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POLICY BRIEFS

FROM RESEARCH TO ACTION

A Case Study of the Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT)¹

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by
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Introduction

Planning and managing street and informal trade within urban areas remains one of the major challenges facing urban governors and cities around the globe. Most approaches aimed at dealing with the challenge have struggled to keep traders out of the Central Business District (CBD) without much success. Research conducted by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi reveals that most policy responses are done without any consultation with the traders, largely due to the lack of organizational capacity among traders. It is this finding that pushed IDS to go beyond research and begin facilitating the organization of street and informal traders in Kenya.

This policy brief highlights a case study that demonstrates the contribution of repackaged research outputs in building local and international partnerships aimed at improving the organization of street and informal traders in Kenya. This policy brief shares the experience of KENASVIT, an umbrella organization of street and informal traders with a vision of transforming street vending and informal businesses into corporate establishments. The brief aims at sensitizing policy makers, in

particular urban governors and other primary stakeholders to support the organization of those operating within the informal economy.

The Issues

The issue of who should trade within the CBD has been contentious in most cities of the world. On one hand, formal traders and those who take an exclusive approach believe that street traders are denying the formal traders who pay substantial taxes on their business. On the other hand, street traders and those who believe in inclusive approach contend that the street traders deserve to be allocated space within the CBD, just like formal traders. This notwithstanding, the debate on who should conduct business within the CBD should not be reduced to those who are pro- and anti-, but rather should take a rights perspective. If all citizens have a right to trade within the CBD, the issue to deal with is how best to allocate and manage the available spaces effectively. The informal economy, in particular trade, provides livelihoods to over sixty per cent of the urban population in most African countries. While the sector has been acknowledged as an important part of the economy, most countries have failed to address the

issues facing those operating within the sector. In Kenya, the history of the sector is full of running battles between the informal economy traders and urban authorities over recognition. Despite decades of discord, the informal urban traders have lacked a collective voice in dealing with authorities, until the establishment of the Kenya National Alliance of Street Vendors and Informal Traders (KENASVIT). The informal economy in Kenya started getting recognition in 1972 when the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in collaboration with the Institute for Development studies (IDS) of the University of Nairobi produced a report on Employment, Incomes and Equality in Kenya (ILO, 1972). In spite of its recognition, the sector did not get organized until 1992, when the Kenya National Federation of *Jua Kali* Associations (KNFA) was formed, with the support of the government. Members of this association were largely small-scale manufacturers. KNFA left out the street and informal traders. The latter have been struggling to find their space in socio-economic and political development of Kenya, and the birth of KENASVIT provides hope for the sub-sector.

Birth of KENASVIT

The KENASVIT is an umbrella alliance of seven core urban alliances in Kenya, namely: Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru, Eldoret, Machakos and Migori. The Alliance has over 3,000 members drawn from 140 local associations that form the seven urban alliances. The **vision** of KENASVIT is to transform street vending and informal businesses into corporate establishments. The **mission** is to organise and empower street vendors and informal traders, in order to improve their businesses through training, access to credit, dialogue with local authorities and other relevant organizations on appropriate by-laws and policies that give recognition to, and bring to an end harassment and discrimination against these traders.

IDS Research

KENASVIT is a product of a research carried out by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) of the University of Nairobi between 1999 and 2000. The research titled 'Women Street Vendors in Kenya' was co-funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and the British Department for International Development (DfID). The research examined the following issues: policies and regulations, site of street vendors operations, licensing and daily fees, enforcement of policies and regulations, communication between vendors and other stakeholders and organizational capacity of street vendors.

During the conceptualization of the project, the research team liaised with individuals within IDRC and DfID, who were keen on addressing issues relating to the informal economy, in particular street trade. In addition, the research team linked up with the founder members of a global network, Women in Employment Globalising and Organising (WIEGO), which was then at an infancy stage. These founder members of WIEGO emphasized the need to conceptualize the research in a manner that ensures that research findings are useful not only to researchers but also to street and informal traders, planners and policy makers.

In order to realize its goal, the research adopted a participatory research methodology, which gathered, not only information from the traders but also provided them an opportunity through Focus Group Discussions to raise some of the challenges facing them. During the dissemination of research findings and recommendations forums bringing together the street traders, local authorities, government departments and other stakeholders were organized at the local and, national levels.

The sharing of the findings of the research with primary stakeholders triggered the need to address the organizational capacity of street vendors. This proved to be a fundamental problem influencing all other research issues affecting the vendors. This finding provided the justification for IDS to move

beyond the research by proposing the implementation of a project focusing on 'Facilitation of Street Vendors and Informal Traders Organisations in Kenya'. This project nurtured all the activities that eventually resulted in the establishment of the KENASVIT which was officially launched in Kenya on the 18th of March, 2006.

Networking and Partnerships

One of the outputs of research was a street vendors' handbook written in popular language and illustrated with cartoons. Further, the IDS continued providing technical support, writing a proposal, fund raising and marketing the idea of facilitating the street vendors and informal traders' organizations to various local, regional and international organizations. StreetNet International, an international organization that supports street and informal traders globally, was the first organization to support the project. The Coordinator of the organization attended the national research findings dissemination workshop in 2000. The workshop was attended by Senior Government officials, including the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development, a ministry responsible for the sub-sector; and local authority civic leaders and senior officials.

