

Resilience of Children and Youth Negotiating Urban Vulnerabilities and Livelihoods in the Langas Slums of Eldoret, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Young people are numerically dominant in Africa, but often face harsh risks and hostile socio-economic environments that severely limit their potentials. They seldom have the material or socio-political resources with which to meet the threats of poverty. Those who live in cities are constrained by the boundaries of urban poverty. The situation is worse for those who live in urban slums. Many of them often struggle to maintain even a constrained and deprived livelihood. However, in spite of the constraints, many show resilience. Rather than passively submitting to urban poverty, they frequently become major resources in dealing with urban problems and developing the city. They find ways of coping and even improving their lives. Drawn from ethnographies of the Langas slums of Eldoret city in Kenya, this study examines the plight of young people in the context of the risks they face and the resilience they show as they ably negotiate urban adversity, vulnerability and livelihoods. The study borrows insights from the theory of everyday tactics to focus on how they adapt to the constraints they face, make creative use of opportunities that the city offers, and find ways of improving their lives. Policy implications for mitigating the consequences of child and youth poverty in urban Africa are proffered.

Key Words: Slums, Children, Youth, Poverty, Resilience.

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Research problem

Young People and Urban Life. People living in poverty are often ignored and among them are children and youth. “Young people are numerically dominant in Africa, and the future depends on their ability to sustain themselves and the societies in which they live. Yet they have few resources, material or social, with which to meet the threats of poverty” (Bourdillon 2012: 3). Particularly, they often struggle to maintain a constrained even deprived livelihood. Accordingly, young people’s experiences of dealing with livelihoods, wellbeing and vulnerabilities are limited by their ages.

Those who live in cities are more often inhibited by the boundaries of urban poverty. The situation is worse for those who live in city slums. Many of them struggle to survive in the harsh environment of slum life (Kabiru, Beguy, Ndugwa, Zulu, & Jessor 2013). Characterized by a severe lack of resources, slum life is frequently high in unemployment, inadequate housing, poor services and extreme poverty (Bourdillon 2012). Indeed, majority of the residents of slums (over 50%) are children and adolescents aged 24 years or younger (UN-HABITAT 2008a). Growing up in such resource-poor settings, young people are at heightened risk of negative social, behavioural and psychological outcomes including risky sexual behaviour (Dodoo, Zulu, & Ezeh 2007; Ngom, Magadi, & Owuor 2003; Zulu, Dodoo, & Ezeh 2002), substance use (Mugisha, Arinaitwe-Mugisha, & Hagembe 2003), delinquency, and violence (Blum et al. 2000). Yet, city slums also provide opportunities. In spite of the constraints imposed by slum life, young people are frequently major resources and do find ways of coping, surviving and even improving their livelihoods. Despite the adverse conditions, they successfully progress through, are resilient and show great resilience against the odds.

Operationalization of “Resilience.” Resilience as characterized by Fergus and Zimmerman (2005: 399) is the “process of overcoming the negative effects of risk exposure, coping successfully with traumatic experiences, and avoiding the negative trajectories associated with risks”. The common elements in this characterization is the presence of risk or adversity and of protective factors that enable a person to successfully cope, adapt, or overcome risks and achieve positive outcomes (Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardslee 2003; Fergus & Zimmerman 2005; Mistry, McCarthy, Yancey, Lu, & Patel 2009; Olsson, Bond, Burns, Vella-Brodrick, & Sawyer 2003; Tiet & Huizinga 2002). In simple terms, resilience refers to successful adaptation in risky settings. Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) note that protective or promotive factors, which enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes, can either be *assets*, that is, individual characteristics that enhance positive outcomes, or *resources*, that is, attributes of the social environment that enable an individual to surmount adversity.

Research objectives

This study sought to identify and report on how young people in poverty develop strategies of life and survival (resilience), and how these strategies may be incorporated into public social policies. The study examines the factors associated with young people’s resilience in urban slums, sheds light on mechanisms for promoting the wellbeing of children and youth in high-risk social settings, and indicates how these strategies may be integrated into public policies.

