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Foresight Africa Podcast

"Learning from the people of Nairobi's Mukuru slum"

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Episode Summary:

Angela Pashayan, professor and political scientist at American University, shares her experiences working with the Mukuru slum community in Kenya and the socioeconomic challenges the residents face. Dr. Pashayan highlights the importance of urban agriculture within the community, discusses the effects of climate change in urban slums, and notes policies to address the gender gap in African countries.

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ORDU: I'm Aloysius Uche Ordu, director of the Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institution, and this is *Foresight Africa* podcast.

Since 2011, the Africa Growth Initiative at Brookings has published a high-profile report entitled *Foresight Africa*. The report covers key events and trends likely to shape affairs in Africa in the year ahead. On this podcast, I engage with the report authors as well as policymakers, industry leaders, Africa's youths, and other key figures. Learn more on our website, Brookings dot edu slash Foresight Africa podcast.

My guest today is Dr. Angela Pashayan, and she's a political scientist and a professor at American University here in Washington, D.C. Angela is also an adjunct professor at the London School of Economics in the UK. Her research covers international development, informal settlements, and extreme poverty reduction in Africa. Angela contributed to research for Joy Reid, host of MSNBC's *ReidOut*. Angela was instrumental in securing Joy Reid as moderator for us when we launched AGI's flagship report for South Africa 2023 earlier this year. Angela was also a panelist when we launched the gender chapter of that report on March 10th. A very warm welcome to you, Angela.

PASHAYAN: Thank you. Thank you very much. Very happy to be here.

ORDU: Great. Let's get started then, shall we? Could you tell us a bit about your journey thus far? You did your Ph.D. at Howard University here in the nation's capital, and before that, you studied at Norwich in Vermont, a historical military university. What motivated you to study at Norwich, and how unique was that experience, please?

PASHAYAN: So, I'm glad you asked that question because most people don't think about that. They don't necessarily think about choosing a higher university to study at for specific reasons. And I chose this military university because I knew that I would be studying amongst soldiers, soldiers who had on-the-ground experience. And so, when I think about international relations and international development, I think about the learned perspective from academics and I think about the lived experience. And even though soldiers are not necessarily in international development, they are definitely an integral part of international relations.

And they have a different perspective. They see things on the ground differently than we learn in textbooks. And so, I wanted to have a blend of that in the classroom, hearing what the professor may have to say and also hearing what some of the soldiers' answers would be to some of the questions and how they would discuss the realities on the ground in our class discussions.

ORDU: That's quite a fascinating angle in terms of thinking through an approach to college. I must confess, I didn't do quite such a rigorous assessment when I was choosing mine. But this is this is great, thank you. Angela, I'm curious, though, about your connection to the African continent. How did that come about? Which country did you focus on and why?

PASHAYAN: Well, it's really interesting. I visited the continent many, many years ago for the first safari I'd ever been on. And I remember feeling odd, that I'm on this safari and I would see people who look like me, who are catering, shuffling around and making sure the grass is cut really low on some fancy golf course that I'm playing on. And right outside of the resort, I'm seeing a different lifestyle. I'm seeing poverty. And so I was taken aback about that years ago. And it kind of just went past my mind. Very typical Western life. You go back to your Western living standards.

And over time, I guess as I developed as an academic and even as a human being, I ended up doing more outreach and not only to the continent of Africa. So, I did outreach to the poor in India and Nepal and South America and Peru and lots of other places. And word kind of got around of here's this this woman, she just kind of dives in and goes places and, quote unquote, does stuff to help the poor. And people would sometimes want to travel with me to help me with these programs. And this is just me thinking strategically and being on the ground, talking to people about what they needed and then trying to figure out a way for a long term solution for their problems.

And so with all of this, I ended up coming back to the continent of Africa because someone hired me as a consultant to put together a nonprofit business for them in Africa. And I had to do all this research on all the different countries and poverty rates and things like that. And we settled on Nairobi. And I did set up this client with his nonprofit. But in the meantime, I fell in love with the people of Nairobi. I fell in love with the challenges of living in extreme poverty in such a vibrant city. And it took me back to that very first time that I had visited the continent where I saw this really, really big gap between the rich and the poor. And I was smitten by the people in the slum of Mukuru. And I have been there ever since.

