

Paradox in Emali Town: *Destroyed Livelihoods in the Name of Development*

History: Emali town seats at the border of Makueni and Kajiado Counties. It has a long history, having started as a market point in the late 1800s. Then, the market was mainly for barter trade among the two communities –Maasai and Kamba- in the adjacent hinterlands. The areas' central location and flat topography contributed to the location being chosen ideal for doing business. The different communities traded in various commodities essential for survival mainly animal hides, grains and livestock. Traditionally the Kamba community in Makueni County were mainly farmers while the Maasai community were largely pastoralist; this in itself provided a base for exchange (trade) of farm produces and animals/ livestock.

The construction of the Mombasa – Uganda Railway in early 1900s and establishment of a stopover at Emali contributed positively to the growth of the town. Likewise, the opening of the Mombasa – Nairobi Highway in the early 1950s boosted the trading node as many road users were able to interact with the town. The town that occupies a total area of 300 square kilometres, is located along the Mombasa – Nairobi highway, about 120 km from Nairobi and 350 km from (and to) Mombasa. It is also a gateway to both Loitokitok (Kajiado County, and subsequently Tanzania) and Wote (Makueni County Headquarters). The towns strategic location has made it a vibrant business node well known for its '24 hours' grocery trade of onions, tomatoes, water melons and garlic, transit and roasted meat stopover and traditional Friday's market day (popular with the business and rural folks). The town's development record has in turn made a trickle-down effect as evidenced by the improved livelihood in the hinterlands.



Emali Town: before the demolitions @ Sebastian Kituku

Early Morning Demolitions: Like many urban areas in Kenya Emali had been developing without a clear development framework or plan. This unguided development led to a poorly planned trading centre though bustling with activities, ill serviced with basic infrastructures and services. Through corruption and patronage grabbing of public land has occurred in the town leading to mushrooming of informal housing and commercial units within the centre. Over time business people had been allocated and developed on land earmarked public utilities –like bus park- by the last local authorities, as well as let to encroach on road reserves within the town. Though booming with activities in the last 3 decades activities such as parking of lorries, open air market –especially of Friday, retail businesses of cereals, hardwares and mini supermarkets have always competed for space in the central part of the town (area initially earmarked for a bus park). On a rainy day the same area is flooded due to the lack of storm water drains. The space contestation in this emerging urban area has been quite evident.



'Demolitions in the name of development' @ Sebastian Kituku

On 15th May 2014, Emali town woke up to the rolling sound of bulldozers. The focus of demolition was the central market and bus stage in an attempt to recover the road reserve and bus park space. Overtime both permanent and temporary structures had established operated by numerous small operators and sustained by a highly vibrant network of suppliers and middlemen. The demolitions at Emali, as was claimed, was to pave way for development of town infrastructure and services, including storm water drainage, bus park and market to benefit the residents.



Emali Town: After the demolitions @ Sebastian Kituku

The demolition of Emali has left very bitter feeling over the loss of properties and livelihoods. Many questions came to the fore as concerns the demolitions. Can planning and development be justified when it results into destruction of livelihoods? Between planning and implementation –demolition- what should come first? Needless to say, the demolitions were executed using a survey plan drawn in the year 1990 by the former County Council of Makueni now the County Government of Makueni. The town is yet to have a town plan. Could the process have been negotiated –including all the stakeholders? Could an alternative place have been found for temporary relocation? Who will compensate the lost properties and livelihoods of the victims? What happens to the many youth and women who lost their merchandize and only means of employment? What becomes of the towns’ economy? The County leadership of Makueni is fixed on turning Emali into a clean modern town. They hope to attract investors and have Emali compete with the envisaged Konza techno-city. What about the local base? The small traders, kiosks, fabricators, grain and vegetable dealers are the reality of Emali. Is County determined to uplift or burry them in the name of development?

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