

**Reflection on Map Kibera Methodology from a Participatory Perspective
for the project:
“Mediating voices and communicating realities: using information crowdsourcing tools,
open data initiatives and digital media to support and protect the vulnerable and
marginalised”¹**

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Abstract:

In November 2010 I facilitated a participatory reflection and assessment process, commissioned by the Institute of Development Studies University of Sussex. The overall purpose of the assessment was to draw lessons, challenges and opportunities from the experiences of an Open Source Technology (OST) Pilot Project, “Map Kibera” that was initiated through the effort of a US-based organization called Ground Truth initiative. As a participatory methodologies practitioner my focus was on facilitating a process that would enable a cross-section of those involved in the project to assess how participatory the approaches were used in the project and how they could be improved in the future. In this short article I share the key insights emerging from the focus group discussions and a joint workshop with all the groups involved in the project. I also weave in my reflections based on my experience as a participatory methodologies, trainer, facilitator and researcher.

It was exciting to be involved in this reflection process. It not only provided me with an opportunity to learn how important it is to invest in building relationships and a shared vision with communities at the onset of any participatory initiative, but also how survival needs could hinder individuals and groups from releasing their capacity and commitment to engage in processes geared toward social change in their communities. This process itself was an opportunity for the participants to interrogate and discover challenges related to personal and group dynamics that were hindering them from conceptualizing their vision for change and how the Map Kibera project would fit in and contribute to this. The reflection process concluded with a joint reflection that saw natural leaders emerge and take the driver’s seat in their “*Matatu*”² that had been abandoned in the middle of the road. As I put down these reflections I have had the chance to meet the youth from the Map Kibera initiative and it seems like the *Matatu* is back on track and headed in the right direction. This article is only an initial glimpse into the use of participatory methods and approaches in Open Source Technology and any other initiatives using new media and ICT for development.

1. Introduction

Around October 2009 two OST practitioners from the Ground Truth initiative, a US-based social enterprise, initiated a Pilot Project by the name Map Kibera. While their interest was in trying out OST in new and more challenging environments, they were also attracted by the vibrant tech

¹ This is a project funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) in cooperation with the [Institute of Development Studies](#), the Map Kibera/Ground Truth initiatives and [Aptivate](#).

² *Matatu* is the term used for a public transportation mini-bus which is the popular means of transport in Kenya. This metaphor was used in one of the focus group discussions making reference to what had happened to the Map Kibera Initiative

community in Nairobi which has pioneered innovative programs such as *Ushahidi's*³ use mobile phone technologies. Kibera is now a total community information project including digital mapping, the Voice of Kibera website, and the Kibera News Network citizen video journalism project. It has put Kibera on the world map and given it a different and positive image, other than simply being known for being one of the largest informal settlements in Africa.

The Map Kibera initiative, though only one year old at the time of this study, has generated a lot of interest. The ICT community, civil society organizations, the donor community and academic and research institutions have taken a keen interest in it. They are interested in learning from the Map Kibera pilot and to explore opportunities for scaling-up or even replicating the experience in other places. This study is an attempt to capture the experiences and provide knowledge to respond to this learning need. The overall purpose of this reflection was to assess Map Kibera's methodology or approach to community participation. The assessment sought to draw insights from a cross-section of stakeholders who were involved in the project, identify strengths and weaknesses of the methodology as experienced by them and capture suggestions for improvement of the methodology in terms of community participation.

The groups that participated include Ground Truth initiative/Map Kibera core leadership team, Map Kibera GIS Mappers, Kibera News Network, Voice of Kibera, and community opinion leaders. We held a joint session to share the emerging issues and agree on ways forward. About 35 people participated in the entire process. In the sections that follow I share and discuss key points from each group and give my concluding observation and key questions for consideration as the Map Kibera initiative moves to the next phase.