ORDU: Quite a fascinating journey from South Asia to Africa. And you mentioned a nonprofit. This is community-led. What motivated you to adopt that approach and how did you engage with the community?

PASHAYAN: Yeah, so, once I set up this client in his nonprofit, this guy really didn't know anything about how he wanted to run his organization. And I thought this guy doesn't know much about the community and even I don't know everything about the community. But I do know from my prior experience leading programs and starting poverty reduction programs in other places of the world, that I had to depend on the people in the community to lead the way.

So, I set his program up in that way, and it worked very well. And when I decided that I wanted to do something for the people in the slum of Mukuru, I subsequently set up my own nonprofit following that same path. Community-led.

And this was before community-led development was a thing. You know, this was not jargon thrown around in international development circles. It just didn't exist. But it made sense. How could you possibly know how to help someone unless you ask them? How could you possibly say, I'm going to do this, this, and this when they might not even need it?

So, to be really honest with you, it was logical to depend on the community to think through and figure out what they needed to reduce the amount of poverty that they were dealing with. And that's what motivated me.

And how I engage at this point with my own nonprofit. I'm pretty much hands off. The community comes up with different ideas to help them and they look at me and say, hey, what do you think? And I will give them my impression, but not with not with Western ideology. I just really kind of nod my head and say, hey, let's give it a try and let's see what happens.

And sometimes they fail. Sometimes they succeed. But they're learning along the way, and they're always able to correct their own mistakes. And that's the role that I play. Just kind of nodding and saying, Yep, let's try it.

ORDU: So, could you give us a sense of one such intervention that you went through with the community along the line you describe? What was it exactly about and how did it turn out?

PASHAYAN: It was housing. And so they felt like if they could leave the slum and have housing that had infrastructure and neighborhood streets with names on them nearby and things like that, that they thought, okay, that's going to be very helpful for us. We'll have a solid roof over our heads. We'll have access to water, plumbing, cooking facilities, even a refrigerator to store food.

And so, we actually did that. We did that with a large donation that came from the UAE, from Dubai. And we found a house. And the house was in Karan. Many people may not know Nairobi very well, but Karan is a very nice neighborhood. And so we found a home in Karan. It was four bedrooms and we put twin beds in each room. And so it allowed a test, a test for eight people to move in and cohabitate together and be exposed to a different kind of life. And it was their idea. And I said, okay, let's do it. We went through with it. And it did not work out. We took a one year lease and over that one year lease, the funds were there in the nonprofit that I started to take care of that lease. But it didn't work out.

And it basically didn't work out because they missed their community. They missed the other slum dwellers. They missed being able to go right next door and say, I need ten shillings to buy this or I need this, or—they missed that whole environment of having everything right there for them, even though they had access to open markets and other types of stores around them, it was not comfortable for them at all.

And so it failed. And they were so sorry. And I told them, I said, don't worry, this is a learning process so we can learn what works and what doesn't work. And the day that we closed down that house and they went back to Mukuru slum, they were so incredibly happy and the community welcomed them.

ORDU: A fascinating story. Karan, of course, in Kenya, it's like transporting somebody to Bethesda, Chevy Chase, or Potomac, right? So, it's interesting that, not surprising nevertheless, they missed their original community, Mukuru. That's a very, very fascinating story. Angela, you've been visiting Mukuru now about four times a

year over the past decade. What have you learned from the slum dwellers of Mukuru about themselves and of course the impact of COVID-19 on their community?

PASHAYAN: Yeah, I'm glad you asked that as well. So, what I've learned from the slum dwellers themselves is that when you foster deeper thinking, critical thinking, they're able to suss out what they need. And so, let me just clarify that, because there's some early work by a scholar named Michael Cernea, used to work at the World Bank. And Michael Cernea's big thing was putting people first. Check with people first before you do anything with international development.

