

Policy Brief: Kibera Town Center Evaluation and Learning

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Contributors:

Svea Closser, PhD, MPH¹; Ligia Paina, PhD, MHS¹; Marium Sultan, MSc¹; Pamela Juma Atieno, PhD²; Collins Ayuya, MS³; Fidelis Fukwo, MSc³ and Stella Olukoye, BSc³



KEY MESSAGES

1. HNP has key strengths in water and sanitation, particularly in the provision of high-quality water.
2. HNP's overall basket of services, including toilets, showers, laundry, a SACCO, and courses, are useful and valued by the community members who use them.
3. Uptake and awareness of HNP's high quality services could be further strengthened through a renewed focus on community engagement.
4. As HNP looks towards expansion, market and political analyses of expansion areas will be important to ensure impact.
5. Financial sustainability may not need to be a critical goal for HNP; in the NGO market in Kibera, most competitors are donor funded.

Recommendations

1. Renew the focus on community engagement, both at KTC and in expansion areas, through creation of representative community boards with clear roles and responsibilities.
2. Conduct new market and political analyses in both KTC and expansion areas.
3. Review the Theory of Change for KTC and develop a new Theory of Change for expansion sites to account for market and political dynamics, as well as the current local context.
4. Establish internal consensus between KTC staff in Kenya and HNP stakeholders in the US over the transition of decision-making and financial oversight. Develop a strategic long-term plan with clear roles and responsibilities.
5. Continue to strengthen accountability mechanisms to facilitate sustainability and transition, drawing upon the experiences established Kenyan organizations that have established trusted accountability mechanisms in the Kenyan context.

Additional recommendation specific to expansion sites:

1. Develop new Theory of Change for expansion sites to account for diverse contextual conditions, as well as for market and political dynamics. Ideally, this would be co-developed with local stakeholders in each of the sites and it could look slightly different.
2. Engage community early and create representative boards with clear roles and responsibilities for accountability purposes.
3. Recruitment of expansion site staff should be transparent, providing staff career development and growth opportunities in equitable fashion.
4. Conduct market analysis prior to launch of services in expansion sites, to understand local community preferences for service characteristics and willingness to pay, as well as the other businesses providing services – exploring partnerships and coordination where helpful.

¹ Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Department of International Health, Baltimore, MD - USA

² Independent consultant, Senior Lecturer and Director of Research Presbyterian University of East Africa Kenya

³ Independent consultant, Nairobi, Kenya

5. Strategically design the package of services offered at expansion sites based on local evidence.
6. Develop a process for monitoring and evaluation to be able to adjust the package of services and service characteristics (e.g. price, what is offered) based on utilization.
7. Explore the creation of a community of practice or similar learning network among all HNP sites (KTC + expansion sites), to learn from one another and to use the knowledge to improve services.
8. Maintain focus on transition to local ownership and resources – conduct transition preparedness and sustainability assessments at expansion sites early to tailor and leverage the technical support and resources on offer from HNP.
9. Strengthen capacity of Town Center leadership to engage with local funding sources (e.g. Kenyan private companies with corporate social responsibility mandates; African philanthropists), to complement the global network of funding that is leveraged by the HNP board at the moment.

Introduction

Context

Kibera is one of the biggest and most densely populated informal settlements in Nairobi, Kenya and in Africa more broadly. The context in Kibera has changed in important ways in the past decade, with standards of living having improved and some infrastructure, such as roads, having been built. Significant challenges remain, as both the National and Nairobi County Government provides only minimal basic services in this area. Kibera has always been an area where civil society and non-governmental organizations have aimed to fill in the gap left by the government, providing basic water and sanitation services, including waste management, education, and health. Despite the investments made in the last decade, the service delivery infrastructure remains fragmented, and disparities also exist within Kibera, some villages being better served than others.

