

## SDI initiates exchange in Kenya

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Khorogocho Survey

A Milestone for Nairobi

If you talk about information being power. I think that was seen and felt most clearly in the Kenyan story. This time I felt this power and felt the emotions related to making this information public. We have done several surveys but nothing that has brought out uneasiness like this one.

I was reminded of the South African slogan AMANDLA! IMALI, NOLWAZI. Money and Information is Power.

I think my report will never be able to capture each of those situations.

I have in the past experienced strong emotions related to money through our community savings and loans. The power it has, the greed, the competition, the sharing of it, the control over it and the pride related to it, the lack of it, of suddenly receiving it and the joy of enjoying it without making it the center of everything. The power it has in mobilizing communities and sorting out leadership problems is tremendous. I had never really experienced so many emotions with information.

In Khorogocho, one of Nairobi's largest slum all these vibrations are there in open for all to see just now. One can feel the power related to gathering information and disseminating it.

I wish you were there to experience this. I just think Pamoja trust is so blessed to have a quality of people in the core team who deal with this very maturely. They have such calmness and peace with which they handle these situations. Most of them are at a phase in their life where they have little babies but after being in Khorogocho all day supervising the surveys they have the stamina to sit and share with each other with such patience and love reflecting on all what happened during the day.

Jane is quite a formidable person. She is very caring and yet very proper and you can see that. You can see that she shares an equal relationship with the rest of the team while still being able to give direction and leadership. She does this with a lot of elegance. There is a lot of emphasis on basic values and it reflects in how they deal with each other and with situations confronting them.

For them this is their first milestone as a Pamoja trust activity. This process will give them the courage to deal with difficult situations in the future with the wisdom and rituals which come from this experience.

Jane and the team had got it all worked out. 30,000 forms were printed. Actually there were different estimates of the number of people living in Khorogocho. Salma, Jane's colleague thinks it is 15,000 families.

They were also able to walk through their first survey in Huruma where the situation was not so volatile and touchy when we were there last month. They have written a report for Huruma with family registers and are now in the process of verifying this data the second time with the leadership.

The survey has made the community in Khorogocho to wake up. Both the tenants and the owners are on their toes. Very clearly this had to be done just now. There has been a lot of homework done in last 15 years both by Father Alex and his team. I think they have prepared the ground in several ways for this crucial moment. Father Alex, I was told, he has been fasting 15 days before the survey began so that all goes in peace. I seem to begin to believe that just like spirituality and science go together; there must a connection between spirituality and development.

There was a lot of opposition from the owner's organization to stop this exercise, as it was a threat to them. They have been making money out of renting these structures all these years and now they were keen for their own next to kin to have these structures on their names. Through the help of some human rights NGO they (the structure owners) were able to get a court order the very same day we arrived. The news on the grapevine was that the court order was to restrain the survey. The Provincial Commissioner was a bit rattled with the idea of having to receive such an order as he was wondering what the implications of this could have on his office and what he was seeking to do. This is what explains his hesitation from wanting to go ahead with the survey and suddenly trying to give a signal to the rest of us that he may want to stop it.

Jockin pushed Jane to get a copy of the court order to understand what it actually says, as she too was very confused and worried about the PC's intentions. She got the order and explained it to the PC and one saw immediate change. It was as if he was relieved when he understood what the order stated. It did not say anywhere that the survey should not go ahead. It just said that there should be no demolitions. This was very much what we also supported. A simple thing like this strengthened the PC's hand. It is very clear why Government needs such kind of support. There are times when they want us to strengthen their hands by doing things they cannot do from the inside.

It was clear there were a lot of rumors on all fronts and these confusing rumors could only be cleared with documentation read and interpreted by the group. That was not very difficult to do. The PC was now clear once again that the survey had to go on but without the foreign delegation, as he was not so sure if he could ensure our security.

We were happy to support the survey from the outside and there was a lot to do in helping with creating systems for the survey.

We were 3 country teams present.

- Zimbabwe who had experience of doing surveys with the hostels in Mbaro in Harare City.
- The Indian team, who have initiated and managed such information gathering processes with communities in different cities in India and
- The Tanzanians who came through water aid and were completely new to this process.

What was important was to see how the survey process influenced the situation in Khorogocho each day, and based on the assessment made each evening by the Pamoja trust team, to then decide what to do next.

There was a great difference from Day 1 when we all felt it would be very difficult to go on and to Day 9 by the time I left. From demonstrations on Day 1 there was about 10,000 questionnaires filled out by the time I left.

During this time there were many meetings that happened at different levels. Each of them brought in different dimensions of this process that prepared the ground for community mobilizing and dealing with the state. It was not going to be easy but Jane and the team along with the local committees elected by the PC's office and the PC were clear they wanted to continue to do this survey.

The easiest option would have been to stop experiencing this power by stopping the survey. It was like a miracle unfolding each day. A miracle we all created.

The team selected for the committee had both owners and tenants and so it was good that it represented both groups. We knew we would have the risk of some disbelievers from within who would disclose our strategy but everybody felt it was OK as there were no secrets. It was important that the group (of those who wanted to betray this process) also be present so the rest of the community also get some very clear messages especially those trying to disrupt the process.

