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The impact of COVID-19 on peace and conflict dynamics

A case study of Korogocho informal settlement,
Nairobi, Kenya

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About the Peace Research Partnership

Saferworld, Conciliation Resources and International Alert are collaborating on a research programme that generates evidence and lessons for policy-makers and practitioners on how to support peaceful, inclusive change in conflict-affected areas. Funded by UK aid from the UK government, the research focuses on economic development, peace processes, institutions and gender drivers of conflict. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies.

About International Alert

International Alert works with people directly affected by conflict to build lasting peace. We focus on solving the root causes of conflict, bringing together people from across divides. From the grassroots to policy level, we come together to build everyday peace. Peace is just as much about communities living together, side by side, and resolving their differences without resorting to violence, as it is about people signing a treaty or laying down their arms. That is why we believe that we all have a role to play in building a more peaceful future.

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Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BBI	Building Bridges to a United Kenya Initiatives
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019 (SARS-CoV-2 virus)
CBO	Community-based organisation
CC	Community conversation
FGD	Focus group discussion
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
KEBS	Kenya Bureau of Standards
NCWSC	Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence

Glossary

Barazas – Public consultation meetings or forums.

Boda boda – The term commonly used in East Africa for bicycle and motorcycle taxis.

Chang'aa – An illicit home-brewed spirit popular in Kenya, especially in informal settlements and low- income neighbourhoods.

Kazi Mtaani Programme – A government initiative designed to cushion the most vulnerable youth in the informal settlements from the effects of COVID-19 pandemic through providing casual work to those whose jobs have been disrupted by measures put in place to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This programme was to wind up in March 2021.

Khat – A stimulant popularly used in Kenya, causing excitement, loss of appetite, and euphoria.

Mama mboga – Women traders selling groceries along busy streets and within estates and informal settlements in Kenya.

M-Pesa – A mobile phone-based money transfer, payment and micro-financing service, launched in 2007 by Vodafone Group plc and Safaricom.

Mutura – Local delicacy made of mutton and beef, common in informal settlements.

Nyumba Kumi – A model of community policing built on the premise that citizens know their neighbourhoods and neighbours very well and are therefore able to spot, call out and report any suspicious activity within their locality. It is the lowest unit of local administration. The *Nyumba Kumi* model encourages Kenyans to know their neighbours and brings together citizens in a 'cluster' defined by their geographical locations and shared interests, namely, a safe and prosperous neighbourhood. Each cluster selects one head/leader to oversee its affairs.

Preface

The research for this report was conducted in early 2021. At this time, cases of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) appeared to be declining in Kenya and restrictions had started to be lifted. However, in February cases began to increase again, peaking in late March. While cases now appear to be abating once more, the conclusions in this report are based on the situation before this third wave hit the country.

Executive summary

COVID-19 has had a major impact in Kenya, not just through illness and deaths caused by the virus, but also due to the effects of measures put in place to limit its spread. Kenya's economy has contracted¹ and household food insecurity has increased markedly.² Many women, young people and members of vulnerable groups are worst affected by the socio-economic impacts.³

There is a growing literature on the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 in Kenya and elsewhere, but less attention has been paid to the impact on conflict and peace dynamics. These are critical, especially in countries or places known to be fragile, such as informal urban settlements, where conflict and insecurity interact with high levels of poverty and informal (and illegal) economic livelihoods. This study analyses the impact of COVID-19, including mitigation measures and relief efforts, on conflict and peace dynamics in Korogocho informal settlement in Nairobi. It is a perception-based study, based on key informant interviews, focus group discussions and informal group interviews conducted in January and February 2021, with respondents selected from the nine villages that comprise Korogocho.

The economic impact of COVID-19 and the measures imposed to limit its spread are clear: respondents estimated that household incomes had fallen by more than half as a result of losing jobs and other income sources. The research found that the pandemic has had an impact on social cohesion too.

Korogocho was already fragile before the pandemic. Poverty and crime interacted with widespread instability and ethnic conflict around land and housing. Local ethnic tensions were subject to exploitation and manipulation by national ethno-political leaders, and corrupt local governance had fed persistent grievances on the part of those who felt they were being excluded from resources and opportunities. The police were widely viewed as corrupt, arbitrary and brutal. Social cohesion is a product of trusting and collaborative vertical and horizontal relationships, but these were fragile and under continual strain.

The impact of COVID-19 on social cohesion and fragility in these circumstances is concerning. From the perspective of respondents in this research, the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has increased. Other crimes appear to have increased too, particularly among young people. Relations between landlords and tenants have worsened as tenants have found it harder to pay their rent. Conflict insensitive relief projects have been corrupted by poor local governance, further fuelling ethnic tensions due to accusations of favouritism and exclusion in the distribution of benefits. Confidence in the police is low amid accusations of corrupt and brutal behaviour. Meanwhile community initiatives intended to improve peace and cohesion have been hampered by COVID-19, social distancing and other restrictions. Thus, an already fragile social cohesion has been further eroded by COVID-19, and the mitigation measures designed to combat the virus. Korogocho has not experienced a major episode of political violence since 2008, but given the links between national political rhetoric and local unrest, this increased local fragility raises concerns that the settlement may be at greater risk of violence, for example, during the 2022 elections.

¹ World Bank, Kenya economic update, Navigating the pandemic, 2020

² K. Piper, A survey of 30,000 households reveals Covid-19's economic toll in the developing world, Vox, 9 February 2021, <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/22266951/covid-19-poverty-hunger-developing-nations>

³ PMA, Study reveals stark gendered social and economic impacts of COVID-19 for youth in Kenya, 6 January 2021, <https://www.pmadata.org/news/study-reveals-stark-gendered-social-and-economic-impacts-covid-19-youth-kenya-0>



A tailor works at her open stall along a street in Korogocho © Reuters/Natasha Elkington/Alamy

All relief and recovery efforts must contribute to mitigating this impact and purposefully strengthening social cohesion. This means promoting trust and collaboration between and among social groups, and between citizens and those in authority. All measures must be conflict sensitive, designed to heal, and avoid worsening social cohesion. They should also be gender sensitive, improving gender relations and tailored to the varying opportunities and vulnerabilities of different women and men. International Alert's recommendations are divided into short-term measures, designed to improve the impact of relief and mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on social cohesion, and longer-term recovery measures.

Short-term measures

- **Local government should establish transparent procedures for identifying and registering beneficiaries, and monitoring performance**, coordinated by committees made up of representatives of village elders, women, youth, and other relevant groups, and with a view to ensuring ethnic representation. All relief initiatives should be part of this mechanism, making their plans and progress reports publicly available, along with beneficiary selection criteria.
- **All COVID-19 relief initiatives, whether privately or publicly funded and delivered, should be conflict sensitive**, explicitly designed to maintain and improve social cohesion. They should consult with communities to understand local peace and conflict dynamics, target those most in need, and take measures to avoid nepotism, ethnic bias or corruption.
- **The police should investigate and, where appropriate, prosecute all cases of SGBV**, ensuring accountability of perpetrators and justice for victims. Victims should be supported by social and health services and civil society. This may necessitate training to improve

the understanding of how SGBV risks have been affected by COVID-19, and how to respond.

- **Government, donors and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should keep young people from crime** by sustaining and expanding counselling and social and economic support initiatives during this critical period.
- **Government, donors and NGOs should support ongoing peacebuilding initiatives**, building collaboration and cohesion between and among social groups during the pandemic, and preparing to expand activities as soon as it becomes possible to do so.
- **Civil society organisations should hold the authorities accountable** for fair, transparent decision-making and distribution of benefits, advocate for justice in cases of SGBV, and call out improper behaviour and human rights abuses by the police.