The Kibera Town Center (KTC) pilot project, which opened in July 2014, is an innovative one-stop shop intervention in the Gatwekera neighborhood, an informal settlement in an urban area in Nairobi, Kenya. KTC is sponsored by the Human Needs Project (HNP),ⁱ a California-non-profit social enterprise, whose mission is to “**provide basic services** (clean water, sanitation and energy) and **empowerment services** (business skills training, microcredit, WiFi, and a green marketplace) **to slums** around the world through the creation of replicable, self-sustaining Town Centers.”ⁱⁱ

KTC provides “infrastructure for opportunity” primarily in Gatwekera – one of 18 villages in Kibera, estimated to house 25,000 people^{iii, iv}— intended to empower people and communities to raise themselves out of poverty. It lies on the border between the Olympic Estates and Gatwekera Villages, both of which are relatively well-served as compared to villages that lie closer to the periphery of the informal settlement.^v The one-stop shop includes infrastructure and economic, educational, and social services (including toilets, clean water, sanitation, energy, internet access, job training, banking, arts, hydroponic farming and a cafe) managed by local residents, and designed to be environmentally, technically and financially sustainable.

HNP would like to transition the ownership of the KTC from HNP to the community, with the vision to expand and replicate the Town Center model in the future. For example, efforts are currently underway to expand the reach of KTC services in Kibera by expanding water points and planning a water bottling plant. Additionally, in 2023, HNP initiated an effort to expand the Town Center Model to five additional counties, in partnership with the Her Excellency Mama Rachel Ruto, Kenya’s First Lady.

This research project had the following objectives:

1. *Understand the process by which KTC was initiated and developed from the perspective of different stakeholders (internal and external to the project), and the influence of context-specific factors, such as power, social and gender norms, and politics, on this process.*
2. *Explore intended and unintended consequences of how KTC is related to changes in market systems, institutions, and accountabilities, with particular emphasis on the perspectives of local residents and the roles of domestic and international stakeholders.*
3. *Understand the potential for KTC's sustainability to inform the transition of financing and/or ownership to local stakeholders.*

Our team conducted 5 focus group discussions and 50 key informant interviews. We also conducted a document review, using documents shared by the HNP team, which included grant applications, white papers, point of service utilization data from 2015 to 2023, and impact decks. Whereas we sought to interview businesses that engaged in the broader market in Kibera, most of the respondents we were able to reach were organizations that already worked with KTC. All data was comprehensively coded using the analysis program MAXQDA, using both deductive codes coming from our research objectives and inductive codes relating to emerging themes.

Key Findings

Two sets of themes emerged from our analysis. The first set concerned strengths – particularly those that community-level respondents perceived. The second concerned areas of growth, which, over time, would enhance KTCs potential for sustainability.

KTC's strengths

KTC was designed with a Theory of Change built on Maslow's Pyramid of Needs^{vi}. As such, the founders of KTC envisioned not only the delivery of clean water and sanitation services, but a holistic approach to poverty alleviation – including opportunities for job and vocational training, income generation, and financial services. Over the past ten years, according to both users and non-users of its services, KTC has become recognized in the community for providing a **comprehensive approach to water and sanitation**, including high quality clean water, at fair prices that remained relatively low despite costs going up in the community. Community members approached the clean facilities and friendly demeanor of KTC workers (CM2, CM4), as well as the hot showers without time limits (CM1, FGD women users). More broadly, several respondents commended KTC for contributing to improving the standards of quality for water and sanitation overall. In the short run, it was able to do so by crowding out service providers offering poor quality services, and, over time, has contributed to stimulating diversity among WASH stakeholders in the current market (CL5, CL9). The perception of high quality also extends to the **cafeteria services and the meeting halls**, as well as to the overall customer service approach (BO4, BO5, FGD women users, CM4). **Laundry services** were valued by other businesses and perceived as filling in a gap in the local market (BO8, BO2).

