Resident Perspectives on Investments in Kayole Soweto
I. Introduction

Kayole-Soweto is one of the few informal settlements in Nairobi that has been comprehensively surveyed and planned, its development guided by a subdivision that allocated the land for residential and social infrastructure use. Until recently, the land occupied by Kayole-Soweto had quasi-legal status, with isolated portions allocated to individuals who would construct permanent structures. However, in 2020 the government began issuing title deeds to residents under the Nairobi Titling Programme. Today, two in three Kayole-Soweto residents are tenants, while the remaining third are landlords or structure owners. Most residents engage in small and informal businesses within the settlement, though some also work outside the settlement. These are typically casual and short-term jobs in Nairobi’s Industrial Area to the west of Kayole-Soweto, or in adjacent formal neighborhoods. Additionally, there are several residents who earn a living by collecting and reselling plastic and metal materials.

Over the past decade, Kayole-Soweto received the following cross-sectoral infrastructure investments: i) improved access to piped water and sewerage through the Nairobi Output-Based Aid Sanitation (OBA) Project funded by the Global Partnership for Results-Based Approaches (GPRBA); ii) electricity connections through GPRBA’s Kenya Electricity Expansion Project (KEEP); and lastly iii) World Bank-funded infrastructure investments in roads, drainage, lighting, and the public realm as part of the Kenya Informal Settlement Improvement Project (KISIP).

In order to understand how these investments have helped transform the neighborhood, GPRBA collaborated with the World Bank’s Global Practice for Urban, Disaster Risk Management, Resilience and Land (GPURL) and the Water Global Practice to undertake a qualitative study in Kayole-Soweto. The objective was to capture the perspective of residents and other local stakeholders.
(such as business operators, utilities, tenants, landlords, persons with disabilities, women and girls’ groups) regarding the infrastructure-led physical and socio-economic changes in the neighborhood. The overarching aim of the study was not to attribute a causal role to the project interventions; rather, the goal was to gain a broader understanding of i) the scale of social transformation, ii) key factors that helped to expand the project’s impact, iii) successes and challenges throughout the process; and iv) the sustainability of improvements. The study also investigated how the ongoing COVID-pandemic may or may not have affected perceptions around improvements. GPRBA hired local consultant firm Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI) to conduct 114 household surveys, 9 key informant interviews, 6 focus group discussions comprising 151 participants, and a transect walk, from June-August 2021 (during second wave of COVID-19 pandemic, to inform the study. Insights from the focus group discussions and household surveys are presented below.

Figure 2: Timeline and overview of significant infrastructure investments in Kayole-Soweto in the last decade.

Figure 3: FGD discussions underway as a part of the study conducted in Kayole-Soweto.
II. General Findings and Community Perceptions – An Overview

The study found that residents were grateful and appreciative of the investments. They associated the project’s impact to an increased quality of life, citing improvements in public health, physical infrastructure, land value and economic opportunity. An analysis of qualitative data highlighted multiple references to Kayole-Soweto as an “estate,” marking a shift in residents’ perception about the neighborhood they had previously regarded as an informal settlement or “slum.” A plethora of personal stories and experiences were noted in the data, applauding the changes in standards of living over the past two decades. Residents made over 160 references to the positive impacts of these investments on infrastructure provisions; these sentiments were echoed by household survey respondents, with over 1,640 references to the topic across 114 respondents.

Residents were particularly pleased with investments in power supply, street lighting and road construction, attributing an improvement in safety and security to better lit roads. Of the 110 positive references made to infrastructure provisions in focus group discussions (FGDs), 29 mentioned the availability of electricity and 31 were directed towards the positive impact of improved roads. Business operators, local leaders and landlords said there was a significant reduction in street muggings robberies at local shops due to better lighting, which allowed businesses to extend their operational hours after dark and increased resident mobility. These changes were discussed more frequently among FGD groups with business operators and women. Over 50 percent of all FGD references to enhanced security and mobility from street lighting were made by female respondents. Similar to the FGDs, 75 of the 114 surveyed respondents mentioned electricity provision as one of the key positive changes in the neighborhood.