Longer-term measures

- **Local government should make building social cohesion a core strategic priority**, with buy-in and leadership from political, civil society and business leaders, including representation of different gender, age and ethnic groups.
- **National and local government, with support from civil society, should improve the functioning of and trust in local government** by encouraging transparency and regular changes in local representation through elections to village elder posts and councils.
- **National and local government and civil society should build greater awareness of democratic norms** through civic education, especially for young people, including how to avoid top-down political manipulation that undermines local cohesion and development.
- **National and local government, working with businesses and civil society, should establish sustained social and economic programmes** to reduce the vulnerability and exclusion of women, young people, people living with disabilities and HIV/AIDS, and other vulnerable groups, ensuring benefits are distributed fairly and transparently.
- **National and local government, donors and NGOs should support the expansion and improvement of local peacebuilding programmes**, designed to improve inter-group relations and address historic grievances, unfairness in access to services, infrastructure and economic opportunities, and redress gender imbalances.
- **NGOs should provide training and support to local government representatives in conflict sensitivity, conflict resolution and conflict early warning**, including for local cluster heads, who deal with conflicts on a regular basis.
- **National and local government should prioritise the resolution of all land and property disputes and uncertainties in Korogocho**, deploying trained staff combining legal and community development expertise, and using conflict-sensitive approaches.
- **National government should improve the effectiveness of, and respect for human rights by the police**, through training, investigating and prosecuting wrong-doers, and improved oversight.
- **Civil society organisations should continue to advocate** for all the above measures, holding local and national government accountable for improving social cohesion in Korogocho.

1. Introduction

Since the declaration of COVID-19 as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 11 March 2020, the disease continues to ravage the world.⁴ Globally, as of 1 March 2021, 114 million cases had been reported across 219 countries and territories, with more than 2.53 million dead;⁵ Africa had recorded 3,906,975 confirmed cases and 104,039 deaths;⁶ and Kenya 106,125 confirmed cases and 1,859 deaths.⁷

The rapid spread of COVID-19 led governments everywhere to take drastic measures to contain its transmission. These measures have varied between countries and over time, but have typically included restrictions on social and economic activities, designed to reduce opportunities for disease transmission. Not surprisingly, this has had a devastating effect on national and local economies, and on people's livelihoods and wellbeing. In the medium term, it is feared that the pandemic and policy responses to it may leave millions of people without jobs, pushing more people into poverty. Vulnerable and marginalised groups are the worst hit.⁸

Immediately after Kenya recorded its first COVID-19 case in March 2020, the President established a Coronavirus Task Force to coordinate a national emergency response, and announced strict containment measures. These included a ban on all local and international flights and an initial 21-day restriction on movement by road, rail and air in and out of areas considered to be hotspots. The 21 days took effect from 6 April 2020, with the hotspots being the Nairobi metropolitan area, and Kilifi, Kwale and Mombasa counties. Other measures in place included 100% tax relief for low-income earners, and a reduced higher-level income tax rate from 30 to 25%.⁹ Although the restrictions on movement were eventually lifted, other measures have been retained, albeit in modified form, until early 2021, including a nationwide night-time curfew, a social distance of 1.5 metres between people, wearing face masks in public, and washing hands and using hand sanitisers, among others.¹⁰ Thus the economic and other impacts of these measures have continued to bite all through 2020 and into early 2021 (the time of writing).

Kenya, like many other countries, has experienced an economic downturn as a result of the pandemic, with the country's economy contracting by 1-1.5% in 2020.¹¹ Household food insecurity increased markedly,¹² and young people and women have been among the worst affected by the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic in Kenya.¹³

Most research conducted so far has explored the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and has often focused on the business sector and the socio-economic impact on households. Less attention has been paid to understanding the impact on conflict and peace

⁴ WHO, Novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) situation report – 10, 2020, <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20200130-sitrep-10-ncov.pdf>

⁵ Johns Hopkins University, COVID-19 dashboard, accessed 1 March 2021, <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6>

⁶ WHO, COVID-19 in the Africa region dashboard, accessed 1 March 2021, <https://who.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/0c9b3a8b68d0437a8cf28581e9c063a9>

⁷ Worldometer, Coronavirus Kenya dashboard, accessed 1 March 2021, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/kenya/>

⁸ UNDP, Policy brief: Articulating the pathways of the socio-economic impact of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on the Kenyan economy, 2020

⁹ COMESA, COVID-19 in member states, Trade and customs division governance, Peace and Security Unit, 14th edition, 2020, pp.16–17

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ World Bank, 2020, Op. cit.

¹² K. Piper, 2021, Op. cit.

¹³ PMA, 2021, Op. cit.

dynamics. Yet, in fragile contexts, it is critical to understand whether the risk of instability and conflict has increased in order to develop an appropriate policy response.

Stability and peace depend, among other things, on fair access to livelihood opportunities. This is because unfair access to livelihoods creates grievances, which can lead to conflict, especially if those who feel excluded perceive that this is linked to questions of identity or other structural causes. Further, people who lack access to a decent livelihood have a lower opportunity cost of engaging in unrest or conflict.¹⁴ Peace and stability are also conditioned by good governance and social cohesion: the presence of trusting and collaborative ‘horizontal’ relationships between and among different social groups, and trusting and collaborative ‘vertical’ relationships between people and those in authority.¹⁵

It is well known that underlying conflicts in fragile societies and communities are liable to be exacerbated, at times leading to violence, when they come under additional external stress – for example, when a pandemic strikes. Unfortunately, humanitarian interventions in conflict-affected contexts frequently exacerbate this negative effect, unless they are designed and implemented ‘conflict sensitively’ – i.e. based on a good understanding of prevailing peace and conflict dynamics.¹⁶

This research sought to understand the impact of COVID-19 not just on people’s livelihoods, but also on social cohesion in Nairobi’s informal settlements, with a focus on the Korogocho informal settlement, which was known to have a history of conflict and had experienced particularly high levels of violence following the 2007 general election.¹⁷ Korogocho was also thought to be less ‘researched’ than some other informal settlements in Nairobi. The research was designed to fill a gap, as scanty information was available on how COVID-19 had affected economic livelihoods there, nor how it had interacted with peace, conflict and social cohesion.

The study specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What were the responses by practitioners and policy-makers to the economic impact of COVID-19 in the informal settlements in Nairobi?
2. How have the COVID-19 pandemic and the responses to it impacted economic livelihoods in informal settlements in Nairobi?
3. In which ways has the economic impact of COVID-19 affected conflict and peace dynamics in informal settlements?
4. How have political and social economic dynamics during COVID-19 crisis affected conflict risks in the informal settlements in Nairobi?
5. From the above analysis, what can policy-makers and practitioners do to ensure that Kenya’s post-COVID-19 economic recovery is both conflict sensitive and conducive to peace?

¹⁴ International Alert, *Peace through prosperity*, London, 2015

¹⁵ International Alert, *Programming framework*, London, 2017

¹⁶ H. Haider, *Conflict sensitivity: Topic guide*, Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham, 2014

¹⁷ I. MacAuslan and L. Schofield, *Evaluation of Concern Kenya’s Korogocho emergency and food security cash transfer initiative*, Concern Worldwide/Oxford Policy Management, 2011



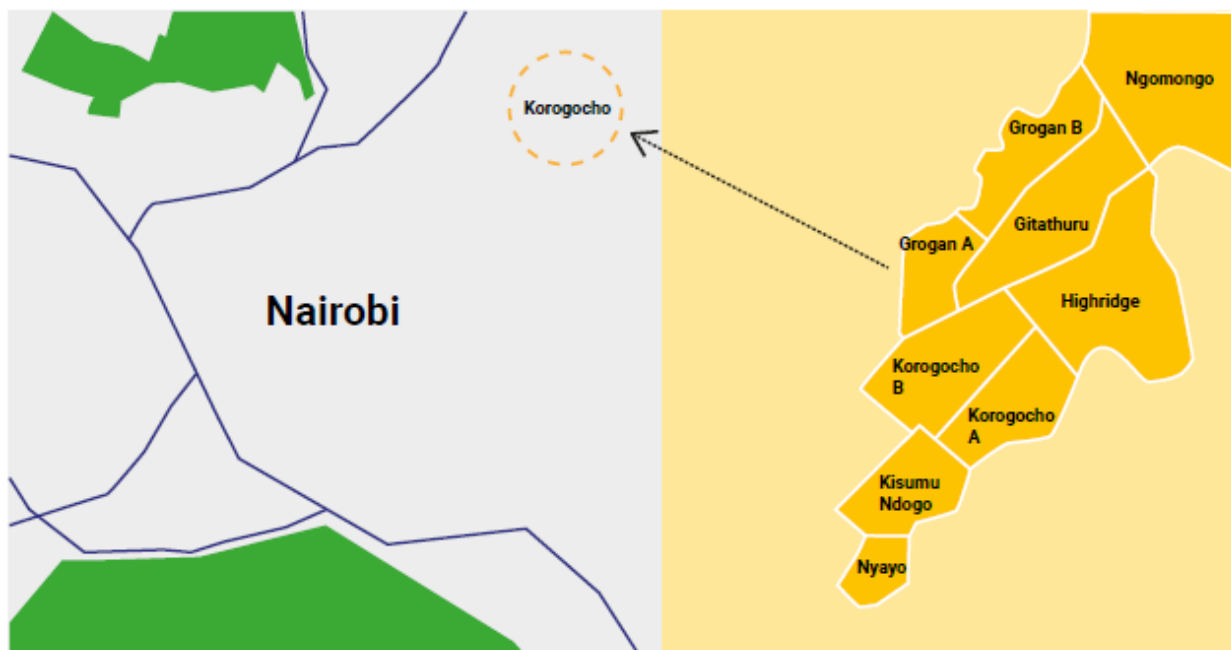
A trader sells dried fish in recycled tins in the Korogocho © Reuters/Natasha Elkington/Alamy

