

# Spatial manifestation of self-governance groups

Addis Ababa x Nairobi

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Yasmin Abdu Bushra

**Abstract** According to official figures from the Ethiopian Central Statistics Agency, the urban population of Ethiopia is projected to nearly triple from 15.2 million in 2012 to 42.3 million in 2037, growing at 3.8 per cent a year (World Bank 2018). Urban Kenya is experiencing similarly dramatic growth, with its population soaring and boundaries expanding. However, urban local government institutional systems and infrastructure have not kept pace with rapid urbanization (UN Habitat 2017, 2022). Despite progress over the last decade in building institutions and providing infrastructure and services across all sectors, urban service delivery remains weak to this day, as urban reform remains one of Ethiopia's greatest challenges. In both Addis Ababa and Nairobi, parallel varieties of self-initiated community organizations exist, among which *iddirs* and resident associations are the most widespread. Primarily established to provide mutual aid in difficult times or for important events, increasingly they have been observed to address other community concerns (Pankhurst 2008; and this volume). This research applies the constructivist grounded theory method to birth a theory that explains the terms of engagement of these community organizations with local state actors through open coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding procedures. A co-production framework has been crafted from the data embedded in the experiences and perceptions of realities within participants. The co-creation, co-operation, and co-optation modes of *iddir* engagements pave the way for the prospect and understanding of a restructuring of power relationships among *iddirs*, resident associations, and local governments for an empowering exercise of the right to the city.

## Introduction

“Spatial Manifestation of Self-Governance Groups” is a research in progress that explores the disconnect across three unique African urban realities: the rapid growth of urban spaces; the inability of states to meet the basic needs of existing and emerging demographics; and the spatial effects of community organization activities. It explores how those different realities can come together and form socio-spatial resilient practices.

The intention of this research is therefore to present an indication of the economic, social, and political potential of self-initiated community organizations in Addis Ababa and Nairobi while understanding their capacity to strengthen urban service delivery and management equitably and sustainably. It also attempts to investigate the interactions of self-initiated community organizations, social movements, local governments, and state agencies around urban service delivery and their role of collective participation in citizen empowerment and engagement. The research also maps the involvements of selected community organizations in the provision of urban services and uses these engagements to understand the conditions needed for co-production.

The research investigates the connections between high urbanization rates, poor urban service delivery, and strong community-led organizations. It explores the possibility of longer-lasting ties between state actors and society, and documents *iddirs* in Addis Ababa and resident associations in Nairobi and their engagement in urban service delivery in these two rapidly densifying African cities.

## Methodology and case studies

In the absence of documentation on the participation of *iddirs* in the process of urban service delivery, this investigation applies Constructivist Grounded Theory, an inductive qualitative research method in which a set of structured but flexible rules for conducting inquiry are applied with the overarching intention of developing a theory. It also utilizes other methodologies, such as Discursive Grounded Theory, which focuses on the language used in data collected (McCreddie/Payne 2010). This methodology recognizes that language produces reality rather than merely representing it, whereby social realities and relationships are constituted in language.

Theoretical sampling is used to allow the researcher to follow leads in the data by sampling new participants that provide relevant information. This process allows the final developed theory to remain grounded in the data. Consequently, the theoretical sampling method is intended for the development of a theoretical category, as opposed to sampling for population representation.

## Section I: Addis Ababa

According to the most recent figures, the urban population of Ethiopia is projected to nearly triple from 15.2 million in 2012 to 42.3 million in 2037, growing at 3.8 per cent a year (World Bank 2018), with 30 per cent of the population living in urban areas by the year 2028, and 37.5 per cent by the year 2050 (Ethiopia 2050/BRP 2020).

Urban local government institutions have not kept pace with this rapid urbanization (UN Habitat 2017). Despite progress over the last decade in building institutions and providing infrastructure and services across all sectors, urban service delivery remains weak. In urban Ethiopia, 80 per cent of the overall housing stock needs either upgrading or replacing (Marrengane/Croese 2020). Currently, only half of the urban structures have private or shared water connections. The government estimates that 35 per cent of urban solid waste is never collected, while only 10 per cent of the population report using a municipal waste collection system (Tsega G. Mezgebo 2021). The public sector is unable to provide sustainable services to the current urban residents and is expected to struggle even further with the new urban influx.

