MISSING THE POINT: VIOLENCE REDUCTION AND POLICY MISADVENTURES IN NAIROBI'S POOR NEIGHBOURHOODS

Addressing and Mitigating Violence

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Violence and vulnerability

This report examines prevailing understandings of violence in Nairobi and how it is addressed, as well as the limitations of existing violence mitigation measures. Violence and crime are endemic in Nairobi's poor neighbourhoods, where they enmesh with wider problems of vulnerability. Widespread poverty and lack of livelihood opportunities for a large proportion of the urban poor exacerbate their vulnerability to being victimised by non-state violent actors and sectors of the state implicated inciting and perpetrating violence and crime. The failure of the state to provide for basic needs in health, education and social care, as well as a lack of effective policing, has created an opening that criminal organisations and gangs have exploited. In poorer areas of Nairobi, they provide illegal connections to public utilities, mediate access to economic opportunities, and operate protection rackets. In some cases, these activities have been carried out with the knowledge and sometimes active involvement of the state.

There is a close and growing association between violence and politics in Kenya, which is inflected with ethnic, regional and religious differences. Ethnicised political violence has existed in Kenya since the early 1990s and has become more widespread since. During the post-election violence that swept Kenya in 2007–8, Nairobi's poorest areas were carved into enclaves where vigilante groups and criminal organisations associated with different ethnic groups patrolled 'their' areas, demanding to see identity cards, carrying out evictions and attacking the homes and retail premises of members of opposing ethnic groups. The failure of the state to provide effective policing in Nairobi's poorer neighbourhoods has meant that control and enforcement of order have become the preserve of non-state violent actors, as well as other community mobilisation efforts, leading to new forms of insecurity for residents of these areas. What becomes ethnic violence or political violence often begins as criminal violence such as theft, burglary or murder. Vigilante responses can easily escalate into a more serious conflict with ethnic inflections if the alleged perpetrator of a crime is a member of a different ethnic group.

Many non-state violent actors such as the Mungiki (a secretive sect and banned criminal organisation) oscillate between working as enforcers and mobilisers for politicians and operating as criminal outfits. While violence instigated by national political figures is certainly an important part of understanding the dynamics of Kenya's contemporary violence, multiple levels of governance and politics need to be considered, with the role of community-level political entrepreneurs being especially crucial.

Limits of law and order approach

Prevailing responses to violence and crime in Nairobi's poor neighbourhoods assume that there is a lack of law and order and that more robust policing and tougher laws can increase security. Violence-mitigation approaches have involved more robust policing measures such as raids and operations to round up low-level criminals, and increased use of 'stop and search' and of surveillance. Police raids are at times characterised by the indiscriminate use of excessive force, and sections of the police forces in Kenya are implicated in extra-judicial killings and assassinations, among other serious human rights violations. Other measures that have been tried include clearing hawkers from pavements in the city centre and cracking down on *matatus* (privately owned public service vehicles) that provide work for young people. These measures, however, have done nothing to reduce crime and violence and actually aggravate the underlying causes of insecurity.

The argument that increased policing will reduce violence and crime in poor neighbourhoods assumes that the police can act effectively. However, institutional weaknesses and incapacities as well as the corruption and alleged complicity of some police actors in criminal activity undermine public trust and confidence in the Kenya Police Service. Public opinion polling has found that a majority of Nairobians overall, and in poor neighbourhoods specifically, trust vigilante groups more than the police forces to respond to crime; they also favour a different type of policing involving greater coordination with community actors and groups. More robust policing measures are unlikely to succeed without fundamental reforms to existing policing institutions, an end to impunity for crimes and abuses committed by sections of the police, and reforms to make the formal justice system more accessible and responsive to the needs of the poor.

Need for a wider approach

The effectiveness of stronger policing measures is also limited because they do little to respond to a problem that has multiple drivers. While official responses to violence and crime in Nairobi have generally involved the temporary use of more robust policing measures, existing evidence on what causes violence and crime suggests that these measures are unlikely to be effective in reducing levels of violence and crime over the long term. A different approach is required to address more deeply rooted problems of poverty and unemployment, particularly among young people, and of the lack of basic services provided in poor neighbourhoods. Public opinion surveys also indicate that measures to address youth unemployment and improve the urban environment – through, for example, better street lighting and infrastructure – can make a positive difference in addressing violence and crime in poor neighbourhoods.

