# Building a bridge through arts

## Tackling neglect of slumdwellers by creating linkages with people from other backgrounds

## Kampala, Uganda

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**Table of contents**

# Introduction

The urban population is growing fast in Uganda; from 137 thousand people in 1960 to 1.6 million people in 2012. (The World Bank 2011; Cohen 2004; United Nations 2011). In Kampala there are more than 14 different slum areas, and they cover up around 25% of the city. Roughly about 1 million people are living in these areas, that is more than 50% of all people living in Kampala (Exploring livelihoods of the urban poor in Kampala, Uganda 2012).

One of the reasons for the growth of the slums is that the rural poor usually move to large cities, they want to take advantage of job opportunities and improved living standards not available in their previous areas of residence (Glaeser 2011). Moving to cities is also often the primary method of income diversification for rural agricultural workers (Banerjee; Duflo 2006). Indeed, it can be a very productive move, even for temporary migrants (Bryan; Chowdhury; Mobarak 2011).

However, cities have often been unprepared to absorb expanding populations and provide adequate urban services --housing, sanitation, health, and education, among others– to meet the needs of these rapidly growing new populations. Consequently, migration has shifted the locus of global poverty to the cities, a process now recognized as the "urbanization of poverty" (UN-Habitat 2003a). Consequently, a lot of people that come to the city end up in the slums. UN-HABITAT (2002) defined slums as a "contiguous settlement where the inhabitants are characterized as having inadequate housing and basic services".  Simply put; a slum is a heavily populated urban area of the city characterized by inferior living conditions. Living conditions in slums are characterized by overcrowding, high levels of unemployment or underemployment, deficient urban services (water, sanitation, education, and health), and widespread insecurity (UN-Habitat 2003b).

Despite the fact that more than half of the population of Kampala lives in slum areas, the slum residents feel that not much is done to help them. During informal conversations people in the slum stated that they feel neglected, misunderstood and isolated due to a lack of skills and no social connections. In other words; they feel socially excluded from the society. This has several consequences: a lack of recognition and acceptance, powerlessness and 'voicelessness', economic vulnerability and diminished life experiences and limited life prospects. Also for society as a whole, the social exclusion of individuals or groups can become a major threat to social cohesion and economic prosperity (Donnelly; Coakley 2002).

Social exclusion is the opposite of social inclusion. Social inclusion is about making sure that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society. Social inclusion reflects a proactive, human development approach to social well-being that calls for more than the removal of barriers or risks. It requires investments and action to bring about the conditions for inclusion (Donnelly ; Coakley 2002).

 Empowering interventions that target capacity development and skill transfer of both individuals and community groups—as well as meaningful negotiations with institutions, such as municipal governments, which can affect slum peoples' lives—appear to be the most promising strategies to improve the slum peoples' asset bases and health. (Sheuya, 2008).

Public art is reputed to be a way of getting different groups of people and communities together to produce meaningful insights, foster peace and create safer and more friendly neighbourhoods. (Clover 2006). By transforming public spaces in some way artists encourage people to meet and interact with each other in new ways. Thus, by creating transitional spaces an art, architecture, design and engineering project may function as a collective practice that opens further democratic possibilities. Public art can ask citizens to become active participants and co-creators of murals, music events, monuments, festivals, performances. In this way art functions as a vehicle to mobilise citizens around particular values and issues.

Why focus on the arts and social inclusion?

- The arts has many benefits for both individuals and society.
- The arts provide us with inspiring ideas and new meanings.
- They symbolise aspects of the world, and can express meanings for communities and groups, through for example pictures or plays about important events.
- Through the arts, children can develop a range of skills, self-confidence, and ways to work better with others.
- Arts events bring people together.

(Coakley, 2002)

Stern and Seifert (2010) show that art is a powerful tool. Through arts, people can develop a range of skills, self-confidence, and ways to work better with others (Stern ; Seifert 2010 ). Therefore the project sought to motivate and mobilize audiences to become active participants in the processes initiated by artists.

The goal of this study is to understand what interventions and activities with relation to art, can form a bridge between people from the slums and people from other backgrounds, so that people from the slum feel socially included and empowered.