Several self-initiated community organizations have stepped into the gap with a focus on solving various urban challenges in the city of Addis Ababa (Solomon Dejene 2009). A variety of community organizations exist, of which *iddirs* are the most widespread institutions in both urban and rural areas. *Iddirs* are community entities that are formed for social resilience. They operate within self-crafted guidelines that outline membership rights and responsibilities, terms of membership, the rights and responsibilities of the *iddir's* leadership, election terms and requirements, areas of operations, and suchlike. The guidelines for each *iddir* are written and ratified by its members through a democratic process, therefore the intricacies of each *iddir* varies depending on the activeness of its leadership and members through the years.

*Iddirs* are primarily established to provide aid in burial matters (Pankhurst 2008). However, in recent years *iddirs* have evolved to cover functions related to urban service delivery and maintenance. Membership in community organizations such as *iddirs* (funeral associations), *equbs* (saving/credit groups), and *mahibers* (other groupings based on monthly religious celebrations, relatives, colleagues, and others) is indispensable for low-income households as it provides an essential web of economic and social security needed to compensate for the weak social-security networks provided by the government.

## Geographic and substantive focus

The Addis Ababa Bureau of Labor and Social Affairs has documented 7856 active and operating *iddirs*. The geographic focus of this research covers the *iddirs* inside the city of Addis Ababa and their role and engagement in urban service delivery processes.

From the data collected, certain patterns of how *iddirs* behave with their local administration have emerged. Their behaviour can be divided into three main categories based on their mode of engagement with their local authorities: co-operation, co-creation, and co-opting. Co-creating *iddirs* often work and have a negotiating relationship with local authorities: they ask and negotiate for their needs. Co-operat-

ing *iddirs* often act as assistants to local authorities: they help with the activities and plans already set by the local authorities. Co-opting *iddirs* often perform their social services completely independent of local authorities. The following explores these three categories and the differences between them, and touches on case studies of *iddirs'* activities in the city.

### Co-creating *iddirs*

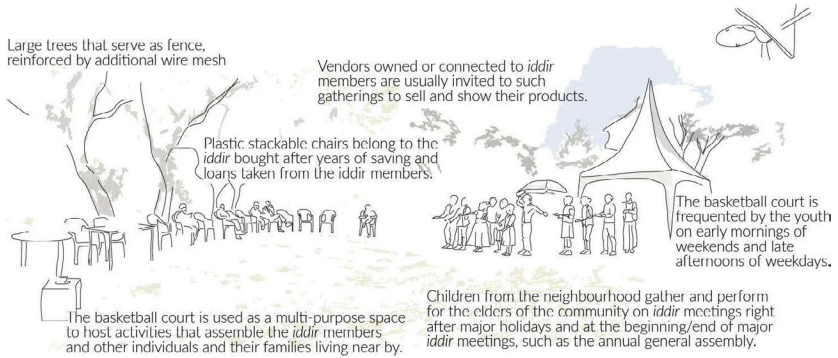
Co-creating *iddirs* engage actively in the provision of social services within their communities. Some of their services include the designation of access roads as one-way streets to manage community disturbances and requesting regular policing rounds to manage security issues. The *iddirs* in this category exhibit strong relationships with their respective local governments; they have surpassed the level of consultation and are in a position to negotiate with their local authorities. This relationship stems from the recognition of *iddirs* as highly influential pillar institutions within the community.

One case study for the co-creating *iddirs* is located adjacent to the new Adey Abeba Stadium. The residents of the 25tu Mahiberat *iddir* first came to the area as a result of the Derg's 1981 campaign to house public servants whose income was considered moderate, that is between 300 and 500 birr per month (US\$1032 to US\$1720 today, taking inflation into account). The area was named 25tu Mahiberat for the 25 smaller cooperatives that were formed to construct the houses. 25tu Mahiberat is today an *iddir* with close to 478 member families, each contributing 40 birr every month.

In the past decade, the *iddir* has become the primary body responsible for the neighbourhood's upkeep. It actively regulates, maintains, and provides the necessary equipment for the upkeep of the neighbourhood's designated open spaces. Over the course of twelve years, the *iddir* has managed to build a fully standardized tennis court and a basketball court. It has also bought and operates a children's playground and general open space amenities such as open-air seating and waste disposal equipment within the open space compound. The rest of the area is planted with fruit trees such as mango, avocado, false banana and papaya, the fruits of which are later sold back to the community at lower than market prices at community gatherings.