The **SACCO** was perceived as helpful and trustworthy by women and business owners. Business owners found the registration fees, the combination of access to loans and financial management capacity development as more than what other SACCOs offer (BO1, BO4). Women face many barriers to access capital in Kenya. Women users of the SACCO emphasized how SACCO services empowered them financially and provided them with a model to access capital even if they had limited deposits with the SACCO. In a focus group discussion of women who used KTC's services, one woman said:

“Here you are able to save as low as 50 ksh per week and with that low amount one is able to access a loan to invest in business or clear immediate needs. The [KTC] SACCO has helped women in many ways.” (R1)

KTC’s courses and capacity development were also perceived as highly valuable, especially from the perspective of youth and women who benefitted from technical training already. The course fees were perceived as affordable, uniquely positioned in the market, and most respondents perceived them to be accessible and available to all. Women who had used the services were appreciative of the business training and felt like KTC understood their constraints well, including allowing them to pay for their courses over time (FGD women users). The combination of training in technical skills with financial management was seen as beneficial across all types of capacity building offered. In a focus group of men who used KTC’s services, one man commented:

“I can say KTC is the home of opportunities. I have been here trying to sing but I used to have stage fright, however I have seen many people come here and have been successful. They don’t just teach you how to do music, but we are also taught some financial management skills so that you don’t go back where you came from when an opportunity arises. It has had a very positive impact. They don’t look at where you come from provided you show your interest.” (R3)

KTC’s **urban farming/hydroponics** initiative is the latest initiative though not widely known. Nevertheless, community members who were aware of it appreciated the ability to invest in the farm even with little income, and that the KTC vegetables were not sprayed with pesticides. One community member commented:

“It has helped the community members. Whenever they harvest vegetables it’s like they provide them to us for free. They are very cheap. And they don’t give them to individuals to entire ghetto. Each time they provide them to this area on a specific day, they’ll provide equivalent to other areas. It goes around Kibera.” (CM6)

Respondents also noted KTC’s contributions to improved **security** for businesses, including the provision of light lamps to help them conduct business in the evening (BO6). Community members noted their appreciation of being able to rent generators and batteries to improve their electricity access at home. Women also noted reductions in insecurity due to greater visibility from streetlights, as well as the increasing availability of transport options in the evening, as boda-boda riders felt more comfortable to offer their services in well-lit areas (FGD women service users).

KTC operates based on partnerships, which they use to create an integrated approach towards empowerment of individuals. While clean water was central to their services, KTC built several services around them. One community leader commented:

“We have a lot of small, small hotels [...] they are individually owned. For the toilets, many of them, they are individually owned. The few toilets that we have maybe sponsored by certain organization, but they only provide the washroom services alone, compared to the KTC they provide washrooms, laundry, cafeteria, rooms for hire, courses.” (CL10)

For example, capacity development in terms of both short-term courses and urban farming are associated with financial management training and investment opportunities with SACCO support, respectively. KTC leverages partnerships with private sector employers, such as Nikon, to create a pathway for employment for youth who participate in their courses. The Voices of Kibera project features a collaboration between KTC and the Octopizzo Foundation to support emerging artists. Davis and Shirliff, a solar and water system company in Kenya was tapped to create the curriculum taught at KTC so as to help create a supply chain of community talent.

KTC’s Areas of Growth

To make the most of KTC’s strengths, especially as HNP works towards sustainability and expansion, we have some recommendations to consolidate and build on the strong foundation that currently exists.

A renewed emphasis on community engagement, including but not limited to marketing, was a key need articulated by many respondents. The need for more attention to marketing was mentioned by 12 respondents, and additional respondents mentioned that awareness of services and access to the services provided in the community could be strengthened. In particular, 9 respondents noted the need to counter a perception that KTC was, as one community leader put it, “reserved for the elites of the community, the white... They need to get out there and change people’s perceptions” (CL2). Many respondents commented that given KTC’s value for money, these perceptions could be changed if actively addressed. Non-users of KTC services were more aware of courses, cafeteria, laundry, meeting halls and WASH services, but less aware of the urban farming and SACCO services. For example, one non-user commented that she had not been directly engaged by KTC, but that “other organizations do market themselves through various activities like clean up campaigns or visibility T-shirts.”