**Main research question**

What art interventions, implemented at a festival, can form a bridge which will make people from the slum feel socially included and empowered?

**Sub questions**

1. What are the social economic differences among the citizens of Kampala?
2. What are the challenges people face in the slums?
   a. Do people feel socially included?
   b. What is social inclusion and how can it help tackle the challenges?
3. How can art make a difference in the lives of people living in slums?
   a. Is art considered to be a tool for social inclusion?
   b. Is art as a tool for social inclusion fitting for slum communities?
4. How can a festival make people feel socially included/empowered?


The rest of the paper is organized as follows: following this introduction, we will discuss the methods that were used to collect the data, after that we will describe our findings. Subsequently, we draw our conclusion. Followed by recommendations and a discussion.

## Methods

To collect our data we used different methods, so we would find an answer to our research questions. Data were triangulated to improve the validity of our findings. This research is performed by four researchers from different backgrounds, two of them are Dutch researchers, the other two are from Uganda.

### *Data collection*

The slum this research  focused on is in Kabalagala, behind the Terupati Mall. We started with informal conversations with people in this slum. This gave us an impression of the problems they face. These conversations helped us to decide on what we should focus our research on, and make a research                                                                                                                                                       design.
After that we made two types of questionnaires (see appendix 1 and 2), one for people who live in the slum, one for people who live elsewhere. The goal of these questionnaires was to find the daily challanges of people in the slum and also to find how they feel about meeting with people from outside the slum. The second questionnaire was used to find out how much the people from outside the slum know about the lives of people who live in slums. These questionnaires were made with help of researchers who used to live in slums. For the questionnaire for people from the slum we questioned 28 participants (N=28), for the questionnaire for outside the slum we questioned fifteen participants                                                                                                                                                       (N=15).
When the questionnaires were completed, we've held semi structured interviews with stakeholders (N= 9). We held interviews with art critics, artists, art students, the Ugandan arts fund, experts on doing research in slums and experts on festivals. After the semi structured interviews we held a focus group with eight participants from the slum (N=8) to find out their most urgent challenges.

## Results

In this paragraph the findings of the research are outlined. All the findings are subdivided under different headings. These subheadings will be further explained by quotations from the interviews and the focus group.

**Challenges**

The questionnaires show that the people living in slums face a lot of different challenges. One of these challenges is the lack of income, in the questionnaire the respondents listed high prices for housing and for food as top of their problems *(see figure 1)*. Many people stated that they worry about how to buy food for the next day, or how they would pay for medical treatment.

*"My dad is sick, he needs medical treatment. I have no idea how to pay for this."*
*-Focus group participant*

During the focus group it was stated that as a consequence of the lack of income, a high amount of women become prostitutes. A lot of them have children and are left by their husbands. They see no other way to earn money.

The participants in the focus group explained that a lot of people living in the slum feel neglected and they feel that the government doesn't care about them, or about their living situation. They also had problems with corrupt police officers. They stated that another challenge they face are the narrow trenches. Since there is no place for garbage, this often ends up in the trenches. This way the already narrow trenches get blocked, the consequence is that when it rains everything floods.

*"When it rains the trenches flood and the water goes everywhere, it even flushes through houses. Only last week a baby got dragged with the stream and drowned."*
*-Focus group participant*

