

Kariobangi: The Case History of a Squatter Resettlement Scheme in Kenya

THOMAS S. WEISNER

...if, for reasons of prestige, neighbourhoods are redeveloped to a standard in advance of the general growth of prosperity, the whole cost is a fair charge on the public purse.... This illustrates a dilemma which the newly independent nations of Africa will often have to face... if they spread their resources evenly in overall development, the progress must fall disappointingly short of their aspirations. But if they attempt, here and there, to reach a standard not yet generally possible, they may overburden groups in their society with a standard of living beyond their power to sustain.... The cost of unbalanced development is social disruption... an artificial pattern of life is still being imposed.... Only the elite can overleap the obstacles in the way of their country's development.... But there is a danger, too, in allocating so much of the nation's resources to benefit the already rich. Unless these problems are understood, the symbols of progress will be achieved only at the price of growing injustice.

PETER MARRIS¹

In 1964, the Nairobi City Council (NCC) and the Kenya government initiated a housing redevelopment program to aid squatters living just a few hundred yards from the modern central areas of Nairobi. This rehousing scheme involved tearing down the squatters' illegal shacks and thus improving what was felt to be an unhealthy, dangerous, and unsightly blight on the capital of newly independent Kenya. Every squatter household was to be given a plot of land, fully prepared with

I did fieldwork in Kariobangi from 1968 to 1970, and again from July to September, 1972. My deepest thanks, appreciation, and admiration to all the many people whom I grew to know there and who helped in my research. Fieldwork was supported by the Carnegie Corporation through the Child Development Research Unit, Harvard University and the University of Nairobi, and by National Institute of Mental Health fellowships, 3F01-MH32936 and 5F01-MH32936-03.

¹ In: *Family and social change in an African city: a study of rehousing in Lagos*, page 131.

essential services, on which to build a new home. This paper sketches the history of the planning, implementation, and final outcome of this resettlement program, and discusses some of the socioeconomic effects of housing policy in Nairobi.

The name of the housing estate to which the squatters were moved is Kariobangi and the strategy of offering prepared plots for further development is called a "site and service" method.² What began in 1964 as a plan for squatter rehousing became something very different. Kariobangi in 1973 was a lower-middle-income African housing estate, composed largely of migrants to the city from all parts of the country who had arrived since 1964 and who were not former squatters. These residents pay rent to largely absentee African landlords. Some of these African landlord-investors are from the original squatter group who were allotted plots in 1964 and 1965, but many others, probably the majority, are not. Kariobangi has been transformed from its original conception as a squatter rehousing site to its present status as a housing estate serving Nairobi's flood of new migrants.

This change has led many to judge Kariobangi a failure – both because squatter resettlement did not proceed as planned and because Kariobangi is overcrowded and built primarily with mud-and-wattle construction. The case history of the growth of Kariobangi Site and Service Scheme illustrates, however, that squatter resettlement as initially planned never had much chance of success. More importantly, Kariobangi's history raises a number of questions concerning the planning, construction, and social effects of housing in Nairobi that transcend this particular scheme. Do elaborate housing regulations create, as Marris suggests, mere "symbols of progress" alongside growing divisions between city and countryside, elites and peasant-migrants?

BACKGROUND OF THE KARIOBANGI PLAN

Lest it be thought that the problem of squatting, inadequate housing, and government concern over such matters is recent, here is a report written in 1913 by a British administrator in Kenya:

² Kariobangi Site and Service Scheme is the real name of the estate; it is quite impossible to conceal its identity, given its unique history. But no names or other methods of identifying any of the residents or current officials involved there are provided in this paper.

...for months past those up country natives who are not provided with quarters within the compounds of their employers, have been forced to rent miserable quarters in unsanitary localities of the town and at excessive rates.... An enormous number of employees of government, of hotels and of private firms are absolutely without quarters of their own.... An inspection of some of the quarters rented by native employees of Europeans reveals the conditions under which they have to live. Most of the rooms visited measured 8' by 10', and were occupied by 4 to 6 boys. The stretch outside some of these places was very bad.... In many of them the roofs could be touched by the hand while one stands in the center of the room (quoted in Van Zwabenberg 1972:22).

The Kariobangi area itself was already listed as a peri-urban, illegal squatters' area by 1944 and there were a number of other squatters' areas noted as early as the second decade of this century. These early African settlements were demolished in the 1920's and their inhabitants moved to a single location. It is interesting to note the plans made in 1917 for relocation; the parallels to 1964 plans for the development of Kariobangi are remarkable:

...the Municipality had decided to remove all the ad hoc African villages and to develop just one special location. The municipal authority looked towards the South African urban experience for a model.... The characteristics of the proposed development were as follows: (a) The houses were to be of wattle and daub, "owing to the lack of funds [heads?] of Nairobi families should be encouraged and assisted to build their own houses" but the "Municipality reserves to itself the right in five years time to demolish the house and erect on the spot a more suitable form of house" (quoted in Van Zwabenberg 1972:28).³

The scale of the problem is far greater now than in the early periods of Nairobi's growth, but the conditions creating the problems, and the solutions proposed, have not changed fundamentally in sixty years.

Reasons for the Resettlement Scheme

There are many reasons why the Kenya government and Nairobi City Council officials wanted the squatters moved. The issue of safety and "security" was, as always, of major concern to the government and the city council:

³ Van Zwabenberg is quoting within this passage a manuscript written by a Colonel Watkins in 1917 or 1918 entitled "Native location Nairobi"; Van Zwabenberg's Note 2 (1972:28) gives the full reference.

