

**“FIRE CAST ON THE EARTH – KINDLING”
BEING MERCY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY
SOCIAL ANALYSIS**

AFRICA

URBANISATION & PROLIFERATION OF SLUMS

A CASE STUDY OF KIBERA - NAIROBI

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TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
ABSTRACT	1
<i>SECTION ONE</i>	<i>1-5</i>
1.0 Prologue	2
1.1. The Concept of Basic Need Basket	3
1.2. Kibera Slums (a Part of a Whole)	4
<i>SECTION TWO: Growth & Development of Kibera</i>	<i>5-10</i>
Introduction	5
2.1. Geography and Historical Background of Kibera	5
2.2. Demographics	7
2.3. Infrastructure	7- 10
2.3.1. Housing	7
2.3.2. Health	8
3.3.3. Education	8
2.3.4. Transport Systems	9
2.3.5. Water	9
2.3.6. Security	9
2.4. Kibera’s Livelihood	10
<i>SECTION THREE: THE CONTEXT – AFRICA</i>	<i>10-12</i>
Introduction	10
3.1. Background	11

SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSIONS

13

Interventions and Reconstructions:

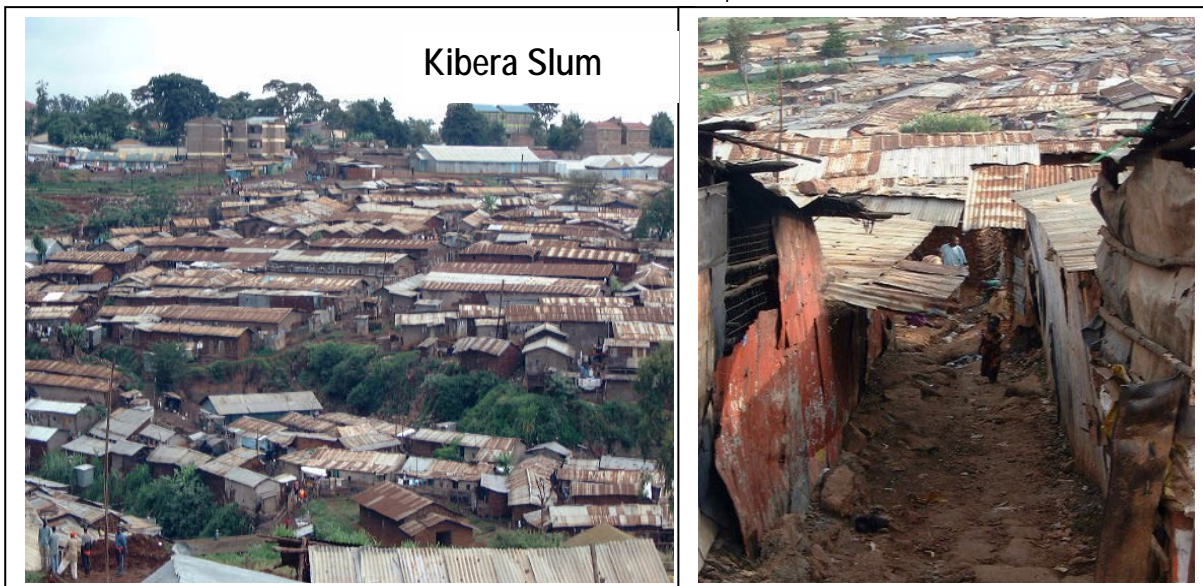
BIBLIOGRAPHY
ABSTRACT

14

The underlying causes of rights deprivation and marginalization of people creates poverty in Africa forcing people to migrate from rural to urban areas. Thus, the rise and high rates of urbanisation and the proliferation of slums is evident of people’s movement in Africa. Many people especially the young dream of a better future. They, therefore, leave the underdeveloped rural areas in search of greener pastures. Many of these migrants end up in very overcrowded urban areas commonly known as informal settlements or slums. Here, they lack the very basic needs and crime is rampant. Currently, a staggering one billion people worldwide live in such informal settlements, and “without radical changes the number could double in thirty years.”¹ This research, therefore, hypothesizes a critical look of this social analysis with focus for Africa. Within the issues named, some awareness of the socio-economic, political and trade imbalances which create poverty in Africa cannot be ignored.

