

## **Building Human Capacity and Initiating Human Development Projects as Rural and Urban Research Centers**

*By Henry Ikatukhu Mpapale, 2025*

### **Part two of my story.**

Part one of my story recounted my initiation into the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) methods, which I acquired at the Human Development Training School in Kamweleni, Machakos, Kenya. After two intensive years of theory and hands-on training, I was awarded a certificate declaring, *“Henry Ikatukhu has successfully completed all requirements of the program of studies in methods of human development for the rebuilding of local communities across the world.”* Reading those words, I felt something stir deep inside me, a mixture of pride, humility, and a quiet sense of awe. It was not just a document; it was the symbol of two years of relentless effort at the Human Development Training School in Kamweleni, Machakos, Kenya. Those years were more than academic training; they were an initiation into a movement that believed deeply in the capacity of ordinary people to shape extraordinary futures.

I could almost smell the dusty classrooms where we argued about strategies for rural transformation. I could still hear the low murmur of voices during late-night visioning sessions, punctuated by bursts of laughter when someone cracked a joke to ease the tension. In addition, I remembered sitting under mango trees with fellow trainees, sketch maps spread out on the ground, debating whether a single well could change the destiny of a whole village. Those were formative years, and as I held that certificate, I knew they had prepared me for something far greater than I could yet imagine.

### **The Kenya Replication Scheme: Part two: A New Dawn**

The next phase of my journey was the Kenya Replication Scheme, a bold and ambitious initiative designed to scale what we had learned in isolated Human Development Projects into a national framework of Cluster Projects. Instead of working in single villages, we would now group villages into clusters, pooling resources, knowledge, and energy to create self-sustaining centers of development.

Returning to Kamweleni for this program felt like a homecoming. Old colleagues, people I had sweated, argued, and dreamed with in Machakos and in other regions of the country, were now gathered once more, older, wiser, and carrying stories of small victories and bitter disappointments from the field.

The energy in the room was electric. I can still see it now: large sketch maps spread across wooden tables, people moving between groups, arguing, laughing, and drawing arrows with colored markers as if the future of Kenya was being rewritten right there on those sheets of paper.

Then Dean Donald Rushed spoke. He stood at the front of the room, his eyes sweeping across us. His voice was steady and commanding as he said: *"This scheme is not about duplicating projects; it is about transforming lives."*

Those words hit me with the force of revelation. Something shifted inside me at that moment. I felt a deep sense of responsibility settle on my shoulders. I was no longer just a trainee or even just a community worker, rather I was becoming a change agent, part of a larger movement that could redefine what development meant for our people.

### **A Legacy in the Making**

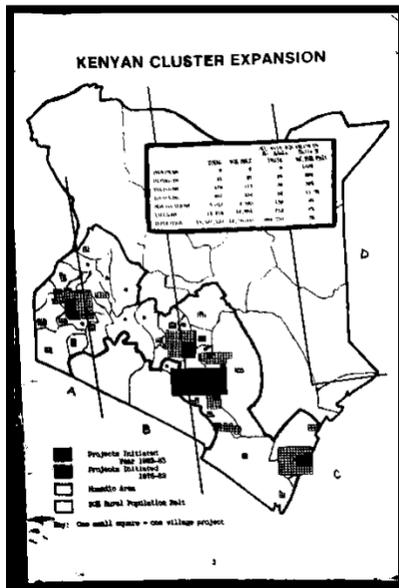
As we left Kamweleni, our minds were brimming with insights and hearts filled with hope. The Kenya Replication Scheme was not just a program, it was a commitment. It was about building human capacity and creating systems that could sustain progress long after we were gone.

We knew the path ahead would not be smooth. However, we were no strangers to adversity. With every challenge, we drew strength from each other and from the communities that had entrusted us with their hopes. We had a clear vision and the determination to bring it to life.

This phase of our journey was the beginning of a wider ripple effect; a movement of local action grounded in dignity, participation, and shared purpose. The Kenya Replication Scheme was our opportunity to translate learning into legacy, and passion into progress. Our task was to ignite the fire of transformation in every village, every city block, and every heart we touched.

