

# **Philanthropy and Citizen Engagement among Middle Class Communities**

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Case Study done in Kilimani Ward, Dagoretti North Sub County, Nairobi

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3/7/2018

Africa's growing middle class is believed to be one of the key determinants of the continent's future. This paper examines the factors that inspire or hinder participation in community and civic life within middle class societies. It also looks at the influence that ordinary individuals have had on the wider community in both enhancing community life and influencing government policy.

## Introduction

While it is generally accepted that citizen participation is a prerequisite for improving communities, the factors that hinder or support one's involvement in their communities remain deeply under-appreciated. Having a "sense of community," which usually refers to the relationship between the individual and their community is often acknowledged but hardly understood.

In their landmark article, Davis Chavis and Abraham Wandersmann (1990) show that having a sense of community depends on three main components, namely, (1) the individual's perception of the environment, (2) one's social relations, and (3), one's perceived control and empowerment within the community. Breaking this down further leads to the one prevailing and pertinent question : **what are the impulses or motivations that lead people to act or not act within their communities?** This paper builds on the existing research to explore this question as it relates to the urban middle class community of Kilimani, the Kilimani Project Foundation's efforts to create a "class of action" and the emergence of community foundations in Africa.

Building inclusive cities, deepening democracy and expanding civic voice and agency requires citizen participation. Recent studies, including the monumental report by Mo Ibrahim Foundation, suggest that the middle class have yet to exert their influence in the public interest. Instead, the middle class in Africa has tended to focus on providing private solutions for public problems. This, it is argued, removes the catalyst for the necessary agitation on behalf of public interest.

Urbanization has brought with it the rise of community foundations. One hypothesis of this research is that the community foundations model provides an avenue for the middle class and other classes to engage, shape and determine the pace and direction of Africa's rapid urbanization.

Four hypotheses have been developed to explain the phenomenon of middle class apathy as it relates to the Kilimani community of Nairobi. The hypotheses are based on five categories of existing middle class behavior. These are as follows: (1) apathetic, (2) individualistic (self-interested), (3), activist, (4), philanthropist, (5), public leaders.

The objective is to understand how individuals find themselves in each of the listed categories, secondly, whether fluidity exists in the categories and finally, what stimulates this behavior and finally, how the categories affect the community in general.

# Methodology

The research was carried out through the office of the Kilimani Project Foundation, Nairobi, Kenya. The Foundation hosted this research in order to better understand the community that they serve. Nairobi County has a population of roughly 4 million people who live in 85 wards. Kilimani is one of the 85 wards and has a population of 43,000 residents. Its remarkable history as one of the oldest desegregated neighborhoods in Nairobi as well as its current heterogeneity offers sufficient complexity from which to draw lessons for other African cities.

Research was based on literature reviews, semi-structured interviews and survey questions that were administered on a snowball sample to both members and non-members of the Kilimani Project Foundation and selected public authorities. This allowed us to capture the heterogeneity of the community and a multiplicity of opinions.

An online questionnaire was used which was shared with the respondents, some of whom were members of the foundation and others non-members. A study of the activities of the Kilimani Project Foundation through its annual report and other public documents was also done.

The data collection phase had a response rate of 65% with 60 people receiving the questionnaire and 45 responding. Although an effort was made to have an equal gender balance of 50-50, of those who responded 43% were male and 57% were female. A total of 44 residents responded. Of these, 34% live in Kilimani, 16% work and 50% both live and work in Kilimani. The vast majority of the respondents were aged between 30 and 39 years old (57%) followed by 40-49 year olds (27%). Only one respondent was over the age of 60. A large number of the respondents have been in Kilimani for a substantial period; 6 to 10 years (28%) and 20-25 years (30%). Non respondents cited lack of time in their busy schedules as being the main factors hindering their answering the questionnaire.

The interviewees came from 24 different professions. Professions that were represented in the study were: Administrator, Architect, Banker, Caterer, Communications and Public Affairs Specialist, Consultant, Contractor, Cultural activist/architect, Engineer, Events curator, Graphic designer, HR Manager, Humanitarian Specialist, Interior Designer, Investment manager, Landscape Architect, Lawyer, Marketing, Pharmacist, Property Manager, Research Consultant, Researcher, Public sector, Tax & Business Advisor, Teacher. A large number of respondents simply termed themselves as 'Business Persons' or 'Entrepreneurs'. These could be part of the already listed professions or belong to other professions. Mainly quantitative data was obtained from the questionnaire and it was reviewed and responses classified according to the categories that were set up in the hypothesis.

