



Policy Brief

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Migration, Urbanization and Environment in Kenya

Movement of people from rural areas to urban centres is one of the major drivers of urban growth, especially in developing countries. Historically, the growth of urban centres in Kenya was partly linked to colonization, which developed new centres to control and administer the colonized population and to exploit natural resources. Labour migration was an important factor of urban development in colonial times when workers were needed for public infrastructure (runways, railways, ports), administration (soldiers, clerks) or various private services (maids, etc.).

Migration flows to urban centres accelerated in all parts of Kenya after independence, increasing the proportion of the urban population from 8 per cent in 1970 to 19 per cent in 1999 and now to an estimated 21 per cent (CBS, 2004; PRB, 2008). Other contributors to the increasing proportion of urban population are the natural rate of annual population increase in urban areas, which is currently estimated at 3.6 per cent, and urban reclassification. This has resulted in uncontrolled expansion of urban areas and rising costs of providing services for the country's increasing urban population.

Inadequate funds – which characterize most of the municipal authorities in Kenya – has made it hard for city and urban authorities to cope with the increasing demand for garbage collection and sanitation services. Among the consequences are a degraded environment and diminished quality of life in cities and towns in Kenya.

What Are the Linkages among Migration, Urbanization and Environment?

Rapid urbanization as a result of increasing migration of people to urban areas has caused widespread environmental degradation and multiple health hazards in Kenya. There has, as well, been an increase in the magnitude of pollution from industrial sources and ever-increasing traffic.

The scale and rapidity of urbanization means that providing adequate infrastructure and services to Kenya's urban inhabitants is a major challenge for the municipal authorities. This policy brief describes the problem and offers some approaches for dealing with it.



Air Pollution

In 2006 alone, 52, 817 new vehicles were registered in Kenya (KNBS, 2007). Moreover, in that same year the number of private cars in Nairobi had risen to nearly a million (Ryu, 2006). No wonder that today, the transport sector in Kenya is said to account for 65 per cent of the fossil fuels consumed nationally and to emit more than 65 per cent of the carbon dioxide (NEMA, 2003).

Poor maintenance of vehicles and traffic congestion are critical elements in the air pollution problems in urban areas. Most vehicles do not conform to permissible emission limits. Air pollution from vehicles, industries and open burning of wastes in our cities and towns causes serious effects on human health and environment. For instance, respiratory ailments, eye diseases, asthma, lung cancer and conjunctivitis, especially in the young and elderly, are associated with air pollution (UNEP/WHO, 1996).

Waste Collection and Disposal

Increasing urbanization, rural-urban migration and rising standards of living, coupled with rapid natural population growth, have resulted in the increased generation of solid wastes in our cities and towns. In Nairobi, for instance, the City Council collects only 40 per cent of the wastes and the private sector only 20

per cent. The rest, 40 per cent, is left uncollected or is disposed of through open burning or dumping in open areas and pits (Ikiara, 2006), causing more environmental degradation and health hazards to urban dwellers.

In the low income areas where up to 60 per cent of the urban population live, local authorities provide almost no waste collection services (UNEP/NEMA, 2005). This is a clear demonstration of the incapacity of the local authorities to cope with the increasing demand for waste collection as a result of the burgeoning urban populations.

Water Pollution

In Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu, the three major cities in Kenya, as well as in other large towns, there is an increasing tendency towards inadequate waste water management by the local authorities. One result is serious pollution of water sources, for instance the Nairobi River and its tributaries (UON/UNEP, 2005). Leachates from dumpsites such as Dandora and Satellite/Kawangware in Nairobi are major sources of pollution of both riverine and subsurface water-courses (UON/UNEP, 2005).

Noise Pollution

Nairobi, in particular among Kenyan cities, faces a major problem of noise pollution. This is a serious health hazard because noise affects people phys-

Traffic jams are a constant, noisy fact of life in Nairobi.



Photo by Nzomo Muiatya

Garbage piles up in Nairobi's Eastlands residential area.

ically, psychologically and socially. Intense noise or a long stay in a noisy environment can cause permanent reduction of hearing sensitivity by damaging the sensory organs of the inner ear.

Noise can also influence blood circulation, cause stress and other psychological effects, and may be an accident risk by drowning warning signals. This noise pollution is partly caused by the growing numbers of vehicles that clog the streets of our cities and major towns.

