World Poverty Map. Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

<sup>8</sup> Actual population for Kenya is 8.175 million people

<sup>9</sup> Actual population for Nairobi is 4.397,073 million people

the census. The number of those who live in the slums are likely closer to 2.5 million (Ngunjiri, 2018)<sup>10</sup>.

Charles Taylor expresses the importance of individual interpretation through the Hermeneutic Theory in *Philosophy and the human sciences* (1985). People interpret situations in a circumstantial, context-based way that includes shared understandings. Slum-dwellers may not view poverty the same as outsiders. Norms differ by community. For example, with a shared understanding that defecating into a bag is the norm, or that one's meal might have to come from discarded food at the dump, partaking in those habits are no longer de-humanizing. Interpretations constructed from shared understandings should play a role in developing the kinds of programs appropriate for slum dwellers to become self-reliant.

The developing country or third world poverty index is \$1.90/day, and recent World Bank publications have recently reviewed the circumstantial context, considering that those who earn \$1.91/day are not beyond the poverty threshold sufficiently. It has been acknowledged that the poverty index should be raised to \$3.20/day as a realistic amount needed to reach a satisfactory level of consumption (Hickel, 2018 Center for Global Development). The discussion on the needed increase is considered hermeneutic in that perceptions of norms change over time and are considered interpretive.

The most current literature about how poverty is measured is at the World Bank (Hickel, 2018), (World Bank, 2019), (World Bank, 2018). As previously mentioned, multi-dimensional factors equate to poverty beyond monetary measure. Factors such as education, access to the market and services, local infrastructure, health, nutrition, and household security contribute to the need for broader measures of poverty. The recent debate began years after the 2010 UN

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<sup>10</sup> This data comes from a compilation of journal articles and online factsheets including Kibera UK. Kibera Facts & Information, NASA. 2016, January 24, The Lunchbowl Network. 2018, and "Facts and information about Kibera."

report, indicating the need for dialog and critical thinking to solidify that multiple needs can converge into a persistence of poverty. In developing effective programs, there is a need for more listening to the affected communities regarding their interpretation of factors that affect their everyday lives.

In James C. Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), he demonstrates how the poor in rural Southeast Asia use human agency against industrialization and modernization efforts imposed by the government in rural rice fields. In the slums of Nairobi, the use of human agency shows up primarily in the form of squatting on government-owned land to the extent of 2.5 million people. The presence of informal settlements makes a statement to government leaders that slum-dwellers will cling to the legs of the sovereign and not fall off, no matter how hard the government shakes its' legs.

Additional scholars, both African and Western, include Carol Lancaster, *Foreign aid; Diplomacy, development, domestic politics* (2006). Lancaster's work helps us understand the various uses of aid to achieve different goals other than poverty reduction. Aid paves the way for diplomacy, democracy, and American values to be instilled abroad. It also provides a security advantage for the United States as well as a capitalistic advantage. Some advantages are morally questionable (Gendzier, 1985), nevertheless integrated into the norms of foreign aid.

Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1982), reminds us of how Africa became so poor in the first place. He exposes the economics of colonialism and the growth of modern Europe and the USA from the back-breaking work of African slaves. Rodney points out the extraction model used by western states to abscond valuable resources from Africa and leave the continent under-developed. The slum-dwellers are left with an additional layer of underdevelopment created by their own government in efforts to modernize. Ironically, a state

underdeveloped by foreigners creates further underdevelopment, trying to follow the modernization model of its oppressors.

Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid* (2009) explains the prospects of Africans solving problems in “their way.” She highlights the resources of the continent, including a robust stock market in Nigeria and Johannesburg. Slum-dwellers may not own stocks but have demonstrated entrepreneurial spirit in managing to start micro-businesses that serve the community.

Still, other literature adds the discussion of euro-centric perspectives not aligned with place-based human-centered design (Ani, Marimba 1994). Furthermore, Duncan Green of Oxfam, whose contribution, *From Poverty to Power* (2008) shows the importance of state structure, also emphasized place-based human-centered perspectives as essential to effective development. This literature is pivotal in explaining the importance of giving voice to the human-centered perspectives on poverty reduction in addition to a state structure that can manage development in stages.

