



BOXES

WOMEN BEAR THE BRUNT OF PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH SLUM LIFE



Kibera, Nairobi . Photo ©:Saltbones/UN-HABITAT

The vast Kibera settlement in Nairobi receives much media attention as one of the largest, most densely populated slums in Africa, but there are surprisingly few comprehensive studies with reliable statistics relating specifically to the women who live there. Much of the documentation about women in Kibera is based on case studies, interviews and qualitative analysis.

Kibera is a vast slum located approximately seven kilometres southwest of Nairobi's city centre. A large concentration of women live there in what can easily be described as the worst conditions slums have to offer. The slum is characterized by severe poverty, poor access to clean water, overflowing open sewers, huge heaps of rubbish, overly crowded mud houses, constant threat of eviction, and widespread criminality, delinquency and unemployment.

Although men in Kibera also suffer from problems associated with slum life, numerous studies on informal settlements in the region suggest that women bear the brunt of problems brought on by inadequate housing and insecure tenure. Unequal power relations between women and men generally leave Kibera women at a disadvantage in areas such as accessing land, property and other productive resources, and securing remunerated work.

Indeed, research by the Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) found that: "Informal settlements in Nairobi are ... often home to thousands of women who were driven by in-laws out of their rural and urban homes and land upon the death of their husbands. In two separate missions to Kenya, as well as through research on women's

inheritance rights in sub-Saharan Africa, COHRE found that family pressure, social stigma, physical threats and often extreme violence directed at the widow force her to seek shelter elsewhere."

The study reinforces findings from numerous others showing that widows are particularly vulnerable to eviction because of customary and traditional practices in sub-Saharan Africa that override international commitments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Such practices often compromise the rights of Kenyan widows to keep their land and housing when disputes with in-laws arise. Property grabbing from widows whose husbands have died of AIDS is also reportedly widespread and is one of the factors that push women to migrate to Kibera.

6
5
4
3
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1
0
(World Population in Billions)

1200 1300 1400 1500 1600 1700 1800 1900 2000

Continued ...

The burden of women's domestic roles in Kibera also puts them at more of a disadvantage when basic services like water, sanitation and electricity are lacking. Like women in many parts of the developing world, those in Kibera are usually responsible for water collection and management of waste in the home. Long queues of women waiting with rows of yellow jerrycans are a common sight in the slum. Up to 85 per cent of women in Kibera draw water from private and community-owned water kiosks.

As in other slums where sanitation facilities are poor or non-existent, going to the toilet at night or in the early morning is a considerable security concern for women. Because they have to venture down narrow, unlit alleyways, many would rather use a plastic bag (the so-called "flying toilets") rather than braving the dark and the inherent risk of rape and sexual harassment.

Compared with men, who are more likely to secure work outside the slum, women spend more time around the home and are more likely than males to take care of household waste. In doing so, they are exposed to environmental hazards such as breathing in harmful fumes from the burning of rubbish, which add to the health risks they already experience by cooking indoors with charcoal, kerosene or firewood in the absence of electricity or cheaper fuel.

Even if women do not get sick themselves, their unpaid labour when caring for people with diarrhoea (leading killer of children under 5 – and malaria, both of which are exacerbated by lack of improved sewerage) takes time away from education or income-generating activities.

The Kenya Water for Health Organization estimates that the average household in Kibera comprises seven people, and that many households are female-headed. A 10-by-10 square foot dwelling for seven people is indicative of severe overcrowding and its attendant problems, such as lack of privacy, ease of disease transmission – especially respiratory infections – and increased risk of "negative social behaviour patterns", such as domestic violence and child abuse. The cycle of violence continues outside the home as well: poverty often pushes girls in slums to engage in risky sexual behaviour or prostitution in exchange for food, shelter, gifts, or cash. As a result, HIV infection in the slum remains extraordinarily high, with estimates as high as 20 per cent – more than twice the national average.

Sources: COHRE & Hakijami Trust, 2007; COHRE, 2008; Ilako & Kimura, 2004; Marras, n.d.; UN-HABITAT, 2002; UN-HABITAT, 2006.

CORRUPTION FEEDS INCOME INEQUALITY

Corruption and income inequality deprive communities and the poor not only of material wealth, but also of opportunities and livelihoods. Generally defined as the misuse of public office for private gain, corruption can take the form of "grand corruption", when legislative and executive bodies implement economic policies for the benefit of a small segment of the population; "legislative corruption", when under lobbyists' influence lawmakers favour specific interest groups; and "bureaucratic corruption", when officials seek bribes.

All types of corruption take advantage of structural deficiencies in the political, judicial and economic institutions of developing countries that are already stacked against the poor.

Empirical research into the causal relationship between corruption and income inequality suggests that it would take only a 10 per cent decrease in corruption to increase GDP growth by 2.8 per cent in Africa, 2.6 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean, and 1.7 per cent in OECD and Asian countries. Africa is where corruption is most detrimental to economic growth, and Latin America where the phenomenon most deeply affects income equality. Researchers infer that a one-standard-deviation decrease in corruption would lower the Gini coefficient of income distribution (on a 0 to 1 scale) by 0.05 point in the OECD area, 0.14 point in Asia, 0.25 point in Africa, and 0.33 point in Latin America.

Corruption has pervasive social and economic consequences, and policymakers' failure to tackle these as part of broader efforts to promote equity and equality only encourages a vicious cycle of interrelated increases in both corruption and income inequality. Corruption stymies economic growth and therefore can affect income distribution, economists have shown; sociologists have found that the reverse is also true: income inequality can increase corruption if the phenomenon is considered as acceptable behaviour in an unequal society.

Corruption makes public spending less efficient, especially in vital welfare and education areas. In Uganda, only 13 per cent of central government spending on some educational programmes reached its destination between 1991 and 1994.

Specific policies, or attempts to strengthen financial and legal monitoring schemes, are not enough to tackle corruption; also required are quick and efficient prosecution of offenders and anti-poverty, redistributive policies. Targeting corruption without addressing its systemic counterpart, inequality, may doom anti-corruption efforts to failure.

Sources: Delavallade, 2006; Gyimah-Brempong, 2002; Gyimah-Brempong, 2006; Lambsdorff, 2006; Subramanian & Chakrabarti, 2003; Svensson, 2005; Uslaner, 2005; You & Khagram, 2005; Weisman, 2006.