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ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION OF KENYA

THE ROLE OF NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS/ RESIDENT ASSOCIATIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS IN URBAN MANAGEMENT

Under the UN Agenda 2030, Sustainable Development Goal 11 on Sustainable Cities and Communities envisages cities that are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The importance of planning of our cities and towns cannot be overemphasized; thriving cities have a vision and follow it through with a framework to develop in an orderly manner. However, rapid urbanization without a base to support it has adversely affected our cities and towns.

Over the last 50 years, Kenya's urban population has grown rapidly from 11.3% to 27.8% in 2021. Currently, Kenya's urban population is estimated to be roughly over 15 million people and growing rapidly. Rapid urbanization has led to increased demand for development and high rates of subdivision in our urban areas. Most of our urban areas do not have efficient zoning regulations leading to disorderly developments.

There are increasing trends to fit many houses and developments into gated areas with homes being built close together. This has resulted in conflicts within the developments including: encroachment, noise pollution, land use incompatibility, inappropriate use of buildings, blocked views among others. This has necessitated the formation of Neighborhood Associations also called Resident Associations, which are voluntary organized groups formed at neighborhood level and are aimed to address local issues.

Neighborhood Associations are guided by the Societies Act, 1968 which guides registration and outlines the mandate of societies. However, it is noted that most of these resident associations in Kenya are not properly registered. Some of the registered Associations in Kenya include Kilimani Project Foundation, Runda Association, Karen and Langata District Association and the Eastleigh Business District Association.

Under the Kenya Alliance of Residents Associations (KARA)- the umbrella body representing the voice of different neighborhood associations, the associations have been able to achieve their mandate. Effective development control is noted in areas with functional resident associations with strengthened links between the residents and policy makers. This prompted adoption of the "Nyumba Kumi Initiative" by the Kenyan Government which aimed at addressing issues at local level.

Despite their achievements and success, there is no statute in Kenya that recognizes the role of the associations as urban managers. Due to lack of strong and legal engagement mechanisms, Resident Associations and the Nairobi City County Government developed the Nairobi City



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County Community and Neighborhood Engagement Act, 2016 under KARA. Kiambu County also recognized the importance of Residential Associations and enacted the Kiambu County Community and Neighborhood Associations Promotion of Participation and Engagement Act, 2016.

Resident Associations are key tools to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 11 and to urban governance and management within our urban areas. They safeguard the price of dignity, safety and freedom through internal vigilance and public participation to ensure public power is not misused by anyone, especially by the government. They are effective avenues to enforce interests in land use planning and compatibility through enforcement of Physical Planning Zoning Laws and implementation of local plans. They assist in quality control through provision of professional consultancy, vetting of designs and control of noise and environmental pollution.

All citizens have the right to adequate access to utilities and services. Urban management seeks to ensure equal distribution of utilities and services across the country. Resident associations have been able to achieve effective public participation and inclusivity in provision of solutions and services within neighborhoods. They ensure good use and maintenance of available infrastructure.

In addition, resident associations have created prospects for business growth. With proper infrastructure put in place, they have channeled opportunities in urban areas through identification of businesses best suited for different locations offering employment opportunities to the youth.

The AAK recognizes the importance of the resident associations and implores their achievement in urban management. The incoming governments; both at National and County levels, should form a collaborative strategy to partner with resident associations within all counties, and ensure proper and effective urban development is achieved across the country.

We challenge all County Governments to develop and implement well thought-out County Spatial Plans. This will stem ad hoc development and provide more clarity for citizens on zoning and land use. The provision of quality public spaces should be a priority for all counties. We call upon our incoming leadership at counties to commit to addressing this issue as a basis for propelling better organized, sustainable, safe, resilient, and healthy living environments in Kenya.