Chapter 8

Bitter Harvest:
The Social Costs of State Failure in Rural Kenya

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In its early years of independence, Kenya was the most prosperous country in East Africa, its GDP per capita having risen by 38 percent between 1960 and 1980. The two decades that followed to 2000, however, recorded a zero increase in per capita GDP, and at $360, per capita income in 2003 was lower than in 1990. Poverty rose from 49 percent in 1990 to 56 percent in 2005 (GoK 2005). Moreover, Kenya’s social indicators have declined in tandem with the economy: infant mortality rose from 63 (per 1,000 births) in 1990 to 78 in 2002. Life expectancy has fallen from 57 to 46 years, in part due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Persistent food shortages are evidenced in the 19 percent of under-fives who are underweight, and almost one in three (31 percent) who are wasting (CBS 2004). These are averages, but much disparity exists in Kenyan society, with exclusion and disadvantage reflecting stratification by class, gender, and region. At 0.57, Kenya’s Gini coefficient for household income is considerably higher than that of its East African neighbors, Uganda and Tanzania, whose coefficients stand at 0.37 and 0.38 respectively (GoK 2003; UNDP 2005). This ranks Kenya as one of the 10 most unequal countries in the world, and among the five most unequal in Africa. Inequality has been increasing steadily since 1994, when Kenya’s Gini coefficient was 0.45. As a result, the top 10 percent of Kenya’s richest households now control more than 42 percent of the country’s total income, while the poorest control less than one percent (UNDP 2005).

This paper explores the causes and effects of economic decline and growing inequality in Kenya, focusing particularly on the recent escalation of violence in rural areas. This violence takes a number of forms: social (domestic violence), institutional (violence in schools), economic (property crime) and political (thuggery and ethnic clashes). Moser (1996) has argued that communities’ ability to cope with economic crisis depends not only on their material well-being, but also on their social capital—the trust, networks, and reciprocal arrangements that link people with their communities. Such social capital might be strengthened by economic crisis to a point, but beyond that threshold, networks become overwhelmed and social systems collapse with disastrous consequences. Physical insecurity exacerbates the break down of social capital caused by economic crisis, rendering the provision of positive opportunities for asset accumulation impossible (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo & Ezeh 2005, Rakodi 2002). While increases in violence and crime under conditions of economic decline have been documented in urban environments, especially in Latin America (Moser and McClaine 2005; Buvinic et al., 1999), this paper illustrates how similar problems have emerged in rural Kenya.

Factors Eroding Rural Assets and Livelihoods

Two key factors have been responsible for the erosion of livelihoods and assets in rural Kenya: the widespread decline or collapse of institutions and services, and the pressure on natural resources (particularly on access to land).

Institutional degradation and collapse

Transparency International publishes an annual index of perceptions of corruption, of which Kenya’s performance has been consistently ranked poorly. A Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) score of two
or less (out of a maximum of 10) indicates severe, endemic or pervasive corruption, and Kenya’s rating has hovered around this level since the surveys began in 1996 (Transparency International 1996-2005).

The six government departments (out of 34) ranked by the public as the most corrupt in the Transparency International Kenya surveys were, in order: Kenya police, Teachers Service Commission, Local Authorities, Judiciary, Ministry of Lands, and Provincial Administration (Transparency International 2002, 2004, 2005).

Given Kenya’s widespread reliance on the production of agricultural commodities, the unreliability and inefficiency of its agricultural marketing organizations has severely damaged the livelihoods of rural households. In the case of coffee, for example, marketing transaction costs have risen sharply through the mismanagement, politicization, and uneconomic fragmentation of coffee cooperatives, to which farmers are obliged to sell. Kenyan smallholders now receive less than one-half of the auction price of coffee (Karanja and Nyoro 2002). More disturbingly, many pyrethrum growers were left stranded by the virtual collapse of marketing activities by the parastatal Kenya Pyrethrum Board in 2002, leaving farmers unpaid for several years of production.

