

## **Nature of Conflicts and Their Resolution in Korogocho Slums, Nairobi, Kenya**



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**ABSTRACT:** Majority of the households in slums are female headed and have very low incomes. Survival for these women exposes them to illegal income generating activities including prostitution, hawking and making illegal local brews. This results in conflicts not just among themselves for competition over the shared resources but also with the law enforcement agencies. The study sought to establish the nature of conflicts prevalent in Korogocho slum, Nairobi Kenya. The study employed the Liberal Feminism Theory to conceptualize and analyze the nature of conflicts and focused on two ideals, equality and liberty to explain the consequence of the push factors leading women into slum life. The study respondents were women, local administrators and leaders, village elders, clinical staff and officers from Civil Society Organizations selected through simple random sampling procedure and purposive sampling. Data was collected using a standard questionnaires with both open and closed ended items. There was also a focused groups and key informants interviews. Quantitative data was exported to Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) while qualitative data was thematically analyzed. Findings showed that most of the conflicts were: over competition for scarce resources. The conflicts resulted in physical battery. The slum vigilante groups led in the resolution of the conflicts with limited police intervention. Given that the groups were male dominated, women got little justice. The study recommends the need for the government and development partners to build inclusive community agencies to identify and respond to the common problems facing women in the slums instead of leaving the slum residents to solve them on their own.

**KEYWORDS:** Women, Conflicts, Conflict Resolution, Vigilante Groups, Scarce Resources.

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Background**

One third of the world's urban population lives in slums and according to a finding by the United Nation report, warns the number of people living in poverty in cities globally could double in the next 30 years and that about a billion people are in urgent need of help (UN Habitat, 2003) The growth of slums globally determines whether poverty is alleviated or worsened, whether health crises are alleviated or exacerbated, whether people have access to basic services, which is a global commitment unfulfilled, of safe water and sanitation, for example, or whether that don't have access to these services widens.

The inhabitants of slums largely consist of the migrants from the rural areas, in search for employment in the city. Due to the high cost of houses in the city they all look for low-cost housing hence the influx into the slums. Majority of the households have very low incomes where large proportion of the households are female headed. Morbidity and mortality rates are caused by diseases stemming from poor environmental management owing to poor sanitation, lack of potable water, poor drainage, overcrowding and uncollected refuse. Although many of the inhabitants have jobs in the formal sectors, majority earn their living in the hawking, prostitution, brewing, service and production enterprises (UN Habitat, 2003).

In Africa today, although physically, the level of urban dwelling is low compared to other continents, the rate of urban growth is extraordinarily high. The population growth rates of Africa are among the world's highest but its urban growth is generally twice as high. At this rate, it is estimated that by the year 2020, more than half of Africa's population will be living in urban areas (The East African 11-17 July 2005). According to UN report, 2003, African countries are poor and high urban growth rates means that there is a high concentration of poverty in the towns and cities. Majority of the urban population are unable to find reliable livelihoods and are consequently forced to live in slum settings and shanty towns that lack proper housing, water, electricity, sanitation systems, healthcare facilities, schools, roads and garbage disposal mechanisms.

The main factor fuelling the growth of slums is the failure of agricultural policies but also conflicts, which are flushing people prematurely from the land. Health will continue to be elusive if people find themselves in slum conditions and targets like education will be very difficult to achieve when people do not have shelter and an adequate place to live.

A few kilometers from the four and five star hotels of the central business district, living conditions verge on the inhumane. No sewage facilities combined with a high water index mean that raw waste flows in and around dwellings and openly through streets

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and paths where pedestrians walk and children play. The problems associated with urban slums all over the world apply to those around Nairobi, including Mathare, Korogocho, Kibera, Kasarani, and Starehe where most of the residents are squatters. However, estimates place the population living in slums as 60% of Nairobi total, occupying only 5.8% of all land used for residential purposes and some areas have been placed at 63,000 people per square kilometer population density (Ehresmann, 2004). The 60% means that about 2 million people are obliged to live in a tiny portion of land. More serious is that the government owns this 5.8% of land hence the slum dwellers lack security of tenure. Worse yet is that 80% of the slum dwellers pay rent, that is, they do not even own the very structures they live in.