The *iddir* has recently expanded its efforts to farm an idle space that used to be open-air garbage. The *iddir* representatives that served from 2018 to 2020 managed to negotiate and convince the local administrative representatives to temporarily allow them to make use of an area estimated to be about 8688 square metres of linear space (24m x 356m) for urban farming, with produce being offered to the area's residents at lower prices.

Figure 1: Ethnographic mapping of a weekend meeting at the 25tu Mahiberat iddir



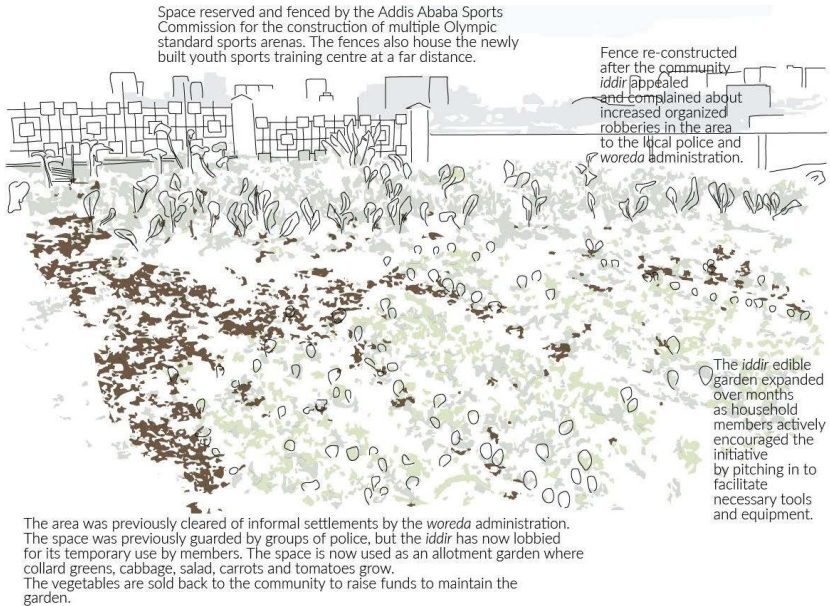
Source: illustration and observation Yasmin Abdu Bushra

Figure 2: Geographic mapping of the 25tu Mahiberat iddir



Source: base map GIS Edits by Yasmin Abdu Bushra

Figure 3: Ethnographic mapping of one of the edible gardens at 25tu Mahiberat iddir



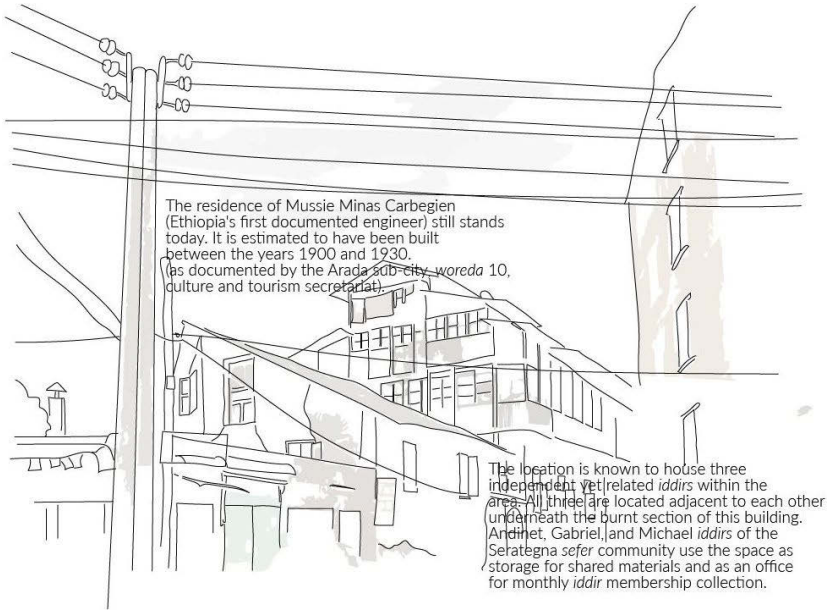
Source: illustration and observation Yasmin Abdu Bushra

### Co-operating iddirs

This category is set apart by the presence of a clear hierarchy within the relationship that defines its engagement with local administrative bodies, as they engage with their local administrations as assistants. Co-operating *iddirs* often mobilize communities and disseminate local authorities' information, as they have a great reach within the community. Examples of their services include the stocking and management of local libraries built by local administrations. While co-creating *iddirs* play a role in making the activities they choose to engage in, the co-operating *iddirs* only contribute to actions proposed by the local administrators.