Steven Koltai in, *Peace through Entrepreneurship* (2016), writes on the benefits of cultivating a start-up culture. His material supports the analysis of the focus groups in this study more so than any other literature. Koltai expands on entrepreneurship for poverty reduction that it is a quintessential American value that also spreads the principles of democracy and open markets<sup>11</sup>. The title of Koltai’s second chapter, “Its all about jobs,” points to what he views as the solution to poverty. While the focus group from the slums voice the need for jobs, they also share norms of corruption in order to gain jobs and the benefits of entrepreneurship, removing the need to engage in bribes to secure jobs.

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<sup>11</sup> This specific information can be found in Koltai, *Peace through Entrepreneurship*, on page 170

Most importantly, in *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993), Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural and social capital highlights the importance of strategies appropriately adapted to social worlds. In other words, the legitimization of programs and the likelihood of success occurs across social capital between what Bourdieu calls the "field" and "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1993), in this case, within the slums. Outsiders do not understand the field; they have no first-hand knowledge of poverty. Moreover, outsiders have no social capital in the habitus of the informal settlements; they do not inhabit the slum or regularly engage in such a way to be recognized by the slum community as an adopted figurehead seen as of "one of them."

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Paulo Freire writes that *subjectivism* is a phenomenon whereby humans create their own oppressive reality, and *psychologism* is the self-reflection necessary to change that reality. Slum-dwellers in this pilot study demonstrate the presence of both over the short course of time together in the focus group. The oppressive reality of the slum life is valid, though conversation in the group soon leads to critical thinking or "conscientizacao" (Freire, 1970), a form of psychologism that raises the consciousness of the oppressed. Freire also emphasizes *sectarianism*<sup>12</sup> and *radicalization*<sup>13</sup>.

### Research Question

This work is more of an exploration to find out what slum dwellers think are effective poverty reduction programs. There is an overwhelming amount of data, theory, and literature about approaches to poverty. Curiosity and social capital direct this work toward the perspectives of slum-dwellers. What are the perceptions of slum-dwellers on development

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<sup>12</sup> Belief in self-limitations

<sup>13</sup> Restructured beliefs toward positive agency

programs; what works, what does not work? The goal is to add knowledge about the level of poverty that is difficult to access and service.

### **Methodology**

#### Focus Groups

In May 2019, two focus groups were held in the Mukuru Kwa Rueben informal settlement of Nairobi, Kenya. A Kenyan research assistant was hired for translation service. The assistant approached potential participants at a community event held at The Rueben Center, a focal point for gatherings and community services. Participants were asked to participate in a focus group about poverty reduction voluntarily. No remuneration was offered. Per instructions, the translator selected the first ten males and ten females who agreed to participate. Participants were divided into two separate groups. Unknown to the research assistant and participants, \$3 remuneration was set aside for each of the participants.

Both sessions were held outdoors in a shaded and safe area with two large benches to accommodate the participants. The males and females were asked twenty and twenty-one questions, respectively. Questions were asked out loud in English, followed by Swahili for clarity. Ample time was allowed after each question to repeat the question if necessary. The participants were allowed to answer individually or in whatever way they wished. Extra time was allowed in case the group as a whole wanted to discuss the question and add more feedback. Observations were noted when questions provoked a quick or emotional response. Observations were also noted when participants had difficulty or could not provide answers.

Of the twenty questions that were asked, four were demographic<sup>14</sup>, and one was a qualifier<sup>15</sup> that they lived in poverty. An additional question was asked of female mothers regarding childbirth. In general, the questions were about family, home and work habits, short and long-term needs, perceptions of government capacity to help reduce poverty, recent voting, traditional development-backed job training, and what they perceive as effective or ineffective programs for the reduction of poverty. The latter questions posed were intended to explore human agency critical thinking of the participants.

Each focus group lasted approximately one hour. The translator collected basic information (name, contact, age, number of children) before the focus group began. Name and contact were collected explicitly in preparation for a potential follow-up and full-scale study to analyze their thoughts over time if necessary. At the end of the session, participants were thanked. They were surprised to receive the US\$3.00 remuneration and expressed their gratitude. See Appendix 1 for the full questionnaire.