“Korogocho” means a collection of rubbish and this is how the people of Korogocho themselves are regarded in the eyes of the better class in Nairobi. Korogocho is a cosmopolitan village and all tribes in Kenya are well represented, with a population of more than 400,000 people. (The East Africa 11-17 July 2005). It is depicted by temporary and/or semi-permanent sub-standard housing and structures made of anything available. Old “*mabati*”, mud, wood, boxes, nylon papers, you name it, where some are bending and one can hardly stand inside them. Basic infrastructure is non-existent and no signs of service provision from authorities. The environment is heavily polluted mainly due to lack of sanitation. There are no proper toilets and bathroom, hence calls of nature are answered in the most repulsive ways, that is, in plastic bags for long calls which are then thrown across the slum from one point to the other or dumped off in the river. For women, short calls are taken care of in their houses, using plastic containers or basins and then poured into ditches flowing in front of the houses.

Garbage disposal is taken care of in the river or along the rugged sheets and pathways, which also serve as toilet nests. The river here is heavily polluted as it also acts as a sewer for the few toilets here.

The economic scenario is characterized by low economic activities and poverty is prevalent. The poverty is evident in poor housing conditions, unemployment, low and unreliable income, invisible health facilities, low levels of education and literacy, insecurity and uncertain access to justice, high levels of inequality and underemployment, food shortages and malnutrition, dilapidated infrastructure and general isolation from the main stream of socio-economic development (UN-Habitat, 2003) The majority of women and girls earn a living by cooking and selling foodstuffs such as *chapatti*, *githeri*, *mandazi*, chips, fish and other fresh vegetables along the streets and pathways, but cannot prosper because prices are adjusted to suit their buyers pockets. Similarly, they must supplement through other illegal activities such as prostitution and beer brewing if only to survive.

Most girls find themselves at the mercy of less rewarding activities such as housemaids, retailing foodstuffs along the roadside and washing cloths and utensils for other women often earning as little as ksh.20 (Pierli & Abaledo, 2002).

In the social context, women and girls are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. The arrangement of the house structures in Korogocho provides a conducive environment for rape. Many girls and women are targeted but with the stigma associated, few come into the open. Similarly, the high rates of unwanted pregnancies among young girls’ and women signify high rates of unprotected sexual practice and hence high rates of HIV/AIDs and other STI/STDs infection among them. Prostitution is prevalent as a means of survival and may start as early as nine years due to the high rate of school dropouts. Since most of their time is spent idling around and they also long for good cloths and a smart appearance, these girls end up “selling” their bodies in order to acquire what they lack.

Domestic violence is also rampant. Frustrations and feelings of inadequacy often drive most men into starting fights with the women or without the slightest provocation. Further the family system is broken due to the hardship of daily survival. Because of the way houses are built and their tiny dimensions, no privacy exists between family members. A couple often has to share the same room with their growing or grown up children often eroding respect and dignity between family members.

### 1.2 Problem Statement

The majority of slum residents are women and Korogocho is no exception with 60% of the homes in Korogocho being female headed (Mitulla, 2003). Their reasons for coming to Korogocho vary, some were born here, others came to Nairobi as domestic workers, became pregnant and either had no money to go home or were afraid to. Others have been sent away by husbands or have quarreled with parents, or are landless and hence nowhere to go. Survival for these women exposes them to income generating activities including prostitution, hawking and even making illegal local brews. This results in conflicts not just among themselves for competition over the shared resources but also with the law enforcement agencies.

Although resolving the conflicts which are manifest through various forms of violence is an obsession of not only the government of Kenya but also various non-governmental organizations, the slum life is still a vulnerable place for women to survive.