2. Ground Truth initiative team

The Map Kibera initiative had all the intentions of involving the communities. However, it did not have a well thought out systematic participatory methodology. As some of the Ground Truth team members put it, the project employed a process of learning by doing; they learned as they went along. The process was meant to be informal and fun with young people. The methodology had a heavy focus on equipping young people with technical skills and providing them with basic working tools that would enable them to map resources and places within their community surroundings and be better able to communicate their experiences to the outside world. For the Ground Truth team it provided an opportunity for professional development and gaining of experience from using OST in a developing world context. Though the Ground Truth team had an emphasis on people's involvement, it was not clear how this would be realized without a clearly spelled out methodology articulating the key entry points, community preparation and ways of working that would enable different groups in the community to own and participate in the process. It would seem this was assumed or left to chance. Coming from the OST community, the assumption was that information would be generated and left out there for whoever needs it to utilize it for whatever purpose. The OST principles, however, were now being applied in contexts outside the Silicon Valley. It would seem that open source principles here were colliding with the context of development practice. More thought needed to be put in to determine what needed to be done differently as OST was being applied in communities that are involved in different social, political and economic struggles.

³ Ushahidi is an open source project that provides tools for information collection, visualization and interactive mapping (www.ushahidi.com).

There was need to have a broader vision for change i.e. beyond the democratization of the information generation and flows. A more systematized approach would have enabled participation of the wider community and key institutions in negotiating and developing a bigger vision or purposes for which the information is being generated. For example, the mapping should have been presented and used as an entry point for identifying issues and discussing strategies for improving life in Kibera as opposed to being seen as an end in itself. In the practice of participatory approaches we say that behind the map there is a story (situation analysis) and beyond the map there is a vision or desire to change the situation. The responsibility of the facilitator is to ensure that the communities do not just stop at the maps, but that they engage in the analysis of the key issues and develop action plans for changing the situation.

The time committed to preparing the communities was really short. The team, as one of the members put it, wanted to get “something really useful quickly”. This contradicts the ethos of genuine participatory processes. It would seem they were in the Rapid Appraisal “*quick and dirty*” mode as opposed to Participatory Learning and Action mode which is more *relaxed and systematic*. Maybe this is because the team had wanted to fit the project within the short duration of their stay in Kenya. With the “*quick and dirty*” approach genuine community mobilization and participation cannot be realized. The team was of the opinion that it is not good to stay for too long so as not to become embedded. Yet in a genuine participatory process it is expected that facilitators come and live with the people, eat with them, learn about their culture and gain their trust, all of which are useful for genuine participation. The team seemed to have worked with the assumption that people in Kibera would see the value once they understood the technology. Though there was an attempt to broaden the conversation to the community about the usefulness of the information generated through the technology, this conversation did not involve many people in the community. Key institutions such as the City Council of Nairobi, Provincial Administration and village elders were not involved. It would have been better to start by obtaining some level of understanding and buy-in from the leadership and a wider segment of the community. The speed at which the process was introduced was an impediment to building rapport with key institutions and the wider community. Even those who were involved in the project directly saw themselves as employees of Ground Truth initiative. There were mixed messages and lack of clarity on relationships, roles and responsibilities.

3. Mappers

The mappers saw the vision of Map Kibera as creating employment opportunities for the youth. This was contrary to the way the Ground Truth team saw the purpose of the project and their mandate. They did not see themselves as employers but as peers who had OST knowledge which they wanted to pass on to the youth in Kibera. It would seem then that the youth did not own this project. Rather, they saw themselves as helping Ground Truth to implement their project, and therefore expected to be paid. The little pay the youth got as “*volunteers*” was misunderstood to be a wage. Possibly the expectations were not levelled from the onset. Possibly a wider involvement of the community and local leadership structures would have helped in community understanding or even shaping of the purpose of the project. However, as some of the mappers stated, the issue of community participation was not there at the beginning. The local authorities -provincial administration, district councils, chiefs and village elders- were not involved, let alone the wider community. This made data collection difficult as the mappers did not have the necessary authority and support to collect information (e.g. from schools). It was the opinion of the mappers that the

