

**“FIRE CAST ON THE EARTH – KINDLING”  
BEING MERCY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

**SOCIAL ANALYSIS**

**KIBERA**

**Reflections**

It is amazing that Africa has an ‘enormous resource endowment,’<sup>i</sup> but this does not benefit the continent. Therefore, there choice to study Kibera is just an example that Africa’s poverty is systemic; it is structural and either consciously or unconsciously strategized<sup>ii</sup>. Hence, my research paper focussed on Kibera slum a situation that provides us with different realities of people living in extreme poverty. These people are not poor, but impoverished. They are victims of national and international policies. We can easily study the number of multinationals and Trans-national Corporations in Africa and see what takes them there. Is Africa an easy cash cow for the rich nations?

From my reflections, I am convinced that slums provide people with an opportunity to gain access to the cities. As they migrate, most of them become victims of inner and outer cities, victims of poverty, industrialisation and mechanisation, victims of hunger, violence and disease. They are victims of socio-political- economic injustices, and victims of urbanisation.. With a population of over a million people, Kibera is a victim of the above. It has an extensive urban characteristic, but it contains issues of extreme poverty. *See Film Clip ‘Constant Gardner’*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Just the part that shows Kibera Slum with a young boy at the railway line to the young man in his bicycle to the city centre of Nairobi

### **Photo Documentary<sup>iii</sup>**

#### **Slide 1 & 2:**

From deep conversations and reflections on this paper, I was enriched by the discussions from various students around Berkeley and Oakland (here in California) while trying to make sense of our conference theme. I am now aware that Kibera is just an example of the reality of extreme poverty. I could have taken Lilongwe in Malawi or Badia West in Lagos - Nigeria and the issues would have been similar. Nevertheless, Kibera is unique for no where else in Africa would you find over a million people living in an area of approximately 630 acres of land.

The study of Kibera has given me an opportunity to ponder the works of the Sisters of Mercy in Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa and Zambia. I can, therefore, say that people are not poor but impoverished. If capacitated they can become agents of change in their own life situations.

- **Slide 3:** African problems are global problems too. We are all interconnected  
The cow represents the map of our world as one whole organ. (See map)
- **Slide 4:** The scramble for Africa still goes on, either for labour utilization, raw materials, minerals and today it is oil. See all the oil producing countries of Africa and the exploration still goes on

Africa is not poor but impoverished. For example, Uganda endowed with significant natural resources, including ample fertile land, regular rainfall, and mineral deposits, the economy of the country has great potential. However, Uganda is one of the poorest countries in Africa. Again, just imagine the super rich are nations of the world are getting more and more attracted to the fossil fuel in Africa. (See some of the oil producing countries in Africa, how come that poverty is live in these countries?)

- Libya (Opec Member, December 1962)
- Algeria (Opec Member, 1969)
- Nigeria (Opec Member, July 1971)
- Gabon (Opec Member 1975)
- Angola, (Opec Member, January 2007)
- Sudan (Currently seeking memberships with Opec)
- Congo (DRC)
- Equatorial Guinea,
- Côte D'ivoire,

- Ghana,
- Cameroon
- Chad
- Egypt
- Mauritania
- South Africa
- Tunisia
- Tanzania
- Uganda<sup>iv</sup>

- **Slide 5:** The Map shows that Africa bears the mark of colonization. Forty years on, competitions from Europe North America and now China continues the mark of our history.
- **Slide 6:** Today, issues of land, unemployment, healthcare, insecurity and justice all impact on the basic needs i.e., food, water, shelter and air. When the basic needs are not met and there are inadequate infrastructures to enable job creation, then insecurity, corruption and decayed morals become evident. Kibera would demonstrate this.
- **Slides 7 on to 57 (Background Music)**

This research has been enriched by the visit of Ben Sawyer Long, a student here in California. He volunteered to work in an orphanage in Kibera (Summer 2007.) I interviewed him on his return and he said, “I have no words left but tears! However, let the pictures I will send you tell the story.” I asked him, “What one message would you offer to the Sisters of Mercy given the theme of this Conference?” His message to us is,

- **Slide 58-59**

“Recognizing the issues that these people face are one of the most important things to do... otherwise, the needs of these people will remain unheard and conditions will not improve.” He cautioned, “...but if the people of the rest of the world know of such issues and still refuse to act, they then too are part of the problem”<sup>2</sup>

- **Slide 60:** Most of the photos offered in the slides are a credit to Ben (June –July 2007) as a gift to me after his voluntary work in Kibera. The signed ones are a collection from the internet.

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<sup>2</sup> Ben Sawyer Long: Message for the Sisters of Mercy in an interview in his presentation of photographs taken while volunteering at an orphanage in Kibera June- July 2007

➤ **Slides 61- 65** Signs of Hope

- **Slide 66.** Finally, I believe that people living in extreme poverty are detained in a system of values that is not their own. They leave their rural home with a hope of a better future. Many ends up in the slums.

My Symbol is the African Khanga<sup>v</sup>. There are many ways of using the African khanga. The message for us as contained in this khanga is: we need - Tunataka

- ❖ Peace/Amani,
- ❖ Fairness/Usawa
- ❖ Development/Maendeleo

In a woman's homestead as shown in the cloth.

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<sup>i</sup> NAIROBI, May 25 (IPS) - Africa's abundance in natural resources, especially oil, has been called a curse because of the fierce global thirst that exists for these assets in Stephanie Nieuwoudt , *TRADE- AFRICA: How to Turn The Curse of Oil Into a Blessing* <http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=37902>

<sup>ii</sup> Oil and other mineral resources have led to conflict and corruption in countries like Sierra Leone (diamonds), Nigeria (oil), Equatorial Guinea (oil), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (diamonds, timber, rare fauna), Gabon (oil) and Angola (oil).

<sup>iii</sup> Seeing in believing: A photo Documentary shows that a camera is a prophetic tool

<sup>iv</sup> companies in Uganda will be required to blend their fossil fuels (oil) with ... gas emissions by partially replacing fossil fuel with oil as a transport fuel Further reading:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy\\_of\\_Uganda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Uganda)

<sup>v</sup> African Khanga (Cloth) has multiple uses