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NEIGHBOURHOOD UNITS IN NAIROBI  
A SURVEY OF BAHATI AND OFAFA I ESTATES

(Second Draft)

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Objectives

During the four Workshops which have been jointly organized in Nairobi by PGCHS, HRDU and UNCHS (Habitat), it has always been emphasized that Nairobi is one of the richest towns in terms of variety of housing environments. At the same time Nairobi is a city of contrasts. Some of the important types of dwelling environments are :- large informal settlements with a rich history such as Kibera; sprawling slum settlements such as Mathare and Kangemi; inner city slums such as Pumwani; older City Commission rental estates from the 1940s and 1950s such as Kaloleni and Mbetela; former Asian neighbourhoods such as Pangani and Parklands; former European executive estates such as Muthaiga and Lavington; large middle-income estates from the 1970s, such as Buru Buru; site and service schemes such as Kariobangi and Dandora; relatively new initiatives such as Umoja II and Pumwani NHC. There is an enormous need for housing, but also a lot of opportunities in terms of unexplored housing potentialities. Part of the housing stock and capacity which has been often neglected by several authorities in the field of housing, is the belt of Neighbourhood Units which stretches along Jogoo Road in the Eastern Part of Nairobi.

Only now, when the pressure on land for housing in Nairobi is getting really out of hand, some attention of the Local Authority is paid to this part of their rental housing stock, while the Central Government has shown some interest too. This coincides with the growing consensus about the fact that the service and space standards of some of these Neighbourhood Units are no longer in tune with the current opinions of what (low-income) housing ought to be.

So, the Nairobi City Commission is currently seriously considering the "Redevelopment" of some of the Neighbourhood Units. The term "Redevelopment" however is very vague and many approaches are still possible. The actions to be taken can vary from minor adjustments (e.g. additional sanitary blocks) to densification (e.g. infill of housing blocks in the open spaces) to the complete demolishing of an estate (e.g. introduction of a new medium-rise housing scheme).

It is however very evident that still a lot of questions are left unanswered. Which estates should receive first priority? How to increase the current densities? What is the technical state of the art of the buildings and infrastructure? How can one preserve the architectural qualities of some of the estates? What will happen to the actual inhabitants? Many questions touching various professional fields are raised but not yet answered.

PGCHS and HRDU have taken advantage of this burning housing issue to formulate an architectural project during the 1989 Course of "Housing in Development". Bahati and Ofafa I have been selected as possible project sites, because of the priority given to them by NCC and the feeling that reasonable answers to some of the above questions can be given for those environments.

This report aims at providing a base of information so as to bring the above project exercise as close as possible to the real situation. Furthermore it hopes to stimulate the relevant authorities to reflect on the issue and finally it could be a first stepping stone towards further research on the subject of Neighbourhood Units in Nairobi.

## 1.2 Survey Methods

The basic problem with most of the housing estates which were initiated before Kenya gained Independence, is the general lack of both textual and graphical information. There is very little research done so far and part of the raw information kept by NCC 'suffered' from the City Hall fire. The above conditions urge for a different research approach than when studying relatively new estates such as Dandora, Umoja and Buru Buru.

The approach of the study team was to draw a picture of the Bahati and Ofafa I estates from different angles. After a search for information (both documents dating back to the construction time of the estates and recent reports), visits to individual units were undertaken so as to collect first hand information of the actual status of Bahati and Ofafa I.

The actual output can roughly be classified in the following categories :-

- (1) Information on the socio-economic profile of the inhabitants;
- (2) Information on the inhabitants' appreciation of the environment;
- (3) Graphical information on the neighbourhood lay-out, the buildings and the actual use of them by the inhabitants.

The field data and most of the drawings which are included in this report were collected and drawn during the month of April 1989 by 2 teams of students of the Department of Architecture (Mr. B.N. Githae and Mr. K.S. Thuo) and the Department of Land Development (Mr. P.M. Bucha and Mr. W. Gachoki) of the University of Nairobi, assisted by Mr. M. Mulili of HRDU.

In Bahati (1966 units) 30 visits to units were carried out, involving questionnaire interviews in all 30 cases and including drafting of detailed unit plans in 14 of the units.

In Ofafa I (1324 units) 20 visits to units were carried out, involving questionnaire interviews in all 20 cases and including drafting of detailed unit plans in 14 of the units.

The above figures indicate that in each estate only approximately 1.5 % of the units-population has been covered. The small sample can be justified by the reasonable degree of homogeneity of the data. Nevertheless, we are limiting ourselves to descriptive statistics and we are carefully avoiding any search for possible correlations between the variables.

A copy of the questionnaire used can be found in Annex A.

The listing of a selection of 31 of the 51 questions/variables including values for all the covered units can be found in Annex B.

The frequency tables for Bahati are to be found in Annex C, while the frequency tables for Ofafa I are in Annex D.

The Bahati questionnaire by NCC is in Annex E.