Additionally, in May 2019, an e-survey was conducted with development professionals from two different conferences on poverty reduction held in Nairobi. One conference, AIDF Africa Summit ([Africa.aidforum.org](http://Africa.aidforum.org)), is regularly attended by government and large development organizations. The other, SANKALP ([Africasummit2020.sankalpforum.com](http://Africasummit2020.sankalpforum.com)), is regularly attended by social impact innovators. The conferences were specifically chosen to create a sample from which comprehensive perspectives could be gained on how best to reduce poverty. The analysis of this data is underway to be presented at a future conference.

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<sup>14</sup> Name, contact, age, number of children

<sup>15</sup> Do you live in poverty (earning under \$1.90/day)

### Coding

Since the focus groups produced qualitative data, no coding was used nor was SPSS needed in the analysis of the findings. Answers to the questions were fairly uniform across both male and female groups.

### Findings and Analysis

The critical consciousness model of awareness (Freire, 1970) stands out in the findings as a guide for analysis. Terminology from Freire's model will be noted in italics to explain phenomenon that occurred in both men and women's focus groups. Critical consciousness is not a derogatory term, but used to differentiate critical thinking for daily survival versus critical thinking to self-analyze and make long-term life changes.

#### Women

- Women aged 25 to 36<sup>16</sup>, with an average of three children, understood that they live in poverty in relation to others in Nairobi. Note that the age range has no correlation to national averages of women with children or any other metric, instead it simply reflects the age range of the participants. Their clothing was dusty from the pedestrian dirt walkways that make up the slum. Regarding Q1, while it may seem evident that the women would know they live in poverty, the perception of poverty varies per cultural demographic. There are also multi-dimensional levels of poverty within the slums, and there is always someone worse off. The women gave responses such as;

*"We are use to it, and others are worse off than us, but we know that others don't live like us."*

*"I know people that live in good areas and still have dirt floors."*

*"My grandmother lives with us, for three generations, this is home for us. But we know others live with flushing toilets. I know we are category living in poverty."*

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<sup>16</sup> The age range has no correlation to national averages of women with children or any other metric, instead it simply reflects the age range of the participants.

- The female participants were single mothers, who gave birth to their children at home except one which gave birth at a hospital. Giving birth at home is a cultural norm in the slums.

*“We give birth at home, I was born at home.”*

*“I gave birth to all 4 of my children at home.”*

*“We don’t rush to hospital because of costs. We don’t have to anyway, we have done it at home for years.”*

The woman who gave birth in the hospital pointed across the way to the maternity ward 100 yards from where we were sitting. She was soft-spoken and appeared embarrassed that she experienced the luxury of giving birth in a hospital. Her clothing and appearance were no fancier from the other women.

The fact that all the women were single mothers is not an anomaly. Single motherhood is common for women living in poverty. Their male partners have a high need to release stress through the physical activity of sex, but the stress of fatherly responsibility to make ends meet while the desperate eyes of family gaze at you for sustenance is too great to bear in the daily home environment.

*“Their father comes by once or twice a month for sex and companionship, but that’s it.”*

*“I see their father weekly.”*

*“Most of the times, they come with money for the house, but they don’t stay.”*

- Of the children they have, at least one must stay home from school due to lack of school fees. The children who stay home are often unattended and do not help with daily chores such as carrying water or cooking.

*“I cannot afford to send both to school at the same time. I send one for a semester, then keep her home for a semester and let the other attend school.”*

*“Their father has helped to provide school fees for two of the children. The third attended for a few years and now stays home looking for odd jobs.”*

*“The siblings say ‘let this one go, then this one, then the other.’ None go to school at the same time. Some get bored and quit.”*

*“They stay home and do nothing. Play, watch TV, that’s it. I leave them; they are fine.”*

- The women in this focus group work *non-traditional*<sup>17</sup> jobs by the day or “gig work.”

They work mostly within the slums, such as providing child care or selling produce in front of their homes. Outside of the slum, their gig work is carrying stones at construction sites, or washing clothes for the middle class. None of the women do *traditional*<sup>18</sup> work in an office setting.

*“I can find work at construction sites carrying stones away from the work area.”*

*“I care for the children of other mothers when they find work.”*

*“Washing clothes for people in Westlands is good, but now they don’t want us in the neighborhood. We knock, and they say go away.”*

*“Sometimes, I get extra produce and sell a few.”*

*“Mostly, I am doing nothing. Just looking for work and talking to neighbors.”*

- The women are unfavorable about development programs that offer training but no jobs.