## Results from the Study:

The research revealed that a large majority of residents are happy to be part of a wider community. Many are already making some form of effort in terms of contributing towards this community in various ways within their means and ability. People also show a preference to work that will produce visible results. Middle class residents also demonstrate a preference for organized structure in taking action.

Although time constraints are viewed as a major drawback for people who wish to take a more active role in community work and public engagements, the establishment of organized community groups like community foundations and residents' associations has encouraged more participation by many middle class persons. The place for these organizations cannot be doubted as they play a big role in creating a bridge between the community and community participation.

From the research done, it can be noted that people are not constrained to any one of the categories. Those who have a philanthropic interest or inspiration have also participated in some form of activism and may be apathetic towards other events or actions. The individualistic also possess some philanthropic interests while being apathetic in other fields. Therefore, it can be seen that there does exist a lot of fluidity in these categories and identification with the different categories may depend on the degree to which residents are affected by events, personal experiences which influence their levels of action.

To conclude, one can reveal that among the various factors that influence human behavior towards action within the society are: 1. Personal interest or challenges. 2. Presence of organized groups to guide and assist them. 3. Results from community initiatives which also have a ripple effect on other communities.

## Discussion from Research Findings

### What motivates people to participate within their Community?

Africa Development Bank broadly classifies the middle class as anybody with an annual income exceeding \$3,900 per year or who spends between \$2 & \$20 a day. By Kenyan standards this would translate to KES 390, 000 and an expenditure of KES 200 to KES 2000 per day. A much more precise definition of middle class describes it as people earning between US\$ 10 and US\$ 100 per day (KES 1000 and KES 10,000). According to Ernst & Young (2013), people in this income bracket can be considered a "global middle class" by the standards of any country.

Kenya's middle class is defined by its material culture, which provides an approximate indicator of status. However, the middle class is also known to have played a decisive role in the constitutional debate in 1997 as well as in the 2000s, in particular on the occasion of the referendum campaigns of 2005 and 2010 (Maupeu, 2014). Understanding what the middle

class' motivating factors for participation in public and community life are formed the basis of the first question in this study. The respondents were asked **what would inspire them to do more for the community**.

The study revealed an interesting insight into the wide spectrum of perspectives of middle class citizens. As some stated that they were not sure how they can do more for the community, others described how they had made individual efforts towards personal community initiatives. The responses have been classified into 4 different categories depending on the reasons people get inspired to do more for the community as follows: 1. Inspired through events, access to information and proper guidance on initiatives 2. Clear Goals 3. Results oriented activities 4. Not Clear/Not sure what to do.

The majority (30%) of the respondents stated that they would be motivated or inspired to participate in community activities through communal events and initiatives. Examples of these include social events, neighbourhood events and as per two respondents- '*Convenient opportunities and working with people with a common vision*' and '*anything that makes the community ambient and conducive to live [in].*' Although they may not be 'mobilizers', this group willfully participates in community events that are aimed at bettering the society. They are the more 'philanthropic' group in the community and do not view the community as a source of financial gain. They look out for different initiatives and participate in activities or campaigns that interest them. A brief observation of the activities of the Kilimani Project Foundation shows how many of the participants in the Foundation's initiatives fall under this category. The Foundation has several initiatives that attract different people from the neighbourhood. The residents who participate in tree planting may not be the same as those who will attend a dialogue with political aspirants. The respondents here were similar across genders but most were between ages 40-49.

Another group of respondents are those who are willing to participate in community work but only if there is a clear goal or objective. The group had more women than men and drew its highest membership from among those who have been in Kilimani for more than 20 years, especially members of the Kilimani Project Foundation. Expressed goals are based on their areas of interest but it is not clear whether they would be ready to take up the initiative to pursue them. Such respondents are easily classified as 'Individualistic.' Responses such as '*a nice and clean environment*' or '*to have a better future for our children*' indicate a clear objective related to the surroundings or environment of the individual as motivating participation. Unless there is a clear purpose associated with their immediate concerns, this group will not participate. The mobilization around the *#icantsleep* campaign is one such example. Several residents in Kilimani and Kileleshwa have come together and formed a critical mass against noise pollution from night clubs, churches and construction sites. The campaign has attracted the interest of over 50 middle class residents some of whom have turned into mobilizers through the process. Its purpose, goal and/or objective-to eliminate noise pollution in the neighbourhood-is clear. The main driving force of the campaign is that those who are part of it are directly affected by the noise.

