THE ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION OF KENYA

AAK | PROMOTING EXCELLENCE IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Is that Building Safe?

A Report of the Mulika Mjengo Project by AAK

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INTRODUCTION

By 2030, half of Kenya's population is expected to reside in urban areas (UN-Habitat, 2023), yet these areas continue to grapple with widespread informal settlements, inadequate housing, poor water and sanitation infrastructure, congestion, and limited services. A 2020 study by the National Construction Authority (NCA) identified the main causes of building collapses in Kenya, including poor workmanship, substandard materials, non-compliance with regulations, inadequate structural design, and poor maintenance[1]. This is exacerbated by the fact that approximately 80% of developments proceed without the involvement of qualified professionals[2]. Recognizing the urgent need for safer and healthier buildings, AAK has prioritized research and advocacy in the built environment.

The association has conducted the Je, Una Mjengo? Campaign annually since 2017 to promote safe construction practices and encourage professional engagement in the building processes. In 2023 and 2024, the campaign incorporated the Mulika Mjengo Initiative through funding from the Kenya Community Development Project (KCDF). This initiative created an anonymous public reporting platform for identifying illegal and unsafe buildings in Nairobi County. Through social media, mainstream media, public forums, clinics, and roadshows, Mulika Mjengo has heightened public education on construction standards and safety.

AAK Je, Una Mjengo? Campaign in 2018

PROJECT TEAM

The project was led by a core team of three experts: Bernard Segecha, an architect, Nashon Tambo, an engineer, and Mercy Ateka an urban planner, supported by Alex Otieno, the project assistant who managed daily operations. Additional specialists, including landscape architects and environmental design consultants, were brought in as needed to provide expertise in specific areas.

All eight professions of AAK were involved in the public awareness clinics and roadshows to educate the public on safe and sustainable construction practices, highlight their roles in the construction process, and promote compliance with building regulations. The experts engaged in the project included:

8

All **eight professions of AAK** were involved in the public awareness clinics and roadshows to educate the public on safe and sustainable construction practices, highlight their roles in the construction process, and promote compliance with building regulations.

[1] NCA. (2020). Research on Failure and Collapse of Buildings in Kenya. Nairobi, Kenya: NCA.
[2] AAK. (2023). Status of the Built Environment Report 2023. Nairobi, Kenya: Architectural Association of Kenya.

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The experts engaged in the project

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project's main objective was to create a public awareness platform for identifying, investigating, and escalating unsafe buildings. The specific objectives were:

1. **Sensitize the public and create awareness of unsafe buildings.**
2. **Identify and investigate poorly constructed buildings in Nairobi County.**
3. **Engage and follow up with the construction authorities to take the most suitable course of action.**
4. **Hold awareness clinics to sensitize the public to the role and importance of built environment professionals.**

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

1. Sensitizing the Public and Creating Awareness of Unsafe Buildings

AAK carried out extensive public awareness campaigns on unsafe buildings through mainstream media channels such as TV, radio, and print, ensuring broad outreach across Nairobi County. These were done through news stories, interviews, press statements, opinion editorials, and press conferences. Additionally, AAK developed articles through Mulika Mjengo Mondays and Friday Focus on social media platforms—including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, and YouTube—where insights on various construction-related topics were shared to raise awareness on construction safety, building regulations, and best practices. These initiatives allowed AAK to engage directly with the public, fostering informed discussions on the importance of safe building practices, sustainable construction, and the role of professionals in ensuring quality standards.

AAK also leveraged partnerships with resident associations such as the Kenya Alliance of Resident Associations (KARA), Kilimani Project Foundation (KPF), Raphta Road Residents Association, Parklands Residents Association, among others, to further disseminate the information on safe and healthy construction and promote community-driven development initiatives. In partnership with KARA, AAK carried out a Citizens' Survey to identify residents' challenges, opportunities, and aspirations, providing valuable insights to inform planning reforms, foster sustainable urban growth, and shape more responsive development policies. Of the 957 residents who participated, 73% indicated widespread dissatisfaction with the current state of their built environment.

AAK President on KTN News

AAK Immediate Past President on Jeff Koinange Live

Raphta Road public participation forum

A key concern among residents was the difficulty in addressing development-related grievances, with 73% expressing frustration over the lack of responsiveness from regulatory bodies, particularly county governments and environmental authorities. Public participation, meant to ensure inclusivity, often fell short, with 68% citing poor publicity and limited access to project details. Corruption further undermined trust, as 59% of respondents attributed zoning violations to bribery, while 41% felt unsafe due to the weak enforcement of building regulations. Additionally, 49% struggled with unclear complaint channels, reinforcing a sense of helplessness, as 64% believe existing laws favor developers over communities.