They express feeling lost hope over the years because they are training for industries that do not exist in Nairobi. Instead, the women have learned to hustle for various *non-traditional* work to make ends meet. These women prefer to have their own business in order to; (1) avoid corruption and bribes needed to obtain jobs, and (2) to take control of their lives and not be dependent on foreign aid programs.

*“Please don’t show me another training program! I know how to do everything; dressmaking, catering, sewing, computers, front desk. But jobs, there are none.”*

*“I learned about environmental health. It was nice, but I live next to the dump.”*

*“I can do electrical, but no one wants a woman to do that. There is no access to jobs.”*

*“To get a job in Nairobi, you must pay a bribe.”*

*“We prefer our own business, no dependence on corruption.”*

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<sup>17</sup> I use the category of non-traditional for innovative ways to earn income such as small businesses (micro-businesses). I also use the category when describing aid that is innovative, i.e. micro-loans, direct cash, animal entrepreneurship).

<sup>18</sup> I use the category of traditional for administrative work. I also use the category when describing aid that is provided free, i.e. free rice, food, or material items like clothing or mosquito nets.

From the statements above, these women did not benefit from the *intentional* programs<sup>19</sup> that development agencies offer. Job training and educational are not effective for every level of poverty. The women look towards *non-intentional*<sup>20</sup> ingenuity to provide economic relief and sustainably.

- Regarding political activity, all of the women vote, yet they do not press the government to help them with services or jobs. They believe the government has the funds allocated to help them, but corruption stops the flow of funds meant to reduce poverty in the slums. This perspective exemplifies *subjectivism* (Freire, 1970); the women have lost hope in their government leaders to help them.

*“We vote for Kenyatta. He is corrupt, be we know him.”*

*“We vote to keep the peace, but they will never do anything to help us because they are corrupt.”*

*“There is money to help us, but it never reaches us. They misuse our money for corruption.”*

*“We can elect better leadership to reduce poverty, but there is no one new.”*

- They identify cash as their short-term need; however, when asked about long-term needs, they go silent. None can verbalize any critical thoughts beyond the needs of tomorrow. There is a disconnect between agency for survival and agency to make the long-term leap out of poverty. The women are initially unable to self-reflect on what is necessary to change their realities.

*“We need cash for school fees, rent, food, and uniforms for school.”*

*“Cash to manage our lives.”*

*“Cash, even to start a business to become sustainable.”*

*“I need to buy food. I have nothing for tomorrow.”*

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<sup>19</sup> The category of intentional is to delineate purpose-driven programs such as education and job trainings.

<sup>20</sup> Non-intentional is a category to delineate the “ah haa moments” when creative ideas are linked to measurable success.

After the last question of the session, the women continued their discussion. They moved from *subjectivism* (dwelling in oppressive thoughts) to *psychologism*<sup>21</sup> or critical thinking necessary for change (Freire, 1970).

“Cash for day-care business or selling cereals, beans, wheat, spices, oils.”

“Cash for hair salon, I know many who would pay for my good service.”

“Produce stand for me; I can serve the homes in my area.”

“Change of residence is too much, and we don’t know what will happen. Mukuru is home.”

These statements represent a significant shift from *sectarianism* (false truths)<sup>22</sup> regarding the capacity of their human agency, to *radicalization*<sup>23</sup> (active truths) that lead to potential ways out of poverty (Freire, 1970). False truths about what one can or cannot do are false truths about human agency. They hold back the development of active truths that offer potential solutions to solve everyday problems in poverty. The posing of these questions led to an environment for the *co-creation of knowledge* (Freire, 1970)<sup>24</sup>.

### Men

- Men aged 18 to 49<sup>25</sup>, with an average of one child, understand that they live in poverty (*sectarianism-Freire, 1970*). Although six of the men have children, only three are married and live with their child’s mother. Of the six men with children, four have been able to provide school fees for their children, leaving only two who have kids that are not in school. The men comment about their children who are not in school.

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<sup>21</sup> Psychologism per Freire is a mental state of critical analysis to solve everyday problems.