Poor rural services are, in part, the result of the structure and functioning of Kenya’s local government system, an organizational structure which is fragmented, and with limited powers and resources. As a consequence, local government is too weak to manage and coordinate investments and services effectively. While the arrival of the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) government in late 2002 led to more resources being made available at constituency level, these resources are not systematically allocated to specific services, hence, in some cases, they can be diverted for use as political patronage.

Access to land
Land, from which 90 percent of rural residents (who account for four out of five Kenyans) directly derive their livelihoods, is a key asset for rural households (KLA, undated; GoK, 2002). However, a combination of demographic pressure, unequal distribution, and a problematic and corrupted tenure system make access to land increasingly scarce and inequitable. While it differs greatly between areas, the ratio of land under crop cultivation to agricultural population in Kenya (a rough proxy for per capita farm size) halved between the 1960s and the 1990s (from 0.46 to 0.23 hectares per person). Available land is distributed extremely unevenly. The Gini Coefficient of land per capita in 1997 in agricultural districts was 0.56, with the lowest two quartiles owning 0.08 and 0.17 hectares of land respectively, indicating a high level of functional landlessness. In many areas, land degradation and erosion exacerbate the problem of access. While women’s access to land is already severely limited, they stand to lose all rights to land and property on the death of their husbands (KLA 2003).

Land in Kenya has always been a highly politicized resource. From the 1980s, however, fraudulent allocations of public land, including forest reserve, became a central element in the system of political spoils in all parts of the country. The courts are clogged with land disputes, and many result in violent clashes between rival claimants (Cross 2002). Land ownership is one of the main sources of tension within households. As an assistant chief of police in Bungoma observed:

“Land is becoming scarce yet there are too many people who depend on it as the main source of income. Many families have fought because of land. Last night, a woman and her children killed a man over land. He had two wives and he was in the process of applying for an Agricultural Finance Cooperative loan. Fearing that she would lose the land, the woman arranged for his murder. Most fights originate from land.”

Livelihood Shifts and Gender Relations

In recent decades, livelihood diversification has been widely recognized phenomena in Africa as households have sought to sustain themselves by means of a wider array of economic activities (Ellis, 2000). This growth in importance of generating non-farm income has been described as “de-agrarianization” (Bryceson 1996). While these processes can be a positive response to new opportunities, they may also reflect a forced shift into more marginal activities as assets become eroded and former livelihood systems unviable.

Some forms of diversification recorded in our study included: shifts to new farm enterprises, to off-farm sources of income, and to non-farm activities. The unreliability of marketing arrangements for export crops has led many households to shift to the cultivation of food crops for sale, in spite of the problems of marketing bulky and perishable produce given the poor state of physical infrastructure. Other activities adopted included tree farming or stall fed cattle. Off-farm, rural households are
increasingly turning to petty trading (for example, of foodstuffs and second-hand clothes), itinerant hawking, bodaboda (bicycle “taxis”), brick making, brick laying and selling water to generate income. Beer brewing has also become an important source of income for rural women.

For those without land or capital, casual labor, either on the farms of better-off neighbors or in nearby urban settlements, may be their only source of income, although earnings for casual labor are low, especially for women (typically K Sh 50–60 ($0.67–$0.80) per day). Out migration to both rural and urban areas is another option. Often these movements follow long-established patterns, drawing on networks of information and contacts established by earlier waves of migration. The unqualified go into domestic service or join the urban casual labor force, while those with some education hold out for better opportunities. While migration brings opportunities and sometimes remittances, for those left at home, it can have negative impacts on rural households. It reduces the labor available for agriculture and adds to the vulnerability of households headed by women and the elderly, especially given that traditional collective and reciprocal labor arrangements have collapsed in most areas (a situation exacerbated by the impact of HIV/AIDS).