Theoretical framework

Theory of ‘Everyday Tactics’. Anchored in Certeau’s (1984) theory of ‘everyday tactics,’ the study draws illustrations and experiences from the Langas slums of Eldoret city in Kenya to examine the constraints typically faced by young people, how they develop means to overcome them, and the initiatives they formulate for livelihood and survival. The study shows how they adapt to the constrictions they face, make use of opportunities slum life

offers, and innovate creative ways of securing and even improving their socio-economic wellbeing.

Certeau's (1984) theory of 'everyday tactics' outlines that everyday life works by using the rules and products that already exist in culture in ways that are influenced, but never wholly determined, by those rules and products. 'Tactic' is the art of harmonizing everyday operations and consequences (or routine practices). Despite repressive aspects of societal strictures, ordinary people enact and synchronize elements of everyday routine practices as tactics of 'creative resistance' (Wild 2012) for reclaiming autonomy from the all-pervasive forces of commerce, politics, and culture. Certeau (1984: 48) indicates that "a society is thus composed of certain fore-grounded practices organizing normative institutions and of innumerable other practices", however, the common person in executing the everyday practices escapes from total control of the procedures elected by the system. The common person improvises with what is ready-to-hand in the system; only it must be fitted to the occasion, so it cannot be used in the expected way or for a pre-existing goal.

Yet the system does not approve nor allow for invention and so the creation is carried out underneath. However, it is tolerated but never acknowledged by the system. In that sense, these practices undermine and evade the force of the system. Yet it is "a silent and common, almost sheep-like subversion," says Certeau (1984: 200), which does not leave the system or threaten it. These practices are the constant "murmuring of the everyday" (1984: 200).

Locating 'Negotiation' and 'Livelihoods'. Consequently, this study highlights strategies of creative adaptation, methodologies of survival and "ways of making do" (Certeau 1984: 29) young people employ in negotiating conflicting and often hostile social-economic environments to secure their 'livelihoods' in an urban slum in Kenya. 'Negotiation' intimates that these young men and women have agency, they choose, and choices make a difference, despite the economic or social constrictions they face. They take control of their lives within the limitations imposed on them. They secure their 'livelihood' by pooling resources, by working in legal but informal economies, and by the use of social networks. In so doing they avoid entrapment in a self-perpetuating culture of urban poverty. Through their negotiation skills, they produce new forms and styles of urban life.

The concept of 'livelihoods' incorporates the "social and physical environment together with people's responses to it. It considers not only material but also human and social resources, including local knowledge and understanding. It thus considers the material means for living in a broader context of social and cultural interpretation" (Bourdillon 2012: 5). As Hebinck and Bourdillon (2001) contend, 'livelihoods' are social constructs, ways of living built by people who make their own value judgements and who choose to follow trajectories to fit their own identities.

Methodology

Location of the study: Eldoret City. This study was conducted between January and April 2015 at Eldoret city's Langas slums and informal settlements. Eldoret is a cosmopolitan city in Uasin Gishu County and the foremost administrative, socio-economic and political capital of northwestern Kenya. It is a major transit point for long-distance trucks that ferry goods to neighbouring countries of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. The city is served by an international airport. In addition, the city is home to numerous educational institutions including primary and secondary schools, middle-level colleges, institutes of science and technology, polytechnics and universities.

The city is also the industrial heart of the north-rift valley with a number of nationally recognized manufacturing concerns, factories, business premises and trade enterprises located here. Eldoret is a high altitude area with extremely cold temperatures that can go as low as 12 degrees Celsius during the months of April through August, with the coldest being July

(Ochieng' 2012). The high altitude climatic conditions are ideal for training for many of Kenya's elite middle and long distance athletes, who have won several internationally acclaimed medals for the country. Surrounded by prime agricultural lands and supported by the high altitude climatic conditions, Eldoret city acts as the main commercial hub for the economies of Uasin Gishu and neighbouring counties of Nandi, Elgeyo Marakwet and sections of Baringo, Kakamega, Bungoma, and Trans-Nzoia. These are economies largely fuelled and driven by large-scale grain, dairy and horticultural farming.