[The district commissioner, Nairobi area] reported that an increasingly dangerous security situation was being created in Nairobi by the continuous migration of work seekers into the City and he wished to emphasize the urgency of the situation and the need for immediate constructive action.... The police together with the City Inspectorate were holding the position with great difficulty and an average of 30-35 new illegal structures were now being demolished each week in accordance with the Cabinet's Directive. In Buruburu and several areas of privately owned land the situation was getting out of hand. Immigrants from Kiambu, Machakos, and Fort Hall were deliberately and continuously rebuilding their illegal houses as fast as they were demolished... no constructive action had so far been taken - the construction of Kariobangi had not even started - and he [the district commissioner] considered his officers, the Police and the City Council staff were faced with an increasingly difficult and unpleasant task (Nairobi City Council [NCC] 1964:2).⁴

There was concern over health problems and epidemics, and over the general unsightliness of the settlements. The precedent and policy implications of squatting were also important, because it was felt that stern measures were necessary in relation to existing squatters to keep the problem from escalating out of control. It was also reported that officials at the highest levels in Kenya's new African government were not pleased with the growth of squatter settlements so near the city center and wanted immediate and dramatic action taken.

The construction of Kariobangi Site and Service Scheme was also directly linked to the formulation of an overall plan to deal with what was clearly seen as a long-term, national problem of rural-urban migration, population increase, and uncontrolled urban squatters:

[The deputy city engineer] agreed that Government must demonstrate its intention of doing something constructive by building Kariobangi. He did not consider that it would be possible to provide rural counter attractions for a long time (NCC 1964:3).

It was agreed by the meeting that the Squatter Problem is not only a matter of the few thousand squatters in the city at the moment, but also of a long term planning and construction program which is ... likely to lead to a very considerable increase in the city's population over the next ten years (NCC 1964:9).

⁴ Hereafter referred to as NCC 1964b. This meeting was attended by many of those involved in the planning of Kariobangi, including the permanent secretary and deputy secretary, Ministry of Local Government; permanent secretary, Ministry of Housing; district commissioner, Nairobi area; town planning officers; town clerk; chief health inspector; deputy director of social services; deputy city engineer; and so on. This characteristic administrative clumsiness may have contributed to the town planning advisor's remark that "he was beginning to feel very frustrated at the slowness of everything" (NCC 1964:3).

It is important to note these long-range considerations when, later in this paper, Kariobangi's "failure" eight years after its construction is assessed. Although the scheme was closely identified with squatter rehousing in the minds of some, it was also seen as a potentially important way to provide housing for migrants of all kinds soon to be flooding into Nairobi.

KARIOBANGI: THE ORIGINAL SQUATTER RESETTLEMENT PLAN

Planners were sensitive to the real plight of these squatter-migrants, as well as to the political unpleasantness and bad publicity which would accompany burning down the shanties of the poor. Kariobangi was designed to provide sites for new homes that were graded, laid out in an orderly fashion, and had nearby shops, water, sewers, washing facilities, and other services necessary to meet basic city requirements. Each squatter would be allotted a plot on which to begin building a house according to standards of minimal size and acceptable construction materials. Each plot was 1,800 square feet (forty by forty-five feet) and was served by its own toilet and water line. The house itself was entirely the responsibility of the allottee of each plot, subject to what were called "grade II" or temporary materials standards. In practice this meant that the house could be made of mud and wattle (although cement and stone were encouraged) and had to have a tin roof. "Paper, cardboard, string will not be used in construction" it was defined by the city council subcommittee that had been set up to oversee the development of Kariobangi (NCC 1964-1968 [June 9, 1964]).⁵ It was the feeling of the planners that mud and wattle houses of this size could easily be constructed by allottees without the help of costly builders, without the need for many imported materials, and at a modest cost payable by the allottees.

The allottee had six weeks to build his house to a standard acceptable to the city engineer; after the house was finished, its improvement from temporary to permanent materials was required after ten years.⁶ Further,

⁵ Unless otherwise noted, the subsequent descriptions are based on an amalgam of the following sources: NCC (1964); NCC (1964-1968), minutes of the NCC Site and Service Subcommittee and other committees; interviews with a number of officials involved in planning Kariobangi; and interviews with many Kariobangi residents.

⁶ NCC (1964-1968 [July 9, 1964]:89) suggests that the lease period be twenty years for temporary materials. However, ten years was reported to me by residents as the correct number, and this figure appears on the actual letter of offer to allottees.

if the house was shown to be in disrepair or below minimum NCC standards, the council could take possession of the plot and/or order reconstruction.

The uses to which the house could be put after construction were also regulated by the allotment agreement. These regulations are crucial to understanding the social form the planners envisioned for Kariobangi:

The building is to be used as a private dwelling house for the plot owner and his/her family. In addition, lodger's accommodation will be permitted; this will be restricted to a maximum of 2 rooms and will only be allowed after obtaining written permission from the Town Clerk. This may be refused, if in his opinion such provision would result in overcrowding (NCC 1964-1968 [July 9, 1964]:87).

This paragraph appears on the allotment agreement signed by the plot owner and the city. It was clearly intended: (1) that the squatter-allottee live on his own plot in at least two of the four rooms in a standard temporary house; (2) that rentals of allottee's rooms be of secondary importance and be regulated by the clerk; and (3) that this device would also be used to control crowding. No shops, trade, or cottage industry was to be permitted. Kariobangi was to be primarily for ex-squatters – some of whom might also sublet some of their rooms to earn more income, as many had been doing in their former illegal housing.

Financing of the new estate came primarily from loans and grants from the Kenya government, with some supplemental funds from the city council itself. The estate was built under the supervision of, and the transfer administered by, the city council officers – primarily members of the Social Services and Housing Department, the Town Planning Department, and the city engineer and valuer.