In many communities, collective responses to livelihood erosion were apparent. Community-based organizations have a long history in Kenya, and include women’s groups, welfare associations, youth groups, communal self-help groups and savings and credit associations (Wanyama 2003). These groups have come together to provide support for their members, promoting income generation. Even relatively poor communities have banded together to supplement the failing services of the state through the provision of school and dispensary buildings, and produce buying centers, or by recruiting and paying teachers where government staffing is inadequate.

The shifts in livelihood systems imposed on rural Kenyan households have not been gender neutral. The collapse of established sources of income from cash crops such as coffee, pyrethrum and sugar, the decline of pastoralism for political, security and ecological reasons, and the fall in labor migration have affected men and women differently, and resulted in profound shifts in gender relations. Broadly speaking, the livelihood systems which have been most severely eroded have tended to be dominated by men. Traditionally, even though production systems were underpinned by women’s productive and domestic labor—as in cash crop production—male dominance was secured through patriarchal land tenure systems and customary norms controlling the disposal of cash income. Pastoralism was also largely a male preserve. Likewise, men have been the main agents in labor migration.

Concurrent with the “demasculination” of the rural economy, new opportunities—such as food crop production, petty trade, informal services, beer brewing, casual labor, domestic service, and the gathering of firewood and other non-timber forest products—have extended traditional female roles. These factors have contributed to the very different ways in which men and women have responded to change. Men, with unreliable markets for traditional produce, crumbling niches for migratory employment and (for pastoralists) their herds in decline, have found themselves unable to live up to established norms of manhood. Their characteristic response has been one of withdrawal. Women, finding themselves responsible for filling a growing gap in household provisioning, have been obliged to support themselves and their children by multiple means: a combination of intensification, diversification and cooperation. As a result, women have found themselves not only the domestic but the economic core of households, while men have moved to the periphery. This is also reflected in patterns of residence: more than one in three rural Kenyan households is now headed by women (CBS 2004).

Findings from Isiolo district illustrate some of these points. In Manyatta Demo, where the pastoral economy has never recovered from the brutal government counter-insurgency activities of the 1960s and raiding by groups from the east in the 1980s and 1990s, men have relatively few economic activities. Most have no capital or stock, and are obliged to produce and sell charcoal, an activity which is precarious, low return, and illegal. Women, on the other hand, have a much wider set of pursuits: collecting and selling of firewood, selling miraa (khat), milk, eggs and honey; gathering wild fruits, herbal medicines and incense; weaving baskets and mats; and making bread. While most of these activities are small scale and low return, they nevertheless amount to a portfolio on which their households can survive. Similarly, in Nakuru, pyrethrum production for export has been replaced by the cultivation of food crops for the domestic market, which women are mainly responsible for cultivating. As one woman said: “The children have to eat and attend school.”

Alongside the rising demands on women by changing livelihood systems, domestic care has also increased. The burden of caring for the sick (multiplied by HIV/AIDS) falls largely on women and girls, as well as the responsibilities of childcare, cooking and the collection of water and firewood. The community responsibilities of women have also increased: women’s groups are more ubiquitous, active and effective than men’s.
Hence, while livelihood erosion has undermined the social value, identity and self esteem of men, for women, the ubiquitous triple burden of economic, domestic and community responsibilities has intensified in all three spheres. However, men’s “disempowerment” (Silberschmidt 2005) is not translated into the empowerment of women, since the recognition of the feminization of the rural economy is obscured and muted by patriarchal ideology. Although women are increasingly the generators of household income, men still control immovable and moveable property, and seek to retain decision-making power over disposal and expenditure. As one Bungoma man explained: “If she [my wife] buys sugar, I have bought it. If she buys a cow, it is mine because she lives in my house and tills my land free of charge.” The increasing divergence between patriarchal ideology and the material reality of household provisioning leads to tensions that more and more often overflow into violence.