A second national workshop was held in 2003 and was opened by the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Human Resource Development. During the workshop, the street vendors and informal traders operating in seven major urban authorities who attended the workshop with the facilitation of IDS extended the workshop to midnight discussing the technicalities of forming a national alliance of street vendors and informal traders. Each of the represented urban authorities had a break out session in which, each group elected two representatives, a woman and a man to constitute a National Interim Steering Committee for developing a constitution for the proposed KENASVIT.

KENASVIT Activities

Since inception, KENASVIT members have engaged in lobbying and policy influence and have so far provided inputs to the National Land Policy. They have also influenced the preparation of a motion on street vending in Kenya which went through the first reading in Parliament in August 2005. KENASVIT will organize a National Conference to discuss the hawkers' bill and will circulate the bill to hawkers associations across the country. Through these two inputs, KENASVIT has managed to infuse the voice of street vendors and informal traders into national policy process.

Apart from the national level activities, at the local level, KENASVIT members have begun negotiating with urban authorities on issues of trading space, including approaching some local authorities for allocation of land for construction of offices. So far Mombasa Urban Alliance has received a cargo container from the Provincial Commissioner, which they intend to convert into an office. The KENASVIT national office located in Nakuru, the fourth largest urban centre in Kenya, has begun serving as a contact point for traders and development partners. The alliance with the support of the IDS has produced a brochure, and the first issue of their newsletter, *The Trader*. Other planned activities include: urban alliance meetings, office capacity building, including National Executive Committee (NEC) meetings. The NEC has undergone an induction seminar, and the same is planned for the member urban alliances.

At local level, street vendors and informal traders associations affiliated to KENASVIT are engaging in dialogue and negotiation with respective councils. This engagement has mixed results. For example, in Kisumu City, the third largest urban centre in Kenya, the vendors and informal traders have taken the Council to court, while in other urban centers such as Mombasa City Council, Machakos and Migori Municipal Councils, the relationship remains amicable.



Funding and Support Agencies

In 2004, the StreetNet International leveraged a total of US\$ 10,500 seed fund from FNV for IDS for facilitating and monitoring street vendors and informal traders associations in organizing and dialogue with local authorities and other stakeholders; National Interim Steering Committee Meetings for developing the constitution; National Delegates Meeting to endorse the Constitution and elect office bearers; and partly supported the official launch of KENASVIT. The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), a human rights and social justice international organization based in Cambridge, MA, USA joined the effort and provided a total of US\$ 26,800 in June 2005. Since then, UUSC has worked with IDS in supporting this effort, and in March 2006, provided additional US\$ 68,900 for supporting the organization for the 2006/7 year.

IDS Policy Briefs

IDS Policy Briefs is a monthly publication of the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi. The objective of the *IDS Policy Briefs* is to disseminate key outputs of IDS research findings. The *IDS Policy Briefs* is aimed at informing and influencing policy formulation processes, serving policy consumers and development practitioners.

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Institute for Development Studies

The Institute for Development Studies (IDS) is one of the oldest and best-established research institutes in Africa. The IDS is a multipurpose and multi-disciplinary research institute focusing on social and economic issues of development in Kenya and the rest of Africa. It undertakes research and training in collaboration with other social sciences organisations, provides a facility that enhances intellectual stimuli between local and visiting scholars, and offers professional consultancy services to various government, regional and international development agencies, voluntary bodies and the general public in Kenya. Since its inception in 1965, IDS has carried out research on issues of development concern to Kenya, Africa, and the rest of the world. Its research findings have informed government policy, fed academic discourse, and enlightened students for more than a generation.

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Challenges

The major challenge facing the KENASVIT is consolidation of the gains made. Like many other new associations, the young alliance faces the challenge of leadership, conflict resolution, and raising required resources for effective discharge of functions. The IDS has been able to facilitate the alliance to go beyond being mere research subjects. However, facilitation is not the core business of IDS. The core business of IDS is the generation and development of knowledge, promoting debate and encouraging utilization of research findings in post graduate teaching and training, and in shaping the growth of development thinking, theory and practice. During the official launch of KENASVIT in March, 2006 attended by many stakeholders, the IDS made special appeal to stakeholders present, in particular government departments and local authorities to provide the support required by the street vendors and informal traders. The IDS observed that issues affecting street vendors and informal traders such as site of operation, policies and regulations, and organizing must be mainstreamed and not handled in an *ad hoc* manner. The IDS further assured the development partners, including civil society organizations that supporting street vendors and informal traders is a key step towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal on poverty eradication. Further, effective street vendors and informal traders associations have the potential of turning the millions of micro enterprises operating across Africa into viable corporate businesses as stated in the vision of KENASVIT.

(Footnotes)

¹ This case study was shared at the World Urban Forum in Vancouver, Canada as an example of repackaging research product for policy intervention.

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