<sup>22</sup> Sectarianism per Freire is believing in limitations prescribed to you, also referred to as false truths.

<sup>23</sup> Radicalization per Freire is the awareness that false truths need not be a barrier to ones success, that active truths can be operationalized into human agency, in this case to reduce poverty.

<sup>24</sup> The co-creation of knowledge is a shared process where teachers become learners and learners become teachers of knowledge learned from educational settings and lived experiences.

<sup>25</sup> The age range has no correlation to national averages of women with children or any other metric, instead it simply reflects the age range of the participants.

*“My kids stay home with their Mom.”*

*“Mine I don’t want to talk about.”*

The men who cannot afford to send their children to school appear to be embarrassed that they do not earn enough income to provide an education for their children. The men who have no children are jovial that they do not have the added economic strain. Regardless of marriage or living situations, the men state that they communicate regularly with the mother of their children.

*“There is no interrupt in talking to the mother of my children. We love each other.”*

*“We talk on regular basis; she needs my help for cash to buy food.”*

*“We pay school fees of course, and we are talking to them all the time, and we see our kids.”*

Considering the women are all single mothers struggling to make ends meet, the men appear to have allegiance to their families, whether married or not. It is noteworthy to share that one male participant attended the focus group with his child in his arms. He stated that he spends his free time with his 1-year-old child.

- The men earn a living through *non-traditional* odd jobs and gig work. Their gigs consist mostly of construction and masonry. They also gain odd jobs repairing cars or dismantling them to sell the parts for cash. Some of them collect recyclables from the dump (plastics, discarded metal, tin, wood) and carry them to a local trader by foot using a pushcart. Others sell charcoal or chapati (flatbread) in the slums.

*“We do hustle jobs, collecting water, carrying materials for construction.”*

*“We sell food products like grains and oil for cooking or charcoal.”*

*“I got a construction job for four months through a friend in another county.”*

*“We can always get small money from recycling things from the dump or sell chapati.”*

*“Some people stand in line to get a job for \$1/day to sort through trash for recycling. Thirty in line for six jobs.”*

*“To fix cars and re-sell them is good money but hard to access cash to start.”*

- Six of the men voted in the 2017 presidential election. One could not vote due to being underaged, another was working outside of his voting district by a four-hour distance. The remaining two did not vote for reasons unknown. Like the women, the men said they do not press the government to provide for them because they know corruption dominates all funds allocated to help the poor. The false truth of having no human agency in the face of a corrupt government is the *sectarianism* that feeds their subjective thoughts of being stuck in an oppressive reality (Freire, 1970).

*“The corrupt elites will never allow us to receive help.”*

*“They pay the cartels, and funds don’t make it to the slums.”*

*“There is a security risk if cartels are not paid.”*

*“We vote, but do not push them because they can do nothing to help us.”*

- Additionally, like the women, the men prefer to earn a living by *non-traditional* means such as owning unlicensed micro-business. It demonstrates a shift from *subjectivism* (non-truths about personal capabilities) to *radicalization* (active truths about capabilities), (Freire, 1970). However, unlike the women, nine of the men feel favorable about development-backed *intentional* training programs. They accept that *traditional* jobs may not come to fruition from the training, but they can apply skills learned when they get odd jobs at construction sites for electrical and mechanical engineering. They also believe the training will be useful if *traditional* industry ever comes to Nairobi.

*“The trainings were good for us, even with no jobs we learn to repairing and do wiring for construction.”*

*“The Chinese don’t always give us a chance, but sometimes they need extra workers to finish quickly and hire us for more than concrete and masonry.”*

*“The training is not relevant to getting a job, but skills are nice to have.”*

*“The best development programs would be entrepreneurship, free school fees and uniforms, and jobs.”*

- The men identified cash as their short term need. When asked to identify their long-term needs, there is silence as with the women’s group. The inability to answer exemplifies Freire’s *subjectivism*; thoughts do not move beyond the oppressive existence of daily life

(Freire, 1970). The men have difficulty thinking critically about how to move beyond their immediate needs.