Ground Truth team did not have a good understanding of local politics and stakeholders. They had not done good context analysis-community organization, power and leadership structure. According to the mappers the community did not have a chance to identify what issues needed to be mapped and for what purpose the maps would be used. This was done by a small representation of stakeholders. The assumption was that that these stakeholders were the community or true representatives of the community. The thematic mapping, as they put it, happened very quickly- mappers had about one month to cover all four issue areas (health, security, sanitation and education) and then organise the meetings to validate the maps. According to the mappers the use of the maps by the community is still a challenge: the maps are not yet easily accessible to those without access to the internet. They are still waiting for the maps to be printed and even then it is not clear what people on the ground would really use them for. According to the only opinion leader we interviewed the government departments (Provincial Administration and City Council) were not using the maps. Only the Kibera Community Development Agenda (KCODA) organization and the Pamoja Radio Station were using the maps. The opinion leader stated clearly that the ordinary Kibera residents did not understand or see the importance or value of the maps as they knew very little or nothing about the project. He argued that if they (Kibera residents) do not see the value of the maps it [Map Kibera] would be another dead 'white elephant', a euphemism used to describe large failed aid projects. To use the words of Robert Chambers (see *Whose reality Counts* 1997) the big questions in participatory mapping are: *Whose Maps are they? Whose purpose or need do they address?* We sought to understand from the mappers themselves whether they had any idea what the maps would be used for. Their response was:

"Our role was to collect data and feed it to the computer. What happened after this no one knows" (said one)... "in the meetings that we have to present our work we have to say what the impact of the maps is and we don't have an answer" (said another).

Surprisingly the mappers did not even see it as their role to articulate the function of the maps. They felt that the Ground Truth team should have been more specific about how the maps could be used. This implies a teaching mode as opposed to facilitating a process that would bring out the expectation by the community. Whose role was it to ensure that people see the connection between the maps and their lives? How best could this have been done? The preparatory training of the mappers seems to have been more focused on making the GIS maps and not on mobilizing key stakeholders and the wider community participate in and own the process. According to the opinion leader, the mapping was done hurriedly, in a short time. He felt that there was need for another edition of the mapping that would be more inclusive and participatory, starting with agreement with the communities from the different villages in Kibera on what information they wished to see included in the map, the purpose for which the information would be used, with a focus on pushing the government to provide better services. He advised that everyone interested in making change in Kibera, should start by first understanding the institutional and community dynamics, and that the Kibera community is not homogenous.

During this reflection session the mappers began to realize that there were concerns they needed to address as the map was not an end in itself. They began to think beyond the maps to ask the 'so *what*' question. It also dawned on them that there was over dependency on the Ground Truth team and possibly the whole Map Kibera initiative would prove unsustainable if the mappers were to be left on their own. The mappers had not yet become genuine participants in the Map Kibera

project. They did not see themselves as owners and decision makers but employees of the initiative. They even had grievances:

“...the decision making processes within the project are not clear. There is no satisfactory information flow between the mappers and Ground Truth team, about the future.”

Mistrust seemed to have developed over time between the different groups that had evolved during the process. This is due to the perception that some groups have more information than others, and that some are benefiting more from the Map Kibera initiative than others:

“Voice of Kibera and KNN are working for free (no pay) and they are feeling bad” (a male mapper argued)...“we have to get this information to the community...it’s not just about mapping...we need to work with Voice of Kibera and Kibera News Network...the great problem started when they [GT team] introduced KNN and Voice of Kibera...we could have had some consultative meetings. They [GT team] were telling us what was already there. The groups are told different things.”

Clearly the weak coordination and communication resulted in the three groups seeing themselves as being in competition with one another. As one of the mappers put it:

“... there is little understanding of how the different groups are working with each other and not being seen as competitors”...the problem was/is communication...there are things that they were hiding from us” (added another mapper).”

There was suspicion due to inadequate openness, transparency, and trust among the key players. Feelings of preferential treatment/valuing more groups than the others were evident. The mappers felt that the leadership was concentrating more on the Voice of Kibera and KNN and leaving them out. So was KNN benefiting economically from their association with Ground Truth initiative or was this a misperception? The mappers seemed more concerned about the economic gains they were making from the project. They did not want any other group to be competing over the scarce resources. It would then seem their participation was no more about adding value to the Kibera community but about their immediate survival needs. If they ever had a bigger vision this had been abandoned midway.