The selected case for the co-operation type of engagement, Andinet *iddir*, is located in one of the founding *sefers* of the city of Addis Ababa. Serategna *sefer* is adjacent to a building registered as a heritage site by the Arada sub-city administration and Addis Ababa's Culture and Tourism Bureau. Its members estimate Andinet *iddir* to have been there for around two decades, with an average of 275 permanent members. Andinet is based adjacent to the Mussie Minas residence in the burnt and damaged section (date unknown).

Figure 4: Ethnographic mapping of Andinet iddir location



Source: illustration and observation Yasmin Abdu Bushra

This *iddir*, like others, was primarily established to provide mutual aid for vital events and emergencies among member families. Prominent members within Andinet emphasized that while the *iddir's* main function is to come to the rescue of families at times of emergencies, the contribution of one *iddir* might not be enough to address all the different family needs. Thus, many families join multiple *iddirs* to get different benefits, prompting leading *iddirs* to specialize and address specific community needs.

The Andinet *iddir* is the most prominent one in Serategna *sefer*. The *iddir* makes a substantial contribution to the public library found just in front of its shared storage unit. The library is said to have opened about 30 years ago and has since served to nurture students in the area. While the *woreda*<sup>1</sup> 10 education bureau of Arada sub-city allocates an annual stipend to the library, the *iddir* closely follows the day-to-day operations of the public facility, helping maintain damaged books and sagging shelves, and repair leaky roofs, broken desks and chairs, etc. It also maintains close contact with the librarians to ensure that the library offers a generally pleasant

1 A *woreda* is the lowest entity in the governance structure of the city of Addis Ababa. The city is governed by the Addis Ababa City Administration under which 11 sub-cities exist. Then come the *woredas*, which are assigned jurisdictions under the sub-city.

environment for students. Generally, while the *iddir* does not single-handedly contribute to the management of the public library by physically maintaining the library space, it continues to directly contribute to the preservation of a neglected modern urban heritage where a public facility directly benefiting the community is housed.

Figure 5: Geographic mapping of Andinet *iddir*



Source: base map: GIS Edits Yasmin Abdu Bushra



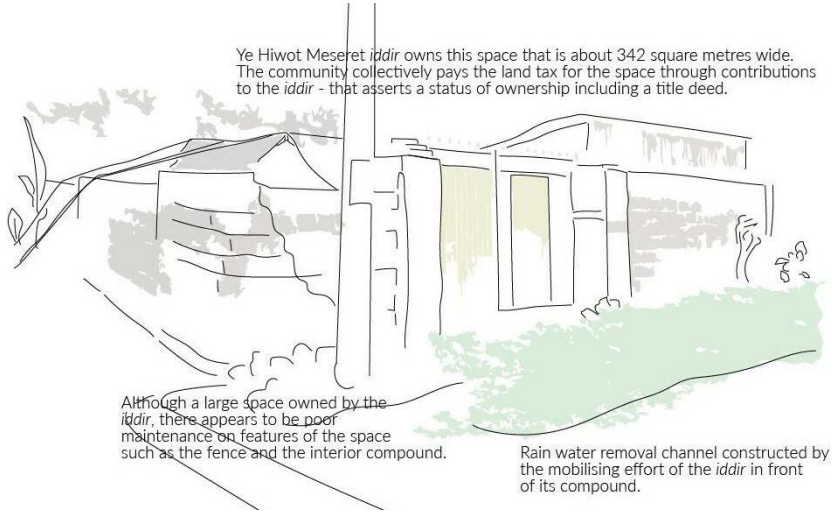
munication with the *woreda* administration is very limited, and its representatives show no interest in forging relationships with the administration.