Why was Kariobangi chosen as the site? In 1964, Kariobangi was well away from any other housing area, council-owned or private; there was no city bus service or paved road; and the area had a reputation for being somewhat dangerous. But it did have positive advantages in the eyes of the city council planners. First, there was already a small permanent housing area there, built by the old county council and now within the expanded city boundaries; this meant that services such as water mains and sewers were already there and needed only to be expanded. Second, land was quite cheap there at the time. Third, it was far away from things; that was a positive advantage in the eyes of some. Kariobangi was an experiment, both socially and physically, and its future was uncertain. It was thought to be better not to risk depreciating existing, more permanent NCC housing areas than to try to integrate the squatters

into these already crowded estates. Finally, future industrial growth was planned for this area, and it was felt that development would move into the region. No alternative site was seriously considered.

How were the allottees to be chosen? On first glance it would seem quite easy to allocate essentially free land in a housing-short city to those needing housing who were already squatting on the property of others. But the allotment procedures proved quite complex in practice. The allotment plan involved: (1) delimiting the physical location within which residents were to be offered plots; (2) deciding who in fact was a resident of that area; (3) deciding who would be eligible within the area; and (4) deciding on methods of offering plots. The area deemed most urgently in need of rehousing was termed the "Pumwani Road Area." The Pumwani Road Area had increased in size since an initial, September 1963, survey; however, the subcommittee decided to limit allottees to those listed on that original survey – i.e. presumably those who had not moved into the area because it became known that a rehousing scheme was planned. The director of social services and housing along with the chief valuer then conducted a series of surveys in this area and prepared "a list giving particulars of illegal squatters who should be allocated plots when the Kariobangi Scheme was ready" (NCC 1964-1968 [July 2, 1964]: 325).

Eligibility was somewhat more complicated. Priority for being offered a plot depended not only on residence in the Pumwani Road site, but also on: (1) willingness and ability to move immediately into Kariobangi; (2) the number of dependents of the squatter (the more dependents, the higher the priority); (3) whether there were joint owners of a specific dwelling (joint owners were asked whether one could accept a plot and the other become a tenant on that plot); and (4) assurances by the squatter that he would vacate his existing dwelling and not rent it to others (NCC 1964-1968 [July 27, 1964]: 325-326). Given these considerations, city council officials went into the squatters' homes and began explaining, checking lists and amendments to lists, trying to sort out issues of eligibility, and then sending formal letters of offer for signature by the squatter-allottees.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESETTLEMENT SCHEME

The alterations in the original plans for Kariobangi that had to be made by the city reflect clearly the fundamental questions of urban migration and housing raised at the beginning of this paper. Four major changes oc-

curred in the original conception of the estate. First, allocation was not as easy as expected. Second, transfer of ownership after allocation was difficult to control. Third, the use of the plots was not as the planners had hoped – namely, use to be limited to squatter-owned-and-occupied residences. And fourth, squatting greatly increased along with the development of Kariobangi, even near the estate itself. Kariobangi ultimately became a crowded, lower-middle-income, African-owned urban housing estate, physically different from but socially similar to others owned by the city.

Allocation and Ownership

The signal for coming problems was sounded on August 10, 1964, at the Kariobangi subcommittee meeting: "...the Director reported on the difficulties encountered during the allocation and that some squatters had refused to take up plots at the Site. The Sub-Committee noted that out of 76 squatters allocated plots only 31 had accepted them." Squatters wanted to stay where they were – near the city, trade, and work, near their already constructed houses. They did not want to go to distant, unknown, out-of-the-way, perhaps dangerous new homes, where they would have to start construction all over again on a more expensive scale. The city then decided to dispense with some of its priority requirements and to offer plots section by section to everyone on the relevant lists, forcing every squatter to decide within seven days whether he or she wanted a plot at Kariobangi. If they accepted the plot, the squatters had to move immediately; if not, they were to be notified that their homes would be destroyed regardless (NCC 1964–1968 [August 10, 1964]: 327). In short, far from having to set standards to control an expected rush for plots, it was necessary to threaten squatters in hopes that they would accept them.

Punwani Road squatters may not all have wanted the plots, but there were many other African investors who did want them. The problem of sales of plots to nonsquatters arose immediately and led to a committee ruling that no plots were to be transferred for five years after allotment (NCC 1964–1968 [March 9, 1964]: 1,741). It is widely reported that some maneuvering by African investors occurred in order to buy out or replace squatters who were eligible for plots but wanted (or could be convinced) to sell. Although such sales were illegal at the time, most people went ahead, hoping that the transactions would ultimately be legalized. (In fact, these hopes were eventually realized.) These transfers of ownership

fundamentally changed the social character of Kariobangi from its intended form. Absentee African investors began to control many plots and houses and to rent out all the rooms to tenants. In addition, many of the squatter-allottees who retained their plots rented all their rooms and lived elsewhere. Resident, "homeowner ex-squatters" were soon in the minority in Kariobangi.

The city officers conducted their own survey of Kariobangi in 1965, when the estate was nearing completion, and reported the figures shown in Table 1 for the distribution of current plot owners.

