

Post Election Violence and Its Impact on Informal Settlements in Kenya, Especially Nairobi's Maasai Village

Wafula NABUTOLA, Republic of Kenya

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SUMMARY

I read an article in Kenya's most popular daily; "Daily Nation" of December 23rd, 2008, its headline was captivating as well as challenging: "Revealed The full Cost of poll violence". It listed the most affected sectors of the economy following the hotly contested elections and the violence that ensued.

Agriculture declined by 4.7% pushing the price of Kenya's staple food, maize-meal to more than double. This affected the demand side, but an audit trail shows that the supply side suffered even worse. Agriculture is the bed rock of our economy and the largest employer so many jobs have been lost. Tourism is a key driver of the economy and it declined by 34.7%. It was the hardest hit. Manufacturing declined and since it was still recovering from the previous year's adverse conditions and it fell to 0.7% way below the 7.5% forecast. Transportation being another major employer because it is labour-intensive recorded a marginal gain of a negligible 0.1%. All this set me thinking how this potential loss of jobs would push more people into already crowded informal settlements, both in the rural and urban areas alike.

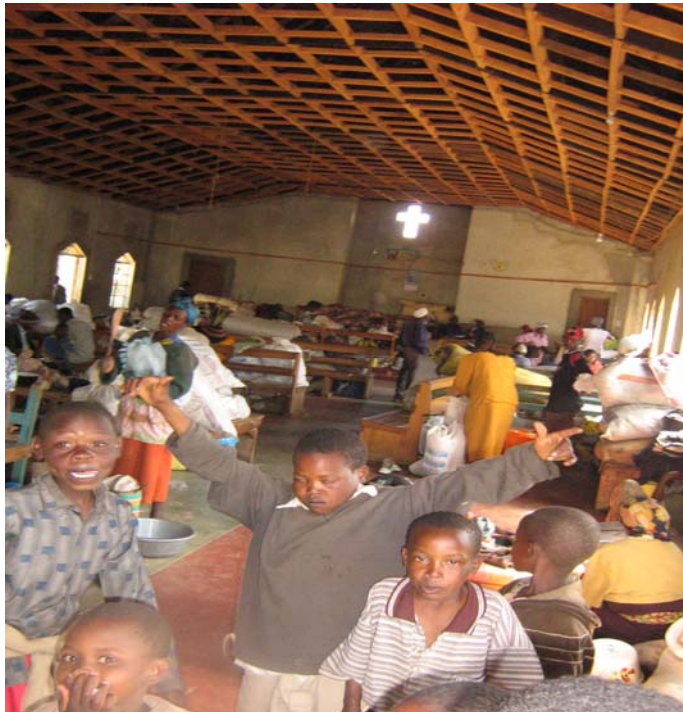
Now am asking myself, why being poor invites such low self-esteem and feeds on indignity in every sphere of life in our country. What can be done to ameliorate such humiliation? How can it be done? Where can intervention be of most impact? That is the purpose of this paper.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Early in 2008 Kenya was burning, literally. This followed presidential, national assembly and local government elections, on December 27th, 2007. The results of the elections were contested, violently in Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru, Eldoret and Kisumu. More than one thousand three hundred people died in most parts of the rift valley province, central and Nairobi city. Property worth billions of shillings was destroyed. Although the fighting was sporadic, and erupted all over the nation, it was felt most and centred mainly in the informal settlements of Nairobi and other major towns in our country.







2. FEAR IS THE KEY

The post elections violence generated a totally different breed of human habitation, the Internally Displaced Persons camps. It is something you hear only on TV news from another country or even another continent. After years of hosting political refugees (from Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Uganda, Zimbabwe, South Africa) it was strange to hear Kenyans had crossed the border to seek refugee status in Uganda. The camps in Kenya are simply referred to as IDP's. They are dotted in several parts of the country. Kenyans, who have homes and farms but refuse to go back, they fear for their lives. It is a legitimate fear of actual bodily harm. They prefer to camp in football stadiums, or near prisons, or in church compounds, or police stations, public parks. The Kenya Red Cross has erected many tents for these IDP's..