Moreover, investments in tarmac roads under KISIP have attracted resources and eased transportation of people and goods, benefitting local business operators in the area as well as the larger community. Residents mentioned that roads contributed to ease of traveling, increased access to hospitals in emergencies and proper routes for lorries to sell groceries across the neighborhood. They highlighted the previous issues of water logging and muddy routes during floods and the rainy season, which led to accidents and forced them to carry separate shoes to walk across muddy paths on their daily commute. Female respondents across FGD groups made references to better hospital access with tarmac roads, especially for pregnant women. Residents also discussed some of the challenges with road construction when speaking about changes in their lifestyle. Although roads brought increased mobility and access to services, they increased the number of vehicles owned by residents, thereby causing a shortage of adequate parking facilities. Moreover, the footpaths constructed along roads led to the construction of narrow, single lane driving spaces, causing increased traffic. While localized flood risk likely decreased due to drainage investment, local hazards due to that drainage infrastructure somewhat increased. Residents mentioned risks associated with potholes and uncovered drains, forcing them to walk in the middle of roads to avoid them and thereby increasing their risk of being hit by moving traffic. The issues worsen during the rainy season when uncovered and overflowing drains add to pedestrian safety risks. This is especially affecting children on their daily commute to school and persons with disabilities who have to manoeuvre wheelchairs along the path.

In contrast to FGD data, household survey data listed water connectivity as the main change in the area, with the highest number of respondents (82) mentioning water as one of the main positive changes. Investments in water, sanitation and hygiene removed residents’ sole reliance...
on water vendors and reduced the extra cost associated with drainage of pit latrines. Qualitative discussions, on the other hand, emphasized greater challenges with water connections than successes, owing to lack of awareness of loan terms and sparse availability of water across different zones in the neighborhood. Household survey data reveals that out of 114 participants, 83 respondents cited water rationing as the main challenge for residents, though 95 respondents mentioned the benefits of access to clean water.

Residents also attributed their elevated standard of living to the construction of toilets and sewage systems. Female residents welcomed the move away from pit latrines and the consequent reduction in infections and diseases. Local leaders also mentioned the ability to construct self-contained houses with pathways to direct human waste downward. This facilitated the neighborhood’s development into an estate and increased land values. However, FGD respondents highlighted a lack of inclusive toilets as a challenge, citing insufficient community involvement and inadequate representation of persons with disabilities, women and youth during project design and implementation. Residents brought up difficulties faced by the elderly and disabled populations, including the absence of a seated toilet and handle bar for support, and the need to carry a bucket of water to the toilets because of the pour flush mechanism. A similar pattern can be noted with the household surveys, where 9 respondents out of 114 surveyed had a household member with a disability. Forty-four respondents mentioned pour flush facility as the main challenge to persons with disabilities (PWDs) and the elderly. Female respondents mentioned the low toilet height as a challenge.

Overall, most positive feedback in FGD data was in reference to electricity provisions, while most negative comments referenced sewage management. Household survey data recorded 72 mentions of pipe bursts, but 97 respondents reported that their sanitation status was better post connection. FGDs and household survey data echoed issues pertaining to solid waste management that led to sewage blockages. Residents also collectively highlighted the need for active community involvement and representation of social groups. They mentioned that they did not always feel their concerns were reflected in the final outcomes of the investments. Older citizens complained that despite their convening power and role in conflict resolution in the community, they were side-lined when jobs were being assigned during construction.

Additionally, the study revealed the role of infrastructure provisions at the household level in adapting to the COVID-19 restrictions. Residents cited a number of benefits to having reliable power access during the
COVID-19 pandemic, including increased access to information on mitigation and prevention measures via radio, continued learning for children, and improved setup and operation procedures for small businesses, allowing them to remain operational during curfew. Newly constructed roads increased access to hospitals and mobility for business operators during lockdowns, and reliable water supply furthered infection prevention efforts via sanitation and handwashing. Nevertheless, during qualitative discussions, residents also highlighted existing issues with infrastructure provisions that hindered COVID-19 mitigation in some areas of the neighborhood. Inability to pay water bills, consequent disconnection of water supply, and sparse availability of water in certain areas hindered sanitation and handwashing efforts. Moreover, uncovered manholes and potholes on roads reduced social-distancing measures by forcing residents to walk along narrow spaces. In contrast, household survey respondents credited the role of investments in mitigating the spread and impact of COVID-19. Over 80 percent of the interviewed residents agreed that water, power connections, sanitation facilities and roads helped contain the detrimental impacts of the pandemic.