Gender violence
Half of all Kenyan women have experienced violence since they were 15, and one in four in the 12 months prior to being interviewed (three in 10 in the case of married women). Substantial variations exist in these figures regionally, with domestic violence most endemic in the west of the country. Some 73 percent of women had experienced violence in Western province and 60 percent in Nyanza province, compared with the lowest figure of 30 percent in Coast province. Husbands (58 percent) were the main perpetrators of this violence, followed by teachers (26 percent), mothers (24 percent), fathers (15 percent) and brothers (8 percent) (CBS 2004).

Regional variations in domestic violence appear to relate both to cultural norms and to increasing pressure on land and livelihoods. In Bungoma and Kisi, the “disciplining” of wives was described as if it were an elemental component of local culture. A typical view expressed by a Bungoma man was that “a woman must be beaten by the man to instill respect and a sense of discipline.”

Such expressions of timeless patriarchy aside, our interviews indicated that, far from being a hangover from a primitive past, domestic violence is in fact increasing in both incidence and severity. Women emphasized the link between domestic violence and the recent rise in alcohol abuse. In many parts of Kenya, traditional norms, while permitting a man to beat his wife, also circumscribed the scope of violence: if he acted without pretext, drew blood, or broke a limb, he would have to answer to, and compensate, his in-laws. However, these limited protections for women have largely broken down due to the fragmentation of extended family ties.

Growing violence against women is also manifested in the escalating incidence of rape in Kenya. Rape often accompanies other crimes and rural women, frequently obliged to fetch water or forest products during the night, are especially vulnerable to sexual assault. Rape is not reported for many reasons, not least because of the limited seriousness with which it is taken by the police, and so official statistics are of little use in establishing trends. However, police statistics show that 2,800 cases of rape were reported in Kenya in 2004, an increase of 500 compared with the previous year, and more than five times higher than in 1990 when only 515 cases were reported. Kenya’s Coalition on Violence against Women estimates that only 8 percent of women report rape to health officials or the police.

Intergenerational conflict
In many rural Kenyan households, tension between the generations is high. Unemployment among young people is such that they often lack the resources to establish their own households and are obliged to remain in the parental home. Youth wishing to farm are often constrained by the limited land available and its control by the older generation. Unemployment, combined with the expectations created by education, breed hopelessness and frustration. For their part, parents complain that their grown-up children do not pull their weight in contributing to household income. Parental disapproval of children’s lifestyles and anxiety over their involvement in risky behaviors, such as substance abuse and crime, is another source of tension. Relationships between male youth and their families are particularly fraught. Media reports of violence between parents and children have become increasingly frequent.

The reasons given for intergenerational violence in the communities surveyed are listed in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Kiambu (n = 78)</th>
<th>Kwale (n = 10)</th>
<th>Isiolo (n = 50)</th>
<th>Kisii (n = 58)</th>
<th>Nakuru (n = 39)</th>
<th>Bungoma (n = 78)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access to land</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol consumption</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranged marriages</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Land was the leading cause of tension in the densely-populated Kiambu (562 persons per km$^2$) and Bungoma (424 pers/km$^2$) districts, as well as in Nakuru (164 pers/km$^2$) where land shortage was compounded by severe inequity of distribution. In many areas, land is not customarily transferred to children until the death of the father. Thus, sons may hold only provisional rights to land for many years and be reluctant to invest in agriculture. Tradition is only one reason for parent’s reluctance to apportion land. In the land-short districts, there were complaints of children selling off family land to offset debts or simply squander. Land was much less of an issue for intergenerational conflict in Kwale (60 pers/km$^2$), and pastoral Isiolo (4 pers/km$^2$). Interestingly, in Kisii, the most densely populated of all rural districts (758 pers/km$^2$), the leading cause of contention between children and parents was school fees. The fragmentation of land is now so acute that agriculture is no longer considered a viable livelihood, and education is seen as the only route out of poverty (even if an increasingly precarious one). In Kwale, and parts of Isiolo district, tensions between generations were mostly said to be fueled by alcohol.

