

## Planning for the integration of refugee and host communities in Turkana County, Kenya

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**The Kalobeyei New Settlement focuses on the creation of a spatial plan to guide settlement in both the short and the long term to the benefit of both host community and refugees.**

Various approaches to refugee integration with local host communities have been suggested in the past, largely within the realms of refugee-friendly policies and the creation of opportunities for refugees to engage in income-generating activities. While recent strategies by institutions such as the World Bank are aimed at collective poverty reduction and support for both refugees and host communities, humanitarian funding is still largely geared towards the displaced.

In Turkana County, in northern Kenya, the existence of Kakuma refugee camp for over 25 years – now home to over 150,000 refugees from 18 countries – has created significant inequalities in both physical infrastructure and economic opportunity to the disadvantage of the host community. In a bid to reduce this development gap and spur regional growth, and with the need to expand the camp in order to host incoming refugees from South Sudan, the county government of Turkana entered into an agreement with UNHCR, the UN

Refugee Agency. The aim of the agreement was to focus the sharing of investment towards improvements between the refugees and host communities in the county.

Under this agreement, 1,500 hectares of land were allocated in Kalobeyei, 15km to the west of Kakuma camp, for a new refugee settlement. UNHCR and its partners agreed to develop the site as an integrated settlement for 60,000 people – refugees and members of the host community – underpinned by social and physical infrastructure and a diversity of economic opportunities. Given its expertise in spatial planning, UN-Habitat was invited to partner in the settlement development process. The county government of Turkana would be fully involved in planning, construction, monitoring and evaluation of the settlement and would take over its management in the medium to long term, administering it as an urban settlement and providing basic services. The new settlement could then, over time, generate tax revenue to pay for services.



Recently arrived refugees, Kalobeyei New Settlement, Turkana, Kenya.

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The spatial plan for the settlement emphasises shared provision of basic services to the two communities and encourages both inward and outward integration, in which interaction spaces (commercial areas, public facilities and social spaces) are provided within and outside the new settlement.

These spaces are strategically located at nodes linked through efficient transport networks and are open and accessible to both refugees and host community members.

UN-Habitat has identified several key lessons from this project:

**Lesson 1:** Allocation of land for refugee settlement development should be based on careful site selection, with particular consideration of indicators such as availability of water, security, a suitable environment, proximity and access to other towns, and access to livelihoods. Unfortunately this was not possible with the Kalobeyei project where land had already been allocated.

**Lesson 2:** An integrated settlement needs to bridge humanitarian and development modalities. The UN-Habitat intervention in the Kalobeyei New Settlement focuses on bridging the gaps between the two communities and the humanitarian and development approaches. This is facilitated by the creation of a spatial plan to guide resettlement and empower

local communities to be resilient through development of diverse livelihoods and life skills. This will in turn reduce the communities' vulnerability and support the development of a framework for local governance to monitor and manage growth.

**Lesson 3:** An integrated settlement requires public participation and stakeholder engagement. While various forms of community participation and stakeholder engagement have been applied in many spatial planning-based development processes globally, there is limited evidence of the same being applied in humanitarian projects; this is largely because the latter respond to crisis, leaving little room to implement the sequential steps of spatial planning.

In Kalobeyei New Settlement, UN-Habitat adopted a participatory approach, which was implemented at two levels – community level and key stakeholder level. Community (public) participation was through household surveys and community planning sessions, in which the planning team received input on different settlement options from the two communities. UN-Habitat then formed two settlement development groups from the host community and the refugee settlements, with each group comprising twelve members from each community representative of age, gender and levels of vulnerability. In addition to being the voice of the communities throughout the planning process, the group members were also charged with disseminating information on the planning process to their constituents and obtaining views which were then integrated into the plan. Community engagement in the planning process has enhanced community ownership of the spatial plan and should greatly contribute to its ease of implementation.

The Kalobeyei project, under the leadership of UNHCR, has – unusually – created a clear framework for stakeholder engagement which incorporates humanitarian and development organisations as well as local governance structures. Partnerships in the Kalobeyei project are implemented through several thematic working groups, each of which comprises experts from all



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stakeholders with an interest in the new settlement's development. For example, the Turkana County government and UNHCR co-lead together with UN-Habitat the thematic group on spatial planning and infrastructure development. This structure of engagement has on the whole been effective in building the confidence of the communities in the authenticity of the process. The involvement of the county government of Turkana, which initiated the idea of integration, has been crucial to enhancing compliance of the resultant spatial plan with existing laws and regulations. Once the spatial plan is approved, the county government will have direct responsibility for monitoring its implementation.

**Lesson 4:** Achieving integration should empower communities and guarantee equitable growth. The peaceful and productive co-existence of the two communities depends on the ability of the governance structures not only to monitor and facilitate growth in the area but also to collect revenues in order to provide sustainable services to the two communities. With this in mind, UN-Habitat devised a strategy for continued capacity

development among the two communities and the county government. More than 500 people were trained in various skills including livelihoods, local needs assessment, spatial planning, use of technology for small-scale infrastructure construction, and business development. Those who have acquired business skills are already contracted to operate commercial enterprises within the new settlement. At the county government level, capacity development is being achieved through direct training on planning principles, continuing support in

planning activities, and provision of advisory services to the county government.

While it is still too early to measure the project's impacts, the local response has been positive to date, and it has the potential to be viewed as good practice on how to approach refugee settlements in the future. By creating a platform for the emergence of a sustainable settlement, further investment and economic growth are being encouraged. While a key objective of the approach taken was to bridge humanitarian and development approaches and provide durable solutions and sustainable futures, hopefully the outcome will provide some degree of hope and optimism for both the refugees and hosts.

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