



Compte rendu d'entretien
Nairobi – Kenya

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I'm Calvin Bowa et I'm 45 years old I grow up in Mathari, a slam, in a family of 9 persons: me, my father, my mother, four brothers and two sisters. My mother didn't have a job and my father worked as a cook for the Kenyan airforce

Being born in Mathari is not an easy thing because it is a very hostile environment. I lived in Mathari till I was ten years old and after my family benefit of a program of the World Bank: we left the slam and we were reallocated to a place called New Mathari. But the life in New Mathari was very difficult because only few families living in Mathari were reallocated and so I broke my family and my friend network and there were so many things that I did when I lived in Mathari that I couldn't do in New Mathari. In Mathari my mother rent also small rooms and that was a really important income for my family because from this rent we gain money to go to school and to pay for the food.

In New Mathari we didn't gain enough money and we didn't enjoy the life so we decided to move back to Mathari.

How can you define Mathari? Is it a slum?

Yes, it's a slum. It is overcrowded, there are no services provided by the government, there is no potable water, there is no electricity and there is no toilets. Lots of crimes are committed, rooms where people live are really very small and there are not healthcare services.

Mathari is never in the map: according to government map Mathari doesn't even exist.

And despite all that your parents decided to go back?

My father and my mother remained to New Mathari and I went back to Mathari with my brothers and my sisters. Even if we didn't have a good house and all the services available in New Mathari we decided to move back to Mathari because we had lots of important networks here and because in renting rooms we had another more income.

I went to primary school for seven years. It was a Muslim primary school in Nairobi. After the secondary school I went to secondary school. I got a job immediately I finished the school because I used to volunteer for a local NGO and in the end they decided to take me into the organisation

And all your brothers and sisters went to school like you did?

No, only two finished the secondary school education. The others didn't have the opportunity to finish their studies because it was too much for my mother . Actually it



was my mother that for the most support economically the family because my father had two wives and he used to drink and he spend lots of money in alcoholics

And how do you explain the fact that you went to school and the others did not?

Because I used to perform very well in primary school, I was the first one in the class, I was the only one from Mathari slam in that school and so my mother decided to invest more me than the others.

How long did you work for the local organisation?

I worked there for five years and after I decided to go to study in Britain: I graduated in social policy and administration and after one year I came back I got an employment in another organisation, the African House Found and I rose to the level of employment co-ordinator. And when I came back from Britain I got another job and I became a council government officer for Kenya in charge of the destitute program, a program that take care of people living in difficult situation, children especially. I worked there from 1987 to 1994.

I have been also elected the chairman of an organisation called Mathari sport association for three years continuously and in 1999 I accompany the Mathari United team to Norway to participate to the Norway cup. We stayed there for about two weeks, we had the transports paid by the Norwegian Minister of the Environment

How it was to go to Norway for all those people from Mathari?

It was really very exciting for everybody. When we came back all the parents of the athletes waited for us at the airport dancing and singing

And what did you after?

After I decided to live my position of chairman to someone else, I decided that I didn't want to be elected anymore and I said that I wanted to do something else for more than six years.

I went to college to have a master degree. I moved to Canada and I had a master degree in Environmental studies and community development. I finished university and I got a job immediately in Canada. I got a job for co-ordinator for research. So for one year I worked with homeless people in Canada.

After that I decided that I wanted to go back to school again: I had a master degree in Public care at the University of Toronto. After I was supposed to continue with a thesis in 2003, when I came back to Nairobi but I though that it was enough for me and that I have to look after my family and so I didn't finish my thesis. When I came back to Nairobi I decided that I didn't want to be employed anymore by anybody: because when are employed you can just advice your boss and you don't have the opportunity to change things and to do things as you want.

Can you describe us what is your role in the organisation and what the organisation is doing right now?



Right now what we are doing is getting community groups to work together and to create associations. So my job is not to tell people what to do but is to create a framework within which critical things can be discussed, a framework that enable people to understand that if they really want to create change in their communities they need information, activities information. Only when there activities information we can manage to take good decisions for our communities

I'm the head of the association and there are other people that work with me: the most majority of them are volunteers; there are more than one hundred volunteers. We have ten committees and in every committee there are ten people. We have, for example, a committee in Education, another committee in environment etc.

Is there an entity that finance your organisation?

Government does not finance us, the most part of the money come from the French Embassy and for some specifically programs we get allowances

May I ask you how do you earn per month?

Usually earn 220000 Ksh, about 5000 dollars Canadians but I also gain money from my consulting activity, I work for IFRA for example and I got nearly 200 Euro for project.

To come back to our project we are working about middle class, which is a concept that people in Europe understand more or less. In your opinion is this notion applicable to Kenya and what it represents?

