

## GOETHE-INSTITUT NAIROBI

The Goethe-Institut is the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany with a presence currently in some 92 countries, often in multiple cities in the same country. The Goethe-Institut Kenya, founded in 1963 and located in Nairobi's city centre, covers the entire scope of functions of the Goethe-Institut. The cultural program holds close to 150 events annually in all genres of art, cultural education, library cooperation and discourse. The spectrum ranges from high culture to pop culture, from specialist, expert events to events for the general public. The often multilateral projects emanate from the Kenyan cultural scene and are often oriented towards the international academic scene and the global art circuit.

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[info@nairobi.goethe.org](mailto:info@nairobi.goethe.org)

## KÖLN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF DESIGN

KISD is one of the most renowned design schools in Germany. The approach at KISD is to understand design as a complex process and a multi-dimensional discourse. Therefore, students at KISD study outside traditional design disciplines. Furthermore, KISD offers opportunities for project-orientated learning and for working within international teams. Because of the special focal point on networked thinking and action, KISD naturally concentrates on cooperation and research projects with partners from business, science and industry.

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## THE UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI, KENYA

The University of Nairobi, which admitted its first students in 1956, started as the Royal Technical College, Nairobi. Later renamed University College it offered University of London degrees until 1966.

Its growth over time has been phenomenal, with six (6) campus colleges spread across the city of Nairobi. The aspirations of the university are not only being met through provision of quality education and training, its innovative parallel degree programmes continually strive to create an unparalleled environment of research and academic excellence.

<http://www.uonbi.ac.ke/>



Technische Hochschule  
Köln  
University of Applied Sciences Cologne



### EDITORS / AUTHORS

#### Köln International School of Design (KISD)

Philipp Heidkamp  
Heiner Jacob  
Lisa Janßen  
Jessica Stihl

#### University of Nairobi (UON)

Kigara Kamweru  
Paul Mpingu

#### Goethe-Institut Nairobi

Johannes Hossfeld  
Marie Güsewell  
Mbugua wa-Mungai  
Peter Wafula  
Alfred Omenya

#### Musashino Art University Tokyo

Tadanori Nagasawa  
Hiroshi Imaizumi

#### Shih-Chien University SCID Taipei

Wan-Ru Chou

#### Students KISD / UON

Myra Chemmei  
Jochen Edling  
Melanie Giza  
Eric Ologi Juma  
Menza Amani Katana  
Kristina Kelava  
Brian Mumo Kianga  
Josef Kril  
Bob Muhia Njoroge  
James Kanyi Njoroge  
Tabitha Nzilani Kilungya  
Dancan Omondi Odhiambo  
Mathilda Oluoch  
Peter Ouma Otieno  
Gurmukh Panesar  
Marie-Helen Scheid  
Ulf Seißen Schmidt  
André Sheyidin  
Louise Smith  
Ellen Sturm  
Nina Werner

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# LEARNING FROM NAIROBI MOBILITY

cultural library

GOETHE-INSTITUT NAIROBI / KÖLN INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF DESIGN / UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI



Cultural Library is a series of projects, a collaboration of international research partners investigating everyday habits and rituals and the use of products and spaces associated with them. The current Cultural Library project MOBILITY is a collaboration between 20 students from Cologne and Nairobi, three international research partners and experts from various disciplines (design, architecture, city planning). The results, and the manner in which they are presented in this book, show, yet again, the problem-solving potential that design has, due to its interdisciplinary approach.

By asking the relevant questions (»what are the decisive factors that shape the urban space in the centre of Nairobi?« or »what opportunities does current information technology offer to improve the situation of the jobseekers who gather every day at certain spots in the city?«) and also through details that enable us to get a handle on complex interdependencies (»what can sukuma-wiki, a staple Kenyan vegetable, tell us about mobility structures?«), those taking part in the project and the project authors have sketched out both the relevant issues and opportunities for intervention with regards to the theme of mobility at the micro- as well as at the macro level.

Developing finished product solutions is not the main thrust of this project; rather it is about the aspects of transformation and interaction: how can the collaboratively gained knowledge be reworked to make it useful, to start a discourse and, above all, to put intercultural differences to good use. The title Learning from Nairobi clearly reflects this. This book presents both the results and the nature of this German-Kenyan collaboration, which was based on reconsidering existing solutions and developing new ideas. »Moments of interaction« – not only intercultural, but also interdisciplinary – are visualised in this book in a lively and engaging manner.

We hope that we can pique the readers' interest in understanding the interdependencies and in finding out about the different ways of looking at the issues. Readers will be invited to join the discussion and ask questions. By providing links to the project's website [culturallibrary.com](http://culturallibrary.com) with further information on themes, places and cultural dimensions, we will show the wider context regarding the questions and the snapshots illustrated in the book.