Then there's another scholar from Brazil: Paolo Freire. Freire lived in the favelas, which are the slums of Brazil, but he also lived in a middle upper class setting. So, he's had his foot in both places. And from the two of them, I've learned that dialogue is really, really important. And so, when I have dialogue with the residents of Mukuru and let's say they say something like, oh, I need to be able to buy some medicine, I take them deeper into how long will this medicine last? What else is needed to stop the root problem of why you need the medicine? And so, I'll ask them questions and get them to think critically, meaning thinking deeply about the root of what the issue is.

And so, now instead of them saying, you know what? I need medicine, they're saying I need warm blankets, I need light, and I need to have hot food. And so, that's the issue. Not that I need the medicine. It's like let's take care of those rudimentary issues so that you don't catch a cold or the flu.

And so, I've learned from them that when they speak about something that they need, you can't stop there. You have to guide them and help them go deeper. And then they're so grateful. They're like, Wow, yeah, I didn't actually need that. What I need is this. So, that's what I learned from them about this critical dialogue that's needed. I'm an academic, so I have to say it does tie into Michael Cernea's work and Paolo Freire's work.

Regarding COVID-19, oh my God, I learned so much. Initially when it happened the first thing I thought—and I reached out to a friend who was an ambassador who could maybe get the word to the AU, the African Union—about the density that during COVID there was no place for anyone in the slums to go if they had contracted the virus. Homes there are no bigger than ten feet by eight feet at best. And so there's no place to set yourself apart from anyone else. And even if you were able to stay in that space by yourself, your neighbor is right next door. And it's highly likely that you're going to bump into them at some point. Especially think about it, there's no toilets. You've got to come outside and be amongst people just to use the bathroom. So, I learned that the density is not good for things like when there's a pandemic.

And one more point I want to make is that they didn't even get the news about the pandemic until later than the rest of the world did, because information doesn't always get into the slums as fast as it does in other urban areas. And so, they didn't even know. I was texting some of the community workers who work for my nonprofit and saying, you guys have got to be careful. You've got to do this. You've got to do that. They thought I was crazy. They said, What are you talking about? Everything's fine.

So, lack of information, especially when it comes to emergencies, and then also I learned from them thinking through what some of their issues are.

ORDU: So, the slum dwellers in Mukuru that you just articulated brilliantly, just wondering, climate change is ravaging parts of the continent including, of course, next door in the Horn of Africa, of which Kenya is a part. What are the unique challenges facing slum dwellers in Mukuru in particular, and in your view elsewhere when it comes to climate change?

PASHAYAN: Yeah, it's really not good news. It's really bad in the sense that the Ngong River goes right through the Mukuru slum, and there's over 19 slums surrounding the central business district of Nairobi. So, Mukuru is just one of them. Mukuru happens to be the largest one in terms of land space. It spreads across three different sub-counties of Nairobi. And that Ngong River runs all the way through Mukuru. What happens every year, homes float away down the river when the water level rises. I have seen, I can show you right now videos of homes floating down that river—they were just perched too close to the river—and people holding onto sofas, some people holding on to pots and pans and mattresses floating down the river, trying to hold on to their belongings. And we're yelling to them, no, let go, let go, let go. But those are the only things they have. That's all they have, they have nothing else. And so they're holding on for dear lives as their homes are falling off of the edges into the river and floating downstream. So, floods have always caused the problem, but now they are causing more of a problem because they're more frequent.

In addition to the floods, if you're able to save your home from something like that, you still have water, because of saturation deficit. You have water all throughout the slums, on the ground. In some places it's a little bit deeper. In some places it's not so much, but it rolls right into their homes, that ten by eight or ten by six square foot space, and now all of their belongings are wet. I have met many families, they have this perch in the top of that ten by six space so that when floods come, they try to lift as much of their belongings as possible onto this perch, this higher perch. There are little streams that run through—I won't say the streets, they're sort of like just soft pathways, as if you were walking through a maze, and these soft pathways made of soft dirt and a few other things that are the same color of dirt, if you know what I mean. There are little streams that run through there. They get over flooded. And so, there's a saturation deficit, the river runs through there.

When it comes to heat, you go right back to that ten by six living space. It's hot. People can overheat very easily. There are no trees or shade throughout the slum. Even without global warming, the slums are a few degrees warmer than other parts of the city because of the lack of natural foliage.

