University/City Partnerships: Creating Policy Networks for Urban Transformation in Nairobi

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Abstract

Kenya's capital city, Nairobi, like many rapidly growing cities in the global South is confronting massive inter-related problems of slum expansion, violence, ethnic segregation, poor service delivery, public health hazards and environmental degradation. These problems, in turn, are deep reflections of a long history of inequitable power relations at both local and global levels, repression, democratic institutional failure and skewed, exclusive urban policy and planning processes. How can a foreign university like Columbia University play a constructive role in this exceptionally challenging context? We argue that part of the answer involves fostering a research and teaching agenda that directly addresses the complexity inherent in the problems of simultaneous urbanization and democratization in places like Nairobi. However, this is not enough. All too often research by external universities fails to circulate or have any impact on urgently needed policy change.

We argue that a key role for Columbia University is not just providing research, technical advice or "technology transfer," rather it is also most critically about nurturing a sustained authentic partnership with local universities to enhance their role in urban transformation. By an authentic partnership we mean a collaboration that produces relationships of trust, honesty, transparency, respect and equity and results in the genuine co-production or facilitation of knowledge for positive local change.[1] Fowler succinctly characterizes "authentic partners" versus relations involving "clients" or "counterparts" as involving"equality in ways of working and mutuality in respect for identity, position and role."[2] This paper explores the dynamics and importance of one such a partnership in the field of urban planning. This partnership, which started in April 2005, involves the Centre for Sustainable Urban Development (CSUD)[3] at Columbia University and the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) at the University of Nairobi.

Keywords: partnerships, policy networks, global south, DURP, CSUD

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For further reading: http://muj.uc.iupui.edu/

[1] See "Achieving the Promise of Authentic Community-Higher Education Partnerships: A Community Partner Summit" April 24-26, 2006 - Wingspread Conference Center, Racine, WI Available at http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/pdf_files/FINALCPS_Executive_Summary.pdf.pdf.

[2] Alan F. Fowler Authentic NGDO Partnerships in the New Policy Agenda for International Aid: Dead End or Light Ahead? *Development and Change* 29 (1) p. 141.

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