The report has five main sections. Section 1 is an introduction to the study which provides an overview of the pandemic and responses to mitigate its impact, and frames the research conceptually in terms of peace and social cohesion. Section 2 explains the research methodology. Section 3 includes the main findings, describing the peace and conflict dynamics in Korogocho before the COVID-19 pandemic, and showing how they were impacted by the pandemic and relief measures, including an analysis of resource-based and ethno-political conflicts, crime patterns including SGBV, and police behaviour. Section 3 also explores peacebuilding initiatives and opportunities in Korogocho. The report ends with a conclusion and recommendations in sections 4 and 5, respectively.

2. Research methodology

Between 26 January and 9 February 2021, International Alert conducted discussions with community members drawn from the nine villages in Korogocho informal settlement. A total of 131 community members (67 male and 64 female) were involved in focus group discussions (FGD) and other informal discussions, with diverse representation based on ethnicity, age, gender, affiliation to economic activities undertaken and areas of residence within the villages. There were nine FGDs and six less formal group interviews that targeted members of *maskani*, which are informal peer discussion groups (known in Korogocho as 'base') where people get together regularly to discuss issues of topical interest at a familiar location. Locations include *khat*¹⁸ kiosks, *boda boda*¹⁹ stages, taxi driver 'bases' and *mama mboga*²⁰ along the Korogocho streets. Due to COVID-19 restrictions and security precautions for the research team, between three and five members from each of six *maskani* were selected and interviewed at a secure venue identified within Korogocho. As noted in 3.1 below, large numbers of non-residents commute into Korogocho daily for business and work; some of these were also included in the research groups, alongside residents.

Figure 1: Korogocho's nine villages



Source: VSO, *Community volunteering in Korogocho, 2014*

In-depth discussions were conducted with women, youth and vulnerable groups such as persons living with disability, persons living with HIV, widows and the elderly. Key informant interviews were also held with 20 local community leaders such as the newly appointed Korogocho Senior Chief²¹ and Assistant Chiefs, *Nyumba Kumi*²² representatives, community-based organisations (CBOs), religious leaders, women, youth and elders from different ethnic groups. Through the

¹⁸ *Khat* is a stimulant popularly used in Kenya, causing excitement, loss of appetite, and euphoria.

¹⁹ *Boda boda* is the term commonly used in East Africa for bicycle and motorcycle taxis.

²⁰ *Mama mboga* refers to women traders selling groceries along the busy streets in Kenya.

²¹ He was posted to Korogocho in November 2020

²² *Nyumba Kumi* is the lowest unit of local administration, effectively clusters of 10 households. Cluster heads are the representatives of each cluster and have a representation, reporting and mobilising role in the local government system.

interviews and discussions, International Alert explored the community's views on the impact of COVID-19, and the measures put in place to mitigate it, on their livelihoods as well as on conflict and peace dynamics in Korogocho informal settlement.

This research was based mainly on perceptions and included questions that were both sensitive and likely to produce subjective responses. The research team was careful to triangulate the information received, by comparing responses from different sources. The research was designed to enable this triangulation, based on the diversity of participants, and the use of complementary interview methods.

Attention was paid to maximising the diversity of participants in the research, but International Alert recognises limitations in the methodology. For example, residents who work outside the settlement were under-represented and the pandemic reduced the researchers' ability to conduct random informal interviews, as had originally been intended. Meanwhile, many peacebuilding initiatives are small, local and somewhat invisible to external researchers, hence may have been missed due to the rapid nature of this research.

3. Findings: The impact of COVID-19 on livelihoods and peace and conflict dynamics in Korogocho

3.1. Background to Korogocho informal settlement

Much of the relevant background information about the study area emerged from the interviews and FGDs. It is, therefore, included along with other findings later in section 3. In this initial subsection we present some basic background data.

Korogocho is one of Nairobi’s informal settlements, covering 1-1.5km², situated about 11km northeast of the city centre. It consists of nine villages: Grogan A, Grogan B, Korogocho A, Korogocho B, Highridge, Gitathuru, Kisumu Ndogo, Nyayo and Ngomongo (see map in Figure 2). Accurate population data for the settlement is disputed, but it is commonly said to contain 150-200,000 residents.²³ Certainly it is known to have a high population density.²⁴ In common with other informal settlements in Nairobi, it is affected by high levels of persistent poverty. A 2011 study found “high levels of poverty and low levels of infrastructure development compared to other urban informal settlements”.²⁵

Table 1: Dominant ethnic groups (by numbers) in Korogocho’s nine villages

Village	Dominant groups
Gitathuru	Kikuyu
Grogan A	Kikuyu & Borana
Grogan B	Kikuyu
Highridge	Luo, Luhya & Borana
Kisumu Ndogo	Luo
Korogocho A	Kikuyu
Korogocho B	Kikuyu
Ngomongo	Luo
Nyayo	Luo

Source: Interviews and FGDs conducted by International Alert, 2021.

Four aspects of Korogocho’s demography brought out by this study are worth noting here: its ethnic make-up, a history of land evictions, the mixture of residents and non-residents, and its underlying tensions linked to crime and ethnicity.

Korogocho is a multi-ethnic informal settlement. There is a mix of ethnic groups in each village, but some villages are dominated by one or two ethnic groups. Based on the information provided by respondents, the numerically dominant groups in each village are shown in Table 1. These are merely the perceived numerically dominant groups, and smaller numbers of the same groups also reside in other villages. For example, significant numbers of Kikuyus and Luos were also said to live in Highridge. All in all, around 30 ethnic groups are thought to be resident across the nine villages. As will be seen, the multi-ethnic nature of the settlement is a significant factor in the peace and conflict dynamics, and in how these have been affected by COVID-19.

A majority of the Korogocho residents are victims of past evictions from other informal settlements. The settlement began with quarry workers who settled in the area and built temporary structures in the early 1970s. It expanded during a second phase, due to resettlement of squatters from informal settlements being demolished in other parts of Nairobi in the late 1970s.

²³ Population estimates vary enormously. Wikipedia may be the source of a widely used figure of 150-200,000. A 2011 research paper suggested the population was “anything between 40,000 (from the 2009 census, which is contested in some circles for underestimating the population) and 180,000 (projections based on the 1999 census)”. I. MacAuslan and L. Schofield, 2011, Op. cit.

²⁴ D. Donatien Beguy et al, Health & demographic surveillance system profile: The Nairobi urban health and demographic surveillance system (NUHDSS), International Journal of Epidemiology, 44(2), 2015, pp.462–471

²⁵ I. MacAuslan and L. Schofield, 2011, Op. cit.

Grogan B is one of the villages that resulted from this relocation, and is one of the oldest villages in Korogocho dating back to 1976. This history of evictions means housing tenure instability has been a factor in the settlement since it was founded, and this too is relevant to recent peace and conflict dynamics, as will be shown.