You've got mosquito breeding which can lead to increased dengue fever, malaria, HIV, and AIDS. That mosquito breeding happens because of pools of water sitting around in tires and tin cans and things like that. And then the heat affects the multiplication rate of mosquitoes. So, you've got issues with that.

Diseases—you know, the slums just becomes a petri dish for eggs and larvae development. And, it's not just Mukuru slum. Climate change is going to affect all of the slums across the continent of Africa as we deal with climate change.

ORDU: I think, Angela, I from your vivid description, if I could catapult you to speak at the United Nations during COP28 for people to actually recognize that when we talk of the ravages of climate change, what you just described nice—a very small area, Mukuru in the slums of Kenya, and then when you see the livelihoods lost in the rest of the Horn of Africa, the Sahel is increasingly now … the desert is unrelentlessly marching downwards and people are losing their livelihoods. In Madagascar, in northern Mozambique, the floods, the cyclones—people used to hear about these things once in five years, once in 15 years. Now they're much more frequent and they are really, really devastating people's livelihoods. So, it's amazing, it's amazing the work you do. And thank you for sharing those observations, indeed.

PASHAYAN: You're so welcome. And the UN would not see me as a stranger. I'm on the ECOSOC committee and so they've heard me speak before, during COVID about some of these issues. And, just to clarify, I don't do this for me. This is not for me. I'm very happy, I'm satisfied with my life. I do this because I see a lot of lives being lost. I just can't not see it, I can't unsee it. I've been there. It's been over ten years. I know what happens. And to think that slums like this are all across Africa, it's important. So, yeah, I'd love to be there with COP 28.

ORDU: Great. So, from your observations, Angela, how important is urban and periurban agriculture to the people of Mukuru?

PASHAYAN: So, it's really interesting. In Mukuru, they do know about climate change and they do know about food security. So, it's very interesting how our message is from the development sector, they do make their way into the slums. And so, food security is important to them and like any human being, you want to participate, you want to be a part of society. You want to be a part of your own growth and your development. And so, here are these people who are making a $1.90 a day or less saying, yes, let's do something. Let's participate.

And so, there are incredible micro farms within the slum of Mukuru. And it is absolutely amazing. Now, these micro farms, they're on pieces of land that are no bigger than maybe 20 by … maybe 20 by 20, 20 by 15. And these are plots of land that they've noticed are just sitting empty. Now, who knows whether the government owns that land or if it's private owned. But they've noticed that it's empty. And so they say, fine, let's put our micro farm here.

They are smart enough not to farm directly into the earth, because in the earth there are all types of toxins from waste and things like that. So, all of their plants are grown either in tires or sometimes they create these different towers out of rubber or out of out of corrugated tin to plant in.

And it's vibrant. And once they started, the community in that area they are there. And, I asked, I'm like, well you know, how do you know if somebody has taken too much food? How do you keep track of that? They don't have those issues. Those are Western issues of somebody stealing more food than they should from the micro farm. Everybody just works on their honor. They come in, they pitch in.

But it's a big, big part of their food security. And it's working. And it also works with smallholder farmers that are just outside of Nairobi. I mean, no more than like 45 minutes, maybe an hour outside. Smallholder farmers are also really, really into

agriculture and food security. And they don't always get the resources or the technology or the finance that we hear about. It doesn't always reach them. I don't know who it's reaching. Maybe people with larger plots of land, but it's not necessarily reaching them. And they are still determined. They have tools that look like tools from the 1700s. And let me tell you, they get down with those tools and they make it work. I have eaten some of the fresh produce, it is delicious. And they make it work. And it's very, very important to them trying to learn how to mitigate and adapt to climate change so they can maintain that food security.

ORDU: Fascinating about the honor code that you talked about. It just reminds me, catapults me indeed, to my home village in in rural southern Nigeria, where you finish farming and you return in the evening, and the idea that some thieves will go and harvest your crop is not really something that comes through your mind because the honor code is taken seriously by the communities.

So, Angela, your work has shown the important ways in which public policies can shape informal settlements, shape our cities, and urban development. Can you highlight some promising examples from Kenya or elsewhere on the continent where such policies are explicitly considered and address gender gaps in ways that have promoted opportunities, especially for marginalized women?