The focal point for this research is Kibera slums in Nairobi Kenya. It is the largest slum in Africa and one of the largest in the world.² It is home to one million people close to that of Swaziland’s or that of Trinidad and Tobago. The problems highlighted in this paper offer a case in point that carries many of the issues named in the summary paragraphs offered for this November 2007 Conference³. The paper is developed in four sections. Section one gives the overview of the situation, section two characterises the case in point, section three positions the research within the context of Africa and section four offers a conclusion of the research. The pictures below illustrate Kibera’s reality that will be unfolding.

4



Kibera Slum

ons Africa

Section One: PROLOGUE

Section One

Introduction

Welcome to the story of Africa whose socio-economic and political climate illustrate that forty years after the colonial government, the continent is still underdeveloped. In particular, over the last two decades, the countries of Africa have faced increased poverty, rising levels of unemployment, increased insecurity, bad governance, deterioration of infrastructures and poor social services just to name a few. As a result, there is high rise of urbanisation and proliferation of slums. The UN Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat)⁵ notes that slums exist in all parts of the world. However, they are concentrated in developing countries. As such, Africa has the second largest number of slum dwellers in the world.⁶

For definition, *Random House College Dictionary* defines a slum as “a thickly populated, squalid part of a city, inhabited by the poorest people.” According to UN Habitat, a slum is a place of residence lacking one or more of five things: durable housing, sufficient living area, access to improved water, access to sanitation and secure tenure. Going by this definition, most places of our cities whether it is in Lusaka, Zambia’s capital, Lilongwe, Malawi’s capital or Badia West in Lagos - Nigeria, or wherever, the conditions are complex. In Kenya for example, slums are informal settlements “hidden away like a dirty secret along railway embankments, rivers, and beside rubbish dumps.”⁷ Kibera exemplifies this reality.

⁵ *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements* (2003)

⁶ Rasna Warah, *Slums Are the Heartbeat of Cities* Global policy Forum 6th Oct 2003
<http://www.globalpolicy.org/soecon/develop/2003/1006slums.htm> accessed 29th May 2007

⁷ Andrew Harding, *The third in a Four Part Series: Looking at what life is like for Nairobi residents in Africa's largest slum.* BBC <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2297265.stm>

Kibera presents micro and macro issues of a people living under conditions of extreme poverty. The slum is severely overcrowded and lacks proper infrastructures (e.g. sewage systems, water supply and sanitation, access roads, drainage and electricity, schools, health centres, community centres, recreational facilities, communication services, open spaces and so on). In Kibera, you will find very high unemployment rate of people, a huge number of school drop-outs and low income earners. There are also bureaucratic government systems and structures that match governments' lack of social energy, poor local and international policies, trade, and debt issues as well as Africa's own problems i.e. land ownership, traditions and customs, corruption and lack of contingency plans in case of disasters.

Time and space constraints do not permit a detailed conversation of all the issues mentioned above and the questions that they hold for Africa. Nevertheless, Kibera's physical environment is a hotbed for crime, prostitution, rape and other forms of anti-social and immoral behaviours. This slum is featured on the film by Fernando Meirelles's (2005) *The Constant Gardener*⁸ and in the CNN video.⁹ As a slum, it is the most studied slum in Africa, either because of its historical role in colonial rule of the 1900s, or, its location in Nairobi - a cosmopolitan city with two UN agencies i.e. Habitat (United Nations Agency for Towns and Cities) headquartered in Nairobi and the UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programmes).

