

VOICING THE URBAN POOR: EXPERIENCE FROM AN ENERGY JUSTICE PROGRAM FOR AND BY SLUM DWELLERS

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Member of a Data Collection Team, working on settlement profiling in South Africa ©KYC TV

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SDI emerged in the mid-90's through peer-to-peer networking of organised slum dweller movements. Today this international network spans 32 countries where grass roots community organisations are supported by professional support NGOs in the building of social movements, transforming urban environments, and securing a more inclusive and resilient future for the world's urban poor. SDI's mission is to build the voice and agency of slum dweller communities, with a special focus on the role of women, in order to achieve inclusive cities in which the urban poor are to be at the centre of strategies and decision-making for equitable urban development.

SDI has a commitment to project typologies that produce learning at scale around clean energy access as part of its informal settlement upgrading agenda. Since 2014 SDI has been involved in the field of access to energy particularly in Africa, India, and the Philippines where the SDI Energy Justice Programme leverages community-led collection of disaggregated energy access data (using the Know Your City tools), community empowerment programs, and pro-poor access models in contribution to energy access goals. In the face of growing needs of access to many essential services in slums, SDI's model provides bottom-up, innovative, and adaptable methodological options for catalysing pro-poor change at settlement, city, national, and global levels.

INTRODUCTION

The number of slum dwellers in developing countries increased from 689 million in 1990 to 1 billion in 2018.¹ In some cities in emerging countries, slum residents make up for more than half of the population and often do not have adequate shelter, clean water and sanitation, access to clean and safe energy, education, or healthcare.

Many governments and international organisations have tried to curb the growth of slums with a limited understanding of underlying drivers of informality, or an appreciation for the vital role their residents play in the functioning of the wider city. The perception of slums being transitory or marginal places deserving of limited attention persists. Generally, this leads to evictions, limited provision of basic services, lack of dialogue between governments and residents of slums, and ill-conceived top-down approaches to urban development.

Since its creation in 1996, SDI has amplified the voice of the urban poor by networking national social movements at a global scale. Communities of slum dwellers organized in local savings groups at settlement level, built into national Federations, from where they are linked to the global network. Federations are trained, equipped in the use of settlement profiling tools and consequently are able to

¹ UN statistics on SDG 11, dated from 2018.

take large steps towards “existence on the map”. Data and data collection processes lie at the core of this approach. In 2014, SDI launched the Know Your City (KYC) campaign. KYC provides a data collection process that empowers communities to co-create solutions. KYC has been a real catalyst to shift to a ‘bottom-up’ approach, paving the way for collaborative planning and action, and participatory investment in access to essential services. In the field of basic energy access, the Energy Justice Programme has been leveraging this data collection process to develop new pro-poor models for accessing clean and safe energy.

KNOW YOUR CITY: SDI’S ‘WEAPON OF MASS CO-CREATION’

SDI, A GLOBAL CONSTITUENCY FOR THE URBAN POOR

During the 1980s and the 1990s, urban poor national and local associations from countries across Asia, Africa and Latin America had multiple exchanges, which revealed the critical value of a network of community-based organizations driven by the poor themselves. Slum Dwellers International (SDI) was officially launched in 1996 to draw attention to the need for a social development approach fully considering the lived experiences of slum dwellers and to gather local and national organisations at a global scale. In 2020, SDI is a transnational social movement driven by over one million grassroots urban poor across 32 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The overall intended impact of SDI’s work is the creation of inclusive and resilient cities where the lives of the urban poor are substantially improved, and development agendas are shifting to be more inclusive and pro-poor, and ultimately more resilient and sustainable. In short, it empowers the urban poor to change their own lives and the shape of their cities by enabling slum dwellers to engage with local and national government as partners in development rather than simple passive beneficiaries. Radically different from the standard development organization approach, SDI is led and governed by leaders of national slum dweller federations themselves.

Slum Dwellers International (SDI) believes that the lack of disaggregated and precise data about tenure security; clean water and sanitation; clean safe and affordable energy; housing; education, or healthcare perpetuates anti-poor urban development. It prevents slum dwellers from showing evidence of their experiences, from collectively

understanding the challenges they are facing and from expounding these in a comprehensive way.