PASHAYAN: Yeah, for sure. You know, when I think about the first promising example, I have to go back to the Maputo Protocol. Right? Established by the African Union, really to advance women's rights in I think it was in 2005. Yeah. You know, it goes back even further. The Maputo Protocol that that was 2005, but it was part of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of 1981. And the reason why these years are so important is because it shows how long it takes to get policy to improve the lives of women as far as equality is concerned.

So, we're talking about the African Charter on Human and People's Rights in 1981. Even from there it wasn't enacted until 1986. And then in 1995, women in law and Development in Africa called for the protocol. And then that protocol—this is 1995—that protocol was supported by the OAU, but it took all the way until 2005 for the Maputo Protocol to be put in place.

And basically, to keep it simple for our listeners, the Maputo Protocol advocated for the right for women to take part in the political process, the right for social and political equality between women and men, and for women to have autonomy in their reproductive health. Those are the three main areas.

And so, those have explicitly helped close the gender gap. We still have a ways to go, I believe, 123 years based on the rate we're going right now. But it's a start. This is measured often by how many females hold seats in parliament on the continent. And so, as of 2022, Rwanda is the leader—61% of their parliamentary seats are held by women. South Africa comes in at 46%. Zimbabwe comes in at 30%. Kenya comes in at 21%. And, this is very interesting, Nigeria is last on the list at 4%, and this is as of 2022. So, we've still got a ways to go. Rwanda is the lead, but it's very surprising to see Nigeria last on the list. Kenya's making great strides with this last election, where we had the very first woman deputy presidential candidate, Martha Karua, to run for office. Now, even though she did not win on the ticket with Odinga, at least it was a start.

And the last thing I want to say about that is that when I speak to women—I've met women on these parliamentary seats, I've met other women who work in government, who don't work in government, and academics as well—and they say that some of these women are really good at what they do and others are passively warming seats. In other words, representing that, yes, a woman is in this parliamentary seat, but not doing much to advance women. And so, that's something that needs to be looked at a little bit deeper because we need women to stand up for women and to try and make a change and not get too cozy in these seats without pulling up other women as well.

ORDU: No, those are absolutely salient observations indeed. First of all, in the case of representation in political office, it is one of those dismal, I would say, dismal records that many of us Nigerians are not proud of. A bill that would have assured some percentage or proportion of the parliamentary seats in the House, in Congress, in Nigeria, that bill has been defeated many, many times. And this is we are talking of in the 21st century, you know. So, it's not surprising that we're very much behind.

And it's interesting, the Maputo Protocol you talked about earlier how as early as those days Africans are already putting pen to paper about the need for women to take care of, or be responsible and accountable for what happened to their own body. And here we are in the richest country on the planet, the United States and state after state legislating to have lawmakers decide what women should do with their own bodies. I find it absolutely astonishing.

PASHAYAN: And yeah, it's pretty amazing. It is really amazing to see this sort of backwards movement in the West.

ORDU: Yeah. No, let's be very clear: not just the West, *in* the United States.

PASHAYAN: Yes. Yes. You're right, very clear.

ORDU: In the United States.

Anyway, let's turn now to issues of productive jobs, Angela. In collaboration with our think tank partner in Kenya, the Kenyan Institute of Public Policy Research Analysis, KIPPRA, which you know, we recently launched a study of urbanization in Nairobi. And I'm just curious, what would be your advice to policymakers on how best to create productive jobs in formal and particularly informal settings in Kenya?

PASHAYAN: Yes, policymakers, please hear me. Investing in human capital, that's number one. And, I listened to Janet Yellen speaking at the top of the year here in Washington, D.C. And the main thing that she talked about was that we've got to invest in human capital. And, human capital if you think about population, population is a country's biggest asset. Right? Think about it, Nigeria's population is so big, it's like, yeah, Nigeria can do something. Other countries that have smaller populations, it's harder to achieve goals economically particularly. So, if your population, just the sheer number of people, if that's your largest asset, why are you not investing in them? Why would you leave half of them behind? And so, in Kenya, in Nairobi, I've always said that there are more people living in the slums than not. But I've never have been able to quantify it.