1.1. The Concept of the Basic Need Basket

In Africa, the concept of the basic need basket asserts that most people are below the poverty line bracket. If we take, for example, any five basic needs basket: food, shelter, clothing, Medicare, and education, you will find that the cost of each item has a shortfall in poor people's expenditure in relation to their income. Moreover, each of these basic needs has much hidden and related cost. For example, food alone takes in fuel (charcoal or firewood, water, vegetables, and other groceries). Hence, to provide a meal for an average family of five to ten, (for most families care for other poorer families as well) it would cost close to Kenya Shilling (Ksh) 500.00 (US\$ 7 to 8). In most cases, a casual labourer earns Ksh 70.00 (US \$1) to Ksh 200.00 (US \$3) a day (as per April 2007)

⁸ The Constant Gardener (Film) the story is filmed in Loiyangalan (A small town located on the southwestern coast of Lake Turkana in Kenya and the slums of Kibera Kenya

⁹ Christiane Amanpour reports for CNN *Where Have All the Parents Gone* on the Wind of Hope project in Isiolo, Kenya <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33I4rqTx0V0>

Commodities	Ksh 70.00	US\$ 1.00
2 kg Maize flour	50.00	00.70
Vegetables (Onions, greens, tomatoes)	100.00	1.42
Oil, Salt etc	25.00	00.35
1 kilogram Sugar	70.00	1.00
100gm tea	30.00	00.42
Water (30 litre)	20.00	00.28
Charcoal (8kgs)	80.00	1.12

Malnutrition is very evident and diseases like pneumonia, malaria, TB, typhoid, dysentery, vomiting and diarrhea turn fatal most times. In terms of expenditure, there is nothing left to have a decent life. Herewith, child labour and prostitution are alternative solutions to earning money. Today, the spread of HIV/AIDS is worrying and family resources and welfare is diminishing.

In summary, given the United Nations' report (2005) on the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDG)¹⁰ New York, I can confirm that Africa is one of those continents where extreme poverty remains a daily reality for people who subsist on less than US \$1 i.e. Ksh 70 a day. Therefore, Africa's social capacity in terms of social services is in dire need of attention. This reality weighs heavily on Africa's development which has thirty four of the world's fifty least developed countries. This geographical handicap has been compounded by war, government failure and mismanagement of power as well as poor international and local policies and bad stewardship. Seemingly, negative impacts of globalization on Africa have not spared her - robbing away her spirit of goodness and hospitality. Today, communal values are being lost to over emphases on consumerism, individualism and unethical behaviors. However, if the MDGs were realized, then the basic need basket of every household would be improved in Africa.

1.2. Kibera: A Part of a Whole

From the views of fifty people interviewed from different parts of Africa as well as those who either lived or worked in Africa, the belief is that Kibera as a case in point could well refer to any other slum in the world. For example; Lilongwe has 70 percent of household as squatters, about 55 percent in Caracas - Venezuela; 50 percent in Dar-es-salaam - Tanzania; and 45 percent in Karachi - Pakistan.

¹⁰ Goal 1 Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger
<http://www.globalpolicy.org/msummit/millenni/2005/05mdgreport2005.pdf>

The World Bank's thinking is that "the world's worst slums can be transformed."¹¹ This is because "the rapid growth in developing world cities is making living intolerable for the urban poor and threatening the economic, social and environmental progress of these cities."¹²

Although many of Kibera's problems stem from rural to urban poverty, the backbone of issues is international and national policies. At the same time, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund - 'Structural Adjustment Programme' (SAP) have worsened conditions of Africa. When we look at Africa today, the burden of foreign debt, over dependency on the dollar/Euro notes, inflation of world markets, reliance on fossil fuel, impact of environmental degradation, low social energy, greed and corruption, poor implementations of national plans and lack of cohesion for development purposes, etc, all add up to the continent's woes and pleas.

Section Two: GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF KIBERA

INTRODUCTION

One cannot miss Kibera for "in the grey gloom of first light, it looks like a pile of rubbish - a clutter of cardboard and cloth on a damp pavement."¹³ Although one may be tempted to ask, why people should live in such awful places like Kibera, the slum is widely located in cross proximity to employment opportunities. In the cosmopolitan city of Nairobi, Kibera only shares 5 percent of the size of Nairobi which is 684 square kilometres. Kibera is commonly seen as a city within the city of Nairobi. It has its own class of people, own complete districts, services, churches, shopping areas, medical clinics and bus stations etc. Nairobi is a city that has 60% of the people accommodated in the slums and half of these residents live in Kibera alone.

