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First Fridays: The Peaceful Side of the Street
Nairobi, Kenya

Background and Problem Statement:

Violence has dominated the lives of Nairobi slum dwellers for decades, thereby exposing them to much suffering, harm, and loss of lives and property. There are approximately 2.5 million slum dwellers in about 200 settlements in Nairobi representing 60% of the city's population and occupying just 6% of the land. Nairobi's informal housing areas such as Mathare tend to occupy marginal lands (flood plains, valleys, wetlands, waste dumps); be sited along railway tracks; display lack infrastructure and facilities; have makeshift, substandard structures; are overcrowded; have inadequate potable water; lack proper sanitary facilities; and have an absence of title and insecurity of tenure. Mathare is the second largest slum in Nairobi, "built" over many years on top of a garbage dump. It is home to 800,000 residents. It is very densely populated with most people living in shacks made of corrugated iron, on narrow unimproved streets, with all houses bordering one another very closely. The environment is far from safe. With no streetlights, the evenings and nights are dark and anyone who walks alone runs the risk of being robbed or assaulted. By late evening, doors leading to most homes are closed and locked and people can neither enter nor exit their confines. Few people living outside Mathare visit the place.

Mathare settlement represents a classic example of a slum which has become a poster child of poverty, underdevelopment and other manifestations of human suffering such as rampant violence. Economic deprivation together with ethno-political competition are seen as possible factors that predispose residents to various forms of violence and which form the basis of this project. Youth engage in risky transactional activities in order to earn a livelihood. Competition for scarce economic resources has sometimes led to bloodletting and cases of violence in the slum. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs News Agency (IRIN) reported that two gangs fought for three days in Mathare on 26 November 2006. Eight people were reported to have died and at least 9,000 people displaced, after a row over control of a lucrative illicit brewing market in the slum. Government forces failed to restore calm between the 'Mungiki' and 'Taliban' gangs. Houses were set on fire and people fled, forced to carry their personal possessions and camp at the side of the main road nearby. The youths join these gangs because they perceive their participation as a quick means of getting money in an increasingly competitive society.⁴ The persistence of violence in the slum has an impact on perpetuation of poverty and hence the need to look at the root causes of such severe deprivations.

Project Description:

The **First Fridays Project** is a community outreach program that aims to celebrate and model a safe and friendly community experience, while providing residents with access to much-needed services. It is an immersive, self-reliance promoting, cultural experience to be held on the first Friday of each month in June, July, and August 2019. The program is based on the working hypothesis that enabling residents to experience a recurring safe, friendly and empowering environment will build hope, establish a sense of security, and develop more confidence among those who participate in their own ability to improve their lives and be an inspiration to work together. The project will carefully vet partners and resident vendors, providing them with a platform to reach the community. Sports and dance will be used as a means to draw the crowd. The project will leverage existing partner organizations that offer free social, economic and health services to low-resource settings; thus, bridging the gap between supply and much-needed demand. The set up will be an open day approach, allowing free interaction among residents, suppliers, partners, and leaders. The governing principles for this project are self-reliance and participation.

Proposed Activities and Timeline:

Pre-program phase:

Week 1: Project team recruitment and training, relationship building

Recruit: As project leader, I will recruit a local project team of six local individuals to coordinate and lead all activities. Priority skill areas to consider will be community mobilization, data management, critical thinking, conflict resolution and negotiation. I will institute a volunteer oversight team comprised of local leaders to guide the core team.

Train: I will lead a two-day workshop to train the team on a transformative leadership module, adopted from MasterCard Foundation and Center for Intercultural Leadership. We will sanction a work plan and draw accountability measures. The team leader, who shall be the face of the project and will be a resident of Mathare, will receive supplemental support on how to manage a performing team. I will offer infield coaching throughout the project duration and remote mentorship post my participation.

Building Partnerships: The team will embark on a one-week relationship building exercise with local leaders, business associations, interest groups and members of the community. Each touch point will be aimed at informing, seeking support and onboarding each contact person.

Week 2: Logistical planning and marketing

First Fridays activities will be held at a communal playing ground, Mcedo Grounds in Mathare 4B, where several similar kinds of less well coordinated activities have been held before. The difference between this and such prior activities is that this initiative will be much better planned, organized, and focused on community engagement. As it will be recurring, the community will know that is not a “one-off” event. The project team will use social media; [Slum Voices Radio](#) blurbs, low-cost flyers and word-of-mouth methods to advertise **First Fridays**. Planning for the venue layout, security, invitations, supplies and post-event cleanup will take place well in advance so that all contingencies are accounted for well ahead of time. Assessment and feedback from the first event will be used to improve the second and third ones.

Week 3: Purchases and final planning

The team shall purchase sports equipment, clean up the venue and get ready for the D-Day. We will recruit 28 volunteers for a football match, including a referee.

Main program phase: (Repeat on monthly cycle)

Week 4: First Friday of the month

- Launch **First Fridays** Project with a soccer match
- Kick-off open market (residential vendors sell pre-approved merchandise at a discount)
- Offer an inspiring address from a recognized community leader
- Volunteers open up song and dance session
- Introduce service providers (For launch date – recruitment firm, free eye clinic) open to all

Sustainability and Expected Outcomes:

The project is aimed at promoting a peaceful coexistence among members of this much challenged community. All activities will be led and coordinated by residents of the Mathare slum. The project team will be comprised of volunteers I have worked with previously. The sustainability of this project largely depends on the training element; I will carefully work to develop in-house capacity to manage the team and coordinate all project activities beyond my participation. **First Fridays will continue running** by offering inter-village incentives for participation, broadcasting performance milestones and using local project ambassadors. Our partnership with local leaders will offer public endorsements and good will for the project. The success of this project will lay the groundwork for a **First Fridays** culture and community experience that may spread to other slums. Effectiveness of the project shall be assessed based on the number of attendees, participating vendors, stakeholders involved, variety of services provided to residents, and the social cohesion that is anticipated to proceed these activities. Empowering the community within the environment of an established slum area in enhancing its quality of life may be seen as sparking a movement that will encourage slum residents to address community violence with a sense of resolve.