One of the very first meetings was with the committee on the morning before the survey began. At this meeting there was a public commitment that they wanted to go ahead and that they would not behave like the other side. They committed collectively not to retaliate, not to fight back. They said things like if they were challenged they would move

back and if they were slapped on one cheek they would move away. It is vital to understand the significance of such a stance in communities where violence quickly escalates into death and killings.

This is what gave the group strength. To be able to commit to their higher selves that they would do it differently and not behave like those who provoked them. This boosted up their moral and they all felt more confident to handle the uncertainties that would confront them on the ground the next day.

There were 140 interviewers selected from the 7 villages. There were 20 in each team. Pamoja trust had completed the job of walking them through the questionnaires before we arrived. They had to meet at the chief's office (local government official in charge of Khorogocho) on the morning of Day 1 to collect the questionnaires and get their basic instructions based on the committee meeting the previous day that they would not retaliate. This office is situated in the center of the settlement. There were 7 persons from Pamoja trust, all senior members of the team who were assigned to supervise each village. There was a complete police squad who was sent by the PC's office from the day before the survey. It was like doing a survey during wartime and some outsiders felt that collecting information like this was not the best way to do it.

However, we realize the politics of information and how the federations in different contexts collect it differently. We do not have the luxury of always doing it with complete 100% participation. It clearly reflected that the circumstances in Khorogocho were so volatile and this process no doubt was going to benefit the very poor in the settlement and if we did not do this now we would have lost this opportunity. This was the moment and for most of us we were clear it was the right time. Father Alex too, who lives right in the middle of Khorogocho was very clear we should go ahead.

It was quite interesting to see Father Alex and Jockin on the same track. They felt the same way, they strategize more or less in the same way and there is a strong wisdom and insight with which they both shared their ideas and insights and encouraged the team.

There was a total oneness in the way they think and that surprised me because both have different histories and yet their political analysis and responses were similar. For me it was a paradox, and was all happening smoothly in spite of all the overt tension and crisis and fear of killings. It was as if our angels were carrying us through this whole experience.

It's difficult for me to explain all this in a development language because one really saw in action the power of this collective energy and how we moved it just by the right intentions and thought. That afternoon the survey began and did not stop and is still going on.

There are the usual problems, which do not worry me, but I know they will resolve at their own pace.

There has been some level of corruption during data gathering at different levels which was expected. At the level of the chief too. It was brought to our notice that the chief was selling forms that were lying in his office at night. Some interviewers were making money while filling out the forms and adding new names. These were easy to rectify. The core group was clear they were going to create enough of a case and ask for one or two of the government persons to be removed so in this way one sent a message down to the community that corruption would not be tolerated. It was interesting to see Jane with her lawyers hat take charge of this situation and was very clear about how they were going to manage this and was going to take it up with the PC.

Another thing that was striking was the relationship between the Church and the Muslims. It was decided that the church and the mosques would make an announcement in all the villages that no money should be given during survey time and any such instances of corruption should be reported at the PC's office. The Priest and the Imam's I was told work a lot together on some of these issues. It

was so heartening to see that happen in this "hell" called Khorogocho. Very clearly you can see Father Alex has worked hard to make this happen.

Some owners have been threatening their tenants. This is bound to happen. Therefore the role of the Pamoja trust team started getting clearer. They soon realized they were playing more of a role than just supervising the survey and that their input at this time was very important in mobilizing the community and sending out the right messages.

What were some of the messages?

- That all structure occupiers would be given priority and that the rights of the tenants would be protected.
- That no corruption would be tolerated both at the level of the government and community
- To enable people to be able to voice the right information without fear.
- That there is a long term commitment to this process to building an organization and not just the allotment of a house.

They all decided to speak the truth even though they felt their lives were in danger. There were all kinds of stories that the Pamoja team shared at the end of each day. It made me feel like heaven and hell coexists in the same place. Pamoja Trust is writing their own report too and will share their version of what happened.

One very important thing that came out was the magic of talking to the community women. The team soon realized that there was so much information that they got just talking to women. There was a great need by some of the women who wanted to come and talk separately and tell them what's happening. This way the women checked out information given to them by their men and tested out different messages.

Very clearly this exercise is going to just build up the community momentum and soon it is going to be like a dam burst open. Pamoja trust's next role will be to consolidate all of these groups and create a new leadership that is different from the old and that which includes the very very poor. Mongano, which is the federation, as it exists today, has traditional leadership that has their own vested interest.

A new movement with a new energy and a new culture is what will develop out of this experience. This is inevitable if the rigor and consistency is maintained. This process is important in Nairobi and has the scope of taking over if it moves in this way. The leadership inside Pamoja trust is very aware of this.

I have decided that while Jockin plays a central role in strategizing on the ground in consolidating the community process, I have assigned myself the task of being a support to Jane and the team.

As the federation and the saving groups grow, they need support to be able to translate this administratively and yet efficiently without losing the spirit behind these processes. I see that as a serious lack in the past. While I piggy backed with Jockin. I never really paid attention to this aspect and it is very clear that this separation of the NGO role vis a vis the role of the leadership in the federations needs constant review and nurturing.