*“We need cash. 3000kes<sup>26</sup> (\$30USD) is good / month for taking care of needs.”*

*“I need a real job to care for my family.”*

*“I am used to the hustle, but I need a business format for it.”*

However, some of the men exhibit *psychologism* (critical thinking/critical consciousness), such as the statement from one participant who expressed the need for a *non-intentional* source of income through building a business format to maximize his daily hustle. Like the women, the men continued to talk after this question. Evidence of *psychologism* (Freire, 1970) became apparent through their statements. The continued discussion amongst the men exemplifies a community-based <sup>27</sup> *co-creation of knowledge* (Freire, 1970).

*“I would start medical care because if you cannot pay, you only get first aid, then sent home to die.”*

*“We need to provide medicines too, not the old ones that expire and not the wrong ones you don’t need.”*

*“I like making day-care for boys, to teach them how to hustle so they can succeed.”*

*“Small business is the way for our success. We can do it.”*

*“We need a protection service for women and children.”*

### **Statistics on Livelihoods of Slum Dwellers**

Reviewing the statistics from the 2019 census in Kenya, the population of Nairobi is confirmed at approximately 4.4 million people<sup>28</sup>. The Mukuru slum stretches across three Nairobi counties; Embakasi, Makadara, and Starehe. The population for each county is

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<sup>26</sup> kes = Kenyan Shillings

<sup>27</sup> The co-creation of knowledge per Freire, is a shared process where teachers become learners and learners become teachers of knowledge learned from educational settings and lived experiences.

<sup>28</sup> Actual population is 4,397,073 - Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), December 2019, Vol I, Table 2.7, 38, Distribution of Population by Land Area and Population Density by Sub-county

approximately 989k, 190k, and 210k, respectively<sup>29</sup>. The combined county populations make the total population of the *Mukuru slum* approximately 1.4 million people<sup>30</sup>. The Mukuru population stated in the introduction of this paper (825K) reflects the possibility that some county residents in the three counties may live in dwellings that are not part of the slums. Nevertheless, Mukuru is commonly known as the second-largest slum in Nairobi which means the population of the largest slum (Kibera) would have to be over 1.4 million. These two slums are additive of 2.8 million people. If we err on the lower side of the data, the population of the two slum still remains over 2 million, and, there are several smaller slums not counted in this figure. This data supersedes previous public guesstimates regarding the size of the slum population in Nairobi. It supports the unpopular truth that nearly half of Nairobi's population lives in poverty and predominantly in the slums.

The census statistics for Nairobi counts 1.49 million household, which averages 3 people per household in a population of 4.4 million. Census data shows that 51.3% of Nairobi households have dwellings with iron roofing. The dominant material for wall construction is concrete (40.3%), and the dominant flooring material is concrete at 62.5%<sup>31</sup>. Therefore, about half of the population of Nairobi live in a home without concrete walls, floors and iron roofs. These statistics represent a surprisingly high amount of dwellings with sub-standard flooring and wall construction across Nairobi. The data supports the reality of poverty levels in the city. In Nairobi, census takers have difficulty accessing slum dwellings as compared to the easier access to modern homes. Purposely skewed numbers in the data would show more modern living

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<sup>29</sup> Actual populations are Embakasi 988,808, Makadara 189,536, and Starehe 210,423 people. KNBS Vol I, Table 2.5, 20 Distribution of Population by Sub-county

<sup>30</sup> Actual population 1,388,767 - KNBS Vol I, Table 2.5, 20 Distribution of Population by Sex and Sub-county

<sup>31</sup> Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), December 2019, Vol IV, 10-13, Distribution of Population by Socio-Economic Characteristics

conditions and fewer conditions of sub-grade dwellings. Yet, the data on slum dwellings remains puzzling. I myself have walked across the two largest slums (Mukuru and Kibera), in which dung/mud walls and dirt floors are the norm, not concrete.

For daily household routines, over 28.4% of households use piped water to their plot for drinking, including another 22.7% who get water piped directly into their dwelling. That leaves 60% with no piped water. Although 54.3% have main sewer taps for waste, the rest use covered and uncovered pit latrines for human waste, with a surprising figure of 0.1% that use the open bush for human waste. This is surprising given the millions of people who live in the slums and have no other toilet but the open bush. It is my belief that slum dwellers answered some census questions with their pride rather than the truth. Disposal of human waste is by the government (12.9%), and by NGO's (37.9%). Another 30% report collection of waste by a private company, leaving only 7.8% dumped into vacant plots - again, difficult to believe when over a million slum dwellers do not have toilets.