Launched in 2014, KYC emerged from the historical practice fostered by SDI of slum dwellers collecting data about their everyday lives and the spaces they reside in. It seeks to refine and standardise data collection processes across the SDI network in order to enhance the impact of community generated data. KYC took the shape of a joint campaign between SDI-affiliated federations of the urban poor and the United Cities and Local Governments of Africa (UCLG-Africa), with active support from Cities Alliance, of which SDI and UCLG-Africa are prominent members.

Concretely, slum dwellers collect data, which is shared by their federation with KYC to be certified and made public in an aggregated form. Data can relate to the infrastructure level, access to health, access to energy, education, aspirations... Once data has been captured by community data teams (CDTs), i.e. trained local slum dwellers, a process of validation takes place, where data is presented back to the community. This validation process not only allows a grassroots peer review process but seeks to achieve a broader self-realisation impact on the slum community. Importantly, the information is housed in a data system shared by city governments and slum dwellers. At the close of 2019, SDI-affiliated slum dweller organizations had profiled 224 cities in Africa and Asia, covering 7,712 settlements.

KYC challenges the “smart cities” concept, which tends to place a major emphasis on the use of high-tech and big data to guide choices in the planning and management of cities. Whereas big data inarguably unlocks insights resulting in increases in efficiency in the delivery of services, KYC presents data that is co-created and co-owned with users as a key enabler of transformative development possibilities and outcomes, built on relationships of trust between slum dwellers, city authorities and the private sector increasingly. KYC offers a strategy for harnessing data that is deeply rooted in local knowledge and context, to guide decisions to make cities safe, secure, liveable, and attractive to all.

Through KYC, SDI seeks to articulate settlement, city, and global levers to increase and anchor impact in the long term, while challenging on each level the traditional approach toward access to essential services in slums. From this process, 3 pathways to impact with specific goals and means, and essential synergies have crystallized:

IMPACT AT THE SETTLEMENT LEVEL

At a settlement level, savings groups are the building blocks of SDI federations and drive campaigns towards improved access to essential services. At their most basic level, savings are key to cope with unexpected shocks (medical bills, school...). However, as the Liberian SDI alliance reported, “federations throughout the network know that savings groups do more than collect money – they collect people and build a critical mass. When the savings



Data collection team in Nyanga, Capetown, South Africa ©KYC TV

groups are networked, federations are born.” In Malawi, 83 federation members were able to construct new toilets using their savings, while others used their savings to leverage credit from the Mchenga Fund to build theirs.

In each settlement, SDI’s approach also brings to light and creates space for new leaders, challenging power imbalances between genders, ethnic groups. The Nigerian SDI alliance reported that while “traditional leadership in informal settlements tends to be male-dominated and undemocratic, often not putting the communities’ interest first”, community-led data collection process enables other stakeholders to “emerge as agents of change”: this is especially true for women and youth. For instance, savings groups are mainly led by women who get together and start talking about their own daily struggles: school, food, energy, sanitation². In the end, these processes create spaces and build the agency and ownership of the urban poor over local urban development agendas – ultimately upending traditional power structures and putting the urban poor at the helm of community upgrading and development.

IMPACT AT THE CITY LEVEL

Filling the knowledge gap is the first essential step towards an informed and balanced dialogue between slum and informal settlement communities and city governments. In the absence of disaggregated data, decision makers

continue to use urban averages that perpetuate myths and flawed assumptions, especially regarding access to essential services. At a city level, KYC fills this gap by providing data on informal settlements and has made possible the re-examination of these assumptions.

KYC has identified and debunked 3 flawed assumptions:

- “Informal settlements are temporary way stations for the urban poor on the path to modernity and prosperity.”³ In fact, slums are permanent poverty traps. Many of the world’s urban poor population in low-income countries reside in informal settlements for more than one generation. Indeed this is a core driver of population growth in cities in the so called global south.
- “Slum dwellers benefit from better overall health conditions in urban areas.” In fact, the “urban health premium”, i.e. better health conditions in cities than in rural areas, is a myth. In some African cities like Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, for which data is available, health outcomes (infant and child mortality rates...) among low-income urban dwellers are far worse than among low-income rural dwellers.
- “The conditions of the urban poor can be improved without their involvement in planning processes.” Urban planning and implementation cannot be built without consideration of people’s incomes, needs, and preferences, and the direct involvement of the urban poor themselves.