Figure 7: Geographic mapping of Yehiwot Meseret iddir



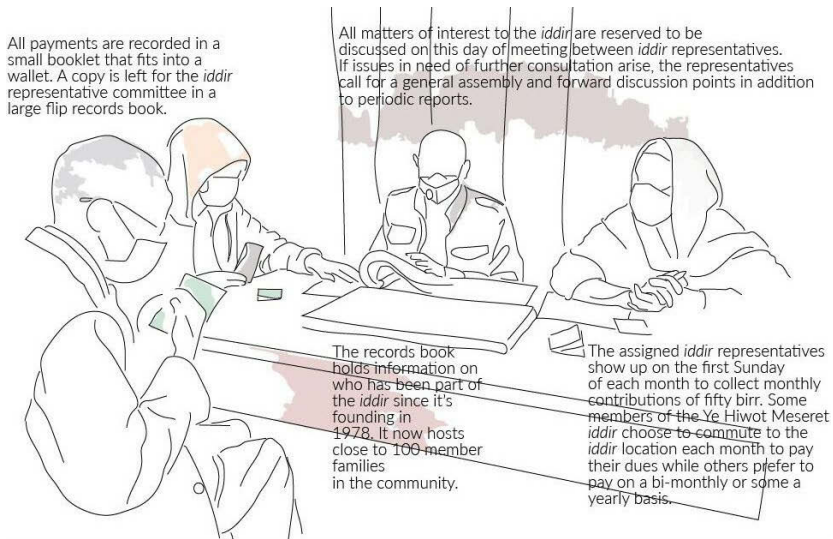
Source: base map: GIS Edits Yasmin Abdu Bushra

Figure 8: Ethnographic mapping of the compound location of Yehiwot Meseret iddir



Source: illustration and observation Yasmin Abdu Bushra

Figure 9: Ethnographic mapping of one of the monthly meetings of Yehiwot Meseret iddir



Source: illustration and observation Yasmin Abdu Bushra

## Section II: Nairobi

The emergence of residents' associations is a recent development that has shaped urban centers throughout Kenya and Nairobi in particular (Chitere/Ombati 2004). An urban residents' association is a group of neighbours who get together and share their ideas, thoughts, and feelings for the purpose of cooperation for the betterment of their immediate neighbourhood (Mitrofanova 2004).

The weakened capacity of local government, excessive pricing from private service providers, and the indifference of community groups are all contributing to bad urban service delivery in the city. In response to the challenges this raises, neighbourhood-level associations in low, middle, and high-income areas have emerged. With their increasing numbers and visibility, they have the potential to shape the landscape of urban service provision in Nairobi.

The research examines the functions of residents' associations in urban service delivery. It investigates the relationship between residents' associations and local administrative groups in urban service delivery, and examines the challenges encountered by residents' associations. It goes on to categorize the associations based on their mode of engagement with local state elements.

### Logic of organization

According to Jonas (2005), participation in neighbourhood associations in Nairobi is important because it offers increased access to information between residents and local governments and allows the co-identification of development options. It also enables residents, who represent an array of community interests, to give priority to their individual and collective needs, identify resources for these needs, and develop their collective capacity.

Urban residents' associations have a brief history in Kenya, which dates back to 1994 and the formation of the Buru Buru and Komarock residents' associations (Echessa 2010). The recent increase in the number of residents' associations can be traced to the reduced capacity of urban authorities to provide basic services to residents (Chitere/Ombati 2004). Urban residents' associations stimulate people's involvement in the design and delivery of common basic services. As observed with the *iddirs* in Addis Ababa, these associations represent the efforts of urban residents to meet the challenges of declining basic service provision through collective action.

Residents become members of associations upon payment of registration fees and monthly contributions. George Echessa (2010) found that registration fees differed across income groups and according to whether members were homeowners, tenants, residents, or organizations. Apart from registration fees, members also pay to get services like garbage collection, plumbing services, trimming of hedges, and security monitoring. In terms of membership size, Echessa (ibid.) reports that asso-

ciations in middle-income areas had the highest registered average: 5155 members. The average membership size in high-income communities was 141 members, while it was 112 in low-income communities. There was an enormous disparity in membership size among associations in middle-income neighbourhoods that ranged from 210 to 15,000 members (*ibid.*).

The reason why associations in middle-income areas have a high number of members could be the high population density in the area. However, in the city of Nairobi, low-income areas have the highest population density (Ngigi 2003). The membership numbers are, in fact, often influenced by reasons other than the neighbourhood density, including the issues addressed, modes of mobilization, membership composition, relations with the local authority, and modes of mobilization (Coelho 2006). Small membership also enhances the quality of the internal administration of rewards and penalties.