The participants also listed individualism as a problem they face. The people in the slum who have more than others keep it to themselves, they don't want to help and they don't want to mingle. Nobody cares for each other, not even family members. There is no love for each other in the slum, only jealousy of neighbors who have more. People even urinate on each other's doorstep. This too because of the lack of toilets in the slum, and the few toilets that are available cost too much money.
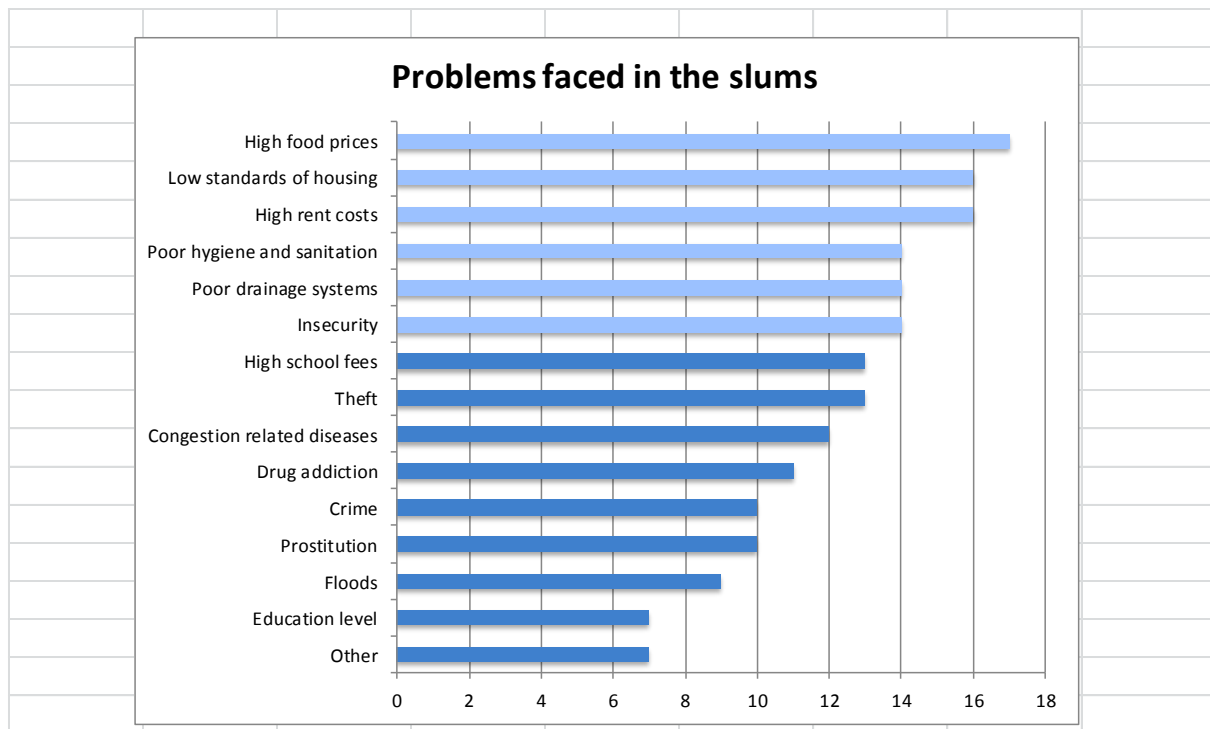
**Problems faced in the slums**

*Figure 1. Problems faced in slums, questionnaire in slum.*

**Empowerment**

Many of the interviewed participants stated that it is important that the people in the slum learn to help themselves. Educate them in something that will help them improve their lives. This way they don't rely on the help of other people anymore. Try to get people who have unique skills to teach them to other people.

*"Don't give them fish, teach them how to fish."*
*–Interview art critic*

Different participants stated that it would be helpful to teach them how to make practical art, so they learn how to work with tools and how to use their heads. It is also a way of empowering them; if you know you can help yourself, that gives you confidence.

An idea, offered by one of the interview participants, was to send four artists into the slum to talk to people about their challenges. Each of them can let their creative minds think of a creative way to help the slum people with a specific challenge. Try to get artists to teach the people in the slum, while working on a practical art piece that helps the community. That way you empower a few people by teaching them skills, while also helping the entire community with a challenge they face. He stated that if we teach people in preparation to a festival, that way they can show their work there. He had done a few projects like this is South-Africa, where it had worked out really well. The Ugandan arts fund stated that preparing for the festival, the laboratory phase, should be more important than the festival itself. That's just a celebration. A lot of participants agreed that people should be engaged for longer than that specific day. One of them had the idea to make a short documentary about the laboratory process and have an outdoor screening in the slum, so the people

living there can follow what is happening. That way you get their attention and you engage everyone in the preparation.

**Art**

All participants stated that art can be an instrument to bring change; it is a way to be creative and help people at the same time. One participant had the idea to let artists make something that is of practical use to the community, functional art. Try to find practical artists, who work in 3D with sculptures or statues, to help you. Let them talk to the people about their challenges, so they can use their creativity to find solutions. Make something that stays, like landmarks. So the help it provides is long term and so that the people in the slum will remember.

