

Map Kibera and Regynnah's empowerment



by Regynnah Awino and
Map Kibera

Map Kibera – a partnership between local youth, non-governmental organizations and several United Nations agencies including UNICEF – is based in Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya. It engages young people, particularly young women and girls, in the participatory digital mapping of risks and vulnerabilities in their community, which is Africa's largest slum. Through this process, young people gain new awareness about their surroundings, empowering them to amplify their voices on critical issues. The project is helping identify safe and unsafe physical spaces, as well as raising awareness and offering advocacy opportunities around the issues of HIV and AIDS and other vulnerabilities.

Map Kibera involves five steps:

- *Stakeholder meetings:* Implementers consider issues of gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS or related topics to identify the most appropriate map data to collect.
- *Map data collection:* Thirteen young mappers from the community use global positioning system (GPS) devices and open source software to create a map of safe and dangerous areas; then the data is uploaded to OpenStreetMap.

- *Community consultations:* Using printed maps, tracing paper and coloured pens, the mappers conduct discussions with girls and young women about safety and vulnerability, leading to better situational awareness for both girls and planners.
- *Narrative media:* Young people from the community use videos, photos and audio to create short narratives about the issues they face, which are then interwoven into the map narrative.
- *Advocacy:* Quantitative and qualitative data are used for advocacy with local governments, community leaders and other decision-makers to obtain better services and protection for young people.

Results from the mapping process will be used to identify physical and psychological areas of risk or vulnerability and patterns of risk perception. The information will be publicly owned and available, helping keep grass-roots advocates and policy planners more accountable to young people in the community.

Regynnah, one of the mappers, provides below an account of her involvement in the project.

Regynnah's story

I am Regynnah Awino, a 22-year-old from Kibera. My father died when I was a little child, leaving my mother to raise a family of six. Three of my sisters died. Growing up as a young girl in Kibera was a challenge. I did my fourth form in 2007, and since then I have not been able to pursue further education because my family cannot afford the fees. My mother is a businesswoman, and the little money she gets goes to sustain us. I always had aspirations to become a journalist.

Until November 2009, when Map Kibera came about, I used to stay at home doing casual jobs to help out. Now I am one of a group of 13 who have been trained to use GPS devices and upload data to the Internet. Mapping has been educational, fun and challenging. In the field I learned many things, though the work could also be a challenge due to unfavourable weather conditions or a poor response from interviewees. Map Kibera has really helped my people know what we have in our community and how to make use of and improve what is available. We were able to collect information on all the schools, toilets, shops, kiosks, health centres and street lights, producing a complete and detailed map.

We spend a week on every mapping theme and then another week creating awareness and helping other people better understand mapping's benefits and impact. For example, one of the most sensitive themes is girls' security. At meetings with a community girls' group called Binti Pamoka (Daughters United), which helps young girls deal with gender-based violence, I helped lead a discussion of what we found on the map, as well as the places they felt were safe or dangerous. Through this we gained not only local knowledge, but also excitement about the project, because we found that the community could respond positively.



To me, this is a lifetime achievement. So many people are impressed with what the group is doing, and I think it will continue to build maps for the community in the future.

The training and the whole process of mapping have changed me. For example, I used to be very shy and afraid of speaking in public, but now I feel much more confident and well informed. Mapping Kibera also allows me to meet people from all walks of life – different people every day. I believe that if by the grace of God I am able to fulfil my dreams, I will not leave Kibera but will stay and make it a better place to live.