Membership sites are also controlled by the ability of an association to forge an interesting and community-engaging agenda for the neighbourhood. The low-income associations are largely unable to forge a broad agenda as they have a lower capacity to raise resources or engage with other stakeholders (Baiocchi 2003). Likewise, low-membership associations have to bear the consequences of having a limited sphere of influence due to significantly reduced social capital.

Members often benefit enormously from their membership in these associations, but benefits often differ from one association to another because of each association's agenda, funds, and resources. For instance, an association in a high-income area can easily raise funds for hiring guards to help with security issues, while associations in low income areas cannot, making the benefits reaped from the association in a high-income area much higher (Mwaura 2000).

Echessa (2010) indicates that different associations have initiated various projects to improve residents' living conditions. High-income and middle-income associations are addressing basic needs, such as security, the environment, and social amenities. Associations in low-income areas fulfil the welfare needs of members and act as a social safety net. They are also known to respond to the efforts of state entities to address insecurity and environmental challenges in the area, and provide important information to the local administration on security and crime.

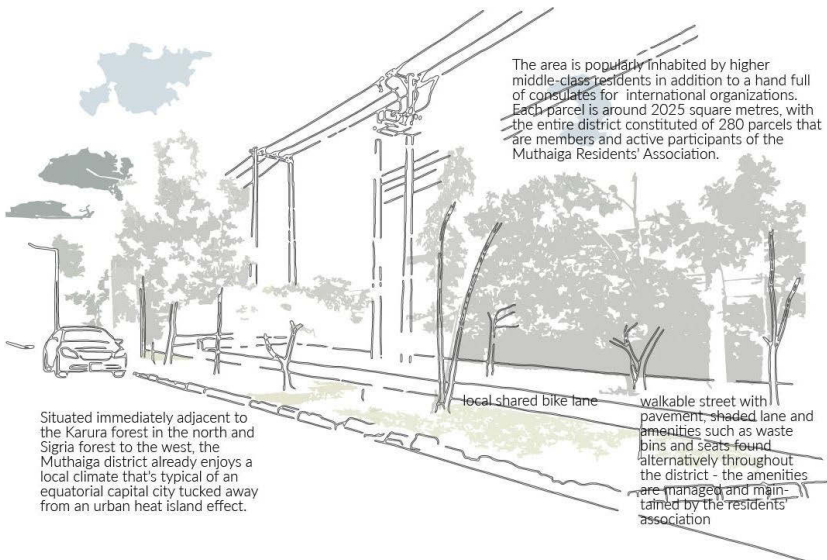
## The Co-production framework

Making use of the framework crafted as a result of data collected in Addis Ababa, the cases observed in Nairobi appear to fall into similar patterns of co-production of urban services between local state actors and self-initiated community organizations.

## Co-operating community organizations

The Muthaiga Neighbourhood Association is a residents' association located in an upper-middle-class neighbourhood in the district of Muthaiga. It was founded in 1997 by early residents of the district with a mere 22 members and now has 280 household members. The organization's administration is independent and is community-funded through membership fees. It mainly engages in security provision to the district as well as ecological upkeep of the area. It also delivers and manages protected green spaces, playgrounds, and golf courses. While some are protected spaces to be used by members only, others remain public and part of the Nairobi city landscape. The association has gained prominence within the community and serves residents by delivering a strong voice to the Nairobi County administrative bodies. It also makes sure all newly planned renovations and developments within the district comply with the zoning laws of the area and it maintains a close relationship with the Nairobi County planning bureau.