For me there are two definitions of middle class. When you are talking about middle class you talk about something associated to money. Is a definition that comes from the amount of money you gain or the type of job you do. But for me there is also another definition of middle class, a definition associated to education. Even if you never went to school but you are rich you are considered middle class. A middle class here is a person with the tie and the jacket, who drives a car and who lives in specific quarters, such as, par example, Buruburu.

But in my opinion a person of the middle class is a person with a degree, a person who holds a good job, a person who is not a simple employed but who has a managerial position.

So to define what middle class is we have not to consider only economical criteria, but also education and ideology.

What are the differences in terms of places where you live or things that you possess between what you see as middle class and the rich and the poor? How you distinguish a person poor from a person middle class or a person middle class from a rich? What does a rich have that a people middle class doesn't have? And what a poor doesn't have that a person middle class has?

There is first of all a difference in terms of lifestyle. Rich people have power. Even if they are not elected in Parliament they can use money to influence power. Middle class, for me, can relate with rich but also with poor . Middle class stands between



the rich and the poor. The only groups that you can move to bring down the system are the poor and the middle class.

There are middle class people in the neighbourhood where you are working?

Yes, because even if rich normally live in Madaira, poor live in Mathari and middle class live in Buburu, you can also find a middle class person or a rich person in Mathari, sometimes rich people who live in Mathari have more money than those who live in Madaira.

For example, I consider myself as a member of the middle class but I live in Mathari. Normally people think that if you are a middle class person you have to go away from Mathari, you have to move to Buruburu, where you can be identified as a member of the middle class, but I don't agree. I was born and I grow up here and I don't want to go out of this neighbourhood only because I have a good education. I want to be part of making a difference in my own community.

I consider myself as a member of the middle class because I can afford good food, I drink milk every morning and not lots of people here can afford milk. My daughter go to a very good school, the Scolastica Academy, and my son will go to University. I live in five rooms and almost the 80% of the people who live in the neighbourhood I, have only one room. I have only two children and normally poor people have ten children. Also the number of children you have can make identify you as a member of the middle class or as a poor. More children you have more poor you are.

How old are your children?

The first one is 24 and the other is 14.

Do you want to send your children to study abroad?

Yes, I want to send my children to study in Canada because college and education here is very bad and I want to give them a very good education, I want that they become critical. But at the end of the University both have to come back here. That's the contract between them and me: they have to come back here and they have to use their knowledge to create changes in their community.

Did they go to a private school or to a public school?

My first child went to a public school and the second one go to a private school.

There is a big difference in terms of cost between private school and public school?

Yes, there is a big difference. Public school is about 5000 Ksh and for my daughter's school, that is a private school, I paid about 45000 Ksh. But you know in public school the quality of the education is compromised. I have money and so I want to invest in education for my children.

Do you have an health insurance? If you are sick do you go to the hospital or to a private doctor?



For myself as an individual I don't contribute to any health insurance and if I am sick I go to a private doctor.

And do you think that people of middle class do the same?

Yes, I think that they are use doing the same. There are certain things that if you are middle class you have to do: for health, for care, for education you are used going in a special places where poor don't go, you don't want to mix with poor. You think that you might compromise your class by doing things that poor people do. For example when they fall sick they don't want go to be admitted at the Kenyatta hospital, because this is an hospital where poor people go. They go to Nazareth hospital may be, or to Nairobi hospital. Even when you are died you don't go to the morgue where poor people are taken. I don't know, but if I died I don't think that my family would bring me to the morgue where poor people go, they would bring me to Kenyatta hospital morgue or to a private morgue.

So you go to certain places for theirs qualities of their services and because they define you as a middle class people. I have another question about politics. In your opinion, are middle class people involved in politics? What is their degree of involvement?

I think that not all but a considerable number of middle class people are involved in politics. It depends on where you located yourself as a middle class person, it depends on the protections that you have and the relationships with the system. There are middle class people who are really against the system and are very actively involved and especially lawyers, may be because of their background of education, because of their political education. Contrary, doctors, who, in my opinion can be considered as middle class people, are not very politically engaged. Teachers too, especially university teachers are very political, because they are unionised. I think that we can't generalise, we can't state that middle class people are political involved or not because it depends on the situation, is especially when their interests are threatened that they decide to get involved in politics. Poor people are more engaged in politics than middle class people, if you go to the village here you can see lots of people talking about politics. An other group of people that are very much engaged in politics are rich people, of course. Because they have to defend theirs interests, to keep occupying the most important places in the society