This study also established the existence of a significant number of commuters, who visit Korogocho daily, to earn a livelihood in business or employment, taking advantage of economic opportunities there. Many rent houses in the areas neighbouring Korogocho. One of these, who took part in an interview, said, “Korogocho is our small city, we come here daily to work and go back home. In Korogocho there is big business.”²⁶ This group includes petty hawkers, industrial materials vendors, *khat* sellers and second-hand clothing sellers. Further enquiry revealed that these were mostly from Kamba, Meru, Kisii and Kikuyu ethnic groups. Commuters are far fewer than people who actually reside within Korogocho.

Korogocho like other informal settlements in Kenya is known for crime, SGBV, and drug and alcohol abuse, especially marijuana, *khat* and *changaa* (an illicit home-brewed spirit popular in Kenya), with a high population density and high poverty levels.²⁷ As will be discussed below, this study established that Korogocho has historical patterns of different forms of conflict and violence. The commonly mentioned forms of conflict were resource-based conflicts, ethnic and political conflicts, and SGBV. It also has a history of tension between police and residents caused by police harassment, arbitrary arrests and, sometimes, extra-judicial killings.

As this brief background summary suggests, social cohesion and livelihoods in Korogocho were already fragile before the pandemic arrived in 2020, putting them under further pressure and stress.

3.2. Immediate economic impact of COVID-19

The pandemic has had a negative impact on household incomes in Kenya.²⁸ Respondents confirmed that this was the case in Korogocho, where the pandemic and government restrictions had an immediate impact on livelihoods. Many small businesses closed, while others experienced reduced turnover, resulting in job losses, limited cash circulation, and reduced household income. According to respondents, few people in Korogocho had benefited from regular employment prior to the pandemic, and the majority relied on informal jobs as a source of livelihood, as listed in

Figure 1: Korogocho's nine villages



Source: VSO, *Community volunteering in Korogocho, 2014*

²⁶ Male youth, Informal discussion group interview, Korogocho, January 2021

²⁷ Security Research and Information Centre, *A study of crime in urban slums in Kenya: The case of Kibera, Bondeni, Manyatta and Mishomoroni slums*, 2014, pp.15–17

²⁸ Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, *Economic survey, 2020*

Table 2. These include sex work and criminal enterprises, which were spoken of in veiled tones, but acknowledged as major sources of income in the area. People’s overwhelming reliance on the informal sector meant that the economic impact of COVID-19 and associated restrictions was felt immediately.

Table 2: Sources of income in Korogocho, as identified by study respondents

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arts including music • <i>Boda boda</i> motorcycle taxis • Brewing and selling illicit alcohol • Building and construction • Car wash • Casual jobs • Daycare • Domestic cleaning services • Electrical wiring • Garbage collection • Hawking • Motor vehicle mechanics • Peddling drugs – mainly marijuana and <i>khat</i> • Photography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running cyber café • Sale of cooked food, e.g. chapatis, <i>mandazi</i>, boiled legumes and eggs • Sale of second-hand clothes • Sale of vehicle and motorcycle spare parts • Scavenging at the Dandora dumpsite • Sex work • Shoe repair • Stripping in clubs • Tailoring • Welding • Working as drivers and conductors in public service vehicles • Working in hotels and bars
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Based on responses from residents in FGDs, the typical range of daily incomes per household before the COVID-19 was between KES 500 and KES 1,500, with around KES 700 being considered average. With the onset of the pandemic, the typical income range of those who were continuing to earn a living was said to have dropped by more than half, ranging from KES 250 or less, up to about KES 500.²⁹ A majority of the residents, however, had no earnings at all between March and June 2020, when most economic activities in Nairobi ceased.

Respondents reported that many Korogocho residents were pushed into poverty, as prices rose, even while incomes fell. As one respondent put it, “the economy has been affected by COVID-19 and resulted in inflation, so we are buying things at higher prices than before. The little we have is no longer enough.”³⁰

3.3. Resource-based conflicts

This research sought to understand underlying conflicts in Korogocho in order to see how these might have interacted with COVID-19. According to the information obtained from respondents, these fell largely into two categories: resource-based conflicts and ethno-political conflicts. This subsection covers the former and 3.4 the latter.

Respondents acknowledged resource-based conflicts as part of the history of Korogocho. The resources that drive conflict are ownership, allocation and utilisation of land within the settlement, problems over rent payment, and access to economic opportunities provided by the county and national governments, as well as from external investments or projects. (The latter include COVID-19 relief measures, which are discussed in section 3.5 below.) These different resource-based conflicts overlap, and some have taken on an ethnic dimension in the past.

²⁹ These estimated incomes do not include any cash relief that may have been received.

³⁰ Female participant, Women’s FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

Land

There are two main categories of land conflict in Korogocho. The first of these is between the government and residents of Korogocho. Most of the land on which Korogocho is built belongs to the government. Respondents said that for years there have been tensions between residents and the government whenever the government wanted to reallocate residential land for development projects in the area. In some instances, residents have taken the government to court for determination of these disputes. More recently, as part of reforms, the government has begun to allot land to individuals, providing title deeds, but unsurprisingly this process has raised new tensions, both between the government and residents, and among residents. For example, FGD participants reported instances where the same parcels of land had apparently been allocated to more than one person, creating inevitable conflicts. Some respondents went so far as to allege that residents had bribed the Residence Committee³¹ involved in the allotment exercise. The land allotment exercise in Korogocho A and B had been halted by court order, after some residents filed a complaint.³²

Another incident mentioned by the respondents was forced evictions that had occurred between 4 and 6 May 2020, at the height of the initial surge in COVID-19 infections. They reported that 7,000 households in the Kariobangi sewerage farmers' slum, Korogocho market and Kisumu Ndogo and Nyayo villages – all part of Korogocho settlement – had been forcibly evicted by the Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company (NCWSC), despite the residents having obtained interim court orders halting the evictions.³³ The residents claimed that they had title deeds to their homes and that they had consistently paid levies to the Nairobi county government.

Although most land belongs to the government, the second type of land conflict relates to land, or the buildings on it, that are privately leased or owned, most often by Kikuyus according to respondents. Ownership of private land is often disputed and this has contributed to conflicts between individuals that sometimes take on an ethnic dimension. Ownership also changes hands, and some Somali and Borana families have bought properties from the original Kikuyu owners, especially in Highridge village. There are also parcels of seemingly unoccupied land, due either to absentee landlords who left Korogocho many years ago and have not returned, and to land belonging to government agencies such as NCWSC and other private owners. According to the respondents, conflict deepens when people from different ethnic communities claim ownership over the same unoccupied land; thus there is an ethnic dimension to this phenomenon.

Landlords and tenants

Conflict between landlords and tenants was also said to be common, reportedly increasing during the COVID-19 period. Although the President had urged landlords to consider waiving rent for their tenants during the initial stages of the pandemic, respondents reported that landlords had not done this. “Many of the tenants have been thrown out of their houses in Gitathuro due to delayed rent payment.”³⁴ In Korogocho, the monthly house rent is between KES 400 and KES 2000, depending on the nature and size of the house. For residents who had lost their jobs and incomes, paying this amount of money was difficult in a context where household incomes had dropped to between KES 250 or less and KES 500. Some landlords were reported to have

³¹ Formed in 2008 as strategy for a slum upgrading programme, the Residence Committee remains as a local management structure. The committee consists of two representatives from each village (one male, one female).

³² Paul Mungai Kimani & 20 others (on behalf of themselves and all members of Korogocho Owners Welfare Association) v Attorney-General & 2 others [2020] eKLR, <http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/200683/>

³³ Amnesty International, Evicted residents vulnerable to COVID-19, 7 May 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/evicted-residents-vulnerable-covid-19>

³⁴ Male cluster head, key informant interview, Korogocho, January 2021

resorted to punishing residents who could not afford to pay rent by removing parts of the roof or the main door to the house. Given that most landlords are Kikuyu, Somali and Borana, while their tenants are frequently from other groups, this problem was also said to have played into and exacerbated ethnic tensions.