With a population of about 300,000 people by 2009 (KNBS 2009), slum households comprise the majority of Eldoret city's inhabitants. Majority of the slums and informal settlements' residents come from rural areas with the hope of finding a better life but end up settling in these neighbourhoods that are under-developed, over-populated and deprived of formal basic services. The unfolding trend is referred to as 'the urbanization of poverty'.

Langas Slums. Langas (the centre of the study) is an estate about 5 kilometres south of the central business district of Eldoret city, where the majority of the residents are low-income earners. The estate was once a large agricultural farm but was later sub-divided and sold in the form of small plots dimensions. The new plot owners erected semi-permanent structures, built latrines and sunk shallow water wells in their plots. The use of water drawn from wells exposes the residents to groundwater with high levels of bacteriological contamination. In addition, overcrowded cramped conditions mean that diseases such as bronchitis, allergic dermatitis, tuberculosis, dysentery, influenza, meningitis, amoeba, cholera, typhoid and fungal infections are a common occurrence. Their spread is partly aided by low resistance due to malnutrition (Kiptum & Ndambuki 2012).

Population, Sampling and Data Collection. The respondents for this study were limited to those of children and youth making livelihoods in the Langas slums of Eldoret. To enable more meaningful data collection, a research sample of ten was purposively selected through the snowball method, targeting those who had been at the slum working-site longest. In total, seven males and three females ranging in age from 10 to 22 years were sampled. However, a narrative profile of experiences focuses on one representative case (*Ibrahima*) of all the other sampled cases.

Data for the study was realised through ethnographic methods (Whitehead 2004, 2005) of in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, focus group discussions, non-participant and participant observation. These methods were chosen because they emphasize observations of natural behaviour and captured social life as the participants experienced it (Richardson 2000). The methods also allowed a richer, more intimate view of the social world than could have been achieved using structured methods (Schutt 2006: 320). Partnerships were built by establishing rapport with the respondents. Rapport was useful in ensuring that the respondents spoke as honestly and as freely as possible.

Information acquired generally relates to attributes, life histories and lived experiences of the respondents as it concerns age and gender, amount of money made, extent of commoditization of the proceeds of their work, occurrence of hazards, conflicts with government agencies, time, cost, opportunities, level of domestic application of proceeds, etc. A discussion theme guided the interviews and group discussions. Ethical principles of informed consent, costs and benefits of participation, anonymity, confidentiality and rights of withdrawal were shared with research participants (Hopkins 2008; Greene and Hogan 2005).

Urban inequalities

Slum Conditions. UN-HABITAT (2008b) estimates indicate that slum prevalence – or the proportion of people living in slum conditions in urban areas – is highest in Sub-Saharan Africa; 62 per cent of the region's urban population lives in a slum or suffers from one or more of the deprivations that define a slum. UN-HABITAT (2003) defines a slum household

as a group of individuals living under the same roof that lack one or more of the following conditions: access to safe water; access to sanitation; secure tenure; durability of housing; and sufficient living area. Based on the aforementioned characteristics a specific place, whether a whole city or a neighbourhood, is defined as a slum area if half or more of all households lack access to improved water, improved sanitation facilities, sufficient living area (not more than three people sharing the same room), quality and durable structural dwellings, secure tenure or combinations thereof. These deprivations focus attention on the circumstances that surround slum life, depicting deficiencies and casting poverty as an attribute of the environments in which the slum dwellers live.

The problem of slum conditions is emblematic of general poverty stemming from chronically low incomes, high unemployment rates and lack of essential services. Characterized by substandard and inadequate housing, informal settlements, instability, inefficiency or absence of housing institutions, and other factors, many slum households lack access to basic services, but municipal authorities often refuse outright to extend these essential services to unplanned neighbourhoods, putting untold risk to thousands of households and families (World Bank 2008).

Cycle of Slum Poverty. Life in slums is difficult and precarious, fraught with endemic poverty, lack of employment, income-generating opportunities and other basic social amenities. Slum neighbourhoods also suffer from lack of financial resources and high costs of living, harsh living conditions and physical exhaustion from lack of transport. Slum households are more likely to be located in neighbourhoods with poor road conditions, open drain sewages or other inadequate drainage systems, poor management of solid waste, and where air and water pollution are prevalent. In the absence of regular collection of household solid wastes, organic waste fills up public spaces, backyards, lanes, pathways, and vacant lots (WHO 2007). Overcrowding, noise and air pollution, poverty and dependence on a cash economy, high levels of violence and reduced social support weaken and devastate both individual and social network that could serve as buffers against negative impacts. All these contribute to sustained and chronic stress that predisposes individuals, households and families to significant negative impacts on their wellbeing.