2.1 National Peace Accord

February 28th, 2009 marks a year since the National Peace Accord was signed between the two Principals President Mwai Kibaki and Prime Minister Raila Odinga, through astute brokering by Koffi Annan, a former United Nations Secretary General, President Jakaya Kikwete of Tanzania, a host of former heads of state from Africa, Kaunda of Zambia, Mkapa of Tanzania, Chissano of Mozambique and Graca Machel Mandela of South Africa. Indeed peace in our country was restored, but it is, in my view, uneasy peace. Koffi Annan has declared it a lost opportunity. In a recent opinion poll, in mid February, 2009 most Kenyans felt that not enough has been done, by the leadership to ease the ethnic tension. Corruption has become worse than at any other time in the history of our nation, there is a culture of impunity. In the third week of February 2009, the UN special envoy on extra judicial killings declared that the Attorney General and the Commissioner of Police ought to

2.2 Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's)

One year later the Internally Displaced Persons' camps still exist. People are not confident enough in the security apparatus, to want to return to their farms or wherever it is they came from. They are still in those camps and are bitter that the government is not doing enough to resettle them. Government on the other hand is embarrassed to admit failure and is instead forcing people out of these camps, by declaring them closed. Families are being given Kenya shillings ten thousands to go back home and restart their lives. It is interesting what some are doing with the money:

- In Kakamega, of Western Province, most took the money, went out drinking and returned to the camp, expecting a meal and somewhere so sleep. They reckoned the money given was too little to start them off, and also blamed the current for the situations they found themselves in. In fact in most places where people were camped, a good number just did not go back home after the receiving the resettlement funding.
- Some married additional spouses and continued to stay in camp
- Few went back to the farms
- Ironically some in the informal settlements of Kibera, Kawangware, Mathare, found themselves in IDP camps at the Jamhuri Park show ground, home of Nairobi's largest International Trade Fair. They claimed their lives were in danger. Indeed there is the possibility that ethnic animosity was still rampant. We heard information that certain landlords would not let out their houses to people from other communities. How badly our country degenerated to such low levels of intolerance.
- There are those who, not wishing to go back to their farms returned to their ancestral land. For example those who originally came from Nyeri in Central Kenya went back there, and some were welcome while others met hostility.
- The Nakuru showground is still packed with IDP's in a camp and they refuse to go anywhere. The same case in Eldoret. Both cities are in the Rift Valley Province, where most of Kenya's staple, maize (corn on the cob) is grown.
- The fear factor was so much that families allowed their children to sit their national exams in IDP camps; however less conducive they were as opposed to going back home.
- There have been reports of rape, amongst the camp dwellers themselves, but reports of security forces being involved are not unheard of.
- Also cases of prostitution arising from desperation to fend for the family. There are significant reports of HIV/AIDS in these camps and the numbers are growing. Equally children are being born here, mind you the parents are idle and so the economics phenomenon of "keeping busy" comes to mind, naturally.

2.3 GDP Growth

In 2006, the year before elections, Kenya's GDP expanded by 6.1% and was projected to grow by 7.3% in 2008, but this was not to be. In fact, in real terms there are more poor Kenyans than before. People have less disposable income than before; prices of goods and services rise faster than average corresponding income. This could be as a result of other factors for example, income distribution and cascade, is skewed in favour of the very few

very wealthy. Another cause of this inflation is the displacement of Kenyans (from their farms) which led to lower food production, thus demand exceeded supply. This factor has drastically affected our economic national output. The situations have been exacerbated by drought, which has led to rationing of water especially in towns.

The people living in the countryside are not any better off. Ten million people are facing starvation. There are reports of some people in parts of Kenya who live on roots and wild fruits, or even boiling raw paw paws. In the middle of all this the strategic food reserves were reported to have disappeared. It became a scandal to hoard or export maize to the Sudan when our own people did not have enough to go round.

2.4 The Kenya We Want vs. the Kenya We Don't Want

In early February 2009 I was invited to a national conference dubbed "The Kenya We Want" hosted by the Prime Minister's office and attended by the President and Vice President. Ten people were invited from each of the 150 districts (the equivalent of a county) in the country. The discussions, even at breakout syndicate groups were marred by a degree of disorganization, but the intention was good. There are some who felt it was a waste of tax payers' money. So dissatisfied were some Kenyans that they organized a parallel conference called "The Kenya We Don't Want". The main challenges facing the current grand coalition government are to do with grand corruption a symptom of bad governance.