Moreover, 67% of Nairobi uses liquid gas for cooking, leaving the rest to use pollutants such as paraffin, firewood, and charcoal. The census shows that 96.5% of Nairobi households have electricity, possible because slum dwellers achieve this illegally through wires reaching main lines that run across city grids. All of this is noted to show the living conditions for Nairobi conventional households presents a false reality of little poverty, which plays a role in decreasing the urgency for more effective poverty reduction programs. The next set of data is shared to show the tools that slum dwellers have in terms of technology and skills. These are tools that development professionals could build programs around.

Almost half of Kenya's population from age three<sup>32</sup> and above (69%), own a mobile phone. More surprising, 68.7% own a functional television. Suffice to say that Kenya, like many third world countries, skipped the modernization step of phone wiring into home walls and find value in television communication and entertainment. Having a television also indicates preferences and spending capacity for slum dwellers. Development programs through media may be effective.

The data continues with trained skills acquired (KNBS Table 2.7) for all Kenyans. The number of Kenyans trained in business (commerce, accounting, finance, marketing, admin, management, insurance, hotel management, tourism) is 779,621. Similarly, 740,605 are trained as educators (in science, arts, management, and economics). There are 307, 699 trained in engineering (electrical, mechanical, chemical, aeronautical, bio-systems) of which are mostly male, and 114,973 trained in interdisciplinary studies (urban planning, cultural & gender studies, project management, human resources). Other categories with more than 87,000 trained are computer science, agriculture, health, and journalism (KNBS Vol IV, Table 2.7). The amount of trained Kenyans may demonstrate positive impact of some development programs.

Over the three sub-counties in Nairobi that encompass Mukuru (Embakasi, Makadara, and Starehe), approximately 573K slum dwellers are actively working out of 1.3 million. Be reminded that work may consist of gigs or odd jobs that end within a day or week of the census. This statistic is for age 5+ and indicates that one third of the Mukuru slum population is employed. It includes, for example, some of the children over age five who are left home because their parents cannot afford school fees, who may work odd jobs to help the family. This

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<sup>32</sup> The age seems unusual, however the Kenya census data on these of technology is collected based on activities of age 3+.

statistic shows that the majority of slum dwellers sit idle with thoughts of micro-businesses that could be serving the community and circulating currency for self-reliance.

The census measured homeownership uniquely according to categories of land tenure. Dwellings in the Mukuru Slum are 5.8% owned with tenured land<sup>33</sup>, while dwellings purchased without land (53.23%), constructed without land (29.2%), and inherited without land (17.66%)<sup>34</sup>.

Households *renting* by mode of tenure-ship are reported: 4.7% through government leases, 3.9% county government, 2.9% parastatal (having some political authority), 8.1% private companies, 79.1% individuals, and .05% from NGOs<sup>35</sup>. This data supports that the slum population rent their dwellings but do not own the land on which they live. Some have managed to obtain land tenure from the government (5.8%), though the majority are paying rent to individuals (79.1%) who claim to own the land legally.

Again, this section on census statistics was written with the intent purpose of revealing truths about the slums; living conditions, daily habits, employment, skills, and tools of technology, all which could be used in future development programs.

### **Conclusion**

This pilot study reveals the perceptions of slum dwellers regarding the most effective programs to reduce poverty. Both men and women think that micro-entrepreneurial development programs will benefit them the most. They are not seeking job training, but actual start-up skills

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<sup>33</sup> These slum dwellers represent the small percentage that have manage to purchase their plots from the government, as see in KNBS Vol IV, Table 2.7, 160, Main Training Acquired in all of Kenya KNBS Vol IV, 251, Tenured land status of mania dwelling unit

<sup>34</sup> KNBS Vol IV, Table 2.11a, 258 Distribution of households owning the main dwelling by mode of acquisition (purchased-constructed-inherited)

<sup>35</sup> KNBS Vol IV, Table 2.11b, 264 Distribution of households renting provided with main dwelling by a provider - mode of tenure-ship

for micro-business that serve the slum community; day-care, fresh produce stands, chapati making, selling oil and dry foods, safe home wiring, security patrol for women and children. The men agree that development-backed job trainings are beneficial, though there are no jobs awaiting post-training. The women believe that bribes are the only way to gain traditional jobs. The women wish not to engage in corruption, and if they did, they do not have the funds to maintain the ongoing bribe. Overall, the slum dwellers identified the desire for micro-businesses to help reduce poverty and provide a pathway to self-reliance.