### 1.3 Objective of the study

The study sought to establish the nature of conflicts prevalent in Korogocho slum, Nairobi Kenya.

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Challenges in Slums

The problems facing the residents of Korogocho slums are many but the challenge of inadequate social services takes lead. This is evident in challenges like health, water and sanitation.

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Health challenges are manifest through malnutrition, air and waterborne diseases, drug abuse, poor sanitation and poor garbage disposal. Although the government has sought to provide social facilities like schools, hospitals, clean water, and toilets to the slum dwellers, she is not in a position to meet all the needs of the people. Several Non-governmental organizations support not only address the medical needs of the patients, but also provide advices on matters of hygiene.

Water and sanitation facilities is a challenge. Although, according to the 1997-2001, development plan, 75% of the country's urban population has access to safe drinking water, this water is not extended to unplanned settlement and where it exists it is inaccessible on account of high cost. For example, 43% of the people living in slum areas in Nairobi do not have safe drinking water connection on their plot (Alder, 1994). Sanitation around the houses in Korogocho is poor, with no drainage but a stagnant and stinking trench, with rubbish strewn around the houses. Solid waste disposal is similarly a major problem where it is disposed of in open dumps or crude sanitary landfills, burned or turned into compost with the commonest mode of disposal being dumping along streets, play fields and between houses. NCC (1996) observed that 90% of the population did not have access to adequate toilet facilities while an estimated 60% of the households had no access to a toilet with pit latrines being shared by as many as 50-400 people.

Insecurity portends a real threat to peace with numerous incidences of crime, occurrences of robbery, violence, rape, stabbing and shooting being permanent disturbing features in national news (Ehresmann, 2004). The thugs are known to waylay the church faithful and rob them of the days offering. In December 2000, a group of men rapped a woman, mutilated her private parts, and gouged out her eyes leaving her mutilated body to be found the following morning abandoned in a disused water Dam near Ngunyumu village in the slum. In June 2001, fighting that took an ethnic dimension broke out between Ngunyumu and Grogan residents after a gang robbed a Ngunyumu dweller of Television and Video Machine during the day. The fight took an ethnic dimension with the predominantly Luo Ngomongo dwellers pitted against the Grogan kikuyus. The contingents of riot police deployed to the area were shocked to discover that some rioters were armed with guns, teargas canisters, rungas, swords and panga. Police swoop to quell the tension added to the conflicts with indiscriminate killing of residents, maiming and all manner of physical abuse.

Getting adequate and balanced diet is a challenge in the slum given that most women lack basic job skills and are forced into prostitution to earn a living. People with disabilities are even at a greater disadvantage for lack of opportunities to fend for themselves and mostly rely on begging.

People's participation is crucial in conflict resolution. There is however lack of meaningful community participation which makes it difficult to address conflicts and especially conflicts on resources like land and provision of services. The composition of slums makes it difficult to define community since residents represent conflicting interest. Landlords and tenants for example have different interests and provision of services represent different benefits for both groups. Improvement does not always solve the conflict because it could benefit a group that is already benefitting. Upgrading slums for instance benefits landlords who not only get tenancy but also services. This leads to increases in land value hence increased rent, which affects tenants in a negative way because they cannot afford the new rent and have to move to other slums hence increasing conflicts of a large number of urban households.

The provincial administration, who have the mandate to enforce security in the slum use their position to control resources by protecting those who can pay them against the masses who remain at their mercy. Electing leaders does not help because the village leaders join the cartel to frustrate the masses although they claim to be the main link between the community and the provincial administration. These informal leaders are used by provincial administration to enforce both formal and informal rules. For example, in Korogocho, the chief through these leaders collects money from any landlord who wants to improve their plots. In 1996, the payment was reported to Kshs.2000 for development of a latrine and Kshs. 5,000 for the development of a new room. The collection of "informal tax" is illegal and is never accounted for but according to the residents the chief knows about it.