The third group states that they are willing to participate in community work but would be motivated by results. These form 21 % of the respondents. The group was not confined to any gender but many fall in the 40-49 age bracket. They can easily be considered as more 'activist' than any other category. Their responses vary from 'seeing results and change' to 'having breakthroughs in the issues.' A feature of this group is reluctance to participate in any initiative if it does not have clear, visible results or impact. This tends to be a very tricky group to be in as they typically will not participate in something if they are not sure of its impact or results. Feedback and the need for visible change were also mentioned here. 'How much change' would motivate them, however, was an issue that not clearly defined, as well as whether they would still be part of the process if the change was slightly different from what they expected.

The final group, considered apathetic, were the minority and were either 'not sure' or simply stated that they would be not available. These attributes were similar across genders but also prevalent among those who have been in Kilimani for more than 20 years. Many observers have placed the middle class here, but the research is proving otherwise. Middle class are participants, they are motivated and it is only a small minority who are apathetic towards community participation.

## Factors that Hinder Participation

Respondents pointed out 4 key factors that hindered participation. These were: 1. Time Constraints. 2. Lack of Impact or Clear results. 3. No Reason and Not Sure. 4. Did not see the need to give more.

When asked about what stops them from doing more for the community, the majority (34%) identified time as a major constraint. This was especially common among those aged 30-39. Coincidentally, it was stronger among those respondents whose motivating factors were more 'Individualistic' thus indicating a trend towards egoistic tendencies among these respondents. Challenges such as work engagements, young families and other competing priorities were quoted.

However, 19% pointed out that the lack of impact and lack of clear results were a constraining factor. These were mainly cited as attributable to apathy from others in the community, political interference, corrupt authorities, government bureaucracy and social inequalities. One statement '*Not getting results, feeling resigned to nothing works*' provided a good description of this group. Most of these were respondents who live in Kilimani but work elsewhere therefore one would have the impression that they have different perspectives by virtue of not spending their days in the area. None of them had been identified as 'Apathetic' under the initial research question as to what would motivate them to do more for the community. One can conclude that these are citizens who want to participate and do something for the community but feel hindered by lack of impact.

A group consisting of 9% of respondents stated that they were not sure or had no reason for not doing more. These can also be seen as closely aligned to those respondents who stated that

they did not give more time as they were ignorant on how to do so. One of them stated that *'I honestly didn't know about KPF until recently. Now I am more than willing to play my part.'* This statement, alongside that of another respondent who stated *'Actually nothing, just don't know where to start'* shows the importance of being able to have some formal setup that can create an enabling environment for citizen participation. Lack of resources like finances and access to information were pointed out as limiting factors. Like with the previous group, these responses also depict the fact that people within the communities are willing to participate but need a bit of a push or incentive.

A minority of respondents consisting of 6% stated that they did not see the need for giving more time. 2 of these respondents stated that as tenants in the area, they felt reluctant to participate or be involved in community activities while the other saw reluctance of middle class involvement as a deterring factor. These respondents had also fallen under the individualistic group in the previous question. Many of them were males within the age group of 20-29. Nobody who has been in Kilimani for over 30 years gave this as a reason.

6% still stated that they were ready to give more time when called upon and did not see anything hindering them from doing so. Some explained that they were motivated by the progress in some of the campaigns; the progress in the noise pollution issue was stated as one example. Though one had already been identified under the activist group, other respondents included those who were identified earlier as philanthropic and individualistic.

## Actions taken in the name of Public Interest

Public interest is an area that is critical towards community development and participation. The Kenyan middle class and corporates have been criticized for continuously attempting *to save low- income earners instead of challenging and volunteering themselves to fix that political and economic system that keeps the wananchi from attaining their potential.*

Participants in the research were asked about the *'boldest action that they had taken in public interest.'* The answers were classified into 4 groups: 1. Public Participation and Social justice (Activist). 2. Public and Private Social initiatives (philanthropic). 3. Political participation (Public Leaders). 4. Nothing (Apathetic or Individualistic).