The lack of basic services in slums has various environmental, social and economic dimensions related to the physical structure of the ecosystem in which people live as well as to the socio-economic conditions of individuals, households and families. The presence of slum areas directly denotes urban poverty and their prevalence in a city is an indicator of urban inequality. Urban poverty is multifaceted. It results in inadequate access to goods and services or the resources to acquire them. It is characterized by, among other things, a lack of purchasing power, exposure to environmental risks, insufficient access to social and economic services, and few opportunities for formal-sector income generation—the primary source of income-earning opportunities. In addition, it is directly associated with other influential dimensions such as malnutrition, lack of shelter, lack of political rights and illiteracy.

Historically, poverty has been regarded as a vicious cycle. Poor households produce and raise poor children resulting in the loss of childhood opportunities, such as schooling, that cannot always be regained. Poor children, in turn, tend to become poor parents. Poverty is therefore, passed on from generation to generation affecting the long-term health, well-being, and productivity of families and of society as a whole. In the midst of these urban adversities and vulnerabilities what are young people's adaptation and coping strategies?

Children and youth negotiating urban livelihoods and vulnerabilities

According to available information, children and youth constitute a large proportion of Kenya's population of whom 32.3 percent live in urban areas. 34.4 percent of this group lived in poverty in urban areas in 2009. A majority of these young people live in slum communities and neighbourhoods (Allan 2011). Slum households are highly visible in most Kenyan cities, and many are clustered within geographically contiguous high-density neighbourhoods.

Poor housing and sanitation, weak or non-existent infrastructure, a lack of basic services such as education and health care, high unemployment rates, and high rates of violence typically characterize Kenyan urban slums. Limited formal education and employment opportunities mean that young people living in these deprived communities are prone to involvement in crime, violence, alcohol and drug use, and other hazardous behaviours that place them at heightened risk for poor health and social outcomes. The Langas slums of Eldoret suffer the same degree or magnitude of deprivations as other slum areas. It therefore reflects slum characteristics as most of the individual households within its neighbourhood do (Kiptum & Ndambuki 2012). Although official figures are lacking, it is estimated that just like other big cities in Kenya such as Nairobi (Allan 2011), over 60 percent of Eldoret city's population live in slum settlements.

Life Histories. Eliud Yegon, Timothy Matunda, Richie Nyanchama, Veronie Kibichoi, Johnson Karanja, Peter Njoroge, Harun Wasike, Heelen Ndombi, Jason Machogu, Ogero Kemuma, Kiprop Nemwel, Chelagat Ibrahim, Vernessa Yegon and others are between 7 and 23 years and in a group of fifteen (15) children and youth, born and raised in the Langas slums of Eldoret. For these young men and women extreme poverty is the norm. Neither they, nor their parents or guardians can afford basic needs. Their families often share household units. They have all been friends since childhood. While a few of these young men and women like Yegon, Matunda, Ndombi and Karanja have been lucky to go through primary school, most of them missed the opportunity to complete lower primary school because as they confide, their "families lacked fees to finance our schooling." Indeed, images of people living in desperate conditions in the Langas slums are a common site.

Most of these young men and women have histories of broken homes, absent fathers and female-headed households. Coming from low socio-economic family backgrounds means hardship in meeting their individual livelihoods and household survival needs. Equipped with poor formal academic attainments, no skills training and with no proper source of income, these young men and women were unable to meet their daily needs. Risks of poverty like hunger, illness and a wasted life threatened their future. Their level of education could not get them meaningful formal occupations.