However, it is essential to note that COVID-19 restrictions and lockdown measures disproportionately affected informal settlement residents because of the predominantly informal economic structure of the neighborhood. Most workers are daily wage earners with irregular income and insecure jobs. Many residents are also essential workers (e.g. domestic help, waste pickers, food deliverers) who had to continue working despite higher exposure to contagion risk at their workplaces, and constraints of lockdown restrictions and enforcement during the peak of the pandemic. As a result, there is evidence from Kayole-Soweto of widespread short- and long-term effects of the pandemic to residents’ livelihoods, health, and mobility. The study found a reported reduction in household income related to the immediate cessation of many informal businesses and employment, putting pressure on families to meet basic costs. In the household survey, over 90 percent of the reported impacts from COVID-19 were related to loss of employment, reduction in work hours, and reduced income, as opposed to health impacts. There was also a relatively high level of defaulting (inability to make rental payments) and stories of significant financial stress.
Amongst residents. This has led to knock-on and long-run effects, such as an inability to pay school fees. A key here is the importance of factoring in livelihood support and economic inclusion in upgrading project design. The study noted general similarities between household survey and FGD data on community development and power and lighting projects, with a few contrasts in the provision of water supply and COVID-19 mitigation.

### III. Existing Challenges and Potential Needs

In addition to the positive changes and developments resulting from continued investment in Kayole-Soweto, it is essential to note the community’s existing concerns and priorities for change. The neighborhood struggles with disproportionate water supply, maintenance of existing roads, and sewage blockages arising from improper waste management and inadequately sized sewer pipes. Residents suggested a zone-wise approach to address infrastructure challenges, since water and road related issues were particularly prevalent in areas such as Bahaati and River Bank. They also mentioned the need for flushable toilets and better solid waste management through designated garbage disposal sites. Residents highlighted the need for community-led sanitation practices and more organized solid waste management.

The community also underscored the vast unemployment in their neighborhood, which has affected the youth population in particular. The FGDs and household survey data identified unemployment as the main challenge; this was further amplified by a rapid population increase. Residents proposed future programs that would focus on creating employment opportunities for young people through technical skill trainings. They also discussed the development of Kayole-Soweto’s local market to expand opportunities for small businesses and generate jobs for youth. Residents underlined the importance of community participation and representation of women, the elderly, PWDs and the youth in project design and implementation, thereby ensuring inclusive provisions and development.

### Changes and Benefits

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- **FGDS**: Stories and mentions of development into an estate
- **HHS**: Land value and better housing data to corroborate FGD findings
- **FGDS**: Women and others highlighted enhanced security & ability to run businesses with better lighting
- **HHS**: Second-highest mentions to electricity and lighting as a major change
- **FGDS**: Emphasized more challenges than successes owing to inadequate availability & issues loan terms and billing
- **HHS**: Highest member of respondents mentioned water as the main positive change
- **FGDS**: Few mentions of infrastructure provisions helping COVID-19 mitigation. Only noteworthy mention by local leaders for ensuring access to schools for children through the internet
- **HHS**: Amplified role of infrastructure investments in mitigation through increased hygiene, enhanced security, social distancing and education for children
IV. Lessons Learnt and Way Forward

The study has captured varied responses from the community regarding the success of investments and the scope for future interventions. Although largely implemented along a similar timeline and unequivocally appreciated by the residents, some provisions saw better implementation results than others in terms of maintenance, design and community involvement.

Residents underscored the importance of active community participation in diverse representation during design and implementation, in order to address specific needs across groups. The community discussed their lack of awareness and understanding of the loan terms for toilet and water provisions as well as water billing requisites, which resulted in misinformation, billing accumulations, toilet blockages and other challenges. Residents asserted that consumer awareness from the beginning of programs would help to avoid financial backlogs and social issues after implementation. The study reiterated the importance of inclusive data collection with appropriate sampling and representation of social groups in order to credibly assess project impact. Lastly, it is important to highlight the need for integration between varied infrastructure investments and inclusion at all stages of the project lifecycle, thereby optimizing social and economic benefits.


Source: Pascal Kipkemboi (KDI)

Figure 5: Solid waste being collected and carried in Kayole-Soweto.

Source: Pascal Kipkemboi (KDI)