This millennium has given a shine to the slums as settlements that need proper attention rather than the preconceived idea that slums are informal settlement and the people in them are squatters. Kibera has been home to many dating back to 1900s settlements and under government control since 1948.

¹¹ Washington, June 3, 1996

¹² Ismail Seregeldin, World Bank Vice President for Environmental Sustainable Development June 3rd 1996

¹³ The third in a four part series looking at what life is like for Nairobi residents in Africa's largest slum. BBC documentary <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2297265.stm> accessed on 2007-05-25

2.1. Geography and Historical Background of Kibera

Nairobi is more than 1,661 metres above sea level. The city has approximately three million people (3,000,000) though unofficially people believe that it has close to four million. Kibera is surrounded by affluent suburbs and estates including the famous Karen¹⁴ area, Langata, Upper-hills, and Adams-Arcade. This slum occupies approximately 630 acres of land situated in the “Nairobi South-Western peri-urban zone about seven kilometres from the City Centre.”¹⁵ Kibera contains twelve villages and has close to twenty ethnic communities.

Kibera’s history goes back to ‘colonial period’¹⁶ when the urban layout was based on government-sanctioned population. This was the era of racial segregation that separated people into the enclaves for Africans, Asians and Europeans¹⁷. As an informal settlement, Kibera dates back to “the 1920s when the British colonial government decided to let a group of ‘Nubian soldiers,’¹⁸ to settle on a wooded hillside outside Nairobi.”¹⁹ The British failed to repatriate the Nubians or to compensate them with title deeds to these acquired lands from the Kenyan people. Consequently, the Nubians built homes, and set up businesses. They were still squatters with no legal rights and they called the place *Kibra*, meaning jungle.²⁰ This place became a military reserve in order for the soldiers to act as informal military forces should their services be needed again on a short notice. In loose translation of Zalot’s (2002) writing, he indicates that “later, the colonial government needed labour to construct the Kenya to Uganda railway line, to extract natural resources from the land, and to transport these resources to the near port and load them on ship...”²¹ The Nubians were means to easily available labour for such British projects.

The legacy of colonisation often shadows the atrocity of the Arabⁱ settlers in Africa. These ruled the land (East Coast of Africa) in the 18th century before the Portugueseⁱⁱ gained control on the Indian

¹⁴ see Sydney Pollack (1985) film *Out of Africa*

¹⁵ Kenya Water For Health Organisation <http://www.kwako.org/loc-d-kibera.html>

¹⁶ 1900s When Kenya was a British Protectorate. The capital was transferred from Mombasa to Nairobi in 1905

¹⁷ Africans were not allowed to enter the city without a permit and because of racial segregation the black people ended up in the black suburbs or in Kibera rather than in the white or the Asian settlement areas

¹⁸ An ethnic group from Sudan

¹⁹ The Nubian soldiers had been fighting on the side of their allies in World War One, as part of the King's African Rifles.

The last in a four part series looking at what life is like for Nairobi residents in Africa's largest slum.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2297279.stm> accessed on 2007-05-25.

²⁰ BBC Slums Life Series <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/2297279.stm>

²¹ *The Roman Catholic Church and Economic Development in Sub-Sahara Africa Voices, Unheard in a Listening World* (2002) Lanham University Press of America, Inc p3

coast of Kenya for almost two hundred years with Mombasa as their administrative centre. It is in the early 19th century that the British developed commercial ties with the Arab Sultans. We are all familiar with the world history of slave trade that relates to systems of domination in Africa where Europe and the Arabs were all part of the trade with the Africans. This simply explains why Africa might be in need of healing and reconciliation with its past. In my opinion, past memories frustrate any plans for development and this escalates greed and corruption. People have not yet renewed their trust of any leadership systems.