They consequently invaded the streets of Eldoret city as *chokora* to negotiate (or 'hustle' as Kenyans would want to say) for their livelihoods. *Chokora* is a derogatory term in Kenya, which according to Davies (2008: 314) denotes "homeless children who do not attend school, and who only beg, steal, sniff glue, work for their food, and are always dirty and unclean." To 'hustle' in the Kenyan lexicology means working on whatever project is currently available and being paid on completion of the assignment. Hustling can be as innocent as helping an elderly woman carry heavy loads of luggage for a few coins or as illegal as prostitution and gang-related theft. Precisely, hustling is involved with those who work in the informal economy—those who sell products and services outside of the traditional, sanctioned economy. These include cobblers, hairdressers, hawkers, potters, tailors, brewers, garbage collectors and many others. While the informal economy is less stable, it provides income for many of the urban poor.

However, out of the gloom incumbent of slum poverty came a little hope. To get around these vulnerabilities and to put food on the table for themselves and their families, the older

members of these children and youth invented a creative way of negotiating poverty in the slum where they reside. As they gathered around a common 'idling joint' better known as '*base ya mtaa*', (literary translated to mean the 'estate station/centre'), they thought of an idea. With their strong network of comradeship and friendship, they could earn a living and mitigate their vulnerability, out of the numerous heaps of garbage generated by the slum inhabitants every day, so they thought.

'*Cash for Trash*'. Increase in consumerism and greater population densities in the slum result in high proportions of garbage generation. In spite of this, the Eldoret county government's strategy for garbage management follows a centralized garbage management model, which essentially involves a single agency collecting and transporting garbage to a designated landfill. In this centralized model of garbage management, Langas slums just like other low-income areas are invariably ignored. The city government has no estimates on the number of tonnes of garbage generated per day in the slums and this is because as noted earlier, slums and other low-income residential areas suffer from non-provision of basic services.

Consequently, this group of children and youth established a garbage collection services for the residents of Langas slums. The young people's garbage management model is simple and operates at two levels. They have organised themselves into three groups and divided the slum into three sections. At level one, they collect garbage from the doorsteps of the slum's households, at a small premium monthly fee. This service is only available to households willing to pay. On designated days, the collectors move from door-to-door collecting garbage from the paying households.

At level two, on a daily basis, each group collects all the 'valuable' garbage in their assigned section and transports it to a central holding area. They collect garbage thrown about in drains, empty spaces, open fields and along roadsides. Always donning/dressed in black T-shirts, black jeans and black overalls, these children and youth are ever busy collecting and selecting garbage, which they then stuff into sacks they are lugging around. They however, have been able to buy two handcarts, which serve mostly those clients who have agreed to the monthly payment fees.

All the collected garbage is brought to their waste management field (centre) and segregated, though others are segregated at source. The garbage is variously sorted and segregated into organic waste, bones, paper, polythene, rubber, plastics, metal, bottles and glass.

The biodegradable garbage (vegetables, leaves, fruits etc) is taken to a composting field and converted into organic manure through vermin composting process. Bio-culture is added to the organic waste, composted, yielding compost (after about 4 to 5 weeks of composting), which is later sold to the surrounding farming community as manure or bio-fertilizer. The biodegradable garbage is particularly important as it relieves pressure on landfills while producing an inexpensive, nutrient rich soil amendment that farmers use to improve soil fertility. Compost adds organic matter to the soil, increasing the water holding capacity of its structure, facilitating root penetration, and making nutrients available to crops over time.

Bones, paper, polythene, rubber and plastics, metal, and bottles or glass wastes are sold to local middlemen who transport them to bigger cities like Nairobi and Mombasa where there are processing plants for recycled objects.

This initiative not only introduced a valuable service that the slum community did not previously have, but also offered a livelihood programme for the group of children and youth involved. However, the initiative is not without challenges. According to one of the youths, Johnson Karanja, "we faced initial challenges – to begin with, all houses had to be mapped in the slum as there was no data given that the local city authorities do not include Langas slums under its regular waste management programme. Another challenge pertains to the collection of a monthly service fee for the paying households. It was initially very difficult to convince the residents to pay for a service to which they are not used to paying. Despite this, many

residents agreed to pay the monthly fee. The others however, choose to throw the garbage in nearby drains, road reserves and/or along the roadsides.”