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

This study focuses on Liberal Feminism Theory to conceptualize and analyze the nature of conflicts in Korogocho slums and the impact that it has on women. It focused on two ideals, which are Equality and Liberty. Feminism is a diverse and evolving framework for understanding gender inequality and interpreting women's experience in relation to men, other women, and patriarchy as a system. The basic idea behind liberal feminism, and liberal thinking in general, is that humans are rational who, with enough knowledge and opportunity, will realize their potential as individuals to the benefit of themselves and society as a whole. Things go wrong primarily through ignorance, bad socialization, and limited access to opportunities. Equality of opportunity and freedom of choice are seen as the bedrock of individual's well-being which in turn makes possible an enlightened society and progressive social change. From a liberal feminist perspective, the main gender problem is that prejudice, values, and norms deny women equal access to the opportunities, resources, and rewards that the society offers.

The relevance of the theory to women living in the slums is a consequence of the push factors. Women find themselves in slums as a result of family breakups, which may be due to marital conflicts where the family members reject the women and would have nowhere else to turn to other than to the urban areas. In this case, the women may not afford to cope up with the high level of living in the descent urban areas given that their education levels are lower than those of men. Many therefore opt for slum areas where life is a bit cheap for them. Due to the poor economic status, social status, low level of education high number of dependents, the

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women end up in the slums where life is cheap for them. Once in the slums, the women are further marginalized due to lack of opportunities and therefore result to illegal activities such as prostitution and local brewing. Instead of dismissing away the issue of conflicts in slums as simply women's problems, there is a rational explanation for women facing conflict that leads to the slums, and further, experiencing conflict while in the slums.

The liberal feminist solution is to improve the barriers to women's freedom of choice and equal participation, from restrictions on reproductive control to providing day care to braking the glass ceiling of work. The liberal method is to persuade people to change by challenging sexist stereotypes and demanding equal access and treatment.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study site was Korogocho slums in Nairobi. The choice of Korogocho slums was dictated by the fact that there was no literature about the slum, being the third largest in the county after Kibera and Mathare.

The study respondents were women selected through simple random sampling procedure and purposive sampling. Simple random sampling is where each and every item in the population has equal chance of inclusion in the sampling (Kerlinger, 1964). This method was used to provide unbiased respondent pool. The researcher also used purposive sampling, to select chief, local leader, village elders and clinical staff and officers. Purposive sampling as a form of non-probability sampling method was preferred in this study because the respondents had to meet a certain criteria to qualify as respondents as advised by (Babble, 1995). For example, the respondents selected this way had to be living in Korogocho or were well versed with the hardships that the women in the area go through.

Most of the data was collected using a standard questionnaire where some of the questions were closed ended while the rest were open ended to allow details by respondents and further probing. There was also a focused group discussion for the illiterate and those not willing to fill the questionnaire and for further probing too. Additional data was obtained by interviewing group leaders as key informants using interview schedule; these were the chief, clinical staff and village elders.

After the fieldwork, the data collected was categorized under quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data contained information on numerical values of respondent while qualitative data consisted of respondents view and opinion on study. Quantitative data was put into a spreadsheet manually and then exported to Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) program designated to provide high-speed statistical analysis of data by the computer.

### 4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

A total of 80 questionnaires were administered to the women but only 55 of them were analyzed as the other 25 were either incomplete or were never returned by the respondents. For the key informants, the chief, social worker, health officer and village elder, 4 questionnaires were administered. For these key informants' oral interviews were also carried out outside the set questionnaires and their views written in a notebook. There was also an in-depth oral interview from the focus group discussion with 10 women.

The study sought to examine the nature of violence experienced by the women in the slum. Before establishing this, it established some basic demographic data of the respondents. This was considered important to explain the reason the women were in the volatile situation in the slum. the findings showed that majority (70%) of the women were middle aged (26 – 35 years). This is the productive age at which many women are starting families. Majority (80%) were single, either by choice, through widowhood, abandonment, separation and/or divorce. Most had been neglected by their male partners leaving them with children to fend for. At least 50% had acquired basic education (primary level). This meant that the opportunities open for them to earn a living in the blue-collar domain. Their income levels were low with 31% earning Kshs.500 per day and most income was derived from petty trade such as hawking, brewing and prostitution.