Therefore, with the wind of Kamweleni at our backs, we walked forward, resolute, inspired, and ready to build a brighter future for all.

### **The cluster projects mapping and analysis:**



TYPE OF PROJECT	EXAMPLE	LIST OF PROJECTS	TOTAL VILLAGES
INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS	1. Village Health Centre 2. Village Extension 3. Village Water Project 4. Village Extension 5. Village Extension	1. Village Health Centre 2. Village Extension 3. Village Water Project 4. Village Extension 5. Village Extension	1,000
CLUSTER PROJECTS	1. Village Health Centre 2. Village Extension 3. Village Water Project 4. Village Extension 5. Village Extension	1. Village Health Centre 2. Village Extension 3. Village Water Project 4. Village Extension 5. Village Extension	1,000
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Area	Project Name	Part I: Implementing the Project		Part II: Implementing the Project		Part III: Reporting the Project
		1990-91	1991-92	1992-93	1993-94	
Geographical Coverage						
Cluster	1. Village Health Centre 2. Village Extension 3. Village Water Project 4. Village Extension 5. Village Extension	1	1	1	1	1
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## Mapping and Analyzing Cluster Projects

Stepping out of Kamweleni after our intensive reflections on the Kenya Replication Scheme, I felt both humbled and energized. The transition from human development projects to cluster projects was not just a change in scale; it was a bold step towards building a national human development zone. This was the moment when theory, practice, and leadership converged, and I was about to play a pivotal role in it.

My promotion to Section Gun for Section A was both exciting and daunting. As indicated in the Kenyan Cluster Expansion map (Image 1), Section A was a key operational region, with multiple village-based projects poised for scaling up into coordinated clusters. The title “Section Gun” carried weight—it meant I was no longer managing a single project. I now had the responsibility to coordinate an entire region, ensuring that dozens of villages could work collectively towards shared development goals.

## Planning for Transformation

In our group discussions, we focused on identifying strategic priorities. Three areas emerged as critical: sustainable agriculture, water and soil conservation, and preventative health services. These were not just theoretical priorities; they were urgent needs we had witnessed firsthand in rural communities.

I remember one conversation vividly. We were discussing agriculture when Mama Mwendu’s name came up. She was a widowed farmer from Machakos who had become a local hero by experimenting with farming techniques that blended traditional wisdom

with modern methods. Not only had she increased her yields, but she had also inspired neighboring farmers to follow suit.

“She is exactly the kind of local champion we need,” someone said, and everyone nodded. Mama Mwendu represented the heart of what we were trying to achieve, by enabling ordinary people becoming innovators and teachers for their own communities.

### The Weight of Leadership

A few weeks later, I was promoted to Section Gun position for Section A. When I first heard the title, I almost laughed. It sounded militaristic, as if I were being sent to war. But in a way, this was a war against poverty, against ignorance, against the hopelessness that had taken root in so many villages.

The responsibilities were immense. I was no longer just managing a single project; I was coordinating multiple cluster initiatives across a wide region. My role included organizing staff teams for village consultation events, reporting regularly to the ICA Head Office in Nairobi, and ensuring logistics and resources flowed smoothly to field teams.

In my office, I pinned the Kenya Cluster Expansion Map to the wall. It showed Section A as a network of small squares, each representing a village project. However, to me, they were not just squares. I would trace them with my fingers and imagine the people behind them: mothers walking long distances to health centers, children studying under dim lantern light, farmers waiting for rain that never came. That map was a silent promise, and I carried it like a burden and a prayer.

### A Moment of Collective Hope

One consultation session in Wamunyu remains etched in my memory. We had arrived early, the morning air still crisp, with dew clinging to the maize stalks. Villagers gathered under a giant acacia tree, their colorful lesos brightening the dusty clearing.

We explained the concept of pooling resources across villages to build shared facilities, cluster schools, health centers, and markets. There were many questions, some skeptical, others curious. Then Mama Mwendu stood up. Her voice was firm but kind:

*"If building one health center for all of us means our daughters will not have to walk ten kilometers to deliver their babies, then let us come together. We are ready."*

The crowd murmured in agreement, nodding vigorously. That moment captured the heart of the replication scheme. Villages that had once worked in isolation were now beginning to see the power of collective action.