Violence against children is also institutionalized in schools. As noted above, the perpetrator of the violence for 26 percent of women had been a teacher. According to Human Rights Watch:

For most Kenyan children, violence is a regular part of the school experience. Teachers use caning, slapping and whipping to maintain classroom discipline and to punish children for poor academic performance. The infliction of corporal punishment is routine, arbitrary, and often brutal. Bruises and cuts are regular by-products of school punishments, and more severe injuries (broken bones, knocked-out teeth, internal bleeding) are not infrequent. At times, beating by teachers leave children permanently disfigured, disabled, or dead (1999: 2).

Crime, violence and insecurity in rural areas

As a United Nations report notes, crime:

…imparts the overall development of nations, undermines spiritual and material well-being, compromises human dignity and creates a climate of fear and violence, which endangers personal security and erodes the quality of life (1992:6).

The crime rate in Kenya rose by 51 percent between 1994 and 2000. High levels of violence have long been a feature of Nairobi and, to a lesser extent, other urban areas, but perhaps the most striking finding of our research was the extent to which crime and violence has permeated rural areas. The trend towards rural criminality is a relatively recent phenomenon, traced by most respondents to the last five years. The new wave of rural crime is also associated with unprecedented levels of brutality, robbery increasingly being accompanied by murder, rape, and the wanton destruction of property. Sometimes such acts of violence are not even accompanied by theft, suggesting that they are driven primarily by frustration, anger and resentment. In Bungoma district just before our fieldwork, a gang had attacked 10 households, gang raping women and girls, assaulting men and destroying property, but stealing nothing. As one informant observed: “It was as if they wanted to humiliate their victims.”

With changing patterns of rural crime, the weapons, too have evolved. In the past, as we were told in Kiambu, thieves used sticks or stones, but now they came with guns, making resistance by victims or neighbors futile or fatal. Decades of instability in surrounding countries and Kenya’s pastoralist periphery have made small arms cheap and readily available. Increasingly, thieves act with the arrogance born of impunity:

“…they come during the day and some even give notice of their intended visit, and there is nothing anyone can do (Bungoma informant).”
In Ngecha (Kiambu) a woman commented that:

“We are producing clever thieves. Young people are educated to university level but they are jobless. They use their knowledge to steal and are so frustrated that they vent their anger on innocent community members.”

Instances of petty theft (of food from farms and minor items from houses) had increased in all districts as poverty had intensified, local enforcement systems and sanctions declined in authority, and the effectiveness of formal policing and justice systems deteriorated. In Nakuru, we were told that food might be stolen while still cooking on the fire, or clothes filched while drying. That these instances were said to be seasonal suggested that they were driven by immediate needs during periods of food shortage. In Kiambu and Bungoma, on the other hand, petty theft was generally blamed on the needs of young men to feed their alcohol and substance abuse habits.

Stealing from the government (for example, removing forest products from reserves or water pipes from government stock) was not considered locally as culpable as stealing from individuals. Indeed, an outcome of the buckling of livelihood systems has been the recourse to activities which are formally illegal, such as forest exploitation, charcoal burning, commercial sex work, and the brewing, distillation and sale of alcohol. The illegal nature of these activities expose the poor to extortion by police, local government or forestry officials. However, given the lack of alternatives, this did little to reduce their incidence. In Nakuru, men and women set out at dusk with their bicycles, walking 20 or more kilometers into the forest to collect a shipment of charcoal and transport it under cover of darkness to Nakuru town. If caught by officials, it resulted in a fine, a beating, or both.