Through this creativity, the children and youth intent on earning a livelihood and mitigating vulnerability have not only come up with innovative solutions to garbage management but also helped clean the slums, get recognition for the role they play in managing the city’s garbage and obtain basic rights and entitlements. Interestingly, their project creates value from the garbage.

Through these, the garbage collectors earn a living; enjoy better life conditions and live a life of dignity. While they may not be able to afford to shop at the high-end shopping outlets, this group of children and youth can pay for food, housing, clothing, products and services within their neighbourhood. Heelen Ndombi the treasurer of the garbage collectors reveals that, “the group earns about Ksh, 180,000 (US\$ 1,800) per month from the sale of recyclables and biological fertilizer.”

Profile Experiences. The transformed life of Chelagat Ibrahima is, perhaps, characteristically typical of the other garbage collectors. Ibrahima, 23 years old, was born and raised in the Langas slums and informal settlements. His formal education ended at the age of ten, after his mother died. After her death one of his father’s many wives, who also live in the Langas slums and has a daughter, Adema, raised him. Ibrahima’s father, who lives in the sprawling slums with other wives, rarely visits. After the tragic death of his mother, Ibrahima worked briefly as an apprentice in one of the metalwork workshops adjoining the slums. As he was in training, he did not get a salary, which is common in the neighbourhood. Without money to cater for his basic needs, pay house rent, buy food items and cater for subsistence, he decided to quit the apprentice job and began peddling the drug cannabis to the slum residents. He operated with his friends from the common idling base. The idling ended when a friend came-up with the idea of garbage collection and composting manure within the estate.

Since then, Ibrahima lives in a rental house close to their garbage collection central site. The house is made out of wood, hardened mud and corrugated iron sheets. These are the typical kind of housing found in this part of the city (Picture 1). Ibrahima’s room is bigger, and, more luxuriously furnished than most of the rooms of the other slum dwellers. He has two wooden beds, a little table and a wooden bench, some closets, plastic water containers, a stereo, a DVD player and a small television. On the walls of his room hang some images of Kenyan political leaders, to whom he identifies. He shares his room with his siblings Makone (12), Ateya (9) and Zabdi (7). Ibrahima is also married to Richie Nyanchama (19) who works as a garbage collector togetherwith him. Together they have a one-year-old daughter, Zawadi. During the weekends, he visits his stepmother and younger stepsister, Adema.

Out of the proceeds he makes from garbage collection, Ibrahima pays rent, caters for the subsistence needs of his siblings who live with him, pays college fees for his stepsister Adema, and his other three siblings who are both in primary and secondary school. Having his own house and catering for both the subsistence and educational needs of his siblings shows that he is doing relatively well, financially.

Informal Microfinance. The garbage collectors have a formula of sharing proceeds from the garbage collected. There are two levels of sharing returns received from the garbage collection. At the first level, all money netted from the garbage collected in a day is put into a central kitty, though each member is given a nominally predetermined amount each day to cater for his or her subsistence. This money is only given to those who report to work, and only on the days they work. Those who do not work in any day and for whatever reason are not paid.



Picture 1. Typical housing and life in the Langas slums. Almost all houses are made of hardened mud and sticks, with iron sheet or tin rooftops.

At the second level, members of the group initiated an informal savings and credit scheme out of the money they make from the sale of bio-fertilizer and other garbage collected. From the daily sales, each member contributes Ksh, 100 shillings (approximately one US dollar) to the group savings and credit scheme. 20 percent of this money is paid into a common pool and is loaned to any member of the group who is in need at a small interest rate. 80 percent of the money is immediately given to a member of the group based on an allotment slot decided on earlier. This is done on a rotational basis until all members of the group receive their allotment and the cycle is (re)started again and again. This is referred to as 'Merry-Go-Round' or *chama*. However, this arrangement often causes conflict when some members defy the rules of the 'scheme'. Nonetheless, those who default on either the daily contributions or on loan repayment are made to forfeit some days of their labour to the group work to compensate for the money allocation received.

This model of garbage management reduces pollution to a minimal, considering littering appears to be the norm in the slum and other adjoining informal settlements. The group hopes the county government will agree to a partnership in the garbage collection enterprise so as to diffuse the model to the other estates of the city and empower the young generation. As of now, the county government does not recognise their initiative. Moreover, it is against the city's bylaws to collect garbage without written authority from the county government.