Table 1. Whereabouts of original allottees of plots (Nairobi City Council survey in 1965)

	Number	Percent
Living in own house on site	64	12.8
Living in Nairobi town	176	35.1
Living in Kenya	17	3.4
Living outside Kenya	27	5.1
Whereabouts unknown	217	43.3
	501	99.7*

* Because of rounding

Only 13 percent of the original allottees were positively identified as residents in Kariobangi. In 1969 I conducted a small random survey of ninety plots and tried to inquire about current plot ownership. Many tenants did not even know the landlord, as rents were collected by various agents; others knew of him but were not certain where he lived; and there were some cases where the landlord lived in Kariobangi but on another plot. As a very rough estimate, not more than 15 to 20 percent of the current landlords are both original allottees and residents in Kariobangi – and this figure includes some allottees who acquired more than one plot. Another group (probably not more than 20 percent) are original allottees but live elsewhere, collecting rent from tenants. (Some of these landlords are even squatting in other parts of the city!) This survey, confirming the NCC figures, indicates that probably 60 to 75 percent of the plots in Kariobangi are not owned by the original allottees.⁷

⁷ There is some confusion in the evidence available to me concerning the number of actual sales of plots that have been registered with the city. NCC (1964–1968 [April 8, 1968]:1,917) states that a survey made by the director of social services and housing found only 64 plots (of 732) had been sold at that time. These sales were ultimately legalized. However, other estimates, e.g. NCC (1969), state that "almost all" the original allottees had sold or defaulted. And the fact that the 1965 NCC survey (Table 1) could not even locate most allottees further confuses the situation. Without access to the true landlords or to private city council records, I can only cite very tentative figures and fieldwork reports, along with the city's own 1965 survey.

House Construction

Both the city council and the Kenya government wanted to encourage the construction of permanent houses – ie. those made of stone and cement rather than mud and wattle. Demonstration houses were constructed on special plots to show allottees the kind of house they could build. The initial problem was of a different kind, however: most plots sat undeveloped for extended periods. Warnings were issued in March, and again in July, 1965, that construction must begin or plots would be confiscated by the city. Although development of plots proceeded far more slowly than had been planned, houses were eventually constructed: by 1969 all but about 5 percent of the plots had houses built on them.

There are three basic kinds of house in Kariobangi: (1) a mud and wattle house, about twenty-three feet square, having a galvanized tin roof and containing four rooms of equal size, each from ten to twelve feet square; floors and walls are mudded and the walls may not extend all the way to the slanted roof of the building; (2) a house as in (1) but with the walls covered with cement or plaster, the floor cemented, and the walls more likely to extend to the roof to fully enclose the room; and (3) a larger house, covering more of the plot, made of stone and cement, usually containing six rooms connected in groups of two; the rooms themselves are usually slightly smaller than in most mud houses. About half of the houses are type 1, 40 percent type 2, and 10 percent type 3. There has been steady improvement in the quality and permanence of housing, as type 1 houses are slowly improved by cementing. Although the speed of conversion to permanent materials is lower than hoped for, this step-by-step improvement in housing quality appears to be effective.

Plot Use: Businesses and Crowding

It will be recalled that the original letter of offer stated that allottees must live on their plots, must not rent more than two rooms, and must not engage in business activities. Shops were as difficult to prevent as absentee landlords. The council's subcommittee on Kariobangi specifically forbade shopkeeping, while at the same time it tried to speed construction of additional shops in a separate market area. Plot owners and renters who had started businesses of various kinds tried to have this policy changed without success.

I conducted a large survey of all businesses operating in Kariobangi in 1969–1970: there were 3451. Of these, however, 2 were hawkers, 10 were

in an official shop building, and 114 (33 percent) were concentrated in an open-air market separated from the housing area. This leaves 219 businesses operating out of the 732 plots within the estate itself. In fact, some 10 percent of the household units within Kariobangi depend primarily on the internal market economy of the estate for income. These businesses provide essential services not otherwise easily available in the area and aid many residents of Kariobangi who have no other source of income. However, these shops are not authorized and are not assured of tenure by the city; they are purely the product of indigenous needs and enterprise among allottees, new owners, and tenants alike.

Kariobangi is also far more crowded than had originally been intended. Assuming the allottee lived in two of his rooms and rented the two remaining, there would have been a maximum of two family or household units per plot (as two rooms per household was the desired space requirement). In 1970 there were 4.2 persons per household unit in Kariobangi and 93 percent of the households occupied only a SINGLE room. Thus there are nearly seventeen persons occupying an average four-room house on a plot, rather than the eight or so persons that would have been the maximum had the original densities been followed. This heavy crowding is more than twice what had been planned. However, densities are very heavy throughout the city, not only in Kariobangi; thus the fact that allottees no longer own plots and landlords do not live in two rooms on their plots is not the primary reason for overcrowding. The heavy demand for living space on the part of new migrants to the city is a far more important factor.

The Growth of Squatting in Nairobi

The number of squatters in Nairobi has increased enormously since 1964. Estimates of the number of squatters vary widely, but an estimate of between 25,000 and 30,000 would not be too far off. Most of these live in the Mathari Valley, an area north and east of the city center which ends near the edge of Kariobangi estate. Indeed, there is a large squatters' village 100 yards across the road from Kariobangi and there are other similar settlements nearby. The city has constructed low-cost housing across the road from Kariobangi, using labor from the area and mass purchases of materials to try to alleviate squatter growth in this area. However, Kariobangi estate has not solved the problem of squatting. Indeed, it may have encouraged it, squatters can use the water and other services that are now more easily available.

The original intentions of the planners of Kariobangi were altered in almost every respect – ownership, residence, business activity, density, and the control of squatting. These plans were accomplished, if slowly, with respect to the completion of construction on all available plots and to steady improvement of house construction. Another contrast between Kariobangi as intended and Kariobangi as realized is found in the estate's social characteristics – who lives there, what kind of community organization exists, and what services are provided. Although no explicit social planning was involved in preparing the site and service scheme, the goal of having an estate comprised largely of ex-squatters would have given Kariobangi from its inception a definite social structure, one that would have differed from those of other African housing estates in the city. As in other respects, however, Kariobangi is not very different from other housing areas in the city containing unskilled and semi-skilled working migrants.