Half of the respondents (50%) had taken part in engagements with local or national government in order to get better service delivery or social justice. This was either through their resident associations (e.g. security), through KPF or self initiatives. Actions taken included signing petitions, engaging in dialogue with county government and participating in forums to derive better governance at ward level.  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the respondents in this group mentioned that they did their initiatives through organized groups like KPF and the majority were between ages 30-39.

Those who have been involved in fighting for social justice were mainly concerned about fighting illegalities. A large number of the respondents had done these through the Kilimani Project Foundation (50%).

Respondents stated that they had participated through signing of petitions, speaking against injustices and fighting for the reclamation of public land.

37% who had participated in social justice action had been fighting against noise pollution from nighttime construction works, night clubs or churches. This is quite significant within Kilimani as the Foundation has been involved in an active campaign against noise pollution levels from clubs and churches in the area. Actions included signing petitions, attending court sessions, highlighting the menace and participating through social media.

A suitable subject for further research here is whether those who have taken action against social injustices have done so because they are affected directly or because they believe in justice for all.

18% of respondents stated that they had participated in or continue to participate in public and private social initiatives. Coincidentally, many of these were in the education sector. One included up-scaling public primary schools in Kilimani through books, art and music; giving training scholarships to jua kali mechanics; championing girl child education as well as advocating for justice for university students. Others (11%) stated that they had volunteered or made a personal initiative for public good. These included refusing to give bribes and picking up trash.

An interesting group comprising 13% of the respondents stated that they had not done anything for the public interest. In the words of one of them, *'It pains me to type this, none.'* These responses were scattered across the categories in the previous queries thereby making it difficult for one to conclude why they end up seemingly 'Apathetic' towards public interest.

Three of the respondents have run for public office including MCA and MP. Although none of them won a seat they all stated that they firmly believe that through political representation they can bring about various levels of change in the community.

An analysis of the response to this question demonstrates that a large number of those who may have been viewed as apathetic, individualistic or philanthropic in the previous research questions also appear to be strong activists. Consistency is, however, evident in those who are philanthropic both here and in their previous responses. Coincidentally, those who have vied for political office have been consistently activist in their previous responses.

## The Effectiveness of Communities in Influencing Government

The Constitution of Kenya 2010 in Article 1(1-4) states that all sovereign power belongs to the people of Kenya and shall be exercised only in accordance with the Constitution. It also states that the people may exercise their sovereign power either directly or through their democratically elected representatives.



The effectiveness of communities in influencing government has always been an area of interest for many in civil society. A publication by Transparency International states that Public Participation is *Kenya's best weapon against Graft and Poor Governance*. It is heralded by all democracies as the backbone of democratic governance.

Public participation aims at bridging the gap between state actors, civil society, private sector and the general public. A society with a pervasive and enduring civic culture participates more in managing its affairs. Respondents were asked how effective they think communities are at influencing government policy or city by-laws. The respondents gave the following responses: 1. Very effective 2. Effective 3. Slightly/Moderately/Fairly/Partially Effective. 4. Not effective.

15% stated that the community is very effective. They stated that the importance of collective voice was necessary. A good example given by one respondent has been the slow gains made with respect to the noise pollution campaign in Kilimani area. This initiative has also influenced residents of other parts of Nairobi to advocate against noise pollution.

24% found the community to be 'effective' especially when they speak up. Particular examples were given in issues related to zoning, noise pollution and road repairs. *'I find there has been a great push forward by KPF from its inception when I played a heavy role. Today we see great progress with zoning, sound pollution among others. Our community through KPF is very vibrant and engaged. As long as we have a County and National Government that's receptive to our ideas and feedback then we'll be successful in influencing bylaws'* was one of the responses recorded. The majority of these respondents were those who both live and work in Kilimani as well as those who have been in Kilimani area between 11 and 20 years.