Conflict between village elders and youth over community projects

Conflict between village elders and young people over access to economic opportunity was also mentioned by respondents as being common in Korogocho. In the past, the village elders had demolished temporary stalls set up by young people to earn a living, claiming they were being used for crime – something this research was unable to confirm. Though these demolitions had reportedly become far less common, the majority of youth respondents raised another long-standing grievance with village elders over community self-help projects such as car wash,³⁵ public bathrooms and toilets. According to them, some village elders work in cahoots with unnamed persons who would take over these projects and turn them into private income-generating projects. Youth respondents alleged that the elders wait until the community projects have been set up, then claim that they had been established on private land, thus justifying the private take-over. According to those who participated in the youth FGD, village elders want young people to remain poor and disempowered because this makes them easier to manipulate. They also alleged that some elders collaborate with youth gangs to demand bribes from external investors or donors. Youth respondents claimed that several projects have been blocked in this way, following demands for exorbitant bribes for development or beneficial projects to be established. Out of frustration, the investors abandoned their efforts to set up projects, leaving communities disadvantaged. One young woman who was interviewed said, "...there was a well-wisher investor who wanted to resurface the playing ground, but the chief, village elders and youth cartels asked him for a bribe before he could do so. He left, never to be seen again."³⁶

Conflict over access to public resources

Resources provided by county and national government intended to benefit Korogocho residents were also mentioned as a cause of tension. In the examples given, there was an ethnic dimension to these because, it was claimed, Luo politicians were diverting these resources to members of their own ethnic group, which had increased tensions between groups.

An example given was the allocation of school bursaries, the distribution of which had reportedly been skewed, with Luo families benefitting more than other ethnic groups. The study was not able to access bursary distribution records to verify this allegation, but the widespread perception is indicative of heightened tensions between ethnic groups. According to the respondents, these decisions had been made by specific Luo-elected politicians (whom they named) at a national and local level. This is particularly relevant for the present study because respondents indicated that similar practices had occurred in the distribution of COVID-19 relief, with food and other materials being distributed only or primarily to residents from Kisumu Ndogo and Nyayo villages, which are predominantly inhabited by Luos. (This is further discussed in section 3.5.)

This perceived unfairness by elected political leaders was highly politicised. For example, an aspiring non-Luo politician – someone who plans to run for political office in 2022 against one of the representatives accused of corruption – stated, "We are seeking an alliance with the Kikuyu

³⁵ 'Car wash' is the name used for local facilities, often run by groups of young people with NGO support, where *boda boda* motorbike taxis, household goods and other items can be cleaned. They provide income for local youth and an affordable local service.

³⁶ Female youth leader, key informant interview. Korogocho, January 2021

come 2022 so that we can terminate this dominance of Luo in Korogocho. We have had enough of them because they have been elected since I was born.”³⁷ This sentiment exposes the deep tensions between ethnic groups in Korogocho, tensions that were exacerbated by COVID-19.

3.4. Ethno-political conflict

Ethnic tensions in Korogocho are of course linked to the wider picture in Kenya, where ethnicity remains a persistent feature in national politics.³⁸ As noted above, Luos or Kikuyus are the most populous people in all but one of the villages in the settlement. This is especially relevant because of the dominant role that recurrent conflict between these two ethnic groups has long played in national politics. This was particularly evident during the post-election violence in 2007–2008. The political conflict between the then incumbent President Mwai Kibaki from the Kikuyu ethnic group and the opposition leader Raila Odinga from the Luo ethnic group led to a nationwide crisis. Respondents said a declaration made by opposition leader Odinga, that upon taking office if he were to win the 2007 presidential election, rent need no longer be paid to landlords in informal settlements, had provoked a powerful reaction in Korogocho. Respondents described how, during the unrest that followed the disputed election, many Luos, who are mostly tenants, seized control of buildings belonging to Kikuyu owners, while leaving others in the hands of their Somali and Borana owners. This, the respondents said, was because the Somali and Borana were in the same political party, the Orange Democratic Party (ODM), as the Luos. This state of affairs has remained unresolved until now, especially in Nyayo, Kisumu Ndogo and Ngomongo villages, which are dominated by Luos who have retained control of the properties they had seized. The resulting grievances have continued to play out during successive general election campaigns, with local politicians promising to address them, only to renege on the promise once the elections are concluded, according to respondents.

Despite this, Korogocho has not undergone any new major episode of socio-political violence since the 2007 election. Following that episode, respondents said many Korogocho residents withdrew into more or less mono-ethnic communities,³⁹ unlike before when each village had been populated by different ethnic groups. According to respondents, the local behaviour of different ethnic groups remains conditioned by the outlook and demands of their national leaders; for example, many Luo residents in Ngomongo village complied with Odinga’s 2017 call to boycott products and services associated with businesses owned by President Kenyatta’s family, such as dairy products.

The March 2018 handshake that gave rise to the Building Bridges to United Kenya Initiatives (BBI) process initiated by Odinga and President Kenyatta has restored a measure of political tolerance, and halted looming violence not only in Korogocho but in other parts of the country. According to the respondents, however, this tolerance and cohesion is expected to last only as long as the agreement holds – reinforcing the strong linkages between local and national politics and conflicts. Interestingly though, despite new political tensions currently reported in national media over the BBI,⁴⁰ and the resultant fallout between the President and his Deputy at the time

³⁷ Male youth respondent, key informant interview. Korogocho, January 2021

³⁸ Kenya Human Rights Commission, *Ethnicity and politicisation in Kenya*, Nairobi, 2018

³⁹ Among these, one can identify largely mono-ethnic separate communities of Kikuyu, Kamba, Luhya, Somali, Borana and Luo people.

⁴⁰ E.g. M. Karua, BBI has affected the country by bringing too much tension, Pulse Live, 10 March 2021, <https://www.pulselive.co.ke/news/local/bbi-has-affected-the-country-by-bringing-too-much-tension-martha-karua/pyz89d3>

of this research, these tensions "...have not reached us here to the ground/Korogocho", according to local respondents.⁴¹

Sections 3.3 and 3.4 have shown how resource-based conflicts have informed and deepened ethnic tensions in Korogocho. The following section 3.5 shows that these tensions were further exacerbated during the pandemic, when the distribution of new resources in the form of COVID-19 relief was perceived as being skewed towards the families and wider ethnic communities of decision-makers.

3.5. Tensions linked to COVID-19 relief

In response to the COVID-19 crisis government and non-state actors comprising NGOs, CBOs, businesses and individuals rallied to provide relief from the ravages of the pandemic. As noted by the Korogocho Chief, "Government paid attention since they understand life is unbearable for the most vulnerable when calamities strike, thus focusing on informal settlements for relief measures."⁴²

The assistance or support came through welfare or relief projects, mainly in the form of cash, dry foods, soap, sanitiser and face masks. However, while they undoubtedly helped people, they also had the effect of exacerbating tensions among residents, as well as between residents and the authorities. Respondents consistently reported that COVID-19 relief measures undertaken in Korogocho left them even more divided than before, while also undermining their trust in the authorities. They attributed this in particular to what they perceived as unfair distribution mechanisms and a lack of transparency in the registration and distribution process. Skewed distribution of relief contributed to an increase in divisions and resentment; in other words, some of the relief was provided without conflict sensitivity.

Assistance programmes

A variety of assistance programmes had been implemented in Korogocho. As identified by study respondents, relief measures came from three main sources: the government, Kenyan and international local NGOs, and private actors including churches, business institutions, foundations and individuals. In addition, CBOs were also mentioned, often engaged by NGOs to recruit beneficiaries and distribute materials.

The implementation of COVID-19 relief commenced towards the end of April/beginning of May 2020. Since the relief programmes were meant to benefit the most vulnerable, each commenced with registration to identify households or individual beneficiaries. In view of the accusations of poor or skewed targeting discussed below, it is worth noting here that respondents said few of the programmes consulted with beneficiaries to help inform their targeting or the design of their projects. According to respondents, all projects began by soliciting lists of beneficiaries either through the Chief's office, local CBOs or through local influential individuals in the case of some NGOs and private actors.

