

Urban THE NEW

March 2017

KITUI COUNTY

The significance of Kwa Vonza Town in Kitui County has recently risen. This is due to the transformation of Ukamba Agricultural Institute in to South Eastern Kenya University College, and the establishment of Kenyatta University Kitui Campus. The student population of over 10,000, and a growing number of faculties, elevates Kwa Vonza's importance in defining the spatial and economic path of Kitui County.

The abrupt population explosion demands an equal or greater commercial growth to meet the need for better education, healthcare, clean and safe water, improved infrastructure and sanitation, among others. This means Kwa Vonza is on a road to rapid urbanisation, which poses positive and negative impacts. For instance, solving the worsening service provision, or growing scarcity of resources like water, may in turn lead to a better quality of life for the residents. However,

if the imminent challenges are not solved as quickly, the unmet demand for basic needs and infrastructural development, may reduce the quality of life and health of the urban population.

The SymbioCity Kenya Programme is supporting the County Government of Kitui to preempt such problems. The programme is helping the county to strengthen its management and service delivery structures in urban

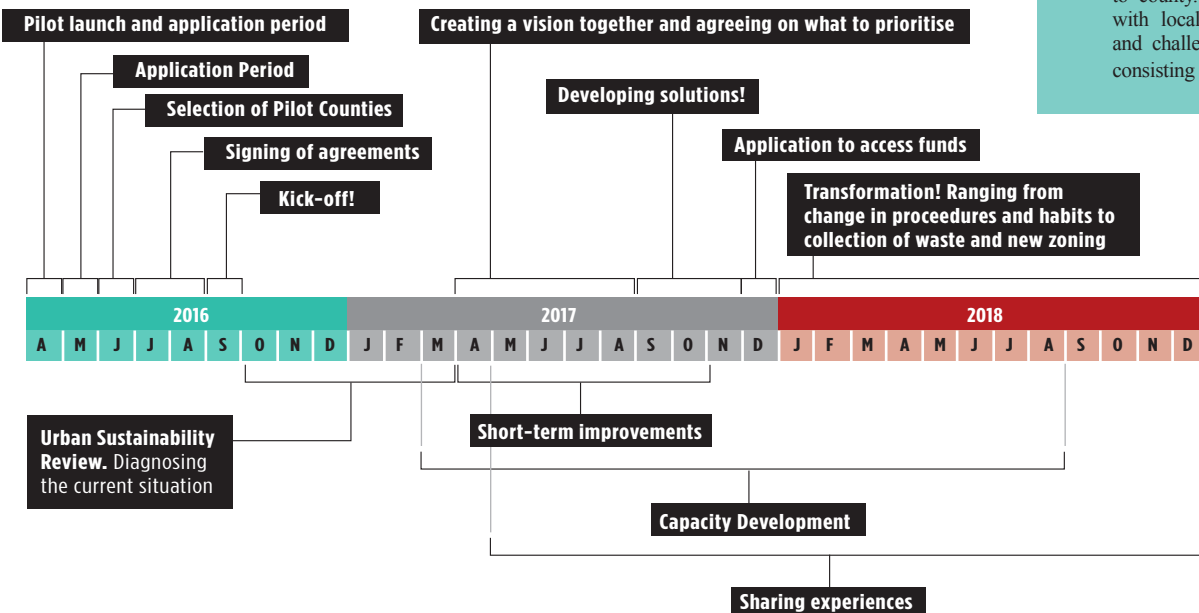
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KWA VONZA The University Town

A wide view of Kwa Vonza Town

Timeline for SymbioCity Kenya Programme in Kitui County



THE SYMBIOCITY KENYA PROGRAMME

What?

SymbioCity is an approach to sustainable development with emphasis on improving living conditions for the people living in urban areas. It doesn't provide ready-made solutions to all urban challenges. Instead it offers committed local elected representatives, officials and activists a chance to develop properly planned and managed cities where people work, access services and thrive! Urban areas with health, safety, comfort and quality of life for the people who live there. With efficiently managed urban services like waste management, mobility and water. And where the economic potential that urbanization brings is captured, while protecting the urban environment.