Development of Slums/ Informal Settlements

The steady flow of people from rural to urban areas in Kenya has led to the development of slums in most of our cities and towns. Nairobi is home to some of the largest slums on the continent, such as Kibera and Mathare, along with Korogocho, Viwandani, Sinai and many more. Millions of people in these euphemistically termed "informal settlements" live in old, dilapidated structures with no toilets or tap water and virtually no services provided by the local authorities. Between 1971 and 1995 the number of such informal settlements in Nairobi is said to have increased from 50 to 133 and their estimated total population from 167,000 to 1,886,000 (UN-HABITAT, 2003a). It is here where new and temporary



Photo by Nzomo Muiatya

migrants find accommodation because of the central locations, low cost and ease of transaction. Because of the congestion, lack of sewage disposal facilities and nonexistent garbage collection services, slum areas are characterized by poor sanitation and heaps of uncollected garbage that pose environmental and health hazards to residents.

Making rural areas more attractive places to live, with jobs, utilities and other amenities of modern life, can help to slow down rapid urban growth by retaining potential rural-urban migrants in the rural areas.

What Can We Do?

Addressing the undesirable linkages among migration, urbanization and environment in Kenya calls for a multi-faceted strategy. This requires the involvement of government, communities, private enterprises, development partners and civil society actors and could include the following:

- ◆ **Establish public-private partnerships:** The municipal authorities in cities and major towns in Kenya should establish public-private partnerships to provide the needed urban infrastructure and ensure that critical services are better managed. This will help to cope with the ever-increasing population in our cities and towns.
- ◆ **Increase government budgetary allocation to local authorities:** Government needs to increase budgetary allocations to municipal authorities to

enable them to meet the cost of providing services to the growing urban population. But, this must be accompanied by greater accountability from municipal authorities to help prevent corruption and cost overruns through the greater involvement of local self-help and civil society groups.

- ◆ **Enforce existing bylaws, laws and legislation:** All the cities and towns in Kenya need to scale up the enforcement of existing bylaws, laws and legislations that have been developed to address environmental issues. Among these are the Public Health Act, Cap 252, the Local Government Act, Cap 265, the Factories Act, Cap 327 and the Chiefs Authority Act, Cap 128. The enforcement of these bylaws, laws and legislations on the use of plastic bags, timely collection and disposal of garbage from residential areas, proper sewage disposal, and protection of urban wetlands will facilitate active participation in the conservation of the environment and the resources in the country.
- ◆ **Improve urban governance:** There is a need to improve urban governance in order to ensure effective and efficient

development and delivery of urban services. Currently, high and middle income areas receive most of the services from the local authorities. Low income areas also need to be given fair consideration in service delivery.

- ◆ **Plan land use more effectively:** The limited land available for city expansion in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu, together with other major towns, coupled with population-related land pressures, calls for a coherent and pragmatic approach to land use planning in the country.
- ◆ **Intensify population control programmes:** Rapid population growth in the rural areas and increasing rural-urban migration calls for a scale up of family planning efforts in order to match the current population with the available resources. There is need to intensify such campaigns and to develop informative messages on the relationships among rapid population growth, protection of the environment and people's quality of life.
- ◆ **Initiate and develop rural development programmes:** The neglect of rural areas has made prospective investors stay away and thus

Kibera slum, Nairobi, home to tens of thousands of Kenya's working poor, is said to be the largest "informal settlement" in sub-Saharan Africa.



Photo by Nzomo Mulaya

Carelessly thrown and uncollected garbage clogs Nairobi streams...



Photo by Nzomo Muliaya

unemployed rural youth are pushed towards cities to eke out their living. Across the country the village economy has to be made more vibrant by focusing on increasing non-farm employment, accompanied by the provision of adequate facilities for transportation, communication and power supply. Only then can thriving small-scale manufacturing units and service industries be established.

- ◆ **Enhance data collection and research on urban environmental issues:** There is a need to collect data and conduct research at the local level to provide local authorities with the information they need to make decisions. Research that



Photo by Nzomo Muliaya

...and creates environmental and health hazards.

addresses urban environments should be encouraged by providing funding opportunities and making the findings available to policy makers and the managers of local authorities in Kenya.

Conclusion

Kenya has witnessed unprecedented rise in urbanization and this has led to the elevation of Mombasa and Kisumu to city status. More people than ever before are now living in the three Kenyan cities as well as every major town and urban centre. People in the cities and towns across the country daily confront problems of safe drinking water, unreliable power supplies, and inadequate sewerage and garbage disposal. With rapid natural increase and inflow of rural population, cities and towns are growing fast and there is an urgent need for better governance, transport and basic amenities for the growing population.

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NCAPD is a semi-autonomous government agency that formulates and promotes population policy and coordinates related activities for sustainable development in Kenya.