Demonstrations against unplanned development

957

Number of residents who participated in the Citizen's Survey in partnership with KARA

KEY CONCERNS

73% decry frustration over the lack of responsiveness from regulatory bodies

68% complained of poor publicity and limited access to project details

59% attributed zoning violations to bribery

49% struggled with unclear complaint channels

64% believe existing laws favor developers over communities

2. Identifying and Investigating Poorly Constructed Buildings in Nairobi County

Since its launch, the Mulika Mjengo Initiative received 52 project reports, with the majority submitted through the Mulika Mjengo portal. Other complaints were received through email, social media, and WhatsApp. Out of the complaints received, the project team inspected 26 reported sites within Nairobi County, as the funding was limited to Nairobi County only. However, complaints were also received from other counties, including Kiambu, Uasin Gishu, Bungoma, and Machakos, highlighting the widespread concern over unsafe buildings and the need to expand the initiative's reach to ensure improved construction standards and compliance countrywide. The list and reports of the site visits have been provided in the appendices.

Site visit in Uthiru

Site visit in Tassia

26 Number of sites in Nairobi County inspected

Site visit along Kirichwa River

Site visit in Arboretum

3. Engaging and following up with the Construction Authorities to take the Most Suitable Course of Action

As part of its follow-up on the site inspections, AAK shared inspection reports with regulatory authorities, including the National Construction Authority (NCA), the National Building Inspectorate (NBI), and the Nairobi City County Government, which oversee construction processes. Additionally, AAK engaged key regulators, such as the Board of Registration for Architects and Quantity Surveyors (BORAQS) and the Engineers Board of Kenya (EBK), to further uphold professional integrity.

To strengthen its role in construction oversight, AAK successfully applied for inclusion in the Multi-Sectoral Agencies Coordinating Committee (MSACC), a collaborative platform that includes the National Construction Authority (NCA) and the National Building Inspectorate (NBI). AAK's participation in the committee will enhance regulatory coordination, promote greater accountability among developers, and contribute to policy reforms aimed at improving compliance within the construction sector.

Meeting with BORAQS

Meeting with EBK

Meeting with Nairobi Governor, Hon. Johnson Sakaja

Meeting with National Building Inspectorate

Meeting with the National Construction Authority

Presenting at the Chief Justice round table

4. Holding Awareness Clinics to Sensitize the Public on the Role and Importance of Built Environment Professionals

AAK organized four public awareness clinics and a 2-day roadshow where members of the association, alongside other stakeholders, engaged the public on safe and healthy construction practices. These interactive sessions allowed the public to ask questions about the campaign, the initiative's objectives, and professionals' critical role in construction. Information materials such as fliers and posters were distributed to enhance awareness, ensuring key messages reached a wider audience.

Mulika Mjengo Activation in Nairobi CBD

Awareness clinic in Mihang'o

Roadshow in Mihang'o

Development control Symposium in Ngong

KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED FROM THE SITE INSPECTIONS

The Mulika Mjengo site visit team conducted inspections of the reported sites to investigate, assess, and verify the legitimacy of the complaints. The inspections revealed several recurring issues, including:

Regulatory Violations

1. Non-compliance with building regulations as required by the various construction statutes, such as the National Building Code and zoning regulations, and exceeded permitted heights. In some cases, developers initiated construction without conducting the legally required and essential community engagement process before project commencement.

2. We observed significant **structural integrity issues** at several inspected sites, including honeycombing and large cracks in some developments. Some of the collapsed developments we visited were located in Uthiru, Kahawa, Shauri Moyo, and Parklands.

Lack of observance of the Building line in Pangani

Beacon to beacon construction in South C

Collapsed slab in Parklands

Honeycombing on an active construction in Kamulu

3. We noted the **absence of a site board** at the entrance of some construction sites. In some instances, they lacked complete information, such as missing approval numbers from the county government, NCA, or NEMA.

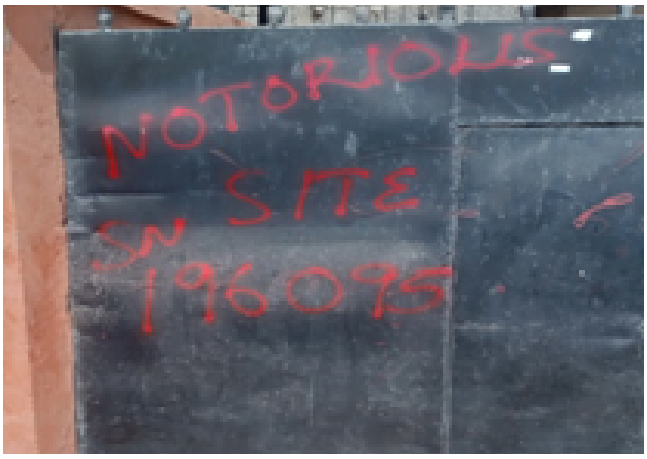
4. Some construction works were **proceeding despite receiving stop-work notices** from relevant authorities. Residents also complained of traffic congestion due to heavy construction trucks, road closures and poor traffic management.

