



Participatory Upgrading, Tenure Security and Housing Investment

A Commentary on Mathare Valley, Nairobi

Kamau Githinji^{1,2} Wanjiku Mwangi³

¹ Pwani University

² Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT)

³ Department of Advanced Studies, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT)

Correspondence: kgithinji@hotmail.com

Published: 18 February 2006
Received: 08 November 2005

Accepted: 21 December 2005
DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.18943453](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18943453)

Author notes

*Kamau Githinji is affiliated with Pwani University and focuses on African Studies research in Africa.
Wanjiku Mwangi is affiliated with Department of Advanced Studies, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT) and focuses on African Studies research in Africa.*

ABSTRACT

Informal settlements in urban Africa face chronic tenure insecurity, which constrains household investment in housing improvements. Participatory slum-upgrading programmes are promoted as a mechanism to enhance perceived security and stimulate incremental development. This commentary critically analyses the relationship between a participatory upgrading initiative in Mathare Valley, Nairobi, and its outcomes for residents' tenure security and propensity to invest in their dwellings. The analysis synthesises findings from existing grey literature, project evaluations, and academic case studies on the settlement, employing a political economy lens to interrogate the assumed causal pathways. Evidence suggests that while participatory processes fostered collective action, the perceived tenure security derived from project involvement was highly uneven. A significant theme was that investment was often contingent on the specific upgrading component, with improvements to shared infrastructure like pathways showing more uniform uptake than private housing investments, which remained linked to deeper, unresolved legal tenure issues. Participatory upgrading alone is an insufficient condition for catalysing widespread housing investment, as it frequently fails to address the underlying structural and legal dimensions of land tenure. Future interventions must integrate participatory physical improvements with parallel, concrete advances in the legal recognition of occupancy rights. Policymakers should design explicit mechanisms within projects to convert participatory gains into documented claims. tenure security, slum upgrading, participatory development, housing investment, informal settlements, urban governance This commentary provides a novel critique by disentangling the distinct effects of participatory project components on perceived versus legal tenure security, revealing why physical improvements do not automatically translate into private investment.

Keywords: *Participatory slum upgrading, Tenure security, Housing investment, Informal settlements, Sub-Saharan*

<i>Africa, Urban governance, Kenya</i>	
<p>Article Highlights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participatory processes fostered collective action but yielded uneven perceived tenure security. • Investment was contingent on upgrading type: shared infrastructure saw more uptake than private housing. • Physical improvements alone do not translate to private investment without legal recognition of rights. • Future interventions must link participatory gains with concrete advances in documented occupancy claims. 	<p>Policy Imperative</p> <p>Design explicit mechanisms within projects to convert participatory gains into documented legal claims.</p> <p><i>A political economy analysis of tenure security and investment in a Nairobi informal settlement.</i></p>

ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

REQUEST FULL PAPER

 **Email:** info@parj.africa

Request your copy of the full paper today!

SUBMIT YOUR RESEARCH

Are you a researcher in Africa? We welcome your submissions!

Join our community of African scholars and share your groundbreaking work.

 **Submit at:** app.parj.africa



Scan to visit app.parj.africa

Open Access Scholarship from PARJ

Empowering African Research | Advancing Global Knowledge