KARIOBANGI TODAY: SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Table 2 compares the tribal composition of Kariobangi with that of Nairobi migrants overall and of migrants to eight urban centers.⁸ Although somewhat overrepresented with migrants from Western Province and underrepresented with migrants from Eastern Province and other areas, Kariobangi is essentially similar in its tribal composition to the city as a whole. Median ages are thirty-five for male household

Table 2. Percentage distribution of places of origin of migrants to Kariobangi estate, to Nairobi, and to eight Kenyan towns*

Province of origin	Kariobangi census	Nairobi migrants	Eight urban centers
Central	38.0	43.2	31.7
Eastern	7.0	16.9	14.6
Nyanza	22.0	15.0	21.2
Western	30.0	14.8	16.3
Other	3.0	10.1	16.2
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0

* (Rempel [1972:5] and census of Kariobangi by author.) These data are not absolutely comparable but are close enough to illustrate the differences. Rempel's data refer to province of birth of migrant men. Kariobangi data refer to tribal affiliation of household heads. Because birthplace and tribe are very closely related (see Table 8 in Rempel [1972:16]), the relative differences in Table 2 above and the subsequent table are unlikely to be affected by this discrepancy.

⁸ These towns are Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru, Eldoret, Thika, Nanyuki, and Nyeri.

heads and thirty for adult women; median years of school for men is six and for women, two. The median monthly income per household is approximately 350 Kenyan shillings (\$48.50), and the median farm size for male household heads is 2.5 acres. Most residents work at unskilled or semi-skilled jobs – as carpenters, drivers, machine operators, shopkeepers, watchmen, clerks, and so forth.

How do these figures for the 11,000 site and service residents compare with similar figures for other city council estates? Table 3 (from Ross and Weisner i.p.) presents directly comparable information on a series of demographic measures on three Nairobi housing estates – Kariobangi, Shauri Moyo, and Kariokor. Shauri Moyo is quite similar sociologically to Kariobangi; however, it is entirely owned and run by the city council, and is one of the city's oldest low-rent African housing estates. Kariokor is also city-run but has a higher rent structure and houses a clearly higher-income, better-educated, more affluent population. Socioeconomically, Kariobangi is perhaps in the third quartile: a bit below average, but not very much below the average for African residents of Nairobi.

Table 3. Comparison of adults in Shauri Moyo, Kariokor, and Kariobangi

Average age (adults, in years)	33.3	33.0	26.6
Years resident in city	12.3	8.7	6.2
Percent of life spent in city	34.1%	26.3%	22.7%
Percent with no education	30.0%	20.9% ^a	2.0%
Percent with some primary education	63.0%	67.4% ^a	27.0%
Percent with some secondary education	6.0%	11.6% ^a	60.0%
Percent earning K.Shs ^c 300/- or less per month	73.0%	52.2%	10.0%
Percent earning K.Shs ^c 800/- or less per month	99.0%	94.6%	41.0%
Percent earning K.Shs ^c 800/- or more per month	0.0%	5.3%	59.0%
Adult male/female ratio	2.1:1	1.2:1	1.8:1
Percent of wives residing in city	33.0%	53.0%	79.0%
Percent owning land outside city	55.0%	70.9% ^b	63.0%
Percent owning three acres or more outside city	27.0%	41.8% ^b	46.0%

^a household heads

^b household heads excluding women

^c Kenyan shillings

Kariobangi's social and demographic profile is similar to those of many areas housing unskilled and semi-skilled workers in Nairobi. What if the residents were as HAD been intended in the original scheme? This question can be answered only partially, because no specific information is

available concerning the social characteristics of the original squatter allottees.⁹ Some facts are known, however. Many of the squatters were former detainees from the Mau Mau resistance movement; many were landless and jobless; most were Kikuyus; a significant number, although a minority, were unmarried women living independently in the city; and there was some loose community organization among these squatters, but not an extensive one. Although allottees did not move to Kariobangi *en masse*, these social characteristics of the population that was originally granted land continue to influence the social community in Kariobangi, because some landlords and many tenants from the former area continue to live there.

The great majority of landlords are Kikuyu, as are some 70 percent of the shopkeepers. The city councilman from the area and most of the influential political figures from the party or city administration concerned with the area are also Kikuyu. There is a continuing, loose community of interest among these allottees, purchasers of plots, and shop owners. To the extent that there is any kind of continuing Kariobangi-based local community, it comes primarily from among this group. However, it is not characteristic of most of Nairobi's housing areas to have a strong, locality-based community organization. Social contacts within the city tend to be based on kinship, occupational, and rural locality criteria rather than primarily on housing location. Thus Kariobangi is little different in this respect — i.e. in having no tightly knit, homogeneous community — from other African housing areas in the city.

Six percent of Kariobangi households are headed by independent women; this group does tend to give Kariobangi a distinctive social character. Many of these women are brewers of beer and some are also prostitutes. The estate is thus noted as a place where, particularly on weekends, men can come to find various kinds of legal and illegal liquors and companionship. Although the great majority of residents on the estate neither brew nor participate in this drinking regularly, the image persists in the minds of many that Kariobangi is "that rather scruffy-looking place where everyone drinks and brews liquor."

In fact, beneath the different physical appearance of the estate, there is little continuing effect of the original attempt to "administrate" a squatters' community, other than the ones mentioned — absentee, largely, Kikuyu landlords; some loose contacts among former squatters (landlords, tenants, or shopkeepers); and a reputation as a drinker's haven.