An artist had the idea to try and get the artists to use cheap material, maybe even waste. That way, after the artists are gone, people from the community can continue to work with these materials. The community can be involved, they can collect the waste for a small fee, so they feel involved in the project as well.

Another idea offered by the Ugandan arts fund was to use advocacy projects to make people aware of what is going on in the slum.

*"Visual art is visual, that is why it is a good way to raise awareness."*
*-Interview Ugandan arts fund*

Visual art is a way to show people what is going on in the slum. But it is also a way to give a voice to the slum people, a platform. It's a way to make them feel listened to. The participants who filled in the questionnaires stated the same thing. They stated that art can help them advocate their rights *(See figure 2).*
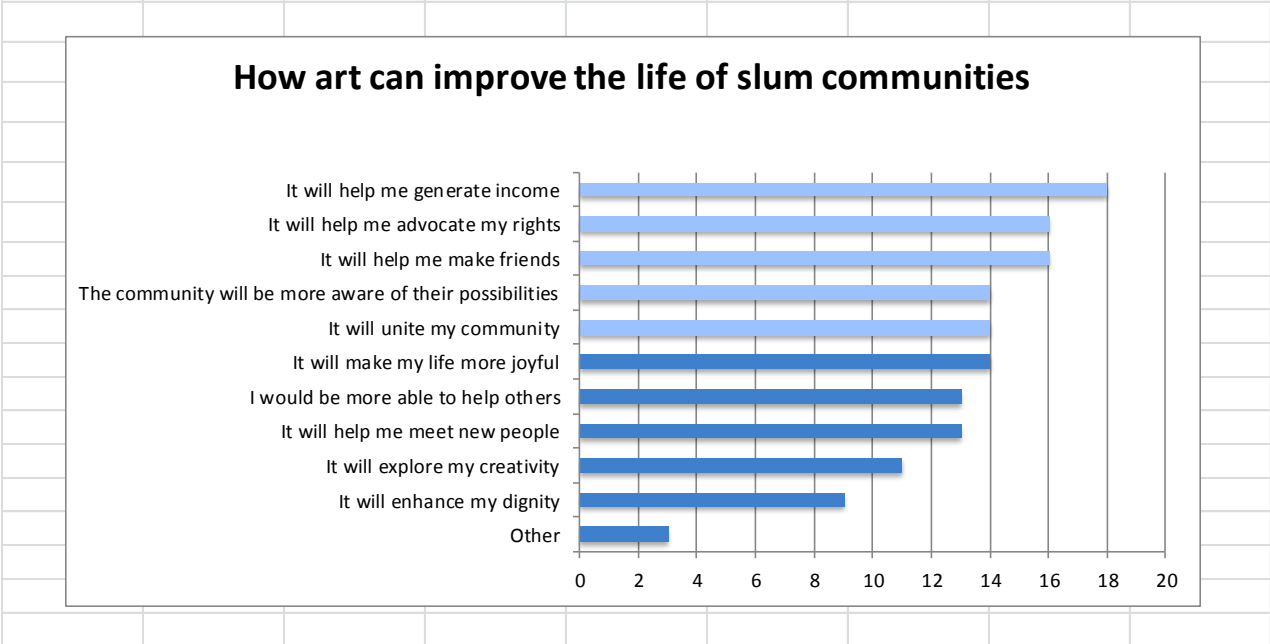


*Figure 2. How art improves lives of slum communities, questionnaire in slum.*

**Festival**

The artists that were interviewed all stated that an art festival is a good platform for artists. An art student said that finding exposure can be a difficult thing for artists. This could be an opportunity for exposure and to meet different people, a great way to promote your work. Young artists often just want opportunities to show what they can do, an art festival could be one.

*"I want to take art out of the galleries; take it to the streets!"*
*-Interview art student*

An artist stated in his interview that artists could get together and work together. They can help each other to figure out difficulties, share challenges they face. All artists work individually now, which in his opinion is a waste. Sharing and helping each other like a team, so everyone can benefit. Another finding in this research is that the a festival could also be a good platform for the slum community, a place for them to be heard.  Different participants also stated that it is a good place for people of different backgrounds to interact in a friendly manner.