The problems that hamper growth and development in Africa are multiple. The present and the past is well connected to the issue of highly inequitable land distribution,²² forced *hut tax*²³ introduced by the British systems, “institutionalisation”²⁴ of money in Africa, collapse of formal institutions, changes in gender roles and in social cohesion more generally, increased population pressure, corrupt systems, subsistence farming and cash-crop production etc. Today, housing, land ownership, employment, tribalism, crime, abuse of alcohol is some issues that if addressed slums like Kibera could be transformed

Though Kibera is not attractive from the outside, if invited into a home, feel privileged. Most visitors to the slum never get the chance to see the real living areas there and the routines of daily living. To enter a home, one doesn't knock, but instead calls out, “Hodi...Hodi” and the response to enter is, “Karibu” (welcome). If you are invited in, you may be invited to enjoy some tea “chai” (boiled water with milk, and sugar) and slices of white bread. Inside most of the homes, everything is clean - worn, old, and falling apart - but freshly washed.

2.2. Demographics

With an estimated population of one million (1,000,000) people, Kibera's situation is urgent just as in many other slums in Africa. In Kenya, the last decade has witnessed loads of influxes of people into the

²² This goes back to colonizers who forbade Kenyans from growing their own coffee crops, lest they compete against settler plantations, and British settlers extracted any material or economic wealth generated within Nairobi (in Marker Kramer (2006) *Dispossessed Life in Our World's Urban Slums* Orbis Books, Maryknoll USA p59) The post independent leaders did not make any difference to the realities of the poor who lost their livelihood through colonization.

²³ Communities were put under forced labour to pay for the ‘hut tax’. When people lost their lands and homes, they were put into concentration camps and lived in grass thatched huts. The British enforced payment of tax per hut. This forced people to start looking for jobs to get money to pay. The jobs were either in the white settlers' farms or in the city. Before this, people did not use money as the system of trade was barter - exchange of goods for goods. Today, militia groups are using the same methods of harassing slum residents with protection fee per household, capitalising on the sins of the past history.

²⁴ People practiced Barter Trade (exchange of goods with goods) which explains why trade is still an issue in Africa

slums since the government instigated ethnic cleansing 1992-1994 and the continued violence in the country. Most slums contain a lot of young people and women's burden in the slums is severe. Thus, the shift in gender roles has intensified, and destabilised families, because both man and woman have now to contribute to the welfare of the family. This has a detrimental effect on men women relationships. In Kibera, women are particularly disadvantaged because half of the population lives in female-headed single-parent households. Girls education is not encouraged either and many of them end up marrying young.

2.3. Infrastructures

2.3.1. Housing

The majority of structures are rented on a room-to-room basis. The average home size in Kibera is 3 meters by 3 meters, with an average of five persons per dwelling. Urban services such as water or sanitation are minimal. There is an average of one pit latrine for every 50 to 200 people. People resort to "flying toilets"²⁵. Toilets are not easily affordable, for to use one (a filthy private latrine) costs five shillings. Bureaucratic structures disable people to do simple repairs or to build a toilet without dealing with the administrative provincial government through the local chief for permission. Hence, the illustration below can speak for itself.

26



In terms of housing, it is not simply the problem of affordability that keeps Nairobi's population from access to decent housing. According to a 2002 study, "mortgages range from 15 to 25 percent, with repayment periods averaging about ten years. Borrowers are required to pay up front 20 to 40 percent of the appraised value of the property and all the related legal fees. This can amount to 10 percent of the loan value. To have the land surveyed, marked, and appraised, together with stamp duties and legal fees, this is likely to cost Ksh 210,000 approx US\$ 3,000." (see Consortium of International urban organizations: Cities Alliance)

²⁵ These are plastic bags which fly over the roof tops at night. Note: Amref has constructed a total of 286 pit latrines across the Kibera slum. All the units are in use and are contributing to the reduction of the "flying toilets" menace. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/picture_gallery/07/africa_flying_toilets/html/1.stm