According to residents who had received cash transfers from the government, the cash relief of KES 4,000 per month was disbursed for four months. This was part of the government's COVID-19 recovery stimulus, designed to reach the most vulnerable households in the informal settlements of Nairobi and Mombasa. In addition to cash relief, the government also rolled out

⁴¹ Individual key informant interview, Korogocho, January 2021

⁴² Chief, in charge of Korogocho settlement, key informant interview. January 2021

Kazi Mtaani,⁴³ a casual employment programme targeting youth. Each *Kazi Mtaani* beneficiary earns KES 4,000 every two weeks because the programme is rotational on a two-weekly basis. According to respondents, youth from the majority of Korogocho households registered for this project, although it was never intended to support more than a small percentage of targeted communities and respondents said very few actually benefited.

Non-governmental COVID-19 relief measures were either through cash transfers or materials such as food, soap, sanitisers and face masks. Cash was distributed through the M-Pesa⁴⁴ mobile cash-transfer platform, with amounts ranging from KES 1,000 to KES 7,800 per person per transaction. While some private actors provided relief materials, others assisted in rebuilding houses for elderly residents whose houses were dilapidated. The main food items distributed by both governmental and private actors included maize and wheat flour, sugar, cooking oil and rice; other goods were soap, masks, sanitizer and sanitary items for women and girls. Some residents of Korogocho also offered support in other ways. For instance, a group of Somali and Borana women supported residents with tents, chairs and utensils at no cost during events such as meetings held to mourn the death of a community member and funerals. Some youth leaders also mentioned that they sought help from organisations and individuals on behalf of Korogocho residents. One of these was the owner of Koch Films (one of the CBOs based in Korogocho) who said, “I personally went out to seek help for my friends and to help my neighbours who were in dire need of food items”.⁴⁵ The interviews with cluster heads and other *Nyumba Kumi* representatives also confirmed that they mobilised relief items to help needy and vulnerable cases. At the time of this study, most of the relief programmes had ended, but WFP was said to be planning on rolling out the next phase of its relief programme in February/March 2021 through further disbursements of KES 4,000 per distribution round.

Besides the cash and dry goods, a few residents were trained by well-wishers in how to make bags from African fabric (*kitenge*) and denim cloth, face masks, and soap, which they distributed mainly to schools after they reopened, and also for sale. “For me COVID-19 has been a good thing as we got orders to supply masks and soap to schools in the area. This enabled me to take care of several girls’ sanitary needs and, in the process, rescuing them from sexual exploitation,” said one young woman taking part in an FGD.⁴⁶

The assistance was short term, but some youths were said to have established small businesses after receiving their proceeds from *Kazi Mtaani*, so they will still have a source of income once the project comes to an end. These businesses include selling boiled eggs, sweets and *mutura*,⁴⁷ and establishing hair salons and barber shops, most of which they would not have considered before COVID-19 because they had been employed. Respondents reported that other beneficiaries used the cash they received to develop their rural homes, including building houses or buying cows for milk production – perhaps providing a basis for contributing to their economic recovery and longer-term needs.

⁴³ A government initiative designed to cushion the most vulnerable youth in the informal settlements from the effects of COVID-19 pandemic through providing casual work to those whose jobs have been disrupted by measures put in place to curb the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. This programme was to wind up in March 2021.

⁴⁴ A mobile phone-based money transfer, payment and micro-financing service, launched in 2007 by Vodafone Group plc and Safaricom.

⁴⁵ Male youth leader, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

⁴⁶ Female respondent, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

⁴⁷ Locally made delicacy made of mutton and beef, common in informal settlements.



A hairdresser peers out from her salon stall in Korogocho © Reuters/Natasha Elkington/Alamy

Tensions emerging from relief initiatives

In previous sections we have seen how conflicts in Korogocho were often linked to resources and ethnicity; these themes recurred when looking at the relief programmes, which are, after all, about access to relatively scarce resources. The main drivers of conflict related to relief projects arose from accusations of bias and exclusion, and thus can often be traced to the registration process and to underlying problems of governance. As directed by the government, all relief measures, and especially food, were meant to be certified by the Kenyan Bureau of Standards. Successful implementation of the projects also necessitated a transparent registration process. Despite being intended as the surest means of identifying the most deserving of support, the registration process ended up becoming a barrier to effectiveness and contributing to tensions and resentment both towards the authorities and other communities. Study respondents blamed this on the skewed and untransparent registration process.

Tasked with overseeing the registration process, the Korogocho Chief sought the assistance of *Nyumba Kumi* representatives, village elders and cluster heads or chairpersons to undertake this process. These representatives were expected to be able to identify the most vulnerable households, based on their interactions as well as their mandate, but according to many of the respondents, neither *Nyumba Kumi* nor village elders actually fulfilled this role. They said the registration process was mainly conducted in secret. In addition, respondents reported that around 70% of those registered were relatives and friends of those doing the registration, or others from their ethnic group. This was seen as unfair, and as undermining social cohesion. As one respondent noted, “Those donating had the good will and good intentions. It is those implementing who failed the projects.”⁴⁸ It was also reported that some of those responsible for registration demanded kickbacks. One of the respondents explained, “If I am to get KES 3,000 then he or she would demand KES 1,000.”⁴⁹ Overall, the lack of transparency and apparent unfairness in the registration process has clearly contributed to grievances over the implementation of relief measures.

“Some of us just heard about it and wondered when they were registered. It was based on whether you have an affiliation to those conducting the registration. Some were called by their friends who were registering and thus became beneficiaries. Some were tricked that they have been registered only for the submitted list to be the one bearing the relatives and friends of those registering. Some would even register their own children as long as they had national identification cards. When confronted, they blamed it on computer error. It is some sort of corruption. This type of corruption has affected cohesion within Korogocho. I would not even tell my friends since they would not keep quiet especially if not registered. It will end up messing up my chances.”

- Young mother participant in informal group discussion, Korogocho, February 2021, referring to confusion over registration for COVID-19 relief.

A small number of organisations were reported to have been more transparent. Some had attempted to go door to door to identify the residents most in need of relief, mainly targeting people with disabilities, orphans, those affected by illnesses including HIV/AIDs, and the elderly. Indeed, one Kenyan NGO was reported to have temporarily halted its project once it received word of the lack of transparency.

When asked about these grievances, one of the officials in charge indicated that many residents complained about the bias by the *Nyumba Kumi* and village elders, but would not offer solutions or “would probably do the same thing if given the opportunity to undertake the registration”.⁵⁰ The Chief decided to continue using the *Nyumba Kumi* and village elders since they were the entity recognised by the government; however, he said he had contacted village elders about whom the most complaints had been received, to warn them against the lack of transparency. When questioned as part of this research, officials did not confirm whether they had verified that the names submitted to them were genuine. One female political leader who also oversaw the registration process laid the blame on residents themselves. She confirmed that she had attempted to verify some of the names, by calling the phone numbers given at registration, but this was made difficult due to illegibility or the wrong digits being written down. She said, “We would make random calls to the numbers to verify, only to at times have persons answer the call we made [who were unaware of] the registration process.”⁵¹ Due to tight timeframes that ranged from three to five days, she said they would strike such names out. This suggests that intentional wrongdoing was not the only cause of problems. Nevertheless, social cohesion depends largely

⁴⁸ Male youth leader, key informant interview. Korogocho, February 2021

⁴⁹ Vulnerable male participant in FGD, Korogocho, February 2021

⁵⁰ Female youth leader and public official, key informant interview. Korogocho, January 2021

⁵¹ Female youth leader and public official, key informant interview. Korogocho, January 2021

on perceptions, and perceptions of wrongdoing by the authorities were both widespread and consistent among participants.

Although almost everyone interviewed for the study reported having registered to benefit from the relief measures, only a few had actually benefitted. This was replicated in all FGDs across the nine villages. FGD participants claimed that the same few beneficiaries ended up benefiting from all or most of the relief measures, including assistant chiefs, village elders and women and youth leaders. Complaints of favouritism and nepotism were raised during the discussions and interviews. One young person taking part in an FGD said, “This NGO money has made a few people and families rich in Korogocho. In some instances, all the elder’s family members and even relatives who do not reside in Korogocho got cash transfer. It was like a family affair!”⁵²

According to respondents, more residents would have benefited had the measures been implemented in a rotational manner since almost all of the measures were made in at least three disbursements. While some residents had attempted to raise their grievances about the registration process through the Chief, he would simply report their grievances to the village elders, who in turn threatened to arrest the complainants over trumped-up charges, so they abandoned their complaints. Furthermore, some who spoke out claim they were excluded from future relief measures as a consequence. “Because I fought for my sister to be registered, they ended up not registering me. Thankfully, my sister got into *Kazi Mtaani*. If you are too loud fighting for social justice, they label you an enemy,” said one resident who participated in an FGD.⁵³

The reportedly unfair registration and distribution of benefits also eroded people’s willingness to help one another, according to respondents. For example, while in the past residents would extend favours to each other, some of those who felt excluded from the relief measures were no longer willing to continue to help those who had benefitted. Others reported that they knew neighbours who were constantly receiving cash transfers from NGOs, but the same neighbours would not offer help even if they knew others were suffering. Thus, divisions grew between friends and neighbours. This was a common phenomenon, reported by many respondents.