41% of the respondents stated that the community is only slightly/moderately /fairly/partially effective. Here, one respondent pointed out that *'the influence of community is just beginning to have an effect on policy'* and was of the opinion that more needed to be done to enable more people to effectively participate more conveniently. *The respondent suggested that, 'there could be an online platform to interrogate and raise issues on specific policy' in place of holding meetings requiring physical presence.* Another respondent also pointed out that *'influence is usually a two Way Street, certain policies created by the government can have negative influences on a community in terms of health, housing, transport and education. Raising awareness, local initiatives, boycotts by the community on social media and using other avenues creates a certain trend that eventually goes viral. This gets the attention of the government and respective authorities and negotiations begin. Communities have a power to change laws for the better.'* Two respondents pointed out the need to form organized groups that contribute a platform for engagement. *'The community is engaged and involved a lot in matters affecting the community especially in governance. Participation is very inclusive to community members especially through the Kilimani foundation'*.

20% of the respondents felt that the community is not effective at all in influencing government. It was explained by some that the government is responsive to community pressure. One point raised here is that the community is yet to master most of the bylaws and thus not able to

influence most of the bylaws. Another suggestion is that middle class communities are often passive in such matters- *'With sustained whipping of community members to organize themselves and participate in public policy and legislative matters in a structured manner, their impact will be strongly felt.'* It was also felt that middle class communities are not aggressive enough.

On a similar note , 56.7% of the respondents know their Member of the County Assembly, 63.3% know the Ward Administrator while 56.7% know the area MP.

## Volunteering in the Community

65% of the respondents stated that they had volunteered in the community, while 27% had not. Respondents who had done so gave a variety of examples of ways in which they had engaged in the act of volunteerism. This included supporting the local Schools and Children's homes, building a school in Kibera (a nearby informal settlement) while coaching students during the construction period, sponsoring several students and donating sanitary pads in schools in two counties. Respondents also stated that they had enrolled into various projects conducted by the KPF including Kilimani Street Festival and the Kilimani Grey2Green (Tree Planting Initiative). Those who have volunteered their services have engaged in both philanthropic and activist engagements.

The 27% who claimed to have never volunteered could be termed as either individualistic or apathetic although the research did not further investigate why they do not volunteer. However, 25% of these had already appeared to be apathetic when it came to motivation to participate and had also stated that time constraints prevented them from participating in the community.

## Influence within the Kilimani Community

Jake Luhr (2012) states that *'you can't change people. You don't have the ability to control their thoughts or behavior. But you can change the course of someone's life. You can make an impact to divert them from the path they're walking, or influence them to make a pivotal decision'*.

Respondents were asked how much influence they have in the Kilimani Community. 9% said that they were not sure whether they had any influence or not. 37% stated that they considered themselves to have very little or no influence at all in the community while 48% stated that they considered themselves to have a lot of influence in the community.

Modes of influence derived from involving themselves in public participation, engaging in issues via social media and using forums for engagement with public authorities in matters related to social injustice or citizen rights. Many of the examples that were given included the noise campaign led by the Kilimani Project Foundation. A smaller percentage of the respondents described that they have had some level of influence through philanthropic activities while others direct their influence through their businesses. Support of organized groups like the

Kilimani Project Foundation was hailed and time and financial constraints were mentioned as limiting factors.

One respondent pointed out, however, other constraints such as attitude or approach of the authorities towards citizenry and neighbours not wanting to fight for a better environment.

## Conclusions

As regards legitimacy of the African middle class, Njau N, Chege G et al (2015), state that based on the estimates offered by some of the most reliable and respectable experts, it is fair to conclude that there really exists a rapidly growing middle class in Africa that could be around 34.3% of Africa's population. This implies that about one in every three Africans is actually in the middle class.

The study above has been able to highlight some of the participatory and philanthropic characteristics of this growing middle class. It is evident that middle class citizens are willing to participate in community drives, campaigns and activities. However, these have to be results oriented and their public or social impact ought to have some level of visibility. One must note too, that the sense of responsibility towards public participation and the wider community is built over time as one becomes a stronger and more influential member of his or her society. Citizens have also come to understand that they can have a larger influence on government policy and social development through lobbying and public participation, in particular, through organized groups like community foundations and associations. The Kenyan 2010 Constitution provides the necessary legislative framework for public participation and majority believe that they can have influence. As one columnist put it, *'it is time to become active citizens on and outside Twitter by holding our national and county governments to account so that they can provide quality public services that can restore the dignity of all Kenyans'*.

The common views or perspectives that middle class citizens are all apathetic towards public policy and influence have been proven to be incorrect. Though it is true to say that the middle class do suffer from time constraints in contributing more space for the community or volunteerism, it is safe to say that the vast majority are willing to do so if given the right opportunity and platform.

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