The city has provided a number of important social services to the resi-

⁹ Ross's study (1973) of a Mathari Valley squatters' village provides a picture of a population probably very similar to the original group of allottees.

dents, including a new, fully-staffed primary school, a dispensary, and a social center. There is also a self-help nursery school run by local residents, and a number of churches that meet at the estate. These amenities, along with regular city bus services, have considerably improved life in the estate from its original isolated and barren circumstances.

These improvements, important as they are, should not mask the very real problems and unpleasant aspects of Kariobangi. Lacking fully paved walkways, the area is perpetually dusty when it is dry and is a series of semi-islands surrounded by seas of mud when it rains. There is very little greenery to be found among the densely packed rows of symmetric houses. The typical household is packed into a single room, within which cooking, eating, cleaning, sleeping, and washing occur. Noise and a lack of privacy are the results. Cars and trucks race along the single paved road that curves through the estate, perilously close to pedestrians, cyclists, and children playing along the roadside. The storm drains often become clogged and smelly, and children play in them. On weekends and after paydays, the tempo of drinking increases, and the estate is jammed with sometimes boisterous visitors. Residents often complain bitterly of these and other unpleasant and dangerous aspects of Kariobangi life. High on the list of complaints would be the high rents; typically, about sixty-five to eighty Kenyan shillings (\$9.30 to \$11.45) must be paid for the privilege of finding a single mud-walled room in which to live. Kariobangi is not a desirable or first-choice residential location for most tenants, and the majority would gladly accept the chance to move to a council estate nearer town for a similar or even slightly higher rent.

Indeed, many do move, and there is a rather high rate of turnover among tenants. As a rough estimate, 35 percent of the rooms in the estate change tenants each year. This does not mean that 35 percent of the occupants leave in a year, as many of these room changes occur within the estate — i.e. men move to other rooms within Kariobangi. But there is a rather high turnover of residents compared with other housing areas, especially the more desirable city council housing areas nearer the city center or industrial areas where most men work. This high turnover of course exacerbates the lack of community organization among tenants.

In sum, Kariobangi's population of tribally mixed, unskilled, and semi-skilled, lower- and middle-income migrants is socially not unlike that of other African housing estates in the city. There are some noticeable effects of the original resettlement scheme, however, with regard to ownership and shopkeeping, these tending to remain in the hands of Kikuyu plot owners. Brewing activities, overcrowding, and a high turnover rate can also be attributed in part to Kariobangi's origins.

EVALUATING KARIOBANGI

Some Official Views

Kariobangi's progress from a squatter resettlement scheme to absentee African landlord ownership did not go unnoticed, nor did the problems with sales of plots by allottees, slowness in building houses, delinquency in paying the thirty Kenyan shillings per month plot charges, continuing use of plots as shops, and so on. Indeed, in March 1966, twenty-two plots were ordered to be repossessed because they were being used as shops, but this was eased later in the year after pressure from shop owners and recognition of the demonstrated need for local businesses (NCC 1966: 1,687 and 2,155). In January 1966, the Social Services Committee felt constrained to resolve that "...this committee notes with pleasure that Kariobangi Site and Service Phase I has not been a failure" (NCC 1964-1968 [January 10, 1966]: 1,272).

That even this view was not universally shared by governmental and city officials was made clear in September 1966, when a final report was made to the committee regarding continuing negotiations for the next massive phase of Kariobangi's development. The minutes of this report are worth quoting in full; they give the flavor of what many officials felt the lessons of the Kariobangi experience to have been:

- The Director of Social Services and Housing and the City Engineer reported that negotiations had taken place between the Council Officers and the officials of the Central Housing Board for a further loan of 120,000 Pounds for the second phase of Kariobangi Site and Service Scheme, consisting of one thousand extra houses. In view of the experience already gained, the Council Officers recommended that:
- (a) The existing development is unsatisfactory and does not constitute an urban solution.
 - (b) The Chief Architect be asked to design the lowest standard of two- and three-bedroom houses which would be acceptable in an urban setting.
 - (c) Loans of up to 200 Pounds be made available... to allottees.
 - (d) The Council to bulk purchase all materials, and set up.... supervision.
 - (e) Casual labour to be recruited from the allottees.
 - (f) 50% of the allottees' wages to be kept back and used as a deposit for a house.
 - (g) The existing one thousand squatters to be dealt with as a direct Council responsibility and after that the Scheme to be made available to persons of modest means.
 - (h) Emphasis to be placed on building up a sound organization during the first year of operation with the aim of speeding up construction in later years... (NCC 1964-1968 [September 12, 1966]: 459-460).

Some quotes from a meeting on squatters held in early 1969 reinforce this view of the scheme:

...it was the Director's of Social Services and Housing [*sic*] experience that site and service in the "Metropolitan Area" sense of the word was a solution for men with some means.

The very poor could only be housed by Public Authority building and getting into the correct cost discipline.

...the Council's policy had now changed in regard to site and service plots for squatters.

The Council felt that site and service plots were not the answer to the man with no means. Site and Service was a solution to the man who had money and a desire to build. At Kariobangi practically all the original allottees had defaulted (NCC 1964-1968 [January 7, 1969]: 1-2).

These rather gloomy evaluations of Kariobangi emphasize the squatter resettlement aspects of the site and service scheme. It is clear that this goal was the least successful: (1) the city had difficulty exercising effective administrative control over allottees with respect to rent, fee collections, or ownership and (2) squatter-allottees without means had difficulty building rapidly or at all. Other criticisms of the scheme and proposals for future site and service development emphasize: (1) providing loans for allottees, as well as direct labor with enforced withholding of wages; (2) mass purchases of permanent materials that would be used by allottees - rather than mud and wattle and other individual, plot-by-plot building efforts; and (3) mixing aided allottees with men of "means" who could develop plots on their own resources. These are valuable suggestions for some squatters - namely, those relatively well-off, probably owning their existing dwellings, and desiring secure investment in housing in Nairobi. Indeed, the city has made some efforts to implement plans using some of these ideas.