Towards the end of 2008 fuel disappeared from most gas stations. By Christmas queues were forming everywhere in the country as people prepared to travel away from their regular work locations. It was then a blame game between the oil companies on the one hand and the government owned Kenya Pipeline Company on the other. Then news leaked off the loss of seven billion shillings worth of petrol. Someone had been paid but the oil never reached its destination.

3. NAIROBI'S MAASAI VILLAGE

One Sunday morning, I took a walk, along the north eastern border of Nairobi National Park. It is a border between an industrial area that has extended there over the last 10 years or so. I was keenly aware of views of the National Park, the wildlife, that some of the industrialists enjoy from their office. I was not aware of several other features that I came to see.

3.1 The Emergency Power Plant

First, I was looking forward to a nice walk with fresh air and beautiful scenery. I was rather disappointed to realize that the first part of the walk was taking me through heavily polluted air. I had not known that at the edge of Nairobi, there is an emergency electricity generating power plant, fully operating on diesel fuel with countless generators lined up, their exhausts reaching metres above them. The concentration of the fumes was heavier than a regular high way, more like several fully loaded trailers slowly climbing a steep gradient on a road. And from the exhausts, with little caps on them, it was visible that a small fraction of them were

working that Sunday morning. I could imagine the deadening and deafening noise pollution, if all of them were to be running simultaneously. I came to learn that the power plant feeds the national grid, visible right there in a mesh of high voltage cables. This is an example of Public Private Partnerships (PPP's).

3.2 Ordered Disorder

Walking on, it occurred to me that right next to the power plant there is a new residential area. Of course, not residential areas of significance like some of the addresses in Nairobi. Not one of the many high - cost residential areas that one comes across the city. Neither was it one of the usual slum areas with hardly any space between houses, with sewage running down any open spaces, like Kibera for instance. It was a residential area that actually seemed planned to some extent. There were, what seemed, straight streets running down, dividing the sets of houses into blocks. The houses were, with out exception built of iron sheets, and hammered onto wooden frames.

3.3 Construction on-going

Even though it was a Sunday morning construction was going on – wooden frames were being assembled, giving an indication that there was high demand for the houses in that area. Some of the half-built houses had open pit latrines next to the uncompleted structure. The huge, deep gapping holes, still unused, but filled with some water. They had foul smell and seemed dangerous for the children playing nearby. There were also some of the houses that had signs that advertised estate agents, who rent houses or sell land in that area.

3.4 Public Utility

It caught my eye, that being there, right next to the power plant, there were no electricity poles in the entire area, yet majority of the houses had TV aerials protruding from their roofs. I wondered if these were working on car batteries or was the entire area set up on illegal (certainly dangerous) connections. Other public utility amenities that commonly are missing in such neighborhoods are water and sewerage. True enough, I saw people carrying water in 20litre jerry cans, coming down the straight long streets. Water is available but at a distance, and not inside the houses.

3.5 Social Infrastructure

Like any common neighborhood in Nairobi, Sunday morning has its fair share of worship and preaching that echoes across the land. We Kenyans are a very religious nation. This neighborhood was no exception. One of the churches had several cars in immaculate condition parked in front of it. Another was not yet completed, but people were gathering there for a service. I am curious to know if these persons are from within or without the estate.

There were several kindergartens – easily recognized by the drawings of Donald Duck and other children’s characters along the walls; however, no hospital, no clinic, no primary or secondary school.

The people living in this area seemed attracted towards the side bordering the National Park. It was like an esplanade, a boulevard where people came to see and to be seen, to relax and meet others. Some were sitting on the ground and taking in the serene view of the park. Others were taking a walk, chatting away. The breeze coming in from the Athi Plains was very refreshing indeed.

3.6 What is in a Name?

Although I had been told that it is a Maasai Village, so far I had seen nothing to justify its name. To my mind a Maasai Village, is a set of homesteads, surrounded by acacia branches, thorny bushes. The houses are made of mud and have a large number of cattle – cows, goats and sheep around them. None of this was there in this Maasai Village at the edge of Nairobi’s industrial area. After walking for about 2 km along the rough black cotton soil boulevard occasionally covered in dry grass that forms the border between the Maasai Village and Nairobi National Park, I reached the end of the Village. At this point, looking towards the last houses under the acacia trees, I saw four or five houses resembling those of the traditional Maasai. And there were a few women and young men dressed in traditional Maasai clothing – the distinct red cloth. A young man came to offer land for sale, saying it was his grandfather’s land.