As both men and women continued to discuss the issues of poverty and the types of development programs that are effective, their dialog moved from *sectarianism* and *subjectivism* to *radicalization* and *psychologism*. To simplify, the slum dwellers began the focus group with the false truth of having no human agency to help themselves. They also expressed subjectivism through the belief that poverty would persist due to the misuse of aid funds by their government. Through continued dialog, the slum dwellers experienced *co-creation of knowledge* among themselves. They shifted to radicalization (actual truth) that they have human agency and can do something about their predicament. In the last moments of the focus group session, they exhibited psychologism, whereby self-reflection led to the necessary changes for actualization.

Corruption is revealed in this study, though is not the focus of this study. Corruption has impacted the livelihoods of slum dwellers to the extent that they vote to keep the peace instead of voting for the best leadership. Moreover, the slum dwellers choose entrepreneurship as a means of economic advancement not solely because of their talents but to avoid the level of bribery it takes to secure a traditional job. One may consider this to indicate critical consciousness, but it is not. Instead, it indicates acute sensitivity to the realities that affect their daily livelihoods and not

the type of thinking to make the long-term leap out of poverty. Dialog or *dialogics* (Freire, 1970) are the impetus that lead to critical consciousness.

The motivation for slum dwellers to participate in the focus group shows an eagerness to engage in problem solving. The women and men who volunteered for the focus groups would have been more than 10 each had we not set the limit.

The statistics from the 2019 Kenya census provided support to confirm the 4.4 million population of Nairobi and the population of Mukuru - between 825,000 and 1.3 million people (KNBS, 2019) across three sub-counties. The census also confirms how slum-dwellers earn income, and what their living conditions are. They cannot find traditional work regardless of skills gained through U.S. Development trainings, non-traditional gig work is how they sustain themselves. Both women and men in the focus group state that intentional training by development organizations continue to lead to no real jobs, and the non-intentional “ah haa” moments during community dialog leads to new ideas for gaining income.

To re-iterate the cultural attachment to land, during the dialog none of the participants speak of re-locating away from the slums. As the literature has noted, the slum dwellers have become attached to the land they live on and their community. Their grand and great-grandfathers lived in the same dwellings they currently reside in. The option to return to ancestral land in rural areas is either not possible, not feasible, or are not desirable. The slum is home, regardless of how outsiders view it.

In closing, it appears that traditional programs and intentional training are less effective for slum dwellers than non-traditional micro-business, and non-intentional income-producing activities. Slum-dwellers need an impetus to begin the thinking process for strategies to reduce poverty, as well as structural guidance to implement the strategies. The men and women of this

focus group demonstrate a desire to deliver services to their community and take ownership of their future. What remains lacking is the ability to structure their ideas.

**Appendix I - Focus Group Questions**

I want to learn more about life in Mukuru.

We are going to talk about Poverty Reduction; what works and what does not. Is that ok?

1. Name
2. Contact
3. Age
4. # of children
  - 4a) For Mothers: Did you have your child at home or in a hospital?
5. Do you consider yourself to be living in poverty?
  - 3a) Why or Why not?
6. How do you earn income each day?
7. Do you have children?
  - 7a) How many?
8. Do you have any children at home because you cannot afford to pay their school fees?
  - 8a) How many have to stay home?
9. What do they do all day?
10. What do you need to reduce your poverty short term?
11. What do you need to reduce your poverty long term?
12. Do you think your government has the funds to help you?
13. If so, do they help you?
14. What kinds of programs would help you best?
15. Do you vote?
  - 15a) Why? Why Not?
16. What do you think causes poverty?
17. What do you think can reduce poverty?
18. What do you think about business to reduce poverty?
19. What do you think about job training courses to reduce poverty?
20. Is there anything else you would like to say about life and poverty in the slums?

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