# LEARNING FROM NAIROBI MOBILITY

# 03.5 MOVEMENT OF GOODS

MARIE HELEN SCHEID / TABITHA NZILANI / NINA WERNER

- #33 WHICH ASPECTS OF THE DESIGN OF MEANS OF TRANSPORT ARE BASED ON THE IDENTITY OF SPECIFIC ETHNIC GROUPS?
- #25 IF A CRUCIAL NUMBER OF PERSONS ENGAGE IN AN ACTIVITY (EG TRADING) THAT IS CLAIMED TO BE ILLEGAL, HOW CAN ILLEGALITY BE (RE)DEFINED?
- #25 WHICH PRECONDITIONS ARE NECESSARY TO SUCCESSFULLY TRADE ON A MARKET FOR THE VARIOUS PEOPLE ENGAGED IN THE TRADE?
- #27 WHICH FACTORS, SUCH AS BEHAVIOUR, CLOTHING AND APPEARANCE ENGENDER TRUST IN A TRADING SITUATION ON A MARKET?
- #30 WHAT OPPORTUNITIES DOES A CARRIER HAVE AFTER QUITTING HIS JOB BECAUSE OF BACK PAIN?
- #28 WHAT COULD A LANDOWNER DO TO COOPERATE WITH INFORMAL FARMERS AND WHAT WOULD BE THE BENEFITS TO HIM?
- #29 HOW WOULD THE ECONOMY BE AFFECTED BY ALSO ENABLING WOMEN TO TRADE IN MORE VALUABLE PRODUCTS AND WHAT WOULD BE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR MALE TRADERS?
- #32 WHAT WOULD A STREET VENDOR NEED TO PREPARE SUKUMA-WIKI-PRODUCTS TO GO DIRECTLY ON THE MARKET AND WHICH OTHER STAKEHOLDERS COULD BE INVOLVED?
- #32 WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE DISTRIBUTION PROCESS OF SUKUMA-WIKI IF THESE ACTIVITIES WERE AUTOMATED – AND HOW FAR COULD THIS BE AUTOMATED?
- #32 WHAT WOULD BE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR PEOPLE WHO TAKE PART IN THE DISTRIBUTION PROCESS OF SUKUMA-WIKI, IF THIS DISTRIBUTING ACTIVITY WAS CARRIED OUT BY LARGE BUSINESSES?
- #31 WHY DO SO MANY PEOPLE NOT ONLY BUY SUKUMA-WIKI, BUT ARE ALSO INVOLVED IN GROWING, DISTRIBUTING AND SELLING IT? WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO PEOPLE WORKING IN THE SERVICE SECTOR RELATED TO THE DISTRIBUTION AND SELLING OF SUKUMA-WIKI, IF THE SUPERMARKETS IN NAIROBI USED THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY, LIKE SELF-SCANNING CHECKOUTS?
- #33 WHICH PRECONDITIONS IN A CITY LIKE NAIROBI FAVOUR URBAN FARMING?
- #33 HOW DOES INFORMAL FARMING AFFECT THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF THE CITY?
- #33 WHY DOES MICHELLE OBAMA PLANT SUKUMA-WIKI?





# FOLLOWING THE PATH OF SUKUMA WIKI

by Marie-Helen Scheid



TRAFFIC JAM

»In cities in the developing world the provision of urban public transport is often a complex amalgam that links formal and informal transport in a context of extremely rapid urbanisation. Nairobi is typical in this regard.«<sup>1</sup>

»Its infrastructure has not been able to cope with this increase, resulting in the current conditions in transportation and housing. The city roads also experience traffic jams at peak hours leading to passengers wasting a lot of time. This is exacerbated by the neoliberal attitude towards the market, a lack of governmental support and over-reliance on road networks for both public and private transport.«<sup>2</sup>

The planning of metropolitan traffic is a vicious circle to which several factors contribute: bureaucratic, political and economic interests (or lack thereof) are tightly entangled, despite many international research projects, a number of detailed master plans and the participants' awareness of the needs of the people.



SUKUMA WIKI

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## SUKUMA WIKI AS A RESEARCH TOPIC

*Sukuma wiki* is a nutritious vegetable rich in vitamins. This foodstuff (kale) came to Kenya in the 1960s. The word *sukuma wiki* is a mix of English and regional Swahili (*sukuma*: ›push‹, *wiki*: ›week‹). So it literally means: ›pushes you through the week‹. The leafy vegetable *sukuma wiki* is a suitable subject that allows us to investigate, take part in and demonstrate a distribution process.

The aim of this study is to follow a product along the supply chain from the farmer, through the middlemen and on to the final consumer, by recording observations and conducting interviews. I see the purpose of the Cultural Library project in focussed observations in the field in order to arrive at an understanding of a complex, larger picture. As in a collage, snapshots eventually lead to a larger picture. But a selective focus carries with itself the danger of seeing things out of perspective. It may happen that we investigate irrelevant subjects, which do not form part of the bigger picture. That is why an essential part of this project has been the co-operation of the German group with the Kenyan students, who, from their point of view, interpreted and commented on signs, gestures etc. of their culture that would otherwise have passed unnoticed by us. Here the necessity for a truly inter-cultural exchange becomes evident. Only through the experience of both cultures and both habitats, can seemingly incomprehensible phenomena be understood, so that ›normal‹ everyday life becomes legible, in the knowledge of ›otherness‹ and a reflection of ›oneself‹.

**Rachel's story Part I****The patchwork at Wakulima Market**

It is 4:30 am, on the way to the market. Wakulima, one of the largest market for vegetables and fruit in Nairobi. Through a fairly lifeless, sleepy inner city, one walks five kilometres to the market, passing the mosque, high-rise buildings, banks, a few newspaper sellers. One of the first merchants is opening his rented space in the wall, like a kiosk, crammed with chains. At a closer inspection, it is no deeper than 20 cm, and can hardly be called a ›room‹. While he lays out his wares he is chatting with a sweet vendor in a wheelchair. A few minibuses, called Matatus, are beginning their day. Otherwise the streets are empty. At this hour of the day there is no smog; the air is remarkably fresh.