Such tensions existed not only within villages, but also between them. Respondents claimed that some villages had benefitted more than others, and this was also seen through a lens of ethnicity. For example, there was a general feeling that Highridge and Ngomongo villages had benefitted more than the other villages. Ngomongo village is predominantly occupied by Luos, while Highridge is dominated by Somali and Borana residents. Some residents felt that Luos were benefitting more than other ethnic groups. This perception is of course intertwined with the allegations noted earlier about Luos being favoured in the distribution of benefits prior to the pandemic. Some respondents felt that the same political leaders who had earlier influenced the distribution of resources such as school bursaries had also influenced COVID-19 relief distribution, in a similar way. This reflects how ethnic identity and perceptions of ethnic favouritism are structurally embedded in local governance. As one of the local political leaders told researchers in a key informant interview, elected representatives tend to help their own tribe before others, on the basis that others were unlikely to have voted for them.

Other factors influencing the distribution of benefits

While ethnicity and corruption were perceived to be important factors in the distribution of benefits, they were not entirely determinant. Different villages benefitted more or less from COVID-19 relief because of other factors too, such as the dynamism of local leaders. One youth

⁵² Male youth respondent, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

⁵³ Young mother, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

in an FGD reported that because the village head in Highridge was very proactive, consulted more often with residents, and had developed good connections with the Chief, they had been able to secure more resources for the village. Other villages were said to have benefitted because of pre-existing connections with the organisations implementing the relief interventions.

Most of the men interviewed felt that women and youth had benefitted most from relief programmes. The Chief affirmed that this was intentionally the case, because channelling the relief support through mothers/women maximises the opportunity because “women are known to spend any proceeds wisely unlike men who prefer to spend money on illicit brews and extra marital affairs. Women maximise on any money or aid they receive on their families. They will not spend on useless things.”⁵⁴ This was confirmed by female respondents, who suggested that most of the men who had received cash had ended up drinking it all, which led to tensions and sometimes violence in the home over how the money had been spent. On the other hand, male respondents and especially married men claimed that their wives or women would not divulge that they had received any cash relief to their husbands, whereas they as men would have brought the cash home. One youth respondent added that youth benefitted more because they were running most of the CBOs that some NGOs employed to implement COVID responses. Several respondents, however, were of the view that many women and youth did not get any help because they did not have connections with local influencers involved in the distribution of the relief materials.

Overall, the picture that respondents painted of the relief programmes was that, through a combination of confusion and corruption, people who ought to have benefitted had not, pre-existing tensions and conflicts linked to ethnicity had been exacerbated, and trust in the authorities had diminished. In other words, social cohesion had been eroded. Clearly, there is room for relief to be provided in a more conflict-sensitive way.

3.6. Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV)

The number of SGBV cases recorded in Kenya between January and June 2020 had increased by 92 per cent pro rata compared with January to December 2019, according to the Kenya Police Crime Statistics Report 2020. The most common forms of SGBV were assault, physical assault, rape/attempted rape, murder, sexual offences, defilement, grievous harm, physical abuse, child marriage, psychological torture and child neglect.⁵⁵ The incidence of SGBV in Korogocho had also risen sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic according to respondents, who said it had been occasional, rather than common, before. Because of the pandemic, adults who would normally have been working during the day, and children who would have been at school, were now more likely to be at home due to containment measures and the economic shutdown. According to one young woman taking part in an FGD, girls had to stay indoors with their fathers, and in some instances other male relatives, creating a fertile ground for SGBV. “A father raped and killed his nine-year-old daughter and dumped her body in a pit latrine. When confronted, he said that the wife had neglected him as she is always away, as she had not lost her job.”⁵⁶ Worryingly, several cases of fathers abusing their daughters sexually were highlighted during the FGDs with young

⁵⁴ Chief in charge of Korogocho settlement, key informant interview. January 2021

⁵⁵ National Crime Research Centre, Protecting the family in the time of COVID-19 pandemic: Addressing the escalating cases of gender-based violence, girl child disempowerment and violation of children rights in Kenya, 2020, p.61, <http://www.crimeresearch.go.ke/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Report-on-Protecting-the-Family-in-the-Time-of-Covid-19-Pandemic-6th-August-2020.pdf>

⁵⁶ Young woman, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

mothers, youth and women. “Those staying indoors due to COVID with their daughters start eyeing them and assaulting them sexually especially when mothers are away hustling.”⁵⁷

Due to a lack of money to buy basic items such as sanitary wear that were normally provided by parents, some young girls were forced to start hawking items like boiled eggs or roasted groundnuts and “some young boys/youth would lure them to their houses to get money for paying and end up raping them or beating them up to avoid paying”.⁵⁸ Other young girls would opt to engage in sex with older men or young men especially *boda boda* riders, in exchange for money. Unfortunately, according to respondents many girls have become pregnant as a result, with the youngest being an 11-year-old girl. This has not only led to early and unwanted pregnancies, as well as early marriages, but these girls have had to drop out of school, “...deepening the poverty cycle”, as noted by a young woman respondent.⁵⁹

It is not only young girls that are affected by SGBV. Respondents knew of several women who had been victims of gender-based violence, especially at the hands of their husbands: “...idleness and unemployment causes anger and when men come home, they come with ‘kisirani/violence’ so that they are not asked for anything since they have been out all day and are expected to bring something for the family especially food”.⁶⁰

One respondent claimed that the physical, emotional and sexual abuse witnessed in Korogocho during COVID-19 had left many women, girls and even boys traumatised, suggesting a need for psychosocial support on a wide scale. Children were reported to have been longing for schools to reopen, not only for the school feeding programmes they had missed, but also because they feel safer there.

3.7. Crime patterns and drug abuse

Korogocho, in common with other informal urban settlements, has been synonymous with crime, mainly in the form of petty or general crime, including muggings and burglary. Opinions on whether crime patterns had changed due to COVID-19 varied among respondents. To some, the pandemic had caused crime to rise. Examples cited included opportunistic petty crime such as stealing cash and items like mobile phones, shoes and jewellery, which were then sold at throwaway prices: “One man saw his shoes stolen from him a particular morning being sold at KES 350, and yet he had bought them at KES 2,500. He ended up buying them back.”⁶¹

More seriously, there had also been cases of women and children hiding and transporting guns and other weapons for criminal gangs for a fee. Those who thought crime had increased thought that this was due to the shock of suddenly losing sources of income, especially among young people. Lack of income, set against the demand from their families to meet basic needs, resulted in young people getting involved in petty theft, as confirmed by one youth during a FGD for residents of Grogan A and B: “You have slept hungry, your wife and kids have nothing to eat, and you are not sure when to get food, what else do you do? You use all means including stealing, for a meal in your family.”⁶² These sentiments were aired by many respondents, particularly young people.