That automatically when you mobilise people in large number. What we are doing now is to change strategies to show people that there are other ways of demanding rights not necessary going out, throwing stones and burning. We are trying to create a dialogue, we have created what is called village assemblies: is like small parliaments, they are very informal assemblies where you meet people and you talk about politics. In those assemblies people can talk about what they want, they can discuss, they can exchange ideas, they can live whenever they want, and the debates changes. There are so many messages out in the community, competing messages and we need to be there putting our message in the community so that



we can overthrow these others messages. There are messages coming from the religion, messages coming from politicians and we have a message as well as a community centre and we have to diffuse it. We are not a church, we are a mosque, we are not business people, the capitalist who want to make money, we are something different. We are dealing with people who are also interacting with other forces. You can see an example of this kind of village assembly at the Jeevanjee garden. This is a people parliament, common persons go there to debate, but is very relevant that this parliament is in the middle of the city centre, because it shows that we can criticise the authority also from the middle of the city centre. You know the system is very powerful and in spite of the fact that our organisation is strong I know that some of us will get compromised on the way that's way we try to manufacture many people as ourselves. So those those can substitute who get compromised we had manufactured and we will be always ahead of the system. That's our trick, that's what we do.

How do you see your future within ten years?

I want that all the councils in this city come through this centre I want that all the member of the Parliament in Nairobi will be created by this centre . Before 2012 the Congress will be made here. We will start from the con-cities in Nairobi and then we will do it in all the country. Even if we don't achieve in getting the Presidency we will run a parallel government

What do you think about the way the Kenyan society evolves and in your opinion which impact has this evolution in the middle class level of life?

The situation for the middle class people is difficult because they don't have any other place to move to. Rich people stand at the top and they want to limit the access of the middle class to rule positions. More people are joined the middle class. I see an evolution in terms of the level of education but is not evolving in terms of quality of jobs, it is not evolving in terms of the amount of money. In my opinion we assist also to the formation of another class, a class who stands in between the poor and the middle class: they are not poor but they cannot neither afford the same things of middle class people, they earn less than middle class people and they live in smaller houses. There is perhaps another class in between the rich and the middle class: they cannot really be defined as rich nor middle class. We have to ask to ourselves why these classes have been created and what will be their impact on the politics.

Does you wife work or you support alone your family?

My wife used to work before but she doesn't work anymore. I financially support the family, I have also another job: I rent houses, and that's another way to gain money.

What do you do in your spare time?

In the evening I like socialising a lot, I go to my friends, I go to pubs or restaurants. Usually on Saturday I go with my friends to a member's club and normally every Saturday or Sunday I take my family to a restaurant for lunch. I don't play sport,



many people in the middle class usually play sport in clubs and they are members of particular clubs. There are clubs where you can just go in and you are allowed to have meeting floors or if you have a ceremony you are allowed to have your ceremony there. I usually go to the Alliance Française, I love theatre, art expositions and I used to go at cinema a lot, but now it has been closed. I don't go to church.

What's the names of social clubs you go to?

There is one called Homeland and another called **Rostardclu**.

And can you tell us what are the jobs of people you meet in those social clubs?

A number of them are businessmen, there are also people who work in human rights sector. Usually they are people with I share something, we work in the same area, we are informed, we read newspapers, we have the same points of view. We talk about the government, about education, about policy reforms.

Do you pay a fee to enter to those clubs?

For those clubs where I go, you don't have to pay a fee but normally to have access to a club you have to pay a membership fee as a group. We have to pay when we have meetings in those clubs, we have to pay for the food and drinks. Every one of us has to pay 5000 Ksh per month. Whenever you have problems as well all yours friends must pay 10000 Ksh. They've paid 15000\$ for me because I'm going to Canada.

In the case you would have to organise the funeral for one member of family, where there is people would help you?

Also in the clubs. One condition of the clubs is that if one member whose brother dies each one pays 30000 Shl to help paying for the funeral costs. That's always a condition. And that's why it is very difficult to be a member of so many clubs because you have to pay this club, this club, this club and you become poor. So you have to choose two or three clubs. Theses centres sometimes have problems with the police and we you have a politician as a member of the club you can use the influence of the membership of the club.

How many people belong to your club?

We are about 45 people now. We are for the most part businessman, five are politicians, one was a former councillor actually and now is the chairman of **Nack Kenya**. So clubs sometimes are also for convenience, when you want to get social supports. When we do recruitment we always say bring your friends. That's the way we are able to influence: to get more people to come.

Do you have a car?

I use to have a car but I sold it because of the traffic. But it is true that almost the 80% of middle class in Kenya posses a car. All my friends that comes to my club



have a car. Usually is the husband and the wife who has a car. Usually is like a must to have a car, when we go the club every one of us comes with his car.