We recommend an ongoing community engagement strategy, one that is continuous and dynamic, and aims to pull a broad range of community members into KTC’s governance and services. Many strong community engagement toolkits and guidelines exist to draw from.

The creation of a community board was recommended by multiple respondents as one critical piece of the community engagement strategy. One employee of KTC stated, “there should be like a council or a committee of people from the community that should be part of the managerial meetings” (KE8).

The community board should have explicitly defined oversight and decision-making roles. Our respondents suggested that this community board be given the ability to drive KTC’s priorities, as this is a critical piece of the community engagement mentioned above. One KTC employee said, “When it is owned by the community ... the decisions will be made by the community, okay? Because they are the people who will select the board members for the directing.” Another KTC employee commented, “It’s very important to let the community come up with ideas. But sometimes, because we are a board, we’re the management, or we have a board in the USA, they make those decisions, and then push them to us. Sometimes it gets hard to penetrate the community.”

Multiple community-level respondents perceived that job and business opportunities at KTC are not evenly distributed but are associated with alliances with particular individuals. Whether or not this perception reflects reality, it should be addressed through concerted engagement of a range of key stakeholders and advocates in meaningful ways. We recommend that the community board not be simply handpicked by current leadership, but that broader community stakeholders be thoughtfully and systematically engaged in community board selection, with careful attention and thought given to political dynamics.

HNP has done an incredible job harnessing connections, advocacy, and funding for HNP at international and national levels. Bringing that expertise to current community connections and advocacy can strengthen the project as it expands locally. HNP has made many efforts in this area; as informal settlements are relentlessly complex, renewed community engagement in this vein will be continuously important.

Working collaboratively across levels of the project, from the community board to the Kenya-based leadership, to the US-based leadership and the US-based board, **to create clear and explicit structures and responsibilities**, will be useful as the program aims for sustainability and expansion. Our respondents in both Nairobi and the US told us that HNP, as an organization, currently has easy and comfortable informal decision-making processes. We asked all of our respondents, at all levels, about who would hold fiscal and decision-making responsibilities as the project expanded; we got a wide diversity of responses reflective of the need for discussion for clarity on several key issues. This includes clarity on final decision-making; accountability structures and mechanisms; clarity on who is expected to

finance certain initiatives; and clarity on structures and responsibilities for different actors as HNP expands. For example, clearer roles and responsibilities for local staff, as well as for how local staff work together with international staff and board members, would help increase transparency for decision-making and, over time, help assuage some of the current perceptions that decision-making powers are concentrated among few individuals. It could also help to clarify how to best engage the board in strategic decision-making.

A renewed look at market dynamics will be helpful as KTC looks to expand. HNP provides a useful and valued collection of key services. Markets in Kibera and elsewhere in Kenya are very dynamic and differ enormously across contexts. We were not able to do a full market analysis as part of this project. Figures 1, 2, and 3, below, display a trend analysis for key services – such as toilets, showers, and laundry, respectively. Point of service statistics show overall upward trends in service utilization for toilets, showers, and laundry until spring 2020. However, service utilization did not recover after the pandemic and has been again affected by the technical issues faced between July and November 2023. Services are used by more men than women, despite a number of approaches that KTC tried for targeting women (e.g., providing toiletries after the shower). Although some respondents suggested that laundry services provided an opportunity for cost recovery and growth, service utilization remains low. We recommend that a market analysis be conducted in 2024 for KTC as it currently exists in Nairobi, and also for county-based expansion areas. This could include a service-by-service analysis utilization, expenditures, and profits, to gain an understanding of which services are most cost effective and impactful. A market analysis should apply a gender lens, for the services where KTC's is aiming to impact women in particular, according to their theory of change.