² SDI also hosts the KYC TV program – a complementary video documentation program focused on life in informal settlements. KYC TV also created a space for personal expression and creativity for the slum dweller youth.

³ *Know Your City : Slum Dwellers Counts*. SDI report. Cape Town, 2018.

KYC is changing the mind-set of urban planners and creating the conditions for dialogue on concrete slum upgrading projects. In Cape Town, in partnership with the Provincial Government, the SDI federation purchased a 27.73 ha piece of land with the intent to build homes in an infrastructure and upgrading project: Vusi Nsuntsha Development. There, they planned an area-wide, mixed-use development and resilient neighbourhood that will house 800 families. Vusi will also include residents from Cape Town's most dense settlement Kosovo. Since this experience, co-creation with slum dwellers is now rooted in the urban development plan of Cape Town.

IMPACT AT THE GLOBAL LEVEL

At a global level, KYC processes and data challenge national governments, international intergovernmental bodies, and multilateral development agencies, other international networks, among others, to engage with the realities of urban poverty, which is a condition for greater global investment in pro-poor urban development and access to essential services. SDI participates in global working groups (UN, etc.) to influence policy. SDI also supports regional hubs of national slum dweller federations and peer-to-peer exchange between federations and their partners. Moreover, SDI manages the Urban Poor Fund International (UPFI) it has created to finance its pro-poor upgrading policy. It provides capital to member National Urban Poor Funds (UPFN), so that they can in turn provide funds to savings collectives undertaking important urban improvement and housing projects.

How can we “leave no one behind” if there are hundreds of millions of urban dwellers whose needs are undocumented, whose voices are unheard, and whose capacities are ignored?

SDI'S ENERGY JUSTICE PROGRAMME

The Energy Justice Program (EJP) is a demonstrative case study of SDI's action to improve the access to essential services in slums. The SDI Energy Justice Programme consists in using all the SDI tools, including KYC, to generate grassroots and tailor-made solutions to energy access in slums. Indeed, energy is a key condition to develop essential services in these neighbourhoods: safety depends on streetlights, communication depends on charging one's phone, etc. Today, the SDI Energy Justice Programme has active projects in 12 countries (Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Namibia, India, and the Philippines) and has enabled affiliate federations to provide improved energy access to approximately 25,000 distinct households with the total number of beneficiaries numbering in the region of 100,000.

THE CHALLENGING ISSUE OF ACCESS TO ENERGY IN SLUMS

The lack of access to sustainable energy services and technologies is a major impediment to the development

of slums. And this issue has faced many obstacles and challenges for decades. The growth of informal settlements' population often outpaces the financial and practical ability of individual governments to connect these communities to centralised energy systems, and to keep them connected. Moreover, the few important projects they might invest in are often flawed, especially regarding their basic assumptions. For instance, many governments consider that grid connection is the only way to provide affordable energy access in informal settlements. In fact, financial and practical barriers to extending the grid can often leave urban communities un-serviced for decades, when alternatives such as off-grid solar technologies are readily available and increasingly affordable. In the end, the failures of either misappropriated government programmes or exclusive corporate initiatives require new approaches toward the development of the energy infrastructure in slums.

THE FULL USE OF THE SDI TOOLKIT

SDI's core rituals of community-led settlement profiling, women-led savings groups, and peer-to-peer exchanges represent an opportunity for communities to develop innovative solutions to their critical service delivery gaps. The EJP sets out to leverage these assets to develop scalable energy access projects and integrate these into wider settlement upgrading programmes.