Well, KIPPRA was able to do that, right? KIPPRA was able to do that in February 2023 at the launch in Kenya. They said that 70% of the citizens that live in Nairobi live in informal settlements. It's astounding. But it backs up something that I always thought was true. And when you think about human capital and you think that 70% of the people in the capital of your country live in slums, it's not smart. It's not smart at all. So, investing in human capital is number one for policymakers to jump on that.

And I know that there is a World Bank summit coming up in Dar es Salaam late July on that very thing. Now, I wonder if they're going to talk about informal settlements. And to be honest with you, I doubt it. They're going to talk about investing in human capital that don't even need any investment. People who live in Karan, and Lavington, Kilimani. But when you've got half of your citizens that are just sitting there disappearing away into nothingness, those are the people that need the investment.

And so, when you think about compared it to China, China's got 1.4 billion people. Africa's got 1.2 billion people. But there's a huge difference in how human capital is used in China versus in Africa. And so, I think the continent and policymakers have something to learn about that investment.

Now, here's the tough part. When you invest in human capital, it's kind of like, okay, what next? It's like this needs to be strategically thought about so that an outcome can be reached. And so we hear about these entrepreneurs all across Africa and all the money, all the backing that they're getting from foreigners and things like that. Those are African entrepreneurs. Africa needs to capitalize on their own people.

And so, policymakers could create business competitions in their countries so that these entrepreneurs that come up with these great business ideas, they should be funded even if it's partially funded. But the whole idea is give them some kind of incentives so that they can start factories or to have businesses with office space where they can actually hire people.

And so, the investment in human capital now has a place to go to get hired for jobs, because investing in human capital is one thing, but it doesn't do anything if there's no jobs created. So, we need to create jobs for humans to have.

And so, between the business competitions with incentives, maybe there could be tax incentives. Maybe there are certain zones where they can build factories, things like that. That's a part of making this work.

Of course, we have FDI, foreign direct investment. But foreign direct investment is really tricky when it comes to job creation. Unfortunately, what I hear—I'm a half boots on the ground, half academic—from boots on the ground what I'm hearing about foreign direct investment is that there's too much corruption, and no one wants to get caught and have to pay the price of the Foreign Corruption Practices Act.

So, let me give you a really quick example. A water company, okay, decides they are going to go in to Kenya and create this fast way that you can purify water. And that would offer value chain jobs to small entrepreneurs who want a water purification business. There could be jobs for people on *boda bodas*, bicycles, motorbikes, to deliver the water. Lots of different things.

But instead, once this water company sets up, somebody comes around, whether they're a government official or a policeman or whatever, and they say, hey, your water is not pure. There's something wrong with your water. And of course, this water company tests their water according to international standards all the time— right?—with written certificates saying the water's clean. But this one person comes by and says, nope, your water's not clean and I'm going to shut you down. You know, wink, wink. And the wink means pay me off or I'm going to report you that your water is not clean. And of course, that company cannot pay that person off. They wouldn't even want to. But they couldn't. There's a risk there. And so, now here is a foreign company that was willing to invest who can no longer invest because of corruption.

So, jobs can be created if we can get rid of some of the corruption. Jobs can be created if we can lift up African entrepreneurs with incentives to build their own factories. Jobs can be created with regional trade. And of course, jobs can be created with AGOA. So, we have these four tools that we can use. And if we use those in conjunction with investing in human capital, Africa has a chance very easily to surpass China in economic standing.

ORDU: Angela, the points you made really, really resonate. The report I was talking about, you're responding to on the urbanizing urban development of Nairobi, the framework that underpinned that study was, as you rightly picked up: One, issues of municipal governance, making sure the municipalities, the sort of corruption you mentioned in the water entity, et cetera, is minimized.

Secondly, the idea of business environment, right. So, that if you and I are not setting up a company or an enterprise in the city, clearly if it takes us 18 to 20 months or 30 months to get the requisite relevant licenses, we're not going to do it. So, those sort of business environment, issues—very, very important.