From then on, we often quoted Mama Mwendu in our mobilization efforts. Her words carried weight because they were rooted in lived experience, not abstract theory.

### The Hardest Week of My Leadership

But not everything went smoothly. One of the most difficult periods of my leadership came when funds for consultation events were delayed. Communities had done their part, mobilizing participants, preparing meeting spaces, and waiting eagerly. Our teams were equally ready, but without transportation funds, we were stuck.

Hours passed, and frustration grew. Rumors began to spread, first quietly, then louder. Some accused me of inciting teams not to work until the funds were released. Worse still, a whisper started circulating that Judy White, our finance officer, had already received the funds but was deliberately withholding them.

Those rumors hurt deeply. I had built my life on integrity, yet now my name was being questioned. I remember seating at after long hours of waiting on my thin mattress in the field office, which doubled as a sleeping space, staring at the ceiling, feeling a mix of anger and sorrow.

*"How could they think this of me?"* I wondered. But even as I wrestled with those feelings, I understood where the anger came from. My colleagues were passionate about their work, and delays felt like broken promises to the communities they cared so much about.

Eventually, the Head Office intervened. A senior delegation arrived at night in Western Kenya, quietly released the funds, and without mentioning the rumors, urged us to proceed. The consultations went ahead successfully, and villagers appreciated our efforts. But the emotional wound of that week stayed with me long after.

### **Lessons in Leadership**

That experience changed me. I learned that leadership is as much about trust as it is about strategy. Even if my intentions were pure, I needed to communicate better, to make sure everyone understood that I was fighting for them, not against them.

I also learned that perceptions matter as much as intentions. It wasn't enough to work tirelessly behind the scenes; I needed to be visible, to reassure my teams that I was as frustrated as they were and doing everything possible to resolve the delays.

Above all, I learned to stay calm under pressure. Reacting defensively to the rumors would have only fueled them. Instead, I focused on the bigger picture: ensuring the consultations succeeded and communities got what they needed.

### **Beyond Projects: A National Vision**

Looking back, the Kenya Replication Scheme was more than just a development initiative; it was a movement. Each cluster was a microcosm of Kenya's potential, a living example of what could happen when communities looked beyond tribal, administrative, and historical divisions to build a shared future.

Mama Mwende's words in Wamunyu became, for me, a symbol of this shift. Her willingness to sacrifice village autonomy for collective well-being mirrored the kind of national unity Kenya desperately needed.

### **A New Role, a Deeper Commitment**

A month later, I was transferred to the Nairobi Head Office to join the fundraising team. At first, I felt uneasy, almost as if the move was a quiet response to the earlier tensions. But soon I realized it was an opportunity. Strengthening resource mobilization was critical to preventing such crises in the future, and my field experience gave me unique insight into what communities and field teams truly needed.

I left Section A with a renewed sense of mission and several firm commitments:

1. **Strengthening Resource Mobilization:** I resolved to build systems that ensured reliable funding for field teams, so no community would have to wait because of logistical delays.
2. **Transparent Leadership:** I vowed to communicate openly with field teams, sharing updates about delays, decisions, and resource flows to nurture trust.
3. **Scaling the Cluster Approach:** I became an advocate for making cluster models a national standard, promoting shared schools, health centers, and markets as more efficient and sustainable than scattered village projects.
4. **Mentorship and Capacity Building:** Inspired by Dean Rushd and Mama Mwende, I committed to mentoring younger development workers, not just in technical skills but also in values, **integrity, patience, and respect for community wisdom.**

### **Carrying the Wind of Kamweleni**

When I finally left Kamweleni and my role as Section Gun, I felt the wind of that place still at my back, the same wind that had whispered through mango trees during our training, that had stirred the acacia leaves as Mama Mwende spoke in Wamunyu.

What had begun as personal training had now become a lifelong mission. Building human capacity was no longer just a profession; it was a calling—a commitment to leave behind a legacy of community-driven development that could outlast me, outlast us all.