

INFORMATION SHEET THE ISSUE OF HOUSING IN NAIROBI

Where and how the poor live

Fifty five percent of the population of Nairobi, that is 2,5 million out of a total of 4 million people, live in slums which cover only 5 percent of the city's territory, and which are considered among the worst in all of Africa. This land does not belong to the slum dwellers. It belongs instead to the government, which can decide to bulldoze it all, when it wants, with only 48 hours' warning.

Here, public services are practically inexistent, and what little there is consists of dirt roads, rudimentary sewers, collective water holes and latrines that are nothing more than a hole in the ground used by about 60 people.

The example of Korogocho

Korogocho can help us understand the conditions of other slums: the area is about 1 kilometer long by 1 ½ kilometers wide, and 150 thousand people live like sardines in about 11.150 transitory hovels made of mud and rusty metal sheeting, which do not conform to the even the lowest standards of inhabitability. Each structure has 5-6 rooms, one family per room; a sheet separates the sleeping area from the "living area", the floor is made of dirt, or for the more fortunate, of cement. Each of the residents has 20-25 square meters of living space in which to move. The government has brought electric lighting to only a few streets, but it usually does not work. The few services available are the result of activities financed and run by NGO's, by the missionaries or by the inhabitants themselves. Korogocho is peculiar for at least 4 reasons: the land on which it rises belongs to the government; over 65% of the residents pay rent; 40% of the owners of the structures do not live in Korogocho and 70% do not own land in their areas of origin. Finally, all forms of grassroots groups are prohibited and it is forbidden to try to solve common problems. Korogocho is, therefore, a number of assets concentrated in the hands of a few landlords who live outside the slum and venture into it only to collect rent. The effect of the demolitions and forced evictions would be for these people to lose everything: the attributes of their identity, of the relationships and the memories associated with a place.

Where and why the demolitions and evictions are being carried out

Kibera, Korogocho, Kahawa Soweto, Kamae, Kware, Kamwanya, Kanguku, Kandutu, City Cotton, Mutumba, Kareru, Kirigu, Muria-Mbogo, Mutego, Njiku and others, among the most heavily populated of the 199 slums in Nairobi. Other evictions are about to take place throughout the country.

The demolitions began in early 2004, and will affect more than 300.000 individuals: about 20.120 structures, inhabited by more than 108.000 people, have been earmarked because they rise near the railroad; over 16.800 structures inhabited by more than 170.000 people are to be razed to the ground to make room for a highway; and over 4.500 structures which are "home" to about 76.100 people are set to be flattened because they are located near the power lines.

The influence of foreign debt on the disaster of urban development

The most important factor which can help fathom this scope of this disaster is Kenya's 6.5 billion dollar foreign debt, most of which is a consequence of ex-president Arap Moi's corrupt KANU regime.

If foreign investors want to make up their losses, and demand the demolition of the shacks under the power lines or along the railroad or the super highway, the government's last worry is what to do about the people living there.

So what are the wealthy countries doing about it? Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Holland, Norway, Sweden, England, the USA, offered a total of \$ 250,000 to the United Nations' Cities Alliance program. Maybe they think they are going to improve the lives of 50.000 slum dwellers in Kibera with these crumbs, which by the way amount to less than 0,004% of Kenya's foreign debt. Is it going to work? Just to simplify matters, that sum corresponds more or less to the cost of one home in those wealthy countries.

Other nations, like Finland, are willing to revoke the debt in exchange for the promotion of housing policies for the poor, with the participation of all parties involved, including the inhabitants' associations.