In practice, there have been efforts such as the Safer Nairobi Initiative that aspire to a more coordinated effort to improve urban security by involving agencies and departments with mandates to deliver public services and create work opportunities. The initiative, which was endorsed by the Nairobi City Council in 2005, fell victim to a political tug-of-war between council officials and representatives of the Provincial Administration at the time. The initiative was also hamstrung by a lack of public confidence in the city council. Nonetheless, the spirit of such efforts to develop a joined-up multisectoral approach is needed to improve security for the urban poor.

This report assesses a number of measures that could be incorporated in a wider strategy to address and mitigate violence. These include policies to extend economic opportunities and employment to young people:

- The Kenya Youth Empowerment Project of the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) aims to build the capacity of youth through internships and training. *Kazi kwa Vijana* is a national public works programme that provides low-wage work for young people. However, these interventions are few in a context of widespread youth unemployment. Many interventions focus on entrepreneurship even though many young people have little interest in running their own business and lack the ability to do so. Public visibility of these interventions is also low and the agencies have not done enough to reach the potential beneficiaries. Further, lacking a national policy on youth employment, there have been few efforts to connect the multitude of state and non-state initiatives.
- One positive measure was the decision by the Ministry of Finance to remove the import duty on motorcycles in 2008. This significantly reduced the cost of motorcycles, allowing many young people to

purchase them for starting a taxi business. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some young people who were previously involved in crime ceased to be so when they entered the motorcycle transport business and, thus, the measure helped to reduce crime.

Other measures to improve service delivery help to address some of the factors that make the poor vulnerable to violence:

- The construction of 'bio-centres' (sanitation facilities) by the Umande Trust in Kibera and Korogocho areas of Nairobi. In Huruma, the group Getto Green, led by young people, initiated a number of income-generating activities for its members, some of whom were previously involved in crime. The Adopt A Light Company has erected light masts in slums, which some slum residents believe has helped to reduce crime.
- The Water Services Trust Fund and the Water Services Board under the Ministry of Water and Irrigation has established water kiosks in some poor neighbourhoods, which are operated by licensed water vendors. The opening times of the water kiosks are regulated as are the tariffs, which must be displayed. The water kiosks have greatly reduced the distance travelled to fetch water, especially by women, thus increasing their security in areas that are prone to violent crime.

Priorities for action

This study proposes the following priorities to address and mitigate the impacts of violence on the poor in Nairobi:

- **Formulation of a policy framework to promote multisectoral and cross-agency inputs to address and mitigate violence and crime.** In spite of the shortcomings of the Safer Nairobi Initiative, a policy framework is required to promote coordination and coherence of inputs across sectors and multiple levels of governance. The current context in which devolved structures of governance are being implemented under the new constitution provides an opportunity to formulate such a framework. Under the constitution, security remains the mandate of the central government but the delivery of most services is now the responsibility of county governments, with the role of central government limited to policy formulation and coordination in areas such as the provision of water and health.
- **Incorporating analysis of politics and violence into assessment of policies and measures to strengthen youth employment and basic services in poor neighbourhoods.** Although it is well known that a wider approach is required to address and mitigate violence in Nairobi's poor neighbourhoods, there is no systematic effort to assess how initiatives to address youth unemployment or improve the delivery of basic services affect the vulnerability of the poor to violence and crime. Thus, policy stakeholders have little insight into what works, in which circumstances and how. Monitoring and evaluation of efforts to improve youth employment and basic services in poor neighbourhoods should assess how they intersect with politics and violence. Doing so will strengthen the evidence base of what measures can make a difference and how.
- **Learning from existing community efforts to address and mitigate violence.** Responses to violence are rarely informed by community-

level knowledge and expertise on what is likely to work. While there have been many local-level efforts to address violence in Nairobi's poor urban neighbourhoods, many of these are undocumented and not known beyond the neighbourhoods where they are implemented. They therefore remain largely invisible. Yet, it is important to identify, monitor and learn from how local initiatives seek to address violence, with what consequences and for whom.

- **Further rigorous empirical analysis of the setting and circumstances of violence in Nairobi's poor neighbourhoods.** There is a lack of detailed, disaggregated data and evidence to do a forensic analysis of the causes of violence that could be used to craft more effective policy, legal, policing and development measures. Given that much of the violence in poor neighbourhoods is carried out by criminal organisations and often linked to complex local-level political struggles, the nuances and complexities of political dynamics at this level are often difficult to see and understand. Thus, new empirical data are required, drawing on intimate local knowledge.