It is still dark. In the distance one can see the outlines of the warehouses of the Coffee Board of Kenya, Kawaha House and the National Cereals and Produce Board building. People appear to be drawn in one direction. It is getting busier the closer one gets to the market on the broad, paved street. Most of the plastic bags, pouches, buckets and sacks, cars and carts, are still empty. At this hour, only a few people are coming from the market, packed with merchandise. Men are running along the street; a group of four is pushing an overloaded cart. Their work looks extremely demanding.

Cars are parked where one would expect a pedestrian walkway. Instead, the middle of the road serves as the footpath. Pedestrians and cars share the street, men running with their pushcarts, merging with the motorised traffic.

From the high bridge passing over the street, directly at the entrance to the market, one has a view of the skyline of the city: on one side the downtown part with high-rise buildings, the city centre, the minarets of Jaimee Mosque; on the other side the market. The extent of the place is overwhelming. Countless lamps are spilling their yellow light onto the vast space, illuminating the patchwork of tent roofs, tiles and corrugated steel. It is difficult to distinguish between the makeshift timber or metal stalls and the permanent architecture of the market hall. Trails meander through this space, partly unpaved, crossing each other with no apparent plan. People are moving through this space like ants.



A SHOP IN THE WALL



LIVELY ATMOSPHERE

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**WAKULIMA MARKET – ONE OF NAIROBI'S VIBRANT FOCAL POINTS**

Markets play a major role in this consumption: about 70% of rural households sell some amount of fresh produce, and over 90% buy an average of about Ksh 400 of additional produce every month at markets. In urban areas, nearly 100% of households spend an average of over Ksh 1,000 each per month on market purchases of fresh produce. Total market sales of fresh produce in urban and rural areas of Kenya likely average Ksh 50 billion, or nearly US\$ 700 million per year.<sup>3</sup>

Wakulima Market, also called Marikiti in Swahili, is one of the largest wholesale markets in Nairobi; others are Gikomba, Nyamakima, Kangemi, Kawangware and Toi Market. On these markets agricultural products such as fruits, leaves, roots, tubers and edible gum and tree bark are traded. On most of these markets the breakdown of traditional African products is as beside.

Wakulima Market is the key distribution point for fruit and vegetables in Nairobi, and is thus important for Nairobi's economy. Most of the traders are farmers; others are intermediaries who go from farm to farm and also meet small-scale farmers to collect produce and to bring it to the market in bales. The fresh produce arrives in Nairobi from 47 Kenyan districts as well as Tanzania and Uganda. The majority of this passes through the bottlenecks of wholesale markets such as Wakulima before the produce moves on, in small quantities, to retail markets, kiosks, street vendors, and green-grocers.

**AFRICAN PRODUCTS ON NAIROBI'S FOOD MARKETS**

**17%**  
AFRICAN LEAFY VEGETABLES  
(most dominant)

**12%**  
OTHER VEGETABLES

**10%**  
CEREALS

**7%**  
PULSES

**6%**  
ROOTS AND TUBERS

**5%**  
FRUIT

**2%**  
SPICES

**1%**  
NUTS

**1%**  
GUMS AND RESINS





HUSTLE AND BUSTLE AT THE MARKET

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### Rachel's story Part II

#### Business Woman at Wakulima Market

Rachel Wambui, a lady in her mid-thirties, is on her way to the market, as usual, at 6:30am. She is one of hundreds of intermediaries at this location. Every morning she buys fresh vegetables, such as sukuma wiki (kale), for a high-class Indian restaurant in the well-to-do Westlands of Nairobi. Rachel specialises in sukuma wiki, since others deliver meat, eggs, fruit and beverages to the Indian owner. With determination and dexterity she blazes her trail through the maze of the stalls. With her yellow earrings, pink headband and her fluffy pullover it is easy for me to follow her, trying not to get lost in the crowd.

In this hustle-and-bustle there is no apparent distinction between stalls and alleyways. Everywhere the ground is covered with cloths on which produce is neatly piled, alternating with trampled, squashed vegetable waste. Where there are no awnings keeping the rain off, the ground is muddy. Tomatoes are piled up in wooden crates next to sacks of onions. Corn is sold directly from the pick-up trucks parked in the cramped space, pyramids of cabbages, two metres high, are suddenly blocking the way. Mainly women sit behind their goods, haggling loudly, trying to get the best price. Others rip leaves off corncobs, cut off stalks, and stuff sukuma wiki into bales. Along a low wall, many elderly women are lined up, washing potatoes and yams, exchanging the latest gossip while keeping an eye on potential customers. We are trying to pick our way between a pile of aubergines and bundles of carrots as every last square inch of the ground appears to be used for the display of merchandise. One wrong move and you step into a pile of cabbage. »Be careful, it's food!« cries a vendor angrily. Will all the vegetables be sold within a day?



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### AGRICULTURE IN KENYA: ACQUIRED CULTURAL HERITAGE OR SPRINGBOARD FOR WOMEN?