Who?

SymbioCity Kenya is a cooperation between Council of Governors and its sister organization, the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions. Seven counties have been selected, after a competitive application process, to become so called SymbioCity Pilots. Each county has selected a secondary town to be in focus for the piloting activities.

How?

Project activities are delivered by the Council of Governors, Urban Support Team, under the Land, Planning and Urban Development Committee. We are a team of mixed backgrounds and nationalities, with emphasis on Kenyan and Swedish urban specialists. In the respective pilot counties, a Working Group has been established, to guide the work in the county. The composition of the Working Group varies from county to county. The Working Group in its turn engages with local stakeholders when consulting on needs and challenges and report to a Steering Committee consisting mainly of County Government officials.

THE SYMBIOCITY PILOTS!

Pilot	County
Mbita	Homabay
Butere	Kakamega
Ahero	Kisumu
Kwa Vonza	Kitui
Makutano	Meru
Njoro	Nakuru
Kiminini	Trans Nzoia

Students Owning their Town

The participation of the local community of KwaVonza in the SymbioCity Kenya Programme activities is impressive. This is irrespective of the fact that the people have varying interests and the project is new to them. Representation of the community in the programme's working group is dynamic. It has village elders, chiefs, Community Based Organisations, Non-governmental Organisations,

Faith Based Organisations, sub-county staff, university students, and *bodaboda* (motorcycle taxi) operators, all coming together to discuss matters affecting their town.

In particular, university students, who are the majority in the town, are actively involved in processes and committed to following-up on progress. They are always punctual for meetings and workshops, where they participate actively,

and sometimes even guide the discussions. The students have a good grasp of trending issues and well-developed presentation skills, which make them the lead contributors in the SymbioCity processes. They helped to coin the vision of KwaVonza Town, which is: *"To be a vibrant green and liveable university town"*.

Because of the influence of the students, methods of stakeholder engagements with the working group are varied and progressive. These include face-to-face meetings, site visits, telephone calls, and small group discussions, which are so far effective in keeping the processes on course. From the stakeholder discussions on the challenges facing the town, the Urban Sustainability Review for KwaVonza Town will soon be released.



"Welcome to Kitui County!"



Kwa Vonza Open-air Market

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areas, due to the nature and complexity that is associated with urban areas. SymbioCity has emphasised the need for Kwa Vonza to work collaboratively with the local community and key stakeholders towards developing integrated and inclusive plans for the projected urban challenges.

The programme is organised in to a stakeholders group, a technical working group and steering committee. The stakeholders group has representatives of the local community. The technical working group has middle-level county staff from the departments of physical planning, environment, energy, engineering, water, public health, education, sub-county administration, communication and the Office of the Governor. The steering committee, which is the top decision making organ of the programme, is responsible for policy advice, oversight, support and approval of on-going working group activities.

With this level of organization, there is hope that Kwa Vonza will rise in strength to become a new town that draws the admiration of all, and presents a rich basis for future learning.



A garbage dump site in Kwa Vonza Town

What's Next ?

Kwa Vonza to Speak in Photos



Unhygienic source of water in the outskirts of Kwa Vonza Town

Having decided that images were the best, quickest and most memorable way to demonstrate the challenges and possibilities that they face, Kwa Vonza Town Community got into action. The SymbioCity Kenya Programme team in Kitui County collaborated with SEKU University students to take photographs and use base maps to raise the issues affecting the town. The survey that was carried out between February 22 and 25, helped to build the capacity of the community, and increase their participation in the town's activities.

Enabled by a GPS, four groups of students recorded their observations on land use, bringing out issues such as the existence of unauthorised development, formal versus informal housing, commercial use of land, dumpsites, etc. The teams then will share their findings with residents of the town at a future workshop. The images will help the residents to identify the existing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in their environment and take progressive action.

Look out for the images, and the community analysis in our next issue.

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This newsletter has been put together by the SymbioCity Kenya team. The purpose is to share information with stakeholders on the process and progress of SymbioCity in Kitui County.