Any kind of partnership would greatly improve on the city's environment and access to sanitation facilities for poor neighbourhoods struggling with large amounts of solid waste

management (Picture 2). Of particular note are plastic bags used to throw out toilet waste by people with no access to latrines, commonly called 'flying toilets' heaped in large piles in any open space available within slum neighbourhoods. Not surprisingly, slum settlements suffer from high incidences of cholera, typhoid and amoeba, which are directly linked to the prevailing unsanitary conditions. Collaboration and support can be in the form of provision of funding to the garbage collection project, skills development and/or provision of equipments. As Adama (2013) notes, integration and social inclusion of waste workers into solid waste management can be a veritable tool for fighting poverty and generate employment in the informal waste sector. Recycling of garbage products improves the environment because it reduces carbon emissions. As noted by Kahenda (2015), recycling is beneficial as it reduces the need to manufacture new products and also saves on landfill space since plastic bottles take an average of 500 years to decompose.



Picture 2. Open spaces around the Langas slums look more like a dumping site than a community. Scattered trash lines the dirt paths that pass for streets.

Policy Implications

The study has illuminated key protective and risk factors that contribute to growth, development and vulnerability among children and youth living in poor urban settlements in a sub-Saharan Africa country. In particular, the study highlights the need for parents, adults, authority figures, government and other agencies to act as social control agents by supporting intervention programmes designed to address children and youth vulnerabilities, empowerment and well-being.

The study also underscores the need for policies and programmes to ensure that young people living in resource-poor urban neighbourhoods have access to opportunities for social,

economic and civic engagement that address local needs. While the government and its agencies are primarily responsible for providing such services, public-private partnership should be explored.

In addition, the promise of informal microfinance lies in its ability to empower people to work their own way out of the poverty trap, while avoiding dependency and the 'hand-out' shame of conditional assistance. Informal microfinance provides a variety of social benefits, imposes savings discipline and enables members earn returns on their savings contributions. Consequently, informal microfinance is an effective method of ensuring that benefits of increased income accrue to the general welfare of individuals, groups and families. This goes along to ensure improvements on household assets, educational attainment, nutritional and health statuses of a people. Governments must lay firm policy guidelines and frameworks to safeguard and enhance this people driven methodology for poverty mitigation.

Further, accumulation of evidence on positive child and youth growth and development can provide a more compelling rationale for interventions to promote positive outcomes for young people growing up in ecologies of adversity. This is especially critical given the increasing rate of urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa that is rarely matched with improvements in living conditions, livelihood opportunities, and social services.

Conclusion

The conclusions to be drawn from this study are clear. The urban poor are a neglected lot. They receive poor or no services from city authorities. Despite the discrimination and neglect, slum children and youth take-up the opportunity that the slum offers and reap fruits from it. To them garbage is not a problem, but an income opportunity. It is a resource with the potential of earning them a livelihood. With garbage collection, their fears and socio-economic hardships are addressed. Garbage generated by slum inhabitants gives them the potential of becoming social entrepreneurs.

Their system of garbage management apart from ensuring livelihoods for the urban poor also keeps the environment clean and thereby reduces instances of disease. Replicating and scaling up this model to cover the entire city could go a long way to resolve the endemic garbage management challenges across the city and other urban centres in Kenya and indeed in the whole of Africa.

The study shows that adversity of slum life has trained young people coping mechanisms to become socially and economically independent, often living on their own, but increasingly also as heads of households in the absence of adults, especially fathers.

To be able to move out of the cycle of poverty prevalent in slums, governments and other development agencies must partner with citizens to create change using local initiatives and resources. When they do that, the entire community will change. The way to move towards a more satisfying life for self, family and neighbourhood is through empowerment. One way is through income generating activities and what this group of children and youth are doing is creatively sustainable. They work in hazardous environments but securely within their neighbourhood. By so doing they bring improvements to the health of the slum dwellers, create safer healthier places to live and work, tackle slum vulnerabilities and secure their livelihoods. They simply become resilient.

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