Construction on the road reserve in Tassia, Embakasi

Missing site board in Ridgeways Estate

Stop work notice issued to a project in Westlands

5. At some sites, we observed that the **clerk of works was absent** while construction was ongoing.



Site marked as notorious for non-compliance in Kamulu

6. Workers l**acked Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** or were provided with insufficient equipment. Additionally, we observed missing safety signages, safety netting for arresting debris, scaffolding, and site hoarding.

Workers lacking PPEs in Kilimani

Workers lacking PPEs in Tassia

Environmental Degradation

7. Some sites were located in areas without **adequate stormwater drainage infrastructure,** resulting in flooding of construction sites and adjacent roads, particularly during the rainy season.

8. Discharge of **untreated effluent** onto the road, posing significant health risks to neighboring developments.

Discharge of effluent along Muchai Drive

Release of untreated effluent in Kamulu

9. **Solid waste management** was an issue for some of the sites.

10. According to the citizen's report, 85% of residents indicated **insufficient green spaces** in their neighborhoods, further highlighting the negative impacts of unregulated development.

11. **Illegal construction** on wetlands, playgrounds, public land, and green spaces, and dumping of debris into riparian reserves and green spaces reported in South C, Karen, Kangemi, KALRO, Chaani, and Parklands.

Construction along a wetland in Loresho

Encroachment on a riparian reserve in Kileleshwa

12. Residents in Westlands, Parklands, Highridge, Karen, Kitisuru, and Spring Valley also expressed their concerns about the haphazard tree-cutting in their estates.

Massive tree cutting in Nairobi

Community Concerns

1. **Invasion of privacy** due to high-rise buildings with windows overlooking neighboring properties.

2. Construction **exceeding permitted times** and causing inconvenience to residents. There were reports of construction works ongoing up to the weekends.

3. Demolition and development **without proper approvals** for a change in land use.

4. In one instance, construction workers leaped into a neighbor's compound to escape arrest by county enforcement officers.

5. **Community engagement was notably lacking**, with 57% of respondents stating they had never been consulted about construction in their neighborhoods, while 23% reported rare consultation. Only 17% were occasionally informed, and just 3% experienced frequent communication.

6. **Corruption** emerged as a significant issue, with 59% of respondents attributing zoning violations to bribery.

Complaints from neighbours over invasion of privacy by high-rise buildings

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED DURING THE PROJECT

Some of the challenges encountered by the Mulika Mjengo team in conducting site inspections included:

1. Restricted access to certain construction sites.
2. Security challenges, as AAK lacks the legal mandate to conduct inspections.
3. Limited resources hinder inspection efforts, particularly for sites outside Nairobi County.
4. Lack of action from relevant authorities, even after submitting project reports.
5. Regulatory gaps complicate efforts to advocate for planned development. For instance, developers exploit the absence of required plans, such as Local Physical Development Plans, to undertake unregulated construction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen Development Control

The preparation and implementation of Local Physical Development Plans (LPDPs) should be prioritized to guide approvals and construction, ensuring orderly development with well-designated green spaces and preventing haphazard zoning changes. Effective development control is critical to ensuring safe, well-planned urban growth. There is an urgent need to strengthen enforcement mechanisms for planning regulations and implement the National Building Code 2024, which provides a legally binding framework for construction standards. Additionally.

2. County Physical and Land Use Planning Consultative Forums (CPLUCF)

Section 14(3) of the Physical and Land Use Planning Act, 2019 provides for the establishment of County Physical and Land Use Planning Consultative Forums (CPLUCF). Despite the legal provision, most counties have not actualized this provision. The Council of Governors (CoG) should be urged to facilitate the full operationalization of these forums across all counties. The CPLUCFs are critical platforms for multi-stakeholder engagement and would serve as foundational pillars in promoting sustainable and well-coordinated development within the built environment sector.

3. Enhance Transparency in Construction Permits

A unified, digitalized system for construction permit approvals should be implemented across all counties to enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability. The system should facilitate seamless multi-agency collaboration and enable real-time development tracking throughout the project lifecycle. This will help curb corruption, streamline approvals, and ensure strict adherence to building and planning regulations. Additionally, all approvals must align with LPDPs to promote orderly urban growth, prevent haphazard zoning changes, and safeguard sustainable development.

4. Promote Healthy and Safe Housing

Government agencies and county governments should incorporate healthy housing standards into approval and inspection processes, ensuring compliance from project inception to completion. Additionally, awareness campaigns on sick building syndrome and indoor environmental quality should be prioritized.