»Men dominate in marketing high-valued and commercialised exotic crops including fruits and spices. Women dominate in low-value, usually traditional, crops such as leafy vegetables, tubers.«<sup>4</sup>

The majority of the dealers and vendors on the market are female. It is obvious that they are dealing with staple foods and everyday produce. According to a lecture at a symposium for under-utilised food (ICUC)<sup>5</sup> men concentrate on trade in high-value produce. Why is that so? I asked two Kenyan ladies the question: »Would enabling women to trade in more valuable products change the economy, and what would be the consequences for male traders?« They replied that it is better to leave the farming and trading of basic foodstuffs to women. Women in Kenya, they said, take care of the daily feeding of their families, and they are responsible for the food supplies. With their expertise in managing a family in a reliable and resourceful way, they are predestined to carry that expertise over to trading. Men, on the other hand, have different characteristics: they can be seen as risk-takers, unpredictable, even reckless, in search of »high-risk« business with higher returns. This is the gist of a brief conversation, which could not be verified but represents certain perception of gender roles.

On Wakulima Market, for instance, women peel the maize cobs, and one will find men involved in activities such as accountancy or demanding physical labour. Rachel is happy with her job as an intermediary, but she has no family, is flexible and she can afford to finish her day's work at noontime. For her this job is expandable, a potential springboard to extend the trade with agricultural merchandise, for instance either by farming or by reaching a new clientele.

Another advantage women have in dealing with vegetables is their opportunities for networking and making social contacts. These characteristics give them access to other jobs and services in problem-solving and the founding of co-operations.





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### Rachel's story Part III

#### » Don't Give Space! «

Porters, their backs bent double, glide through the melee of Wakulima market. Despite the constant buzz of the place, an audible amalgam of people moving and chatting, after a while one gets to learn the signals of the porters. They produce a sharp hiss, which indicates to those around them that others have to give way to these men with sacks weighing up to 100 kgs. How long can you carry on with such a backbreaking job? A porter comes up the narrow alleyway, hissing, with a strained look on his face. He carries on his shoulders a tall pile of more than 15 empty water bottle crates, altogether over three metres wide. Everything works out fine, and no-one gets hurt. In a split second I have lost track of Rachel. My mistake: I gave way to the man, but here courtesy is not expedient. Courtesy is out of place in this anthill, it produces a tailback behind you leading to a standstill. Bob, my companion behind me, continues to urge me: »Don't give space!« (sic) This is necessary to keep Rachel in sight. On the other hand, it is also a matter of security: if I was not seen as part of Rachel's party we would not get very far. Suspicious looks quickly turn to smiles when they realise I am not a tourist. It is about trust. Interestingly, Rachel mentions that she has been delivering to the Indian restaurant for eight years, and at the end of the week she gets back twice the amount that she has spent. »They know me. I'm a good person. I have lots of friends. You can trust me.« She says proudly. She is reliable, punctual, and anticipates what is missing on the shopping list. »Then I buy this anyway because I know what is needed in the kitchen and what I have delivered the day before.« A minute later she is standing amidst a crowd at a lorry full of cabbage, haggling and gesticulating.



A SHORT CHAT

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### ATOMISED CAPITALISM, SELF-REGULATING SYSTEMS AND TRUST

»Even before the political liberalisation the Moi government, under pressure from donor countries, implemented de-regulation in Kenya's economy. The majority of the state's trade and distribution organisations – stemming from the British colonial economy – were closed and the Kenyan domestic market was opened up to international merchandise. After the people's initial enthusiasm about the new range of consumer products, and after the closing down of corrupt state companies, it became evident that many people had become »economic losers«. Despite remarkable growth rates, the social gap between the poor and the rich continued to widen.«<sup>6</sup> Nothing would work anymore if the people who live and go about their business on the market changed their behaviour, putting themselves first and being constantly on the move. Time is money. Time is about more customers per day, more trade, more sales. Without movement: no job, no money, no profit. But, conversely, this does not imply that one is surrounded by people looking out only for themselves. Rather, this phenomenon can be regarded as an implicit mutual agreement on patterns of behaviour. What in Germany is clearly defined through rules and regulations works on Wakulima Market in self-regulating systems with unwritten laws, predominantly through commonly known, learned and accepted signs, gestures and habits such as the hissing of the carriers or the seemingly inconsiderate and forceful claiming of space. Compared with growing bureaucracy and questionable over-regulation in Germany, this is a totally different modus operandi, a social agreement and not a confrontation between people and a structured system.

Like in an anthill, everyone stays active within a certain timeframe. The best time for business is the morning. At that time, large-scale and small-scale farmers are putting their goods on the market, produce

which comes from the periphery of Nairobi, from Kiambu, Kikuyu and other regions, all at a distance of approximately 30 km from Nairobi's Central Business District. Agricultural products such as *sukuma wiki* are supplied by wholesalers, bought by intermediaries, collected by carriers, and then delivered to retailers: supermarkets, grocers, kiosks, and street vendors.

### WHICH PRECONDITIONS ARE NECESSARY TO GET ACCESS TO SUCCESSFUL TRADING ON THE MARKET FOR THE DIFFERENT PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS?

The deregulation of the Kenyan economy led to free access to trade and the markets. Despite the presence of numerous ministries such as the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and others with decision-making powers, their responsibilities are not clearly defined. This has led to the situation where small, unofficial cooperative units spring up. Rachel states that she does not need a licence for her trade. You simply get started and do what you want to do. Everyone is their own boss, each a micro-capitalist on the open market. This leads to the development of informal cooperation between small units.