²⁶ Problems affecting health <http://www.kslum.org/aboutkibera.htm>

The Kibera has no electricity service; therefore, at night is “pure dark with intermittent glimmers of fire.”²⁷

2.3.2. Health

Kibera’s smells are constantly challenging. There is a stink all over that is compounded by lack of toilets and open sewage, rotten foodstuffs as well as smells from charcoal burners or burning firewood. Cuts and simple injuries are common and tetanus is dangerous unless one gets tetanus a injection. These injuries are common because the pathways that are narrow alleys are littered with rusty nails, plastic bags, wood, pieces of metal, broken glass, and plastic, empty lighters, name it.

There are several individuals and NGOs who run health clinics within the slum. Health mobile clinics are frequently conducted by the health NGO's and the government. However, HIV/AIDS continues to be a permanent condition in Africa a creating hundred thousand orphaned children in Kibera alone²⁸. The disease exacerbates poverty, marginalises people and stigmatises those afflicted and their families.

2.3.3. Schools

There are a few schools within the Kibera slum run by well wishers. These schools are run by donations from individuals and corporate bodies which occasionally donate items like: food, books, and desks, pens, building materials and teacher’s salaries commonly referred to as volunteer teachers.

2.3.4. Transport System

The Kenya to Uganda railway passes through Kibera. The slum also has a railway station but due to the absence of an effective commuter train system in Nairobi, most Kibera residents use buses and Matatus (Local Taxi) where necessary. Consequently, the already disadvantaged poor are forced to trek long distances on foot to work or just give up seeking work in parts of the city. Inside Kibera there are no roads but pathways. These paths are dirt concrete leading through the homes. The paths are so narrow in places that you can actually touch the buildings on both sides of the path if you stretch out your

²⁷ Mark Kramer (2006) *Dispossessed Life in Our World's Urban Slums* Orbis Books, Maryknoll USA p55

²⁸ See CNN video Where Have All the Parents Gone <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33I4rqTx0V0>

arms. Many of the pathways are divided right down the middle by a smelly ditch which helps carry the water away.

2.3.5. Water

Drinking water is sold to the inhabitants in plastic containers after it has been pumped through metal and plastic pipes alongside sewage trenches. The 30 litre jerry-can costs twenty shillings (\$0.28). These trenches carry refuse and human waste to the river at the base of the valley. The river then runs into Nairobi Dam which is used for recreation and other resources. The plastic pipes are brittle and exposed, often breaking, to be repaired without care for sanitation. The 2006 *Human Development Report* argues that “water and sanitation must be put front and centre on the development agenda...”²⁹

2.3.6. Security

The turmoil of slums arises when political leaders spur people to vote on tribal line. Usually, Slums are not a major source of urban unrest but they constitute areas with a higher concentration of crime related activities that range from petty to serious and major crimes. Most of the immoralities arise from the issues of congested housing, illiteracy, ignorance of basic constitutional rights and human rights etc. Idle youth end up as mobs or private vigilantes (militia groups) who patrol the slums sometimes demanding protection fee from the people. These would burn you if you steal one shilling while at the same time, pickpockets mingle with the crowds heading home after their day’s work hiding quickly along narrow alleys, jumping nimbly across open sewers, their paths occasionally lit by the lamps and candles of stall owners selling fruit and fried fish.

2.4. Kibera’s Livelihood

Many slum dwellers depend on the ‘informal economy,’ which involves “some kind of petty retailing”³⁰ e.g. opening a tiny kiosk named ‘Duka’ - a mini-market. Unbelievably, the size of such a Duka is that of a closet or just a stall i.e. a place to sell soft drinks, soap, candy, cigarettes, cooking oil, maize flour or fresh vegetables and fruit bought from the main markets. Employment elsewhere is in the service industry i.e. domestic - ‘maids’, waiters, bar maids, guards, watchmen and prostitutes etc. Other

²⁹ General Analysis on Poverty and Development November 9, 2006 accessed 1st June 2007
<http://www.globalpolicy.org/soecon/develop/index.htm>

³⁰ Marker Kramer (2006) *Dispossessed Life in Our World’s Urban Slums* Orbis Books, Maryknoll USA p55

people find jobs in small business as charcoal sellers, dressmakers or brewing e.g. the “Nubian gin or *chang’aa*, an illicit alcoholic drink made of maize, sorghum, or sugar cane.”³¹ In the past, local brews have turned lethal claiming many lives. “Children sell trinkets and newspapers, scavenge through garbage, and shine shoes.”³² Other activities include selling kerosene and small hotels – food stands.