Commercial sex work was well established in two of the surveyed communities. In Bulla Pesa, a suburb of Isiolo town, in which there is a high military presence, prostitution has become the mainstay of the economy. Clients are said to prefer young girls—children as young as eight years old are involved in the trade, and command the highest prices. This is reflected in the nomenclature: girls aged between eight and 12 years were known as “nice”, teenagers as “coca cola” (“sweet but not as good as ‘nice’”) and girls 20 and over as “mitumba” (second hand). The inducement of children into commercial sex work at such a young age is a reflection both of the extreme desperation of many households, as well as the extent to which community norms have broken down. The ravages of HIV/AIDS could be seen in the number of households consisting only of children and the aged. While aware of the risks of unprotected sex, commercial sex workers nevertheless complained that their clients were often unwilling to use condoms. Desperation was echoed in the words of one young woman: “It is better to live now rather than worry about HIV which will kill you in 10 year’s time.”

The exchange of sexual favors for food or money is not limited to commercial sex workers. Many women in Sirisia (Bungoma), Karia (Kiambu) and elsewhere, resorted to extra-marital relations to meet their household needs. Such statements may, to a degree, reflect deep-rooted fears about moral break down, and in particular the control of female sexuality, but they have a basis in reality. One man in Karia (Kiambu) described his own humiliation: “As a jobless husband, you watch and eat the food knowing well that another man paid for it because you have no alternative.”

With crime and violence escalating, security and access to justice are growing concerns in rural Kenya. However, the police are widely regarded as so corrupt and ineffective that they are seen to be contributing to the problem of crime, rather than providing a solution. Allegations that police (and retrenched former police officers) assisted, protected, and armed criminals, hired out their uniforms, received stolen goods, and even undertook crimes themselves, were so regular as to be commonplace. Even when criminals were arrested, they were said to be released without charge if they had the means to offer a bribe.

The failure of the government to ensure the security of its citizens has led many rural communities to safeguard their lives and property through the formation of vigilante groups. Such groups patrol communities at night, systematically ostracize suspected criminals and, on occasion, destroy their property. Vigilantes can go further. Lynching has become a widely established phenomenon as communities’ frustration at the unwillingness or inability of formal institutions to control rural crime grows. Lynching was considered not only a way to purge the community of persistent troublemakers, but to serve as a disincentive to others. It also reflects growing disenchantment at official ineptitude and collusion with criminals, feelings which outweigh the fundamental injustice of mob action and the inability of alleged criminals to defend themselves.

Community policing, and even the excesses of vigilantism, are generally condoned by the authorities. Nevertheless, the organization of bands of youth to protect the community has created its own problems. It is hard to retain young people, who are a mobile group in search of employment, to
serve on a voluntary basis. Sometimes, once created, vigilante groups have turned to crime and extortion themselves, or have been manipulated into settling grudges or political scores.

The epidemic of crime and violence in rural areas is having an impact on the social composition of rural communities as the better-off are increasingly unwilling to live in, invest in (or sometimes even visit) their home communities, or are driven by repeated gang attacks to the comparative safety of nearby towns, where clustered residences facilitate joint security arrangements. In Kisii, middle-class migrants living in Nairobi and other cities often avoid staying overnight when visiting their communities of origin, for fear of being robbed or violated.

Crime is also driving retail and other businesses from rural communities by compounding the costs of doing business though direct losses to criminals, the costs of evasive and protective measures, and the material, psychological and medical costs of violence. A woman store-keeper in Karai (Kiambu) told us that she had twice been robbed in the last year on her way to the bank. She now varied her patterns and means of transport, hoping to avoid another incident, but her profits had been decimated and she was on the verge of abandoning her store.

Growing crime and insecurity is both the result of a decline in the social capital of many communities, and a causal factor in accelerating that break down by reinforcing social differentiation and decreasing levels of trust between neighbors. Traditional, or informal institutions, can often no longer maintain order, and neither do the formal institutions of the state command any confidence.

Substance abuse and psychological anomie

Here, we turn our attention to the psychological impacts of eroding livelihood assets and the advancing culture of violence which has accompanied it. Development literature has hitherto given little attention to the relationship between social structure and subjective states of mind and feeling, and yet there are at least two good reasons for doing so. First, one of the main social costs of violence and crime is a psychological one: fear and the sense of personal insecurity. Second, the motivation for violence increasingly goes beyond the economic to the expressive, with brutality representing the acting out of emotional states of resentment and frustration. With this in mind, we look briefly at three indicators of psychological anomie in Kenya: alcohol abuse, depression and suicide.