She works with a certain group who assist one another to do business, assist each other even in legal matters, more of a ›SACCO‹ (see below), because in Nairobi, most people have to work in groups. BM

Savings and credit cooperatives (abr.: SACCO) are legal micro-finance institutions that serve lower-income clients who require financial services such as loans, but are not capable of handling the high transaction costs that the banks charge. The movement started in Kenya in the 1970s to assist farmers with credit and savings facilities, and to help in marketing their produce. Eventually it caught on with other sectors such as teachers, government employees and, recently, small-scale retailers and street vendors. TN

These cooperatives (see marginal column), often based on families, neighbourhoods, or even ethnic groups (tribes), are fundamentally dependent on contacts and networks. Here trust plays a crucial role. This can be seen in Rachel's statement how proud she is to have a long-lasting working relationship with the Indian restaurant. The basis of mutual trust secures her job. And it is not only this connection, which is based on trust but also her relationship with the suppliers from whom she buys her wares. They are always the same ones. Because as a customer she can rely on the quality of their products, by the same token the supplier can count on her daily visits. She can also buy on credit when she is short of money; as she is only getting paid at the end of a week. Another reason why she has constructed a solid network around her business is the help in case of need. She can rely on others to do the purchasing for her if she had another job or in times of sickness. »She tries as hard as possible to have as much oneness as possible« the Kenyan student mentioned during my research.



RACHEL'S MOST IMPORTANT TOOLS

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### Rachel's story Part IV

#### A Carrier's Job

*In her hand she hold her most important tools: a mobile phone, money and a shopping list. In the middle of this haggling process her fingers fly over the keys of her phone which she uses as a calculator in order to fix prices. Here she has bought a few kilos of vegetables for the Indian restaurant owner. Payment, a last check on the shopping list, and on she goes through the maze of the market. Not always in sight is the man who collects the merchandise for Rachel in a big burlap sack: Macharia, her ›carrier‹. It is his job to offer his service as a porter to the intermediaries on their rounds through the market, since other suitable means of transportation, – like shopping carts – are simply not available. The Indian restaurant has a large clientele and the sack, half-filled, weighs around. 20 or 30 kilos after the 90-minute journey. Macharia heaves the load up onto his shoulders and hisses his way through the crowd. Eventually he finds Rachel in the crowd, between produce and people, but he cannot follow her pace. He shows up at the herb stall with the sack already open for the next products.*

### MOBILITY ISSUES IN A NUTSHELL

The carriers offer a necessary service in order to meet the challenges of transport on Wakulima market. This is because the narrowness of the place and its pathways cannot be negotiated with wheeled vehicles. The carriers do not take breaks during the day, as any break means money not earned. They take over 15 journeys in a day. Carriers have to be fit; when they develop backaches they must find other sources of income.



**Rachel's story Part V****Splitting costs, car sharing**

*A last bunch of herbs and Rachel's checklist is finished. The sack is full to bursting. On the way to the market's exit we pass by a small, well-kept stall that is situated in one of the roofed niches of the market halls. In the middle of this stall with its terraced crates on which colourful piles of nuts, tomatoes, beans and herbs are laid out with great care, we find a small old lady, whom Rachel proudly introduces as her mother. She also trades at the market, but as a retailer. At the exit, the carrier is waiting. He will receive between 50 and 100 ksh for his work in the two hours. The price depends on the weight, Rachel explains. Today it was not much, but this small amount will have to do.*

*After a 20-minute wait and numerous phone calls later, a car stops in front of us. Another intermediary has arrived, an acquaintance of Rachel's, with whom she agrees to share the car. This will be less of an effort than taking a minibus. Otherwise, they would have to get the heavy sack from the minibus on to a mkokoteni (pushcart) for the remaining journey to the restaurant, which would cost more money. Macharia heaves the sack into the boot of the car, nodding a brief goodbye, and going off to seek new clients. Two men get out of a white station wagon, the driver and a man, apparently very busy, making phone calls, gesticulating wildly. He is a ›contacter‹ (facilitator), Rachel explains, giving notice of his imminent arrival to the next customer. Two journeys are economically combined: Rachel needs to go to the Westlands, the contacter needs to go to a supermarket on the same route. Both sacks are hauled into the boot and what follows is another object lesson in how to accommodate two sacks and 6 people in this space – driver, contacter, Rachel, the other intermediary, Bob and me. For this 30-minute ride Rachel pays 100 ksh (the equivalent of 1 Euro). A minibus would have cost 30 ksh for herself and 50 ksh for her cargo; additional costs would have accrued for the pushcart. But in this rush-hour traffic, both types of vehicle would easily get stuck in a traffic jam. With this in mind, we dive into the chaos of the street, fully aware of the upcoming jam. We have to be in the Westlands by 11 o'clock.*

**URBAN GROWTH AND SPRAWL**

»It is... estimated that the city of Nairobi accommodates about 30% of the car vehicle ownership in Kenya. The large car population is an indicator for urban sprawl in the City.«<sup>7</sup>

Around noontime, the traffic coming from the market can be characterised by two things: congestion and air pollution. The Earth Institute of New York's Columbia University has determined that air pollution in Nairobi is 550% above the US legal limit.<sup>8</sup> Part of the traffic picture is also a strange mix of high-horsepower, fuel-guzzling all-terrain vehicles next to people trying to manoeuvre human-powered pushcarts. There is an imbalance mirroring the contrast between rich and poor. A third phenomenon of Nairobi's inner city traffic is the lack of infrastructure: the picture of pedestrians dodging and weaving between cars is inescapable. Zebra crossings, traffic lights and walkways are all under construction to some degree.