And then the third is the whole point of accessibility, making sure that in and out of the city and within the city the infrastructure is the type that would be attractive to employers who wish to create businesses and also make life easier for people, particularly those who live in those informal settlements, who have jobs in the more formal business district. You know, if it takes them 3 hours in the morning to get to work, clearly that's not going to be very useful in terms of creating productive jobs. So, I hear you very, very clearly that the governance situation is absolutely fundamental as well.

PASHAYAN: Yeah. Do you know that the revenue that is generated in Mukuru slum only is $64 million a year? $64 million a year generated in Mukuru slum only. That's tax revenue that could be used. When you when you ignore half of your population, you're ignoring your own growth.

ORDU: Very, very solid point indeed. It's not so much in this particular case half, because it was 70% as KIPPRA found out in the study in informal settlements, this is a big proportion of the population indeed. So, as we wrap up, what do you think is development's greatest challenge today regarding poverty reduction, Angela?

PASHAYAN: Really I think it's two things. It's the land issues that hold back slums being developed. But it's also a communication deficit. Because we're talking about

poverty reduction. And when you have the land issues that exist in the informal settlements, NGOs, they don't know what to do. It's like, well, can I go there or can I not? Like, who owns the land? Am I my helping squatters or am I trampling on some private property or what do I do? How do I set up a center or a hospital or what can I do? These land issues are holding me back. And so, that's one of the greatest challenges regarding poverty reduction.

And then the other is the communication deficit. Now we communicate all the time. And we ask people who are in need, what do you need? But what we don't realize is that colonialism may not necessarily be in our faces, but it's in our DNA. Right? And I'm not even from Africa, and it's still trailing down through me as well. There's something that doesn't leave you when something's been done to your people or people who look like you, you remember it and you're very cautious. And so, for years, Africans were told, don't think, don't talk, don't do, you don't know what you need, you don't know what's good for you, you know nothing.

And now all of a sudden, in the development sector, we want to ask them, what do you want? What do you need? We want to ask them these things. Well, they're not quite sure what to say. It's like, well, do I say something or do I not really say something or do I just nod my head and accept whatever program they're giving me because they know best? They want to teach me this? Okay, I'll learn it. You want me to learn about this? I will. You want me to participate in this? I will. And so, there's that missing that missing part of communication where we have to go deeper. And that's that critical thinking that I do in my community-led development group. I listen to them and then I pose a question to get them to go deeper until we really find out the best way forward.

And so the land issues, that's one thing. That's a physical thing that development has to sort of tackle. But the other thing is communicating and really, really helping people in the slums to come up with their own solutions.

ORDU: Angela, I see that you're writing a book to be released later this year. What is the book about and what are your plans for the future?

PASHAYAN: So, the book is basically about almost everything I'm speaking about now. But particularly I try to simplify and share what it's like to be a part of a slum community, what some of those norms are. And I also share really, really important communication information about what slum dwellers feel that they need to improve their lives, and what the development professionals feel they need to offer to improve the lives of slum dwellers. So, beyond setting the stage of the conditions in the slum, I do that comparative and come out with a result that shows that we're not that far off from making progress. But we yet are not making progress because of this communication deficit. And so, the book is really to pave the way to show how can we bridge that gap, how can we get past this disconnect with communication so we can really get something done?

And I'm really looking forward for that book come out. It's called *Below the Proletariat*. And I will let you know as soon as it hits the stands.

And as far as plans for the future, I've got some research underway, and it is multidimensional, multidisciplinary research to, quote, unquote, settle the informal settlements. And that will be a book to come out in the future.

But just to sum it up briefly, this settling the informal settlements is really to create this sort of plan, a plan that governments and maybe the private sector can work together and settle all of the issues that hold back the development of the informal settlements.

ORDU: I very much look forward to welcoming you to the AGI platform, our podcast to discuss your new book when published. In the meantime, Angela, it's been a great pleasure speaking with you today. Thank you very much.

[music]

PASHAYAN: Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure to be here. Thank you.

ORDU: I'm Aloysius Uche Ordu, and this has been Foresight Africa. To learn more about what you just heard today, you can find this episode online at Brookings dot edu slash Foresight Africa podcast.

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