The settlement-based community data collection, enumeration & mapping process of KYC is the most important of these tools. In Lagos (Nigeria), Justice & Empowerment Initiatives, a local

NGO supporting the local SDI federation, applied the KYC methodology, building an exhaustive survey in close consultation with C40, the Ministry of Environment, and the Lagos Bureau of Statistics (LBS), along with the technical advisors from the University of Lagos, Hamilton College, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The survey questionnaire was translated into various local languages and tested several times in the field. Enumerators were trained in informed consent and data security, to verify responses using control questions, to conduct a physical inventory in the household, etc. Once the operation was done, participants took the resulting reports back to the surveyed household to share back and verify the data and discuss the first conclusions of the survey. The survey findings and recommendations, as well as the disaggregated data, were then shared with the Lagos State Government as a basis for energy upgrading partnership. Finally, this survey gave SDI in Nigeria much stronger bargaining power in its arm wrestling with an electricity distribution company that had decided to hike the electricity fees up in slums. The company stepped back, which shows how SDI local federations can shift power balances between slum residents and private-owned companies or other stakeholders.

NEGOTIATION AND CO-CREATION WITH ALL THE STAKEHOLDERS

Data collection is a means and not an end: data products produced as outputs from the Energy Justice Programme are able to be used to influence and negotiate with the key stakeholders. Although SDI helps the slum dwellers to initiate projects and solutions by themselves, their realization requires long-term work with the other stakeholders, particularly when faced with large scale area upgrading including access to energy. The case of Mukuru (Kenya), arguably Nairobi's largest slum, is the epitome of this multi-partner and holistic approach.

In 2017, the longstanding close work of SDI's Kenyan affiliate with the Nairobi City County Government (NCCG) resulted in the official designation of the Mukuru informal settlements as a Special Planning Area (SPA). The mandate of the Mukuru SPA project is the development of the area's Local Integrated Development Plan – with a focus on access to essential services – in the framework of the Nairobi Integrated Urban Development Master Plan (NIUPLAN) for 2014-2030.

This landmark breakthrough has subsequently demonstrated the application of community mobilisation methodologies and participatory approaches to slum redevelopment planning and implementation. In collaboration with NCCG Kenya's SDI affiliate has coordinated the work of developing a comprehensive spatial plan for the redevelopment of Mukuru. This work was multi-sectoral in nature and included inputs from sector partners including those specialising in housing, water, sanitation, energy, health, etc.

By leveraging the Energy Justice Programmes experience and combining these with the principles and methodologies of community led data collection (KYC), SDI took a leading role in contributing to evidence-based recommendations for energy access technologies, delivery models, and policy and planning alternatives for integration into Mukuru's spatial plan. What is notable here is integration of local community members in the co-creation of fit for purpose energy access recommendations, as well as how the existing social infrastructure arising from longstanding community mobilisation proved ground breaking in respect to its ability to facilitate a truly participatory process aimed at contributing to the acceptability and sustainability of any given energy access solution. Community Data Teams (CDTs) were involved in the collection of energy demand capacity data at a household level, enabled access to insight into an informal energy access economy fraught with complexity and were able to mobilise large scale community data verification processes held throughout the slum.

This long-term project will also involve international agencies, such as The World Bank, Nairobi Metropolitan Services, private and public companies, like the national electric utility company Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC), which will play a key role in the upgrading of the

energy infrastructure. This high level of institutionalized cooperation is owed to the Kenyan statutory and regulatory framework, which is one of the most advanced in the region. Hence, the SDI Energy Justice Programme has a ratchet effect: evidence to influence decision makers, cooperation with them (public and private, local and international), which can result in the adoption of a legal frameworks – like the Mukuru SPA – and guaranteeing this institutionalized co-creation process in the long-term.

KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE ENERGY JUSTICE PROGRAMME

Since the inception of EJP, SDI's teams have identified some key learnings in terms of project design and impacts.

THERE IS NO "ONE SIZE FITS ALL" PROJECT

SDI does not propose a unique solution but a strong methodology to legitimize each energy solution emerging from and required by a specific context. In Dzivarasekwa, (Zimbabwe) and Longlands (South Africa), the solution was the equipment of slum dweller households with solar home systems (SHS) the latter seeking to leverage a government energy subsidy for the poorest via a private sector enterprise. In Mukuru (Kenya), a delegated service delivery model for lighting and pay-per-use energy solutions for cooking are being implemented. At last, in the cities of Kampala and Jinja (Uganda), the emphasis was put on solar streetlights.