3.7 Overhead Flights

While taking the walk, several planes arriving in Nairobi flew past – the location is in direct flight landing path. While a few hundred metres away, along the main Mombasa Road, the flight path is well guarded, preempting a repeat of the shot at an aircraft in Mombasa a few years ago, here nobody seems to take any interest in the ease of aiming at any of the very same planes.

Later, I approached the Maasai Village from the side of the main road – the way the residents got to town, to work, to school. There is no public transport from Mombasa Road to the Maasai Village. The people have a choice of a 2km walk, or a ride on the back of a motorbike ‘taxi’. The route goes past old warehouses, container depots, over rough side paths and at times lacking a proper path altogether. How would the ride be in rain? What would be security like for women, young girls at the back of a motorbike at late hours? On this side, the Village extends way beyond what could be imagined from the fence of Nairobi National Park. There are also some stone constructions, bars and shops, and more of the houses with iron sheets for walls and roofs. The high voltage power line is now much further away, not running right over homes and houses as it does closer to the power station. Also here, construction is ongoing, with more estate agents propagating homes for new inhabitants, still with no formal electricity, water or sewage systems.



3.8 The Risks and Nuisances

In the USA research has shown that there is a high risk of contracting cancer especially so for children when exposed to high voltage cables. The high voltage cables create magnetic fields to which children are especially vulnerable, the increased risk of cancer is similar to asbestos exposure. The children living in Maasai village are not aware of this danger, neither are their parents. It is also quite likely that the people who work at the power plant are not aware of the danger. They are all just happy to have somewhere to stay, away from the conflict zones.

Maasai Village is situated off Mombasa Rd and has about 500-600 households. We estimate an average households to be a 6 member family, at least.

The village gets its water supply from EPZA (Export Processing Zone Authority) through a neighbouring village called Kiangombe. Kiangombe village has a bulk meter installed by EPZA and they distribute to consumers within their village and adjacent areas. Besides the Kiangombe connection, there are other connections which are suspected to be illegally connected from the Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company (NCWSC) line (according to the NCWSC Sociologist). It must have been part of EPZA's Corporate Social Responsibility to support the villagers then living in the original Maasai Village

Under the World Bank's Water Supply and Sanitation Improvement WaSSIP programme, Athi Water Services Board (AWSB)/NCWSC have planned to do an extension from

Mombasa Road to the village. AWSB has supplied the village with 3 water tanks with a capacity of ten cubic metres each.

4. POVERTY IN KENYA

The different dimensions of poverty in Kenya have been described as:

“Low Income: consisting of those who are unable to participate in labour markets and lack of other means of support, and those whose wage income is so low that they are below a nominal poverty line

Low Human Capital: low education and poor health are components of capability poverty used in United Nations Human Development Index. Health (UN HDI) shock, in particular, can lead to chronic poverty.

Low Social Capital: This involves a shortage of networks to protect households from shock, weak patronage on labour market, labelling and exclusion. This particularly applies to minority groups

Low Financial Capital: Lack of productive assets that might be used to generate income or avoid paying major costs for example a house, a farm or a business.

Poverty is something that people believe they can easily distinguish. UN Habitat’s Report, “Urbanization and Trends and Forces Shaping Slums” states: ‘in fact the concept is difficult to define. Poverty is often defined in terms of household income alone – for example, the proportion of households who are earning less than what is needed to afford a ‘basket’ of basic necessities, living on less than US\$ One or US\$ Two a day’. In Kenya as elsewhere, it is important to consider all the inter-related aspects of poverty. Merely addressing monetary resources or livelihoods may only be a temporary stop gap and may not deal with the many other aspects of poverty that may ensure a sustainable transition from poverty. There are other conceptual approaches to poverty:

Capability Poverty: has been defined as the lack of life chances and opportunities, defined particularly through ill health and lack of education, this has formed the underpinning of the UN HDI. These more fundamental needs are paramount in the least developed countries like Kenya in establishing the capability of individuals to improve their lives. Once these have been met, capability is somewhat more subtle and encompasses empowerment, work contacts and the ability to transcend social class.

Chronic Poverty: In the USA only about 50% of all those in poverty remain thus for more than two years. A similar 50% applies to most other countries, but not so in Kenya. Many of my compatriots remain that way or even slip into such conditions are have no hope of improving their lot. Majority of those in poverty are long term poor, while a tiny minority manage to jump over. In Australia, mobility is higher, about 80% of those poor move upward in two years.