A positive side effect of the slow-moving traffic is the lively trading going on amongst the cars: newspaper vendors, car washers etc. Merchandise of all kinds is on offer. In their immobility, the car drivers are potential customers and business is booming.

»The city and the traffic, mobility and immobility, are not opposites but they are connected, developing a particular, mutually dependent dynamic. Accordingly, the history of cities is also, and above all, the history of transport systems. They are the blood vessels and nerve fibres of the city's body, of fundamental importance for any further growth.«<sup>9</sup>

In the past one hundred years, Nairobi's city limits have moved farther away from the centre. They now encompass outlying areas such as Kiambu, Kajajido, and the Machakos district, including valuable agricultural zones, and even incorporate Nairobi National Park. From an extent of 77 km<sup>2</sup> in 1927, the city grew to an area of 686 km<sup>2</sup> in 1963. The newly founded (2008) Ministry of Nairobi Metropolitan Development predicts an area of 3000 km<sup>2</sup> for the near future.<sup>10</sup>

In the paper ›Urban Growth and Sprawl – Case Study of Nairobi‹, Kenya (2008) Martin Omwenga states: »The 2006 Nairobi Metropolitan Transport Master Plan is focused on addressing transport problems/challenges in the City. This plan document is however not effective as it is not related to any comprehensive and overall development plan for the City.«<sup>11</sup> Nairobi's growing population is in need of a planned, structured, and expanding traffic network. But the aimless, plan-less metropolitan development authorities need to create these systems in the first place, and to keep them functioning. In this situation, ecological problems and energy policy issues are both cause and effect.

**OBSERVATIONS IN A TRAFFIC JAM**

*The contacter, again glued to the phone, appears to be unimpressed by the traffic jam. Alongside the Globe roundabout, where we are at this moment, we see a group of giggling ladies, colourfully clad in traditional clothing. In their large bags they carry sukuma wiki. En route from door to door, they try to sell as much as possible. The bags, called kiondos, have long carrying straps which could be mistaken for shoulder straps. But instead, they are carrying their bags, slightly leaning forward, with the strap wrapped around the forehead. How do they sell their goods and to whom? How much do they earn? And what happens to the unsold vegetables?*





These are women, working in the informal economy, who take vegetables to the many residential areas in the city of Nairobi. You find them with simple mats laid on the ground displaying their goods, one of them being sukuma wiki and other vegetables such as tomatoes and carrots accompanied by some fruits. Acting as intermediaries, these women go to the main markets to acquire the vegetables – not in bulk – but in sizeable portions that are enough for them to carry. With these amounts, they can make enough for the day, considering that they do not earn a lot as they are at the lower end of small scale traders. TN

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SUKUMA-WIKI CARRIED IN TRADITIONAL TRANSPORTATION MEAN

## THE KIONDO – A SHORT INTERVIEW ABOUT A CARRYING DEVICE

by Marie-Helen Scheid and Tabitha Nzilani

What is a *kiondo* and where is its origin? A *kiondo* is a traditional bag found among the Kamba and Kikuyu communities in Kenya. It is mainly carried by older women, and depending on the community, the woman will carry it on her back with a strap across her head or the strap across her neck. Sometimes it is hung on one shoulder, depending on its weight. If it's light, hanging it over one shoulder is fine. Do the colours have a special meaning? These days, the colours have lost their significance. The colours are also affected by the availability of materials and the dye for the sisal. And what about its significance as a means of moving goods? The influence of traditional values and culture in Kenyan society can be seen in the role of a woman when dealing with the issues of food security within the home. She might not be the breadwinner, but she is responsible for what the household eats. As she is influenced by culture, by extension, she will use traditional methods of carrying items, hence the use of the *kiondo* to carry the groceries.

Rachel's story Part VI

**Sukuma wiki—Staff Only**

... At last we are moving on. Four people squeezed into the car's back seat in a traffic jam. With temperatures rising and exhaust fumes becoming

more noticeable, traffic is flowing again. Rachel had no doubt she would arrive at the Indian restaurant on time – at 11 o'clock – after we dropped the other intermediary off at a nearby supermarket. The owner is surprised at our visit; he proudly presents the guest rooms, kitchen and storerooms. We are a bit irritated not to find ›our product‹, sukuma wiki on the menu. Asking whether they are using an Indian name for it, we are told that sukuma wiki is African. It is for the staff. In a high-class restaurant it has no place on the menu as it is ›poor people's‹ food.

## SUKUMA WIKI AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

For farmers sukuma-wiki is relatively easy to grow and in Kenya's nutrient-rich red soil the plant grows fast given enough water and sunlight. Farmers find it relatively easy to produce. It has become a staple food especially for people on low-incomes. Therefore many Kenyans regard it as ›poor people's food‹ and well-off people steer away from it, finding it not appropriate to their social status. But among the general population it enjoys growing acceptance, as consumers have lost confidence in animal products owing to numerous pests in the recent past.