The Ugandan arts fund stated that visual art a good way is to raise awareness, it can give a voice to the slum community. They also stated that it is very important to show the slum community this value of the festival, otherwise they might not see the added value and just want to use the money to buy products they can use.

The different art critics we interviewed all stated that it is very important to organize a festival that is different from all other festivals.

*"A festival is about the experience, you have to sell something unique."*
*-Interview art critic*

 It has to be so interesting that people want to leave the comfort of their home to attend the festival. Participants from different backgrounds stated that a festival in the slums could do that if you sell it the right way; you have to think outside the box. Try not to be traditional, don't stick to what you're used to but try to do something new. Our research findings show that if a festival is unique, you also attract journalists. That way you also get attention for your cause and for your company.

## Conclusion

This research shows that there are a lot of different ideas about interventions or activities that will help the people in the slum feel socially included and empowered. All participants were very inspiring and offered a lot of good ideas.

This study also shows that people in the slum of Kabalagala face a lot of different challenges. The challenges listed in this research are: lack of income, high housing and food prices, feeling neglected, narrow trenches, individualism and a lack of toilets. These are the challenges the participants stated as being the biggest.

Almost all participants stated that it is very important to educate the slum people, to teach them how to help themselves. This way they won't have to rely on the help of other people anymore. An option was stated to get artists to go into the slum and think of interventions for the challenges people face, because they can think of creative ways to make functional art that will help the people. While making these art pieces, the artists should educate slum people on how they work, so the people from the slum learn new skills they can use. This is the idea that was most promising, and the most grounded because something like this was done several times in South-Africa.

All participants stated that art can be an instrument to bring change; it is a way to be creative and help people at the same time. One participant had the idea to let artists make something that is of practical use to the community, functional art. Try to get the artists to use cheap material, maybe even waste. And let him teach the community how he works. This way when the artist leaves, the community can keep on working with the material and keep on using the skills he learned.

The festival on its own was listed as an way to tackle isolation and the individualism that participant of the focus group listed as a challenge. A festival, was said, can be a good way to assist in improving the lack of solidary in the slum, because it is a way for people to interact in a friendly manner. It is also a platform for the slum community to speak their minds and be heard. For artists an art festival can be a way to expose their work.

Different participants stated that it is very important for the festival to be unique and different from other festivals. Try not to be traditional, don't stick to what you're used to but try to do something new.

Concluding to the found data, an intervention was devised. This will be further explained in the recommendations.

## Recommendations

The intervention we recommend to form a bridge between people from different backgrounds that will make people from the slum feel socially included and empowered is the following:

First lies the focus on the laboratory phase, this will take four weeks. Street Angels Uganda will select four different artists, who will get this report to read the challenges that were found. After that they'll be send into the slum. There they will talk to people about their challenges. Each of them will make a functional art piece to help solve a specific problem. While making this art piece they will all teach a few apprentices from the slum, so they learn new skills that will help them generate income. The artists need work with cheap materials, like waste. That way, after the artists are gone, people from the community can continue to work with these materials.

After the laboratory phase comes the festival phase. This will be a festive revelation of the art pieces, made in the laboratory phase. The festival is a platform for (beginning) artists to expose their work, not only the artists who worked in the laboratory phase, but also other artists who can bring and show their pieces at the festival. The festival is also a platform for people living in the slums, here they can show to other people what is going on in the slum. It is a place for them to be listened to. But also a place where the slum people meet people from different backgrounds and they can interact in a non-business related and friendly way.

Last will be the community workshop phase. These are workshops, organized by Street Angels Uganda, where the focus lies on maintaining and building on the skills learned in the laboratory phase for a lasting impact of the intervention.

The entire process will be monitored. A monitoring tool for the festival will be to do a monitoring research during the months prior to the festival. After the festival an evaluation research can be explored.

## Discussion

There are some limitations to this study. First of all the research was done in only ten weeks, which means there was not enough time for a follow-up on the found data. Also, two of the researchers have grown up in the slum, which could lead to assumption bias. Although this was also very useful, because they had insight and could connect very well with the people in the slum. The focus group was held in Luganda, two of the researchers did not speak this language. There was a translator present during the focus group, but it is possible that some of the data got lost in the translation.

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