Figure 10: Ethnographic mapping of one of the streets maintained by the Muthaiga residents' association



Source: illustration and observation Yasmin Abdu Bushra



Figure 12: Photograph of Austin's Grounds on a Sunday



Source: image: © Sebastian Gil Miranda

Figure 13: Photograph of the interior wall of the Mathare Social Justice Center's dance hall



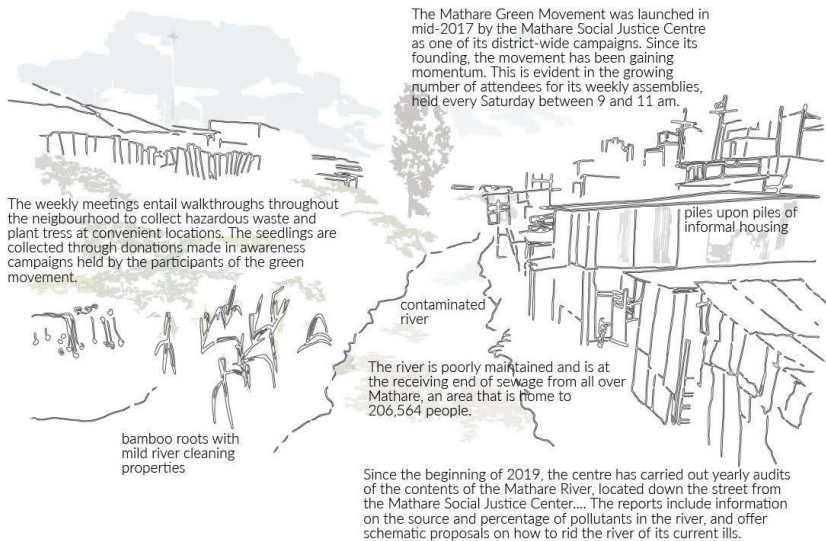
Source: image © Yasmin Abdu Bushra

Near Futbol Mas Kenya is another community organization, the Mathare Social Justice Center, which has made a big name for itself by making use of mass media

in the radio and digital means such as social media to attract members. The centre was founded to promote social justice in the Mathare community. It works as an advocacy centre, providing various services such as creative development, communication skills, performance arts, and others that appear and disappear depending on need. The centre provides an open and accessible space that caters to the youth residing in Mathare and its surroundings.

The Mathare Social Justice Center is an interesting case study for this investigation due to its ecological justice program, which is led by the founders of the community group. The ecological justice program is engaged in cleaning up the neighbourhood (collecting and disposing of improperly disposed waste), planting trees that are indigenous to the Nairobi environment, undertaking yearly river audits that are made public, and planting bamboo trees along the banks of the Mathare river to help clean the river.

Figure 14: Ethnographic mapping of the riverbank in Mathare



Source: illustration and observation Yasmin Abdu Bushra

## Conclusion

The “Spatial Manifestation of Self-Governance Groups” investigated the potential of local self-initiated community organizations to be major actors in the practice of service delivery in the urban space. By taking particular cases in the cities of Ad-

dis Ababa and Nairobi, the research attempted to formulate a theory to reconcile three unique realities. The first is a high rate of urbanization in both Nairobi and Addis Ababa. The second is exceptionally weak urban service delivery that cannot cope with the demands of the present and upcoming population. The third is the presence of self-initiated community organizations that play a strong role in urban service delivery. The research set out to investigate those self-initiated community groups, their varying degrees of engagement with their local authorities, their spatial influence in their neighbourhoods, and their role in urban service delivery in the cities of Addis Ababa and Nairobi.

The research highlighted three main aspects of these community organizations: the various degrees of engagement with local authorities; the effect of the neighborhood's income level and social status on the organization's influence and interventions; and their spatial interventions in urban spaces. The Addis Ababa case studies showed how co-operating *iddirs* choose to work within their local authorities' overall agendas and operate more or less as assistants to their local authorities, while co-creating *iddirs* have more of a negotiating relationship with their local authorities and often communicate their needs. On the other hand, co-opting *iddirs* choose to operate independently from the authorities and formulate their own projects and spatial interventions. Through the three modes of engagement, it is clear that the *iddirs*' interventions in service delivery are positive.

In the case of Nairobi, while the case studies operate more or less under the same modes of engagement with local authorities, the effect of each neighbourhood's level of income is the main factor shaping the influence that each organization has on urban service delivery. While higher-income organizations are able to provide all the security needs of their community, smaller organizations are not able to raise funds nor effect action from other stakeholders to move their agendas forward.

In both cities, self-governed community organizations seem to be influencing the community positively. Their spatial effects can be seen clearly in the neighbourhoods, in libraries, football fields, allotment gardens that feed communities, and dry-waste collection systems. Citizens are stepping up and coming together to fill gaps left by the local authorities. How their relationships with local authorities will evolve and how much influence these groups will have in shaping urban realities is something that is worth studying in the future.

## Figures

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