

katine it starts with a village



Katine project wins praise

The Eisenhower Foundation, an international group based in Washington that seeks to find solutions to urban poverty and disadvantage, has called for the Guardian's Katine project to be replicated in inner cities across America

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People at the shrine to a 19-month-old baby shot dead in the still-troubled neighbourhood of Watts in Los Angeles. Photograph: David McNew/Getty

A leading US organisation dedicated to finding and evaluating ways to reduce poverty, inequality and racial injustice in inner cities is studying the possibility of replicating the Guardian's Katine project across America.

The [Eisenhower Foundation](#), a Washington-based group set up in the wake of the urban unrest that swept through the US in the 1960s and the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy in 1968, has singled out the Katine project for praise as part of its review of the challenges still facing the country 40 years later. The foundation's preliminary report says the Katine project is, "one of the most promising new variations on the public journalism theme" where media outlets act as, "participant in community life rather than as detached spectators".

Alan Curtis, the president of the foundation, said he had been following the Katine project almost since its inception. "I thought it a monumental idea as we search for ways to give power back to the people in the neighbourhoods in which they work."

The foundation was set up in 1981 as a not-for-profit body to continue the government-backed work of two seminal 1960s commissions – the Kerner Commission that investigated the causes of the disturbances in cities across the US, notably in the Watts neighbourhood of Los Angeles in 1966 and in Detroit and Newark in 1967; and the Violence Commission which looked into the killings of King and Kennedy. The Violence commission was set up by Milton Eisenhower, brother of Dwight D.

The foundation's 40-year review reaches some worrying initial conclusions. Almost 40 million Americans live in poverty today in the richest country in history, and the child poverty rate has increased slightly, from 15 per cent in 1968 to 17 per cent in 2006.

The review also looked for examples of good practice that would provide clues to the way ahead, hence its reference to Katine. Curtis said the foundation was keen to encourage an experiment based on the Katine model in a couple of medium-sized American cities such as Peoria, Illinois or Des Moines, Iowa.

The foundation would facilitate the start of such projects, and then help evaluate them. But Curtis stressed that the Katine model would only succeed if it was embraced by local people.

"This can't be top down. Unless there is a newspaper prepared to take it on, it won't work."

The preliminary report notes the way that the Guardian's print and online coverage acts as a kind of process of evaluation, monitoring whether villagers' lives improve as well as encouraging debate. It also notes the involvement of the African Medical and Research Foundation (Amref) as partner to avoid the danger of British Empire-style colonialism or the top-down approach of the World Bank.

The report, which will form the basis of a final review to be published later this year, also records the involvement of Barclays Bank as financial partner.

It says that projects modelled on Katine in American urban areas could lead to "newspapers facilitating the development of clearly-defined inner city neighbourhoods".

"It occurred to us that what the Guardian was doing in Africa had some similarities with what we were trying to do in our inner cities – with the new dimension that a progressive newspaper headed it up. That's an important hypothesis," Curtis said.

Extract from the Eisenhower Foundation's report

"One of the most promising new variations on the public journalism theme is the Katine project. Katine is a small, impoverished area in north-east Uganda – without electricity, water, good healthcare, good education and many other basics. But the Guardian newspaper of London has launched a human and physical capital investment initiative to begin to turn this around.

The Guardian is the initiative's facilitator. It is documenting conditions in Katine and, through local reporters, publishing stories on Katine residents. The Guardian's print and online coverage amounts to a kind of process evaluation of what happens and whether the lives of villages are changed for the better. Constructive debates on what to do and on what is happening are being blogged on the Guardian's Katine portal. The Guardian has selected a non-governmental organisation, Amref, as its partner. Amref will provide training and technical assistance to villagers – for example, in healthcare, teaching and water acquisition. The Guardian promises that Amref will create a 'bubble-up' process whereby villagers will be empowered to take the. (Some Guardian bloggers have warned that the process could easily degenerate into British Empire colonialism and World Bank-type top-down control).

The Guardian's other initial partner is Barclays Bank, which is providing upfront financing and match funding as the project hopefully evolves in a positive way. The Guardian is raising match contributions on its website.

The Eisenhower Foundation is exploring the possibility of Kerner-inspired replications in the United States – with newspapers facilitating the development of clearly defined inner city neighbourhoods."