Kenya and Africa

Improving life in Kibera

Where is Kibera?

Kibera is Africa's largest area of slum housing. It is one of several areas of low income housing in Kenya’s capital Nairobi. Some 60% of Nairobi’s inhabitants live in slums and over half of them live in Kibera. It is estimated that between 750,000 and 1 million people live in Kibera. Compare this with the size of your local town or city. Figure 1 shows the location of Kibera in Nairobi.

What is life like in Kibera?

Conditions in Kibera are very cramped. Most of the houses are made from scrap metal sheets and pieces of timber. They are cramped together in a haphazard way with only narrow streets separating them. Most houses do not have any services such as electricity, water and sanitation.

The vast majority of Kibera's million or so people rely upon water supplied from shared taps called standpipes. These locations are important social hubs where people meet as they collect water in containers or wash clothes. There are many small shops in Kibera, selling fruit and vegetables, charcoal for fires, or clothes. People have set up barbers, repair shops and other services for the people of Kibera.
The streets themselves are commonly strewn with discarded waste and the small streams are no more than open sewers, smelly and dangerous. Most toilets are no more than holes in the ground, called pit latrines. Some 300 people may have to share a single pit latrine! In reality, most people ‘go’ on a piece of paper or in a polythene bag that is then thrown on the ground or flung onto rooftops. Healthcare is poor and many children suffer from diseases and ill health. Crime rates are also high.

Despite the poor physical conditions, most people living in Kibera take pride in their own homes and they value education. Children are often well dressed and wear clean clothes as they trudge through the mud in their wellies to school.

**How is life being improved in Kibera?**

Many governments and charity organisations are working in Kibera to support the local people and improve the quality of their lives.

- The United Nations is working with the Kenyan government to rehouse some of the residents of Kibera in new blocks of flats. The flats all have running water, toilets, showers and electricity. So far, about 1,000 families have benefited from this.
- The World Bank has supported the installation of water pipes.
- The United Nations Human Settlement Programme has provided cheap electricity for some parts of Kibera at a cost of about £2.25 per house. They have also constructed roads and bridges, built communal toilet and shower blocks, and begun to carry out door-to-door waste collections.
- The British charity Practical Action has encouraged the local production of roofing tiles, using sand, clay and natural fibres. Mud bricks are also produced locally for use in building. This type of scheme benefits local people by providing paid employment as well as improved building materials.
- Practical Action is also working to improve sanitation in Kibera by building new shower and toilet blocks. They are also working to install more water standpipes. The problem with all of these services is that trying to install underground pipes in such a densely populated area is extremely difficult.
- Peepoople, a charity organisation based in Stockholm, Sweden, pays people for their faeces which are used to produce a high grade fertiliser. It supplies a self-sanitising, single-use ‘toilet’ that takes the form of a biodegradable bag called a ‘peepoo’ ([Figure 2](#)). Local people are employed in the distribution and collection of ‘peepoos’, so providing people with an income. It currently serves 4,500 people and is making a huge difference to people’s lives.
- The Craft Silicon Foundation operates an Education Bus that provides free mobile computer use for children in Kibera ([Figure 3](#)).

While there are many signs of improvements in Kibera, there remains a great deal to do to improve the quality of peoples’ lives.
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What is it like living in Nairobi?

Activities

Look at Figure 1 and answer the following questions.

1. How far is Kibera from Nairobi city centre?
2. In what direction is Kibera from the city centre?
3. What is the name of the river that flows along the southern edge of Kibera?
4. How does the rainy season cause problems for some people living in Kibera?

Now look at Figure 2.

5. How do most people cope with the lack of sanitation in Kibera?
6. What is the ‘peepoo’?
7. What are the advantages of the ‘peepoo’?

Study Figure 3.

8. Do you agree that education should be at the centre of improvements in Kibera? Why?
9. What are the advantages of a mobile education bus?
10. Can you suggest any other mobile services that could be introduced?