Section Three: THE CONTEXT - AFRICA

INTRODUCTION

In etymology, Africa takes the name proposed by a historian Leo Africanus (1488-1554) who suggested the Greek word *phrike* (φρίκη, meaning ‘cold and horror’ combined with the private prefix ‘a’, indicating a land free of cold and horror. Historically, *afri* was the name of several peoples who dwelt in North Africa near the provincial capital Carthage. The Roman suffix ‘ca’ denotes country or land.³³

Africa as the world’s second largest continent is “home to 900 million people as per 2005 reports in sixty one territories, accounting for about 14% of the world's human population”.³⁴ Yet, “ask someone to tell you quickly what they associate with Africa. The answers in most parts probably range from ‘cradle of humankind” to “poverty,” “corruption”³⁵ and “tribalism,” and so on.

3.1. Background

African countries are characterised by an astonishing contradiction: an enormous resource endowment on the one hand, and social and economic deprivation on the other. According to the United Nations’ Human Development Report in 2003, the bottom 25 ranked nations (151st to 175th) were all African countries. Africa’s past colonial history predisposed her to primary products. Today, she is rich in raw materials including natural resources (minerals, precious stones, and fossil oil), unbeatable game

³¹ Markel Kramer (2006) *Dispossessed Life in Our World’s Urban Slums* Orbis Books, Maryknoll USA p55

³² *ibid*

³³ Consultos.com etymology <http://www.consultsos.com/pandora/africa.htm>

³⁴ *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision* United Nations (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, population division) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa>

³⁵ *National Geographic Africa: What ever you thought think again* Special issue September 2005

reserves and wildlife, and world famous beach resorts like Mombasa. She plays a role of exports in her agricultural exports e.g. horticultural products, coffee, cocoa, tea, tobacco to open markets. She decorates homes, hospitals and hotels with her cut flowers. Her minerals are sold even for high tech computer chips and cell phones. Africa sells her barrels of oil to millions of consumers and she exchanges her wealth for guns and ammunitions as handy resources for war and tribal clashes.



Unfortunately, Africa is still a shadow in the world trade negotiations. Whilst, a look at South Africa will illustrate that the country has access to financial capital, numerous markets, skilled labor, and first world infrastructure in much of the country. The opening of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange³⁶ is a state of the art resource. On the same note, Nigeria sits on one of the largest proven oil reserves in the world and has the highest population among nations in Africa becoming one of the fastest-growing economies today. Seemingly, Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon and Egypt are making comparable progress in

³⁶ Economy of Africa <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa> accessed 2007-05-27

economic growth. African rivers of central Africa are great generators of hydroelectric power. Africa is mother to the big animals that are a major source of ecotourism revenue in eastern and southern Africa; and her forests in the wetter regions if managed and logged sustainably would be renewable as lucrative sources of income. However, the world trade systems, structures, and strategies continue to keep Africa in chains of poverty for the most part. Nevertheless, Africa is still a weak player in the economic market. Africa completely depends on the Dollar or the Euro note to sell her wares and her money is of little value if any.