Rachel's Story Part VII

**Rachel as a Part-Time Farmer**

On the way back from the Indian restaurant, a young woman approaches us at a narrow intersection. She introduces herself as Rachel's friend and neighbour. They meet here every day at this hour since Rachel's friend is a



tomato seller, and she also finishes her work at noontime. Rachel invites both of us to her home. »There, in Kikuyu, I have a small farm and you can see sukuma wiki growing there. I grow it for my friends and myself. If I have more than I need I sell it on the local market.«

## URBAN FARMING – A GROWING PHENOMENON

### WHAT ARE THE REASONS FOR GROWING SUKUMA WIKI IN THE CITY?

In the previous chapters we followed the supply chain of sukuma wiki and the distribution patterns in the context of Nairobi's ongoing urban development. We turn now to the social implications. Because of inadequate economic infrastructure and a lack of social services, mechanisms of self-regulation have developed. Access to food is a case in point. As a growing population has an increasing demand for food supplies. »Urban farming« (>urban agriculture<) is on the rise in Nairobi. Here is a definition: »Urban agriculture is an industry located within, or on the fringes of a town, a city or a metropolis, which grows and raises, processes and distributes a diversity of food and non-food products, (re)using largely human and material resources, products and services found in and around that urban area, and in turn supplying human and material resources, products and services largely to that urban area.«<sup>12</sup>

### PROSPECTS FOR THE URBAN ECONOMY

An alternative to long-distance transport is the growing of vegetables in the city. This can save time, money, and road space, and this is likely to lower the volume of metropolitan traffic. Rachel uses her own garden to farm for her own needs, then sells the surplus. According to Marc Redwood, urban farming can lead to new trading opportunities creating »economic spin-off industries and employment«.<sup>13</sup>

### THE NECESSITY OF A SUBSISTENCE ECONOMY

A strong argument in support of urban farming is the problems that the poor have with their subsistence. Marc Redwood estimates that the money spent on food in low-income families accounts for 40 to 60% of the overall budget.<sup>14</sup> This means: that with rising food prices<sup>15</sup>, other elementary needs cannot be met anymore. Almost the entire budget goes into eating and drinking. Therefore, more and more people try to escape from this economic bind and try to become more independent, by growing vegetables for their own subsistence, ideally in the vicinity of their home. There is a problem when people do not have access to plots for farming.

»Most urban farmers are men and women on low-incomes who grow food largely for their own consumption, on small plots they do not own, with little if any support or protection. (...) Market changes associated with bio-fuels, high oil prices and inflation are raising the costs of basic goods, which leads people to seek alternative ways of securing their food.«<sup>16</sup>

These people are forced to use the public space or unused property of estate owners for informal farming. They have a choice to either travel long distances to farming plots or, with limited mobility, to farm along roads, railway lines or the banks of (polluted) rivers.



SELLING SUKUMAWIKI AT TOM-MBOYA-STREET

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### STREET VENDOR AT TOM-MBOYA-STREET

#### LEGAL IN THE MORNING. ILLEGAL IN THE EVENING

A frail woman sits on the kerb in hectic Tom-Mboya-Street at night, selling vegetables and fruit. She is part of a long line of street vendors who display their wares on the pedestrian walkway. It is the time when many people leave the Central Business District on their way home. Heading for the bus station, they buy things for dinner in passing. It is very crowded and noisy as minibuses and cars are locked in a traffic jam, with pedestrians jumping between the blocked vehicles and squeezing past the street vendors who occupy most of the pavement. One of the street vendors tells me about her daily routines: **9 am** Picking up sukuma wiki at Kiambu Farm (costs: large bunch 5 ksh) **10 am** Transport to Muthurwa market (cost for minibus: 60 ksh) **11 am** Preparing sukuma wiki at the market (making smaller bunches) **12 to 5 pm** Selling sukuma wiki at the market. (Smaller bunches: 15 ksh) **5 to 5:30 pm** Walking to Tom-Mboya-Street with sukuma wiki in kiondo bag **6 to 10 pm** Selling sukuma wiki on Tom-Mboya-Street. (Smaller bunches: 10 ksh) ...when suddenly the whole street becomes agitated. Police are in sight. In a rush, the vendors gather up their skirts which are an intriguing combination of apron and product display. With one quick move, vegetables, fruits and potatoes disappear in the garment, and the walkway – only seconds ago overflowing with merchandise – becomes a wasp's nest, with everyone swarming off in all directions. We run along. You have to avoid being run over. We wait a while in a side road with other women and men. A few minutes later the police are gone. The street vendors return from the side roads and the merchandise is fancifully displayed again as if nothing happened.

Buying and selling on the market is legal but selling on the street is not...

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KANGEMI MARKET –  
ANOTHER RETAIL AND WHOLESALE MARKET IN NAIROBI

## THE INFORMAL ECONOMY

Kenyan and German appear to have different views of the informal economy. A Kenyan student estimated that up to 80% of the business in Nairobi is informal. He also stated that informal business is beneficial for those who take part in it, so long as it does not disadvantage others, and it is probably the only way to sustain the economy.

»Street vendors and informal traders play a central role in the everyday lives of people around the world. KENASVIT is a national network of informal workers organised in seven regions in Kenya (Nairobi, Migori, Nakuru, Eldoret, Mombasa, Machakos and Kisumu), working to improve the rights and working conditions of street vendors and to affect policy on the local and national level in Kenya.«<sup>17</sup>

In the recent past, the Kenyan government has not managed to make provisions to give the informal businesses the same opportunities that the formal ones have, and to create an organisational structure that would represent their members and their rights. That is all the more surprising as »street vendors are a sub-sector of the micro- and small enterprises that dominate the Kenyan economy. (...) The majority of them are micro-enterprises with fewer than 10 employees, while 70% of them are independent

workers. This means that a majority are operating on the bottom rung of the economy, and that a majority lives below the poverty line of one US-dollar a day.«<sup>18</sup>

These micro-finance institutions appear to be a promising method to get a foothold on the economic ladder. Marcel Gounot's paper says that efficiency can be improved »by optimising the connection between grass-roots autonomy, central control and external monitoring.«<sup>19</sup> This would be an opportunity for the informal street vendors to become officially accepted.