Figure 1. Toilet Usage by Gender, Monthly - March 2015 - December 2023 (Data from HNP)

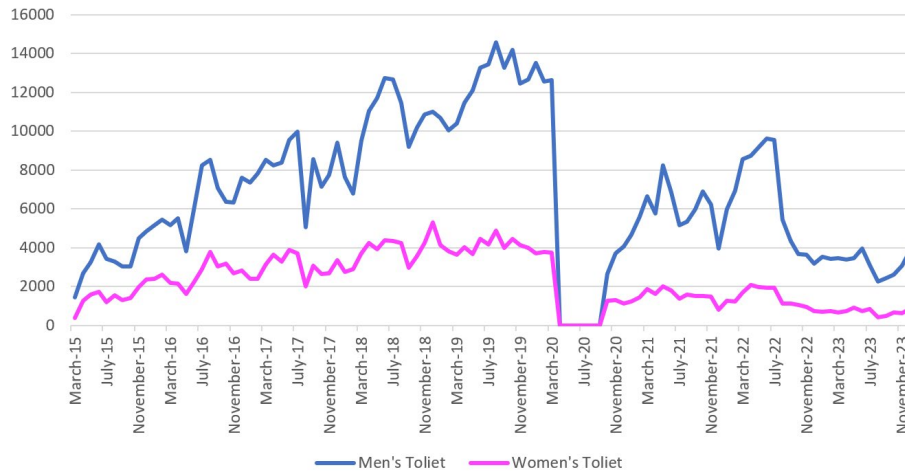


Figure 2. Shower Usage by Gender, Monthly, March 2015 - November 2023

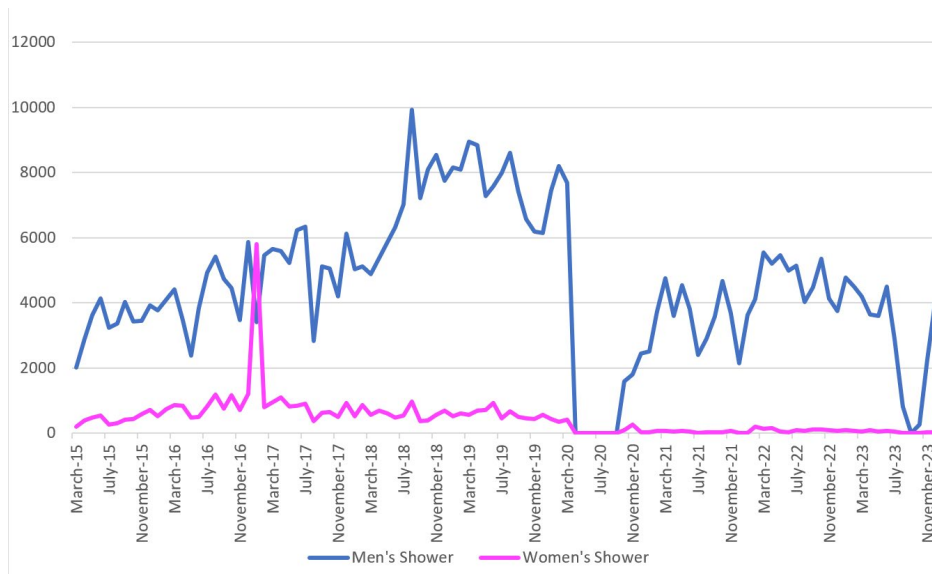
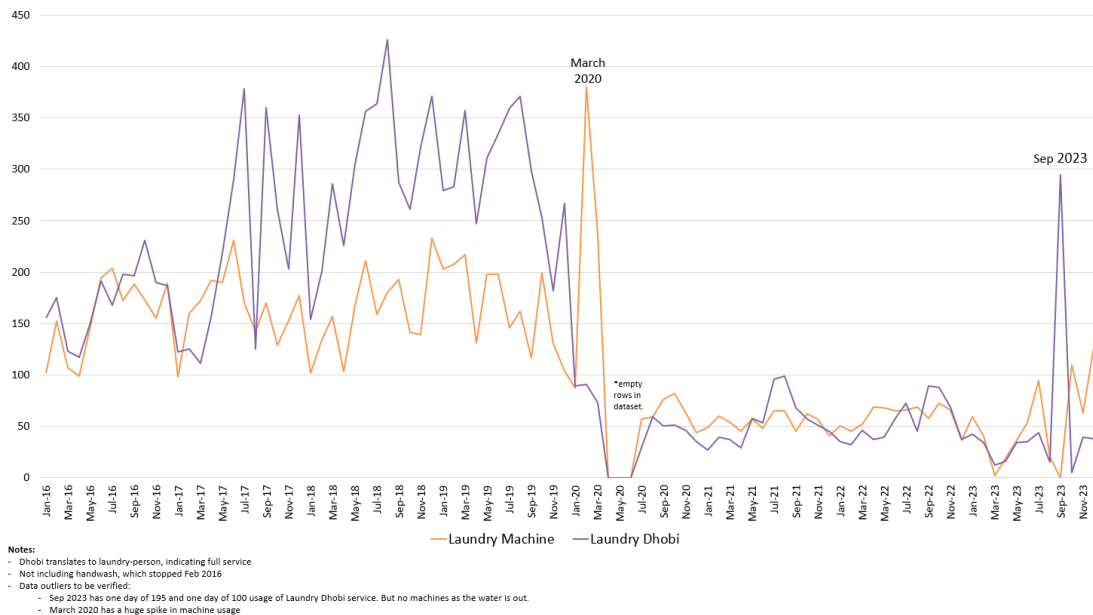