However, opponents of Kariobangi and other "temporary materials," privately controlled residential areas have criticized the concept of site and service and "impermanent" housing standards in general. They believe that an urban standard of housing should not allow gradual improvement from an initial mud and wattle house. African investors and owners should not build their own housing in their own ways without conforming to the existing (and elaborate) city codes. The city itself should control land and housing wherever possible, continuing to develop controlled estates rented to tenants by the city. From this point of view, the Kariobangi Site and Service Scheme is an inappropriate urban development REGARDLESS of the success or failure of its squatter resettlement aspect. Kariobangi thus raises several fundamental issues

concerning the direction of urban development in Nairobi. These issues include the economic effects of the scheme as well as social and administrative policies.

KARIOBANGI ESTATE AND HOUSING IN NAIROBI: FOR WHOM IS THE CITY?

Economic Issues

Kariobangi was expensive relative to the costs of mass construction of concrete houses by the council itself. Estimates of the total costs of services and house construction range from 5,000 to 8,000 Kenyan shillings (\$700 to \$1,125) for most completed houses. Individual construction clearly sacrificed many possible savings the council could have made. This argument ignores the fact that the HOUSES did not cost the public anything; they were built by private individuals with no public loans or gifts of any sort. The plots and services were, of course, provided. But to aggregate total costs and compare this figure with what the council COULD have gotten for that amount assumes that the council would have put up such houses at that time. Looked at slightly differently, the city "GOT" a large block of housing, fully rented, with no capital investments needed for housing at all.

Another effect of Kariobangi was to give gifts to people whom the city felt were socially deserving – namely, squatters in the Pumwani Road area. It is argued that the squatters did not use their gifts in the "correct" way – that is, to construct houses on the plots and live in those houses. Harris points out that this argument implies that the city should determine the utility that squatters or other allottees should have placed on housing relative to other needs they might have:

The "socially deserving" were assisted. In effect, the city council gave them a gift of money equal to the difference between the market price of the land and the nominal allocation charge. Some of these people used this gift to obtain better housing than they would otherwise have had. Others found that they had other uses for this gift that seemed more pressing to them than Kariobangi-standard housing. Therefore, they realized this gift (in cash or rents) and spent a smaller amount on housing than the council thought they should... (Harris 1972:47-48).

Harris makes another point about public versus private housing in Kenya: the lower-income tenants are more likely to rent private than

public accommodation (1972:44). Furthermore, the demand for housing in Nairobi is inelastic with respect to income. This means that those with higher incomes are given a greater subsidy by the city or by employers when they receive free or inexpensive public housing. Kariobangi served to increase the stock of relatively inexpensive, privately owned housing. Because this is the kind of housing lower-income Africans are more likely to rent in the city, the estate provided some benefits to all those, whether squatters or not, who needed such housing. It is true that Kariobangi's housing is of poorer quality in almost every respect than council-subsidized housing and that the rents charged are higher than for comparable or better city housing. However, it is not clear how Kariobangi alone could have altered the general problem of the city-wide heavy demand for housing which creates these rent levels.

Finally, it should be noted that by placing Kariobangi in what initially was a rather distant, isolated, and undesirable area, and then developing that area by providing services, buses, police, streets, and so on, the entire area was improved and made more desirable. Thus the squatters near the estate itself found themselves living in a more desirable area, and new squatting and other kinds of private housing developments were encouraged. The city is now developing several areas near Kariobangi, taking advantage of the growth potential of the area, which was in part created by building Kariobangi there initially.

In sum, the Kariobangi Site and Service Scheme was, in the words of one former official, "capitalism by the back door." The city itself did not want to build houses of the "temporary standard" of mud and wattle built by the plot developers themselves. But the design of the estate permitted this to occur. Those who developed plots were, from this point of view, African entrepreneurs developing their own land which had been either given to them as a gift or paid for by buying the rights to a plot. This African development in turn aided a group of poorer tenants particularly in need of non-city council housing.

Administrative and Social Issues

The Nairobi officials responsible for housing are hard-working and perceptive men, with wide experience in dealing with large-scale, low-cost housing for African migrants in Nairobi. Given the severe financial constraints of available capital and personnel, they do an excellent job. But their job is to build PUBLIC housing, broadly defined, that is, housing that is built and controlled by the city or built by the city and then sold

to others. This role ties planners to a limited range of physical house types, because the city's standards for housing are set substantially higher than the mud and wattle or lumber construction found in Kariobangi and elsewhere.¹⁰ It also ties them to limited kinds of social forms of ownership or control, because it has not been public policy for the city itself to operate as a profit-optimizing landlord or to encourage such forms of ownership. Quite the contrary, the city is effectively offering publicly subsidized housing to Africans fortunate enough to obtain council housing.¹¹ Thus, Kariobangi combines the worst aspects of the city's role (from the latter's perspective) in both physical and social planning, because it is both substandard in construction and appearance and owned by independent African landlords.

It is easier to see some of the origins of this situation creating both subsidization and "landlordism" now, with hindsight, than it was at the time. Consider the group that the city was hoping to make into economically self-sufficient homeowners: by definition these men and women squatters were living in substandard housing, which many had built themselves, and either could not afford other housing or did not want it; even worse, a large number could not even afford to build their own substandard housing at the squatters' site — they RENTED space from other squatters! Further, many of those who were offered plots were unemployed or employed at only the lowest-paying, occasional jobs. Thus the opportunity either to sell their plots or to rent the entire house once built, for desperately needed income, would probably be very attractive.