Originally this sub-project started as a study of a distribution process. It has, in its course, touched on various other subject areas such as traffic safety, gender roles, ecological issues (air and water pollution), self-regulating systems, the lack of political will to implement master plans, the informal economy and the growth of urban farming. Some of the issues will be pursued in other essays in this book, and all of them deserve further study.

The co-operation between the Nairobi and the Cologne students has turned out to be very fruitful. Initial observations were verified (or not), underneath external appearances hidden truths were discovered and misapprehensions were corrected. This has turned out to be a true cultural dialogue.

<sup>1</sup> E. Sclar, J. Touber, C. Alexander, **Rethinking Privatization: The case of Urban Transportation in Nairobi**, Kenya (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA 2007), 2. <sup>2</sup> See K. Ojaamong, **Housing and Transportation Alternatives for a Decaying City - Case Study of Nairobi**, Kenya. Abstract of Master Thesis 2003, Web. 20 Aug. 2009. [www.uni-stuttgart.de/iev/index.htm?vwi/lehre/studierendenarbeiten/mt-casestudynairobi.htm](http://www.uni-stuttgart.de/iev/index.htm?vwi/lehre/studierendenarbeiten/mt-casestudynairobi.htm) <sup>3</sup> D. Tschirley, M. Ayieko **Fresh fruit and vegetable consumption patterns and supply chain systems in urban Kenya**. (Egerton University.Nairobi, 2003), 5. <sup>4</sup> R. Adeka, P. Maundu, M. Imbumi, **Significance of African Traditional foods in Nairobi City Markets**, Kenya, International Centre for Underutilised Crops ICUC, Presentation at the International Symposium for Underutilized Plant Species for food, nutrition, income and sustainable development. Web. 6 July 2009. [www.icuc-iwmi.org/Symposium2008/Theme%203/T3-9-Adeka.pdf](http://www.icuc-iwmi.org/Symposium2008/Theme%203/T3-9-Adeka.pdf), 20. <sup>5</sup> *ibid.* <sup>6</sup> Inwent GmbH – Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung GmbH, LIPortal / Kenia / Wirtschaft & Entwicklung / >Wirtschaftssystem und Wirtschaftssektoren <. Web. 22 Aug. 2009. <http://liportal.inwent.org/kenia/wirtschaft-entwicklung.html> <sup>7</sup> M. Omwenga, **Urban growth and Sprawl – Case Study of Nairobi**, Kenya. Network Events on World Urban Forum 4, 3 - 9 November 2008 (Nanjing, China, 2008), 3. <sup>8</sup> E. Sclar, J. Touber, >**Urban Sustainability from Theory to Practice**<. The Institute of Transportation Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. Conference Presentation of The Center of Sustainable Urban Development, The Earth Institute, Columbia University New York, 20 May 2008. Web. 7 July 2009, [www.its.berkeley.edu/volvo-center/VREF/N6\\_Elliot\\_2.pdf](http://www.its.berkeley.edu/volvo-center/VREF/N6_Elliot_2.pdf) <sup>9</sup> O. Schöller-Schwedes, S. Rammler, **Mobile Cities: Dynamiken weltweiter Stadt- und Verkehrsentwicklung**. Lit Verlag. (Münster, Germany 2008), 4. <sup>10</sup> M. Omwenga, **Urban growth and Sprawl – Case Study of Nairobi**, Kenya. Network Events on World Urban Forum 4, 3 - 9 November 2008 (Nanjing, China, 2008), 2-3. <sup>11</sup> M. Omwenga, **Urban growth and Sprawl – Case Study of Nairobi**, Kenya. Network Events on World Urban Forum 4, 3- 9 November 2008 (Nanjing, China, 2008), 5. <sup>12</sup> M. Redwood, **Agriculture in Urban Planning**. Generating Livelihoods and Food Security. International Development Research Center IDRC, USA and Earthscan UK, e-book at [www.idrc.ca/openebooks/427-7/](http://www.idrc.ca/openebooks/427-7/), Canada 2009 (Web. 8 Aug. 2009) 13. <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>15</sup> D. Foeken, M. Mwangi, **Farming in the city of Nairobi**, working paper 30/1998, African Studies Centre. Open book at: [www.idrc.ca/cfp/ev-7521-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/cfp/ev-7521-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html) Web. 9 Aug. 2009 (Leiden, Netherlands, 1998) 2. <sup>16</sup> L.J.A. Mougeot, **Growing better Cities: Urban Agriculture for sustainable Development**, International Development Research Centre. e-book at [www.idrc.ca/in\\_focus\\_cities/ev-95297-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/in_focus_cities/ev-95297-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html), Canada 2006 (Web. 8 Aug. 2009), 14. <sup>17</sup> Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. Web. 7 July 2009, [www.uusc.org/program\\_partners/KENASVIT](http://www.uusc.org/program_partners/KENASVIT) <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>19</sup> M. Gounot, >**Introduction**<, The efficiency of multi-tier savings and credit cooperatives in developing countries (Frankfurt, 2001)