SAVINGS GROUPS TO FUND OFF-GRID SOLAR HOME SYSTEMS

The SDI savings groups have been particularly adapted to the improvement of energy access in African slums. In Dzivarasekwa (Zimbabwe), off-grid solar home systems



Delivery of solar lighting solutions in Mbale, Uganda ©KYC TV

(SHS) were provided to households on a group savings and loan basis. The Gungano Urban Poor Fund offered two different SHS options, with no interest charged on the loans and no overall profit margin. After passing a vetting process, a household could get a loan if it was a member of one of the community savings groups (minimum 20 members). The loan scheme was based on a 'revolving fund' principle; loan repayments returned to the fund to provide new loans for new participants. 95% of all due payments were made monthly, so loan rescheduling or repossessions were not required. This example shows how the savings groups can be a very practical financing solution, in the field of the Energy Justice Programme. This model is easily replicable and adaptable; and SDI is working on it.

We know our communities, and our community members know what they have and what they don't have. This is the best thing about Know Your City

TRAINING OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Also, central to the implementation plan was the training of community members on all technical aspects of delivery. 15 trained community members were engaged as technicians to scope, install, repair, and maintain the solar systems, and to educate new users on how to use them, along with 3 mobilisers and 2 loan officers.

ONE SOLUTION, MULTIPLE IMPACTS: THE EXAMPLE OF SOLAR STREETLIGHTS IN UGANDA

In Uganda, the setting up of solar streetlights in Kampala and Jinja had a remarkable spill over effect. First, the installation of lighting on busy roads and junctions reduced car accidents, which eased traffic and helped address congestion and air pollution. Second, lighting the streets improved safety by reducing crime rates. This led to the appropriation of the public space during the night time by marginalized groups, especially women, who were the first victims of assaults. Third, this enhanced the night time economy. Business owners were able to trade for an additional five hours per day and have many more customers due to the streets being busy again. This could equate to approximately 4,000 more full time jobs in Kampala.⁴ In Jinja, the local co-production of solar-powered streetlights has also created skilled and technical jobs in the solar sector for a vulnerable young population living in slums. In the end, the combination of these positive shifts increased the property values, and consequently the attractiveness of the neighbourhood itself.

INTEGRATION OF DIVERSE DISTRIBUTION SYSTEMS

The transition to low-carbon energy systems is increasingly considered in the delivery of energy as basic service for urban-poor communities with recognition by the public and private sectors that communities must play an

instrumental role in the implementation and management of energy transitions even though progress has thus far been slow. By including communities to drive and co-create

the opportunities of the energy transition, the adoption of new technologies may be accelerated, more inclusive policies may be developed, and capacity and skills built to support existing and new economic activities. Informal distributors are frequently entrepreneurs who live in informal settlements and draw customers and their workers from the same neighborhoods. Efforts to integrate these diverse distribution systems have

been unsuccessful and often conflictual hence there is increasing interest in exploring new integrated supply modalities.

In Ghana the EJP is therefore exploring economically viable, environmentally sustainable and socio-technologically integrated forms of providing energy services, alternatives to grid-based electricity and the uptake of more efficient and healthier cooking fuels for households. Six communities in Accra participated in both quantitative and qualitative surveys, including Ashaiman, Agbogbloshie, Chorkor, James Town, Madina Zongo and Shukura.

CONCLUSION

In informal settlements, the lack of access to essential services has restrained for decades the economic and social development as well as the well-being of the slum dwellers. Across the continents, the paradox remains the same: their number keeps growing while their influence stagnates. SDI seeks to empower urban poor and secure their 'seat at the table' with mainstream actors such as city governments and international organizations. The SDI federations, either local or national, are today well-identified interlocutors invited to working groups. Know Your City and the savings groups demonstrated their impact and credibility through a multitude of solutions implemented in various backgrounds. In particular, the community-led collection of disaggregated data filled a major gap in the design and implementation of a pro-poor urban planning. SDI is targeting Latin America and Asia to spread and replicate this methodology born in Africa.

⁴ Gillard, R., Oates, L., Kasajja, P., Sudmant, A., Gouldson, A. 2019. Sustainable urban infrastructure for all: Lessons on solarpowered streetlights from Kampala and Jinja, Uganda. Coalition for Urban Transitions. London and Washington, DC.: <http://newclimateeconomy.net/content/cities-working-papers>.