Figure 3. Laundry usage by type, Monthly, January 2016 - December 2023



The market analysis should include an extensive qualitative component to study the preferences of current users and non-users. Based on the current patterns of profit generation for KTC, long term sustainability in Kibera is likely to continue requiring some degree of donor support, which is not uncommon for not-for-profit organizations working in complex contexts. We suggest that current donor support should be targeted to the services most able to recoup costs in the medium- to long-term, and/or the services most valued by community members including the community board. Some expensive services will be worth supporting if they are deeply valued by and meaningful to the community. Services that are both expensive and not deeply valued by the community could be phased out in favor of more cost-effective options.

A renewed look at political dynamics will also be helpful. HNP will need to make explicit choices about the political alliances it is engaging in, as all of these have tradeoffs. The organization will benefit from carefully weighing these tradeoffs. We do not recommend avoiding questions of politics in the context of informal settlements. As HNP looks to expand, we recommend **revisiting the Town Center theory of change**. For each site, we recommend clarifying the following questions: Who decides? Who does? Who pays and finds donors? And who benefits? An updated theory of change should how KTC defines success (i.e. what is the target population and what are markers of impact, including for women if applicable); specify roles and responsibilities in town center model; the financial model and expectations; mechanisms for community engagement and demand generation; HNP's relative advantage in the market; and politics and related dynamics.

ⁱ <https://www.humanneedsproject.org/tags/kibera-town-centre>

ⁱⁱ <https://humanneedsproject.org/about-hnp>

ⁱⁱⁱ 2011 - <https://journals.openedition.org/eastafrica/521?lang=en>

^{iv} 2020 - <https://data.unhabitat.org/documents/GUO-UN-Habitat::the-case-of-kibera-slum-mapping-report/explore>

^v 2020 - https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2021/08/the_case_of_kibera_edited.pdf

^{vi} 2018 Kibera Town Center Theory of Change as presented in document for Omidyar Foundation, referenced in JHU- KTC evaluation concept note.