The Social Impacts of Crisis in Kenyan Communities

For Kenya, the global financial crisis came on top of the political crisis of 2008, the food price crisis of 2007-8, and a seven year drought. All indications were that the global economic downturn would have a major impact in Kenya: growth declined from 7% in 2007 to 2.1% in 2008 and was projected to reach 2.5% in 2009. By 2010, observers were predicting signs of recovery, with tourism and horticulture showing indications of a return to growth. But how have people fared? Community ‘listening post’ research finds that the recovery has yet to be felt by poor Kenyans, and that the affordability of food remains a serious concern. While more assistance was found to be available than a year ago, people reported coping strategies and impacts on their wellbeing that are likely to result in enduring harms.

The tourists return

Positioned on the road between the coastal resort of Malindi and Tsavo National Park, many Lango Baya people have – or seek – economic connections to the tourist trade, in addition to their involvement in agriculture and trading. February 2010 saw signs of economic recovery in the tourism industry, after a year in which the global economic downturn had hit hard, compounding the effects of the January 2008 post-election violence. By late 2009, people in Lango Baya reported an upturn in tourist numbers, consistent with official figures documenting a growth of 44% in the sector in the third quarter of 2009, after a 24% decline in the same period the previous year.

Green shoots in the tourism industry had not translated into recovery in local livelihoods. One reason was that local artisan and cultural groups seeking tourist business were poorly integrated into tourist markets: slightly off the main routes, and dependent on NGO and commercial distribution and marketing networks that failed to guarantee a steady stream of income. Some self-help groups disbanded or diversified in the last year. But others had new orders coming in from Mombasa and Malindi, from retailers gaining from the recovering tourist trade. Farmers who sell wholesale produce locally and to Malindi hotels had noticed little recovery. The

THE SOCIAL IMPACTS OF CRISIS PROJECT

How have people and communities experienced recent global economic shocks? In early 2009, the Social Impacts of Crisis project started work in 12 community ‘listening posts’ in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Yemen and Zambia to answer this question. Funded by the UK Department for International Development, the project developed rapid participatory tools, making repeat research visits to explore the impacts of the “Triple F” – food, fuel and financial – crises.

With the focus on how people and everyday lives have been affected, the research findings complement – and sometimes challenge – macroeconomic and national assessments of the impacts. It has uncovered evidence about how people have experienced official responses to the crisis, and signs of likely enduring harms to livelihoods and wellbeing. This qualitative research is being complemented by analysis of household survey data in Indonesia and Zambia, in a parallel IDS research project on the Microeconomics of the Crisis.
costs of leasing land and irrigation were so prohibitive that even when tourist-driven demand was at its height, they had been unable to increase supply to meet it. Lango Baya men employed in tourist resorts felt that while more guests were arriving, the move to ‘all-inclusive’ models where tourists hardly spend any money on these trips, in the previous three years meant fewer benefits for local people.

Food and fuel price volatility persist
While food insecurity appeared less acute in Mukuru than a year ago, in both locations people reported food insecurity resulting from persistent high food prices. This finding was supported by recent food security assessments (Oxfam GB et al 2009; KFFSG 2009; 2010). The Kenyan food crisis predates the 2007-8 global food and fuel price crisis: after six years of drought, the Kenyan Government declared a national food security emergency in January 2009.

In February 2010, women in Mukuru calculated that household staples – maize flour and rice – were somewhat cheaper than a year ago, but that prices of other items had recently risen, while purchasing power had not. In Lango Baya, poor rains in 2009 kept food prices high throughout. Farmers again reported irrigation constraints as a major obstacle to increased production, also noting that pest infestation and localised flooding had also negatively affected cultivation in 2009. In both locations, fuel had become unaffordable after recent rises in kerosene and charcoal. Individual experiences of inflation are reflected in national consumer price inflation indices (see graph: CONSUMER PRICE INDEX below): while some consumer prices dropped in 2009 compared to 2008, they remained high and volatile.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX (change y-on-y, 2009-10)

Household resilience and strain
Volatile food and fuel prices have pervaded everyday life for all in the two communities. Even better-off people in Mukuru reported feeling the effects as shop-keepers, creditors, landlords, and victims of rising crime; some said they had sold land or dipped into savings to keep businesses afloat.