Asked whether the Map Kibera initiative was still on track toward realization of its vision, one of the mappers used the metaphor of a *matatu* (commuter van) abandoned in the middle of the road. The *matatu* had neither driver, conductor nor passengers. Upon further reflection, the metaphor was elaborated: the journey had started without all onboard agreeing on a destination. The driver and the passengers seem to have abandoned the vehicle as they realized that they did not have clear understanding and clear agreement concerning the destination. My hope was that they had just taken a short break to deliberate and agree on the vision, and that the *matatu* would be back on track. I did warn them that their *matatu* was a good one as it had gained both national and international recognition and if they were not careful someone else would jump in and drive off in it. While some of the mappers thought that official registration of Map Kibera would solve their problem, it was clear that without resolving the group dynamics and coming up with a shared vision this might just introduce another layer of problems.

4. Voice of Kibera and Kibera News Network (KNN)

The Kibera News Network saw their vision as that of enhancing open sharing of information as they embrace new technology. As one of them put it, the purpose of OST is to help make things easier for all of us...its free information for all Kiberians...everyone can be a journalist.” As another KNN journalist elaborated, “our vision was to portray a positive view of Kibera. The vision was also to give the marginalized communities in Kibera an opportunity to express their views, direct from the community itself.”

Before long however, they were already comparing themselves with another group within the larger Map Kibera. A journalist from Map Kibera stated:

“Working with KNN has been good, but not with the mappers...we understand that they were there before us...they started things ahead of us...it seems that someone somewhere has fears that the cake will not be shared equally between the three of us...there is little understanding of what we have in common. In anything there is politics...the other thing that is creating problems among us is the leaders...someone is still thinking in the past...the sooner they get over this, the better it will be for everyone. Engaging each and everybody within the three groups to address our fears is important”.

It seemed the Map Kibera process had not succeeded in creating a team spirit among the three groups. The suspicion observed with the mappers was also evident with these two groups. They seemed also to be blaming the leadership for having contributed to the tension that now existed between the groups. The fear that the cake would not be shared equally also meant they were more concerned about the benefits accruing from the project and how these would trickle down to each individual member of the group. They had been hoping that at some point they would make a transition from being volunteers to being properly employed and thus earn a proper salary. Or better still, that they would make a decent income from the community journalism work they were involved in. One of the participants put it this way;

“We don't want to continue being volunteers forever. We have created this business board whose job is to find money for us through grants. How the money is going to be divided is not clear yet”...it has been hard for some members to balance between our work and our volunteer work [Map Kibera Project]...we miss out on a lot of opportunities in order to volunteer for KNN.”

Safety and ownership of the products from their work was another concern: the KNN team was concerned that their video clips were being used without proper attribution. They also wondered whether someone else was being paid for the use of the video clips without their knowledge. They felt that the leadership could have been responsible for the cross posting of the clips and had done this without informing them. This was a clear indication that there was mistrust and suspicion which is dangerous for a healthy relationship and genuine participation. It is unfortunate that with all the accusations no-one had tried to cross-check with the concerned parties.

“We have been working together by names and we have not discussed why we are working together” said one of the participants. There was a cross post when some of our

stuff (KNN video clips) appeared on Uchaguzi (an election monitoring initiative) without our consent. We want to get credit (**attribution**) and be involved in the decision process about who uses our stuff”, said a KNN representative.

On further reflection it emerged that the team was not aware of the laws governing use of OST products. This is a crucial aspect that should have been covered during the training they had undergone with the Ground Truth team. They did not know that once they post their stuff on the net it was available to the world and free of charge.

Though Map Kibera teams were exploring avenues for fund raising, it seems that the main drive for this was salaries or a wage to meet their survival needs as opposed to programme activities. There was still no clear social change vision, and therefore no programme activities that could be marketed to potential donors. We pointed out to them that donors would only give them money after being convinced that there was a clear and viable vision and programmes. There was need to document and package the impact of their work so as to use it to demonstrate what difference it has made in Kibera, so as to convince others that there is added value to using OST. It emerged that the information generated had not even been widely disseminated in Kibera to start with:

“We cannot reach many people in Kibera. Everything we have produced we are now putting into CDs and we are planning to distribute in facilities such as clinics, everywhere where there is a TV, so through that we are trying to reach” (KNN participant).