Out of the 55 respondents, 17 (31%) of them were living in a *mabati* (iron sheets) or mud house with a cemented floor while 21(38%) were living in mud houses with dirt floors. Another 11 (20%) were living in *mabati* houses with dirt floors and 6(11%) were living in complete stone houses with cemented floors. Understanding the accommodation situation for the respondents was key to being able to explain the sources of conflicts. The structures were piled next to each other and conflicts over shared resources were bound to happen. Table 4.1 summarizes the findings on the cases of violence as a result of the conflicts in the slum. Examining the type of violence experienced was vital in the study because it would be an indication of what the respondents go through in their day-to-day life.

**Table 4.1: Violence cases Experienced by Respondents. (Ranked)**

Type of Violence	Number	Percentage
Over Lovers	25	25.8
Children	30	30.9
Hanging Lines	7	7.2
Battery/physical	20	20.1

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Robbery	15	15.5
Total	55	100

From Table 4.1, 30 (30.9%) of the reported cases emanated from the children where some throw the waste outside neighbors houses and fights between children. This occurred more often than any other. The respondents solved these cases and where not able, they took them to 'wazee wa kijiji' Swahili for village elders. At least, 25 (25.8%) cases were over lovers. This occurred on daily basis whenever one of the women took a neighbors husband or when different partners fought for a particular woman. This was particularly prevalent among women who practiced prostitution as a way to earn a living. The elders solved some of these cases while others were taken to the area chief. The chief confirmed that he handled about three cases of this nature daily. The problem also emanates from the brewing dens.

There were 20(20.1%) cases of physical violence/battery reported either to the chief and or the police stations. The security men who composed the village vigilante group solved some of these cases. According to the area chief, most of the conflicts were due to misunderstanding. In some instances, separating the victim from the aggressor for 2 to 3 days resolved the cases. Physical violence sometimes led to miscarriages and abortions. This would have fatal consequences later on because many of the respondents were not in a position to seek a proper medical attention.

According to a medical staff at Provide International, there were 3 to 4 cases reported in a week on physical violence as compared to rape cases, which had gone down to 4 to 5 cases in a month. The cases, once reported to the village elders, resulted in the victims being assisted to get medical assistance then such cases were forwarded to the police. Other cases were referred to the Kenya Network of Women with Aids (KENWA) centre at Pangani or Korogocho and others to Peoples Vision or Action Aid centres.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.1 Summary of Key Findings

Violence is a common feature of life in Korogocho. Most of the reported cases (30.9%) result when mothers conflict over their children's indiscipline. Much of this conflict is verbal abuse. Similarly, women fight over lover's and this is mainly verbal and physical in nature. At least, 2.1% reported experiencing physical violence from male partners or friends with 3 – 4 cases reported per week to the nearby medical facility.

Various players have now come in to intervene in existing and emerging conflicts in Korogocho. Some of the measures applied include creation and support to income generating activities, referral for violence related cases, psycho-social support through counseling, feeding centers and group support and/or therapy.

#### 5.2 Conclusion

From the findings, it is clear that women dominate the slum population and their socio-economic status therein remains wanting. This may be attributed to the fact that majority are single, are in the childbearing ages and hence have many dependents as well as the fact that women are especially vulnerable to the insecurity of tenure prevalent with informal settlements. The fact that women occupy a marginalized position compared to men has contributed significantly to their vulnerable position in the informal settlements.

#### 5.3 Recommendation

The study recommends the need for the government and development partners to build community agencies to identify and respond to the common problems facing women in the slums instead of leaving the slum residents to solve them on their own. This would reduce the level of conflicts among them.

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