Alcohol Abuse

According to the Kenya Medical Research Institute, alcohol abuse affects 70 percent of households in Kenya. In rural areas, drinking is predominantly, although by no means exclusively, a male pursuit. Problem drinking is perceived to have become entrenched relatively recently, and to be associated in particular with male and youth unemployment. In Nakuru, for example, opinion was quite specific about linking the onset of widespread alcohol abuse to the collapse of the pyrethrum market and the resulting underemployment of men. Locally brewed beer was customarily consumed at festivals and celebrations, and was generally the preserve of older men. Today, drinking has become an everyday activity, starting early in the day, and locally distilled spirits have gradually replaced beer. Youth have taken over from elders as the most hardened drinkers. Drinking by both primary and secondary school children is now widely reported by teachers. A recent survey for the National Agency for the Campaign Against Drug Abuse found that, of a sample of 10 to 24 year olds, 60 percent of non-students and 9 percent of students had used alcohol within the last month. Other common intoxicants used by young people included tobacco, marijuana, khaat and inhalants such as glue and petrol (of these, only marijuana is illegal) (NACADA 2004).

In most of rural Kenya, women are responsible for the brewing and sale of alcohol, often the most profitable of the limited sources of livelihood open to them. Yet, as the main victims of its consequences (lost household income and domestic violence), women are also most vocal in condemning the epidemic of alcohol abuse. In some areas, women highlighted alcohol abuse as the greatest problem facing them, above infrastructure, land, credit and services. The tension between women as brewers and as wives surfaces on occasion when women act collectively to dispose of alcohol and isolate brewers in protest at the damage that drinking does to their families.

Depression

According to the World Health Organization, depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide in terms of years lost to disability, and the fourth leading contributor to the global burden of disease (and the second in the 15–44 age group). Given the low level of development of mental health services in Kenya, data on the prevalence of depression there is unreliable, but what is available is a cause for concern. Our quantitative survey included several questions on depression and hopelessness, and the results indicate that an average of 37 percent of people had depression, varying between 59 percent in...
Kiambu and 27 percent in Kwale. Poverty and money matters were the main causes of depression, followed by health, unemployment and domestic violence.

Other sources indicate high rates of depression among young people—with 10 percent of young men and 7 percent of young women reporting being depressed nearly all the time to the point of giving up (Centre for the Study of Adolescence 2003). These rates of depression (especially for males) are significantly high relative to global rates, which are generally higher for females than males.\textsuperscript{7}

**Suicide**

Young people in Kenya also have an alarmingly high rate of attempted suicides. Official statistics for actual suicide are unreliable given that cases are rarely reported or even mentioned because of the intense social stigma. However, in a recent survey, 7 percent of males and as many as one in 10 young Kenyan women reported having attempted suicide at least once (Centre for the Study of Adolescence 2003).\textsuperscript{8}

**Conclusions**

This paper has documented several aspects of the rising violence and insecurity which currently characterizes rural Kenya, and traced its origins to the erosion of livelihoods. Population growth and the inequity of the land tenure system have undermined access to key physical assets, while institutional malfunction has debilitated agricultural marketing, health, education and other services. HIV/AIDS has increased the burden of ill-health and dependency in rural households, as well as impinging on service providers through the loss of staff.

Faced with these circumstances, rural households have had to adapt their livelihood strategies by diversifying into new farm enterprises, off-farm and non-farm activities. However, limited assets severely restrict their choices, often forcing them into marginal and even illegal activities. These shifts have had a markedly gendered character. The livelihood systems which have been most severely eroded (cash crop production, pastoralism, labor migration) were those dominated by men, while new opportunities often extend what were traditionally female activities. As a result, men find themselves unable to meet their long-established roles in supporting the household, while women’s burdens in the economic, domestic and collective spheres intensify. These shifts in gender roles have had a destabilizing effect on households which, while not empowering women in any real sense, leave men feeling disempowered. The growing tension characterizing relations between men and women has led to a growth in domestic violence. At the same time, the decline in opportunities for youth has put relations between the generations under strain.