It was surprising that, though they had expressed the need for an income, they were now planning to distribute the CDs free of charge. They did not see themselves being in a position to sell their product in Kibera as yet and seemed to prefer to distribute the products on a charitable basis. However, there were expectations that free distribution would itself be supported through a grant.

While the KNN and Voice of Kibera were putting a lot of hope in the registration of a Map Kibera Trust, they had not given it much thought beyond seeing it as an opportunity for jobs for the members. How the Trust would attract resources did not seem to be their worry. Perhaps somebody somewhere would connect it to donors and resources would begin to flow. Care needs to be taken that Map Kibera Trust does not become yet another statistic of the many NGOs in Kibera. Why it was not possible to integrate the Map Kibera or the OST within existing organizations and structures such as youth groups and networks and the local NGOs that were involved in the Map Kibera is not clear.

5. Concluding Observations

The Map Kibera pilot project, though technologically driven, has demonstrated that communities in difficult circumstances in the developing world can be equipped with knowledge and skills to harness OST to create knowledge and share information. The project was successful in providing the youth in Kibera with knowledge, skills and communication tools that enabled them to collect data and information and use it to present a positive image of their community to the rest of the world. However, there is need to think beyond collection of data and uploading of the information and leaving it out there in the hope that whoever needs it will find it useful. The use of such tools should be put in the context of struggles of communities in the developing world. There should be a higher vision of change that the knowledge generated through such technology seeks to contribute

toward. We cannot collect data for the sake of data collection. Use of OST should be geared towards influencing or bringing about pro-poor development or social change.

The Map Kibera initiative had all the intentions of involving communities. However there was no well thought out or systematic participatory methodology to actualize this intention. There was very little done to ensure adequate community ground work and preparation for a genuinely participatory and empowering process that would guarantee ownership and sustainability. The team was not able to identify appropriate community entry points and as such important tasks such as building trust/rapport with local institutions, analysis of community power dynamics, negotiation and leveling of expectations of different players, developing a shared vision, purpose and agreeing on roles and responsibilities, got very little attention. While it is appreciated that these preparatory processes require time and immersion into the community so as to gain better understanding of the community's social, political and economic context and build relationships and trust, the process was too rushed to achieve this. As a result the team took longer to learn how best to facilitate the community to take a lead role in the process and to handle the challenges encountered.

The Map Kibera initiative seems not to have taken cognisance of the great work done by the *Muungano wa Wanavijiji* (Slum Dwellers Movement) that has been championing for the rights of people living in informal settlements. It is this movement which has brought an end to the threat of mass evictions. The entry point should have drawn and built on lessons from past struggles and involved the movement and its members in agreeing on how OST could be used to enhance the struggle towards improving living conditions and well-being of Kibera communities. This vision still seems not to have come to the minds of all the groups in the Map Kibera initiative, and there is need to see how best the process can be re-engineered to ensure buy-in by key institutions and structures and participation by the communities. As it is now, ownership, support and sustainability will remain a challenge unless this link is made.

While building a new structure (Map Kibera Trust) may seem attractive, there is need to guard against forming yet another briefcase NGO to satisfy the survival needs of a few individuals. There is need for the Map Kibera leadership (all the 3 groups) and Ground Truth initiative to get together and articulate their vision and modalities of working together, along with the broader communities and existing leadership structure to move this initiative forward.

There is more work to be done. As the project moves to the next phase the questions below would be important to consider:

- What is the broader vision that the Map Kibera Trust is contributing to?
- To what extent is this vision shared with the wider community in Kibera?
- How can the youth in Map Kibera be better organized and work together with the communities and the CSOs to harness OST, the data and the information generated to strengthen their struggles for well-being?
- What roles could the OST, international NGOs and academic institutions and other external agencies play to effectively contribute to and strengthen this process?