The problems that beset Africa call for new paradigm and call people to look beyond Africa's past colonial history which still impinges on her development. As a continent, tribal divide is becoming a political tool for politicians just as African different cultures, languages, and mindsets keep Africa away from her people. This is also exaggerated in the structures of her zones as Francophone, Anglophone or the Arab north. Thus, Africa remains her own worst enemy. She has lost her fraternity and sorority that offered her solidarity in the *ubuntu spirit*³⁷ in the years past. Consequently, she has to constantly challenge some of her own cultural practices e.g. female genital mutilation (FGM), wife inheritance, or the heart breaking practice of breast ironing in Cameroon.³⁸

Section Four: CONCLUSIONS

Intervention and Reconstructions

With all the policy-sensitive initiatives undertaken over the last decade including the *Enabling Strategy* from the Nairobi Informal Settlements Coordination Committee; or, *Nairobi Situation Analysis, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper* and the *Local Authority Transfer Fund*, there should be some signs

³⁷ Ubuntu does not translate into English as it has rich and nuanced meaning. Ubuntu is the value of human being, it is humanness, it is kindness, Ubuntu is tolerance, sensitivity, and respect. When you put that together you find *UBANTU* as the lifeblood that pumps through your veins and informs the brain to think correctly, to think emotionally correctly. (Anne Itotia (2000) personal notes *African Traditions and Cultures in the Ubuntu Spirit* workshop. Pretoria - South Africa.)

³⁸ The breasts are flattened using heated grinding stones, wooden pestles, heated banana, coconut shell and sometimes herbs and petrol. Breast ironing is a form of body modification where mothers, aunts or older cousins flatten pubescent girl's breasts to make them less sexually attractive to men. Cameroon women and girls are struggling to fight this cultural practice that is equally devastating and traumatising. East Africa Standard 2007-05-27

of hope. These have addressed a series of themes, including settlement upgrading of slums, community participation and improved access to services.

Jacinta (not her real name) offers a success story of a woman who knows best that the people in the slums are deprived not only of life building or coping skills but of opportunities to spot economic gains. Jacinta is today a well groomed lady whose education that was supported by an NGO opened her to a hopeful future. Her word to us is, “that we develop a spirit that enables others to challenge socio-economic and political systems through capacity building, training and education, while focusing on those at the bottom of the ladder.”³⁹ This agrees with the arguments of James Mwangi that “Africa needs an environment to help it pull itself out of its system; Foreign aid has not changed Africa much in the last 50 years.” He continues, “Africa needs support to participate in fair trade where it can export and get an equal share as the rest of the world. Direct investment is the key word.” He added, “Access to the markets through the removal of trade barriers and subsidies would place Africa on a fair and realistic scale on the global market.”⁴⁰

In conclusion, there are many initiatives in Kibera despite people’s difficult situations. These include several active community organisations working on issues such as: environment and sanitation, waste management, HIV/AIDS awareness, counselling and testing; domestic violence, education, and unemployment. Seeing the number of people willing to work in harsh environments and the problems that threaten us today with urbanisation, a well coordinated effort is necessary for all who care about people at the bottom of the pyramid – those who live issues of extreme poverty each day. This is because migration of people has many mitigating factors that thwart people’s dreams for a greener pasture. Therefore, conditions forcing people to migrate should be our concern rather than the movement of people worldwide.

³⁹ Jacinta is a university graduate working with an international community in Nairobi. I met Jacinta through Ken Mathews a Community Aid Worker. San Francisco.

⁴⁰ Equity Bank Chief Executive Officer who was addressing hundreds of economic experts in a technical working group in Berlin ahead of the G8 summit in the report *World Bank challenge G8 on aid* East African Standard 2007-06-06

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End Notes

ⁱ There was one major problem: trade from sub-Saharan Africa was controlled by the Islamic Empire which stretched along Africa's northern coast. Muslim trade routes across the Sahara, which had existed for centuries

ⁱⁱ The Portuguese were present in West Africa and extended their influence around the coast, Mauritania, Senagambia (by 1445) and Guinea, they created trading posts. Rather than becoming direct competitors to the Muslim merchants, the expanding market opportunities in Europe and the Mediterranean resulted in increased trade across the Sahara. In addition, the Portuguese merchants gained access to the interior via the Senegal and Gambia rivers which bisected long-standing trans-Saharan routes.