The point is that most of the men and women who were offered plots were hardly likely to be able to construct a substantial house in a short period of time. They were also likely to have pressing economic needs other than housing. In short, the social goal of squatter resettlement, as represented by the site and service plan, had a number of contradictory aspects to it, making success unlikely from the inception of the plan. If squatter aid and subsidization is to be a policy of the city, then direct improvement of existing squatter settlements where feasible, along with the policies suggested earlier, would have far more chance of success. If those, other than squatters or the desperately needy, are to be subsidized,

¹⁰ However, it should be noted that there are experimental revised standards currently in use in some parts of the city.

¹¹ Harris (1972) points out that many of the problems with city-provided housing stem from the fact that the city, because it does not charge "enough" rent, does not have "enough" capital to construct new housing. Furthermore, the various "tenant-purchase" schemes recently built are also heavily subsidizing mortgages.

the city could most quickly increase the stock of housing by offering plots for sale within site and service schemes, recovering service costs, and developing additional schemes with the proceeds. Such sales could be limited to particular groups the city might be interested in assisting, or prices could be lowered through lottery procedures.

A second theme in criticism of Kariobangi and other African-developed housing areas in the city is concerned with standards and appearance of houses and neighborhoods. This issue raises again Marris's theme: for whom is the city? Only 9 percent of Kenya's population live in any city or town; the remaining 91 percent live in rural areas. A casual drive to the rural areas adjacent to Nairobi will confirm that mud and wattle houses, much like those in Kariobangi, are almost universal. Existing, "permanent" housing standards in Nairobi, with certain recent exceptions, are considerably higher — and more expensive to meet — than the *de facto* housing standards throughout the rural areas. Urban standards are higher in other respects as well — roads, shops, schools, and so on. Through such differing standards, Nairobi and other urban areas are made deliberately and radically different from the surrounding rural hinterlands. Should cities continue to be developed differently from the countryside?

One way to look at separate urban housing or shopkeeping standards is to say that they perpetuate the city as an enclave, a place consciously different from, and deserving better standards than, the rest of the country. Such standards are symbolic of the city as something more advanced, modern, and special. These standards serve elites living in the city who can afford permanent homes of high quality and expensive materials. But what of those who cannot or do not want to invest in housing of this quality of construction, a quality almost certainly far above what most newly arrived migrants already have in their rural homes? Should these urban residents be required to abandon their "impermanent," rural housing standards? Once adequate sanitary facilities, good water, basic services, and modest densities are assured, why should the homeowner or tenant be required to make his home "look good to uphold standards?" Whose standards do they become? Rather than reflecting the aspirations of either the rural farmers, who constitute the vast majority of the nation, or the nonelite urban migrants seeking employment in the city, these standards become the goal of the urban elites.

Cities, especially a capital city like Nairobi, reflect the full range of social class differences, as well as ethnic differences, to be found in the country. Once health and safety standards are met, mere cosmetic housing standards become a drain on the scarce incomes that tenants or

purchasers have available for housing. Note carefully the constraint of minimal standards: Kariobangi, in the eyes of its residents, would NOT meet minimal standards in some respects. It is too crowded, the rooms are too small, the plots are too close together, the road is too obtrusive, and so on. Indeed the rural mud-plastered homes most migrants left behind are far more spacious and well cared for than many urban rooms, including most in Kariobangi. But tin roofs and mud and wattle do not offend most urban Africans nearly as much as these features offend the city codes, urban elites, and overseas visitors. Kariobangi could have been designed, or should be redesigned in future developments, to overcome its present faults. Its "costal-type" construction form would in turn represent a kind of house familiar to all East Africans, one they could build themselves at low cost without public or expert aid. An alternative to developing differences between the city and the country could be to increase the similarities between the city's facilities and character and those of the rural areas that provide its food and its labor.

As Marris (1962) found in his study of Lagos, however, some feel it to be inappropriate for the capital city of Kenya to provide for houses of "impermanent," "rural" materials. It is felt to be demeaning and shocking for the nation to see mud-plastered, tin-roofed houses alongside the skyscrapers and modern buildings of Nairobi. Yet why is it not jarring to see such houses by the tens of thousands throughout the rural portions of Kenya and eastern Africa? From this point of view, one would be as startled to see a fine stone and cement house on an African subsistence farm as one would NOT be to see mud and wattle houses within East Africa's cities.

REFERENCES

- HARRIS, JOHN R.
1972 "A housing policy for Nairobi," in *Urban challenge in East Africa*. Edited by John Hutton, 39-56. Nairobi: East African Publishing House.
- MARRIS, PETER
1962 *Family and social change in an African city: a study of rehousing in Lagos*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- NAIROBI CITY COUNCIL
1964 "Minutes of the working party on illegal squatting in Nairobi held on the 15th January." Mimeographed, Nairobi City Council.
1964-1968 "Minutes of committees and sub-committees." Mimeographed and bound, Nairobi City Library.
1969 "Squatters meeting." Unpublished Nairobi City Council minutes.

- REMPER, HENRY
1972 "The determinants of rural-to-urban labor migration in Kenya." Unpublished manuscript.
- ROSS, MARC
1973 *The political integration of urban squatters*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- ROSS, MARC, THOMAS S. WEISNER
i.p. "Conceptualizing rural-urban networks in Kenya," in *Recent research in rural-urban migration*. Edited by John Harris. Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press.
- VAN ZWANENBERG, ROGER
1972 "History and theory of urban poverty in Nairobi: the problem of slum development." Working Paper 26, Institute for Development Studies. University of Nairobi.