This mobility has implications for pro-poor policies. Safety nets for the transitory poor, and empowerment and capability raising for the chronically poor.” The people who live in IDP camps are not necessarily poor some are people of much means, just that they are caught on the wrong side of the politicians. They need to have their dignity restored. One such way is to give them a means to fend for themselves.

My focus is on the informal settlements and IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps. These are the same places that house street vendors and the micro-entrepreneurs. There is a clear possibility that the majority of those new houses being built in the Maasai Village belong to Internally Displaced Camps. It is also clear that the owners of the land itself have either leased it out or sold it, although we could not get evidence of title deeds.



5. INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDP'S) CAMPS

There is a very unhappy lot of Kenyans called IDP's who have no place to call their home, patched in camps across the length and breadth of this great nation. They are victims of exercising their democratic rights. The government has announced the closure of these camps but if there is no comfort in going back to their farms, then it is a waste of goodwill. Democracy can be very costly indeed. The government is too embarrassed to admit failure to administer the whole IDP challenge in decorum and with due regard to the needs of these people who sacrificed their comfort and their routine lives. It is equally not admitting that some areas are not secure enough to take back those who fled. There were trucks hired to

transport these Kenyans to their former homes and indeed a few have gone, but many more are staying put and demanding that government either gives them more money to resettle or gives alternative land that is safer.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Looking at the IDP camps and the informal settlements there are similarities and differences. And even within the informal settlements there older more established ones like Kibera, Mathare, Korogochio, Mukuru Kwa Njenga. Kibera, the largest and most famous, has grown so large that it is an institution all by itself. It is estimated that informal settlements house about 2 million people. They have developed without services and for a long time were not included in official plans of government. They did not get any attention until barely ten years ago, after a study by the UN Habitat.

Similarities:

- They are home to many persons living close together but without services.
- Population density is very high and the risk of diseases is high.
- In the unfortunate event of a fire they have little support from the City Fire Services because of access.
- And even when they can be accessed, sometimes the people are so fed up that they vent their anger on the fire officials, beating them up perhaps for not arriving on time.
- The materials used for construction are not suitable and in nearly all cases they do not meet minimum safety and comfort requirements.
- They are located in areas which are not intended for the residential purposes. There those in church compounds, in schools, in sports stadia, in waste lands. In the case of Maasai village, it is in the flight path of the busiest international airport in the region
- They are all MEETING a real need, shelter, a sort of shield against the elements.

Differences

Until 2007 elections IDP camps were virtually unknown in Kenya. We had been referred to as a haven of peace, and we have been sheltering refugees in our camps.

- IDP camps are more temporary and more recent. See photos.
- IDP camps are provided and run by humanitarian organizations like Kenya Red Cross, Rotary Clubs, in collaboration with government, which is the originator of the problem in the first place.
- The Maasai Village is a recent phenomenon. It is not as disorganized and overcrowded as Kibera. It is located in an area that is meant to stay vacant or at least very well aired. It has a chance to be planned properly and services provided as they should. I shall be analyzing the financial instruments that the Kenyan market is developing to target this evidently less served and ripe market segment that has been ignored for a long time. They need to be enabled and encouraged, they have potential.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is desirable to have elections without violence but the mechanisms designed by the political class are in place to ensure that the poor continue to be impoverished and dependent on handouts by the politicians. This must stop.
- The more fundamental issues are, who has the right to the land and by how much?
- Who should be held responsible for the sad state of affairs where one Kenyan rallies against another.
- Why only during elections? Other times Kenyans of different communities live together perfectly harmoniously.
- The Maasai Village stands a chance to be a model informal settlement in that it is well spaced and there is order in how things are run. So perhaps any interventions needed can be done now. Or if government is bent on keeping the place vacant then it is not too late to relocate the people before they get too many to manage.

CONTACTS

Mr. Wafula Nabutola
Nairobi Central Business District Association (NCBDA)
10 Floor Kenya Charity Sweepstake House
P. O. Box 8824 00100
Nairobi
KENYA
Tel. + 254 20 352 5515
Fax + 254 20 343 002
Cell: +254 722 617 444 and +254 735 328 359
Email: wafula_nabutola_090382@yahoo.co.uk
myritaconsultants_kenya@postkenya.com
Web site: www.ncbda-kenya.org