The effects on the lives of the poor were more direct and severe. Many were getting by with a combination of ingenuity, social support, and extraordinary effort. There were concerns that livelihood diversification increasingly meant illegal, environmentally damaging or antisocial activity, as the opportunities for more productive economic activity were exhausted. More people seemed to be reaching the limits of their capacities to cope at home, and were abandoning responsibilities to provide and care.
In both Mukuru and Lango Baya, people continued to try to diversify livelihoods in the face of persistent food insecurity. In Mukuru, joblessness was widely reported to be on the rise, consistent with survey findings that income from casual waged labour, the main income source for around half of poor urban households, had declined by 28 per cent over 2008. Many adult men reported searching routinely and fruitlessly for casual work. Some had moved in with women food vendors (a group experiencing relative food security) or taken to drink, abandoning family responsibilities in their frustration. There were instances of enterprising, positive adaptations: women moving rapidly into prepared food sales, popular because of high fuel costs; children earning pocket money playing organised football matches. When the hotel market shrank in 2008, one Lango Baya farmers’ group distributed their produce free rather than letting it rot. Yet many strategies reported had or had the potential for negative impacts on those adopting them, or the wider society.

**STRAINS ON HOUSEHOLD PROVISIONING**

The single best indicator of how well households are doing is how well they are eating. Moderate improvement over the last 12 months was the pattern for many – but not all - in Mukuru. There, schoolchildren reported that their households were now eating two meals a day; a year ago they ate only one. But in Lango Baya, most people reported eating one meal daily, of ugali and vegetables. People living with HIV/AIDS explained that they ate twice daily, but needed to eat more for their antiretroviral (ARV) drugs to work. Across households, children were reported to be fed first, but adults reportedly shared the remaining food, without preference being given to men. The figure: STRAINS ON HOUSEHOLD PROVISIONING above summarises the range of reported household responses, and the effects of the strain on household provisioning.

**Social protection**

A wider range of sources of official support were available in the two communities than had been identified a year ago. School feeding programmes remained popular, as a reliable food source aligned with households’ own strategies and aspirations. A key failing was that infants and pre-school children could only benefit by some rule-bending (which appears to be routine). By contrast, the Red Cross Food-for-Work programme was criticised in Lango Baya, despite providing a significant source of food to poorer households. Complaints included that:

- beneficiary selection criteria were narrow, excluding many in need of food aid; only 12 of the poorest community members were eligible for selection in each village
- the work was excessive: participants had to dig six 2X2X2 feet holes, 12 days per month
- food rations were inadequate (40.8 kg in total), and not adjusted to household size.

**OUTCOMES OF COPING IN LANGO BAYA**

- Hunger as ‘normal’
- Sickness; ARVs do not work properly
- Conflict over gender roles; household fragmentation
- Children unable to perform in school
- Additional time and effort for women in procuring and preparing food

**STRATEGIES FOR COPING WITH FOOD INSECURITY IN LANGO BAYA**

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<tr>
<th>QUANTITY</th>
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<th>SOCIAL DIMENSIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Skipped meals</td>
<td>Lack of diversity (ugali and veg)</td>
<td>Children eat first, adults share leftovers</td>
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<td>Eating once a day</td>
<td>Non-preferred foods</td>
<td>Borrowing, buying on credit</td>
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<td>Fewer meals</td>
<td>Wild vegetables</td>
<td>Eating at night (absent men do not get fed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Smaller meals</td>
<td>Making ‘light’ ugali (bokoboko)</td>
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- Making ‘light’ ugali (bokoboko)
Credit needs emerged as a prominent theme among the slightly better-off in both locations. Traders, retailers, farmers, and aspiring entrepreneurs all gave examples of credit constraints limiting their activities, highlighting areas microcredit has to date failed to reach.

Community-level assistance was believed to have declined. People were increasingly ‘selfish’, focused on their own business and families. In Mukuru, people now shut their doors at mealtimes, to discourage visitors hoping for a free meal. Lango Baya traders were resorting to witchcraft in the fierce competition for custom. These findings suggest that community support is a component of ‘resilience’ that is nearing depletion in these two communities.

**Harms that persist**

Social protection interventions introduced in 2010 will be too late to protect many people in Lango Baya and Mukuru from harms likely to have enduring effects, as a result of the protracted acute food crisis experienced there. Compounded by the effects of the global economic and national political crises, two types of harm are likely to have lasting effects:

- **Social fragmentation:** this trend, identified in the 2009 research, has reportedly accelerated into 2010. Household tensions played out in conflict over gender roles within focus group sessions, with reports of rising household disintegration and of men (and sometimes women) abandoning families.
- **Illegal and risky behaviour.** The 2009 research uncovered concerns about rising crime and sex work as responses to the economic downturn and food inflation. A year on, concerns about rising levels of sex work, among poor women, children and men, were noticeably more widespread. By 2010, concerns in the urban site had risen to the extent that additional police had been recruited to try to maintain law and order.

**REFERENCES**


**FURTHER RESOURCES**


The Crisis Watch network website includes a wide range of resources on the social impacts of crisis: [www.ids.ac.uk/go/crisiswatch](http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/crisiswatch)

**CREDITS**

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