5. Encourage Sustainable Building Practices

Robust promotion of green building practices will encourage environmentally responsible construction. By emphasizing resource-efficient designs, energy consumption can be reduced significantly and the carbon footprint of buildings can be minimized.

6. Address Legal and Institutional Gaps

Finalizing and enacting the Built Environment Bill will provide clear regulatory guidelines for the construction sector. Additionally, legally enforceable zoning and building plans should be developed to support orderly urban growth.

7. Increase Public Awareness and Engagement

Public awareness is key to fostering safer and more sustainable urban development. Communities must be educated on their rights and responsibilities within the built environment, ensuring they understand zoning laws, building regulations, and the role of professionals in construction. This knowledge will empower residents to actively participate in development decisions and advocate for safer living environments.

Additionally, enhancing public participation in planning and approval processes will promote transparency, accountability, and community-driven development decisions that align with long-term urban sustainability goals.

8. Enhance Timely and impactful action from Local Authorities

A comprehensive accountability and follow-up system should be established, tracking submitted reports with clear timelines, ensuring transparency, and allowing both authorities and stakeholders to monitor progress. Public disclosure of the status of projects would further incentivize authorities to act promptly, while strengthening citizen oversight through community forums and feedback mechanisms would hold them accountable. Additionally, introducing legal consequences for authorities that fail to respond within a reasonable timeframe would reinforce the urgency for action and improve overall compliance.

CONCLUSION

The challenges of unsafe and substandard construction are widespread across Nairobi, cutting across all income levels. Poor planning and weak enforcement have contributed to haphazard development, compromising safety, health, and the overall quality of life. Despite efforts at public engagement, many residents feel sidelined, with widespread dissatisfaction about the state of the built environment.

To mitigate this, Nairobi must adopt an inclusive and integrated approach to planning and development—one that values professional input, enforces regulations, and actively incorporates community voices. Without LPDPs, Nairobi will remain trapped in an urban conundrum, unable to deliver orderly, resilient, and people-centered growth.

Poor planning and weak enforcement have contributed to haphazard development, compromising safety, health, and the overall quality of life.

REFERENCES

AAK. (2023). Status of the Built Environment Report 2023. Nairobi, Kenya: Architectural Association of Kenya.

NCA. (2020). Research on Failure and Collapse of Buildings in Kenya. Nairobi, Kenya: NCA.

UN-Habitat. (2023). Country Brief: Kenya. Nairobi, Kenya: UN-Habitat.

APPENDICES

No.	AREA	LOCATION	DATE INSPECTED	LINK TO REPORT
1	South C – Sungura Road	link	17.11.2023	Site Visit Report
2	Ngong Road Footbridge	N/A	17.11.2023	Site Visit Report
3	Lower Kabete Dam	link	02.02.2024	Site Visit Report
4	Embakasi – Standard Drive	link	23.02.2024	Site Visit Report
5	Westlands – Church Road	link	23.02.2024	Site Visit Report
6	Kilimani – Aboretum Drive	link	05.04.2024	Site Visit Report
7	Westlands – School Lane	N/A	05.04.2024	Site Visit Report
8	Ruai, Mihang'o	link	19.07.2024	Site Visit Report
9	South B – Daidai Road	link	19.07.2024	Site Visit Report
10	Roysambu – Ridgeways Estate	link	30.08.2024	Site Visit Report
11	Uhuru market – off Jogoo Road	link	30.08.2024	Site Visit Report
12	Shauri Moyo - Kamukunji	N/A	13.09.2024	Site Visit Report
13	Kamulu	link	20.09.2024	Site Visit Report
14	Kileleshwa – off Oloitok-tok Road	link	27.09.2024	Site Visit Report
15	Loresho – off Loresho ridge	link	27.09.2024	Site Visit Report
16	Kilimani – along Mbaazi Road	link	04.10.2024	Site Visit Report
17	Kileleshwa – off Suguta Road	link	04.10.2024	Site Visit Report
18	Pangani Estate	link	04.10.2024	Site Visit Report
19	Loresho – off Waiyaki Way	link	31.01.2025	Site Visit Report
20	Parklands – 4th Parklands Avenue	link	07.02.2025	Site Visit Report
21	Embakasi – Tel Aviv Estate	link	07.02.2025	Site Visit Report
22	Intersection of 3rd Park-lands Avenue and Mpaka Road	link	12.02.2025	Site Visit Report
23	Lavington – off James Gichuru Road	link	14.02.2025	Site Visit Report
24	Kileleshwa – behind the Marquis and Adornhomes Apartments	link	14.02.2025	Site Visit Report
25	City Park Estate	link	06.03.2025	Site Visit Report
26	Parklands – 4th Parklands Avenue	link	06.03.2025	Site Visit Report

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