The violent character of rural intra-household relations can be seen as a facet of the spread of violence at all social levels—against women, children, political opponents, in disputes over land, in schools and on the street. The brutal nature of this violence appears to be an expression of extreme anger, frustration and resentment; a psychological anomic, also exhibited in alcohol and substance abuse. It is clear that the devastating impacts of inequality, corruption and lack of opportunity, are mediated by destructive emotions as much as by rational “economic” coping strategies. The inequalities in the distribution of power and resources that have come to characterize Kenyan society are both the start and the end point of the processes of social dislocation described in this paper. Inequality, by concentrating power in the hands of the elite, stifles opportunity, facilitates corruption, and creates a climate of despair and desperation among the poorest.

Our account of the origins of violence in the erosion of economic and institutional assets indicates that the consequences of economic policy and mismanagement have been devastating, and have reached deeply into the foundations of society itself. The implication is that, without equitable growth, and widespread institutional reform, these social tensions are unlikely to be resolved. Peace, security, and the associated social capital are not only conditions for holding and building assets, but are themselves community assets which have hitherto been undervalued in policy (Moser 2006). Beyond this, at the societal level, it is clear that current policy approaches to gender and youth are not adequate to the scale of the problems faced. It will be essential to address not only the growing burden of labor and responsibility falling on women, but also the simultaneous “disempowerment” of men and youth. One way to address this gender conflict might be to focus on building the assets of households through the empowerment of the family unit as a whole.
Notes

1 The classification of violence as political, institutional, economic and social follows Moser and McIlwane (2005).

2 The paper is based on research undertaken in six Kenyan districts, representing six of its seven provinces: Isiolo district (Eastern Province), Nakuru (Rift Valley), Bungoma (Western), Kisii (Nyanza), Kiambu (Central), and Kwale (Coast) between February and May 2005. A range of participatory tools were used to gather qualitative data, including in-depth interviews with key informants, focus group discussions, social and institutional mapping and participant observation. These tools were complemented by quantitative data collected by use of an interviewer-administered questionnaire (710 people) at the household level.


4 Since the 2003 Health and Demographic Survey was the first survey in which gender-based violence in Kenya has been systematically surveyed, there is no statistical evidence on trends in domestic violence in Kenya.

5 If current trends continue, by 2020, depression is set to become the second leading cause of Disability Adjusted Life Years lost for all age groups and both sexes.

6 Ndetei and Muangi (1979) found a 20 percent incidence of psychiatric illnesses, especially depression and anxiety, among 140 rural medical walk-in patients in Kenya. Dadphale et al. (1989) found a prevalence of depressive disorders in 9.2 percent, about a third having moderate to severe depression, among a sample of 881 primary health care patients. Other research in Kenya and elsewhere (Maj et al.) has shown a significantly higher rate of depression in symptomatic seropositive individuals than in matched seronegative controls.

7 Globally, it is estimated that the point prevalence of unipolar depressive episodes (that is, those suffering depression at any particular time) is 1.9 percent for men and 3.2 percent for women, and that 5.8 percent of men and 9.5 percent of women will experience a depressive episode in a 12 month period. (Global Burden of Disease surveys 2000, quoted in WHO 2001).

8 Based on countries for which complete data is available, the global age standardized-suicide rate for 1996 was 15.1 per 100,000. The rate for males was 24 per 100,000, and 6.8 for females. The rate of suicide is almost universally high among men compared with women, by an aggregate ration of 3.5 to 1. Male suicide rates are also rising much more rapidly than female.

Bibliography