⁵⁷ Young woman, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

⁵⁸ Woman, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

⁵⁹ Young woman, informal group discussion, Korogocho, January 2021

⁶⁰ Woman, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

⁶¹ Woman, informal group discussion, Korogocho, January 2021

⁶² Male youth, FGD, Korogocho, February 2021

Respondents argued that the closure of schools had led to an increase in young children becoming involved in crime. This was common among young and teenage boys who had to use any means they could to get food to eat. It was suggested that some students had been recruited into criminal gangs during this period. As one of the cluster heads from Gitathuro said, “Right now we are at a difficult place to get children back to school. Boys have turned to crime, while others go to the Dandora dumpsite to collect items like waste plastic items for sale.”⁶³

With the prolonged closure of schools due to COVID-19, respondents also observed that there had been an increase in drug abuse. This mainly involved teenagers aged around 14 or 15, smoking *bhang* and chewing *khat*, mostly due to peer pressure. Although this behaviour was mostly associated with boys, a number of girls and women had also turned to drug abuse to “help them sleep and forget their problems for a night but in the process exposing themselves to violence including sexual violence”.⁶⁴

By contrast, other respondents felt that crime levels had reduced. According to some of the respondents, Korogocho was considered safer than it had been several years earlier, due to police action through an increase in regular patrols dating to before the COVID-19 crisis, and because residents were reporting crime more proactively. They also stated that major crimes such as house break-ins and muggings had decreased due to COVID-19; people were at home more often, meaning there were fewer opportunities for daytime burglary. Meanwhile, mugging normally happens at night, so opportunities had been reduced due to the curfew.



Residents queue to buy food from a kiosk in Korogocho © Siegfried Modola/Alamy

⁶³ Male cluster head, key informant interview, Korogocho, January 2021

⁶⁴ Young woman, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

A senior local police officer who was interviewed believed that crime had risen at the start of the pandemic, but had reduced significantly by December 2020. He attributed this reduction to increased police patrols during curfew hours. Other respondents reported, however, that gangs committed crime with the full knowledge of police: “They are in partnership with police and share the loot with the police.”⁶⁵ The phenomenon of police turning a blind eye also applied to illicit alcohol brewers and sellers in Korogocho, with police allowing them to operate at night, despite the curfew. According to study respondents, the police preferred to catch the brewers in the act of brewing because then they could demand a higher bribe. Nevertheless, the police behaviour had emboldened the brewers and sellers to sell the brews openly, unlike in the past when it was done out of sight.

3.8. Police brutality and extra-judicial killings during COVID-19

According to respondents, tensions between police and residents (particularly youth) had increased with the onset of COVID-19. The police had enforced mask wearing, social distancing and curfew rules through extortion. “Police believe that the ghetto residents do not know their rights, and will arrest residents over trivial issues like not wearing a mask worth KES 10 ... instead of buying that mask or letting off the concerned resident with a warning.”⁶⁶ Often, the police would demand a bribe that residents could barely afford; respondents reported that the police demanded between KES 1000 and KES 2000 from people found without a face mask. Failure to pay could in some instances result in trumped-up charges like resisting arrest, attracting a higher penalty. Consequently, some people ended up in court over failure to adhere to COVID-19 restrictions, or on trumped-up charges. Some people actually perceived spending a few days in the cells as preferable to paying a large bribe. Respondents related an incident where police had been attacked by the public because they had beaten up a resident whom they had wrongly accused of flouting the restrictions. Police reportedly use whips that do not leave marks on the body, but result in internal injuries. Youth were the most affected by police brutality and harassment. Losing their jobs had resulting in many young people staying at home, where police sometimes arrested them for ‘idling’, while they were sitting harmlessly outside their residences.

The police in Kenya have been accused of widespread human rights abuse during the pandemic, including committing extra-judicial killings – effectively, murder.⁶⁷ Respondents in this research also alleged that police have killed gang members with whom they were in cahoots, when they have fallen out or disagreed. In Mombasa, Nairobi and Nakuru urban areas, the general public and motorists were harassed and brutally assaulted by the police in the process of enforcing the dusk-to-dawn curfew.⁶⁸ During 2020, the Missing Voices and Social Justice Centres Working Group, a network of CBOs and NGOs that track extra-judicial killings, recorded a total of 137 people killed by police or reported missing, the large majority of whom were in Nairobi.⁶⁹

Unlike in the past, and to avoid a public backlash, some respondents said police have adapted their methods, so that they now shoot to kill and carry the victim’s body away with them, especially at night. In the past, they would leave the bodies in the street “to serve a warning to the residents. To date families of victims of police shooting are not allowed to host gatherings to mourn the

⁶⁵ Male youth, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

⁶⁶ Male, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

⁶⁷ J-A. Namu and T. Riley, Nine weeks of bloodshed: how brutal policing of Kenya’s Covid curfew left 15 dead, The Guardian, 23 October 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/oct/23/brutal-policing-kenyas-covid-curfew-left-15-dead>

⁶⁸ P. Mutahi and K.J Wanjiru, Police brutality and Ssolidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic in Mathare, French Institute for Research in Africa, 2020, <https://mambo.hypotheses.org/2895>

⁶⁹ Missing Voices, accessed 22 March 2021, <https://missingvoices.or.ke/statistics/>

victim.”⁷⁰ This new tactic apparently arose following a national and international outcry condemning police excesses.

According to some respondents, some extra-judicial killings were being covered up by reporting them as COVID-19 deaths. None of the FGD participants in this research claimed to be aware of any confirmed COVID-19 cases in Korogocho, apart from stories in the media. While this research clearly identified a widespread perception of police violence, and thus a decrease and confidence and trust in the police, it did not find reliable data to confirm respondents’ claims of extra-judicial killings in Korogocho.

3.9. Opportunities for peace during COVID-19 pandemic

The purpose of this research was not simply to understand how COVID-19 has affected peace and social cohesion in Korogocho, but also to identify ways to reduce any negative impacts and promote improvements. With this in mind, respondents were asked about initiatives promoting social cohesion and peace.

Respondents agreed that improved security and peace in Korogocho was something that had been realised in recent years mainly through their own efforts, rather than by outsiders. They identified a number of past or ongoing initiatives that had brought residents together. These initiatives had been established before COVID-19, but since they typically rely on regular meetings, most had been hampered by social distancing measures during the pandemic, although some were beginning to recover momentum by the time of the research.

Public meetings

These initiatives included *barazas* (public consultation meetings) organised by the Chief using *Nyumba Kumi* and village elders to organise and invite participants to discuss matters affecting Korogocho, including social cohesion and security. Village elders and *Nyumba Kumi* members also reported using local religious institutions such as churches and mosque to preach messages of peace.

Similar to the Chief’s *barazas*, some women’s groups had been holding community conversations (CCs). These were held weekly and were opportunities to discuss and suggest solutions on issues affecting the community, especially security, peace and health matters. All residents were invited to these conversations. They were mentioned by residents from Korogocho A and B who participated in one of the FGDs. CC meetings had continued during the pandemic to sensitise the residents on how to avoid contracting or spreading the virus. NGOs had also organised meetings, for example, focusing on empowering girls to address SGBV, as well as to discuss hygiene, family planning, safe sex, etc.

Social initiatives designed to bring people from different communities together

Some respondents also mentioned social initiatives bringing youth from different communities together, especially through music, art and sports. Organisations had created peace awareness through sports and other social activities, training programmes, and collaborative charitable community actions such as food programmes, garbage collection and clean-up drives. For example, one had organised annual soccer tournaments for teams drawn from young people across the entire Korogocho settlement, which was seen as an effective peacebuilding venture.

⁷⁰ Female youth, FGD, Korogocho, January 2021

Respondents also acknowledged the role of some income-generating activities targeting young people, which created opportunities to bring youth from different ethnic groups together. These activities provided them with an income and helped wean them off crime. These included projects supporting the establishment of car-wash sites, reclaiming dumpsites and well-known criminal hotspots, poultry and pig rearing, vegetable farming in sacks, and running public toilets, among others. The majority of the projects were said to have flourished, though some had foundered, apparently when beneficiaries reportedly ‘took their share’ and then abandoned the projects.

Overall, these initiatives were considered to have brought people together successfully for peacebuilding. However, while some of the platforms, like the *Kazi Mtaani*, had continued during the pandemic, most had stalled due to social distancing, restrictions on holding meetings or social events, and other anti-COVID measures. On a more positive note, recent moves to relax restriction measures have seen social events resume such as football matches, religious meetings and CCs with small groups of community members.

Formal peacebuilding initiatives

Respondents also identified initiatives designed specifically for peacebuilding. The Senior Chief, formed a peace and security committee during the pandemic, drawing membership from the nine villages. From his interview it was clear that the Chief was keen to ensure that this committee plays an effective role helping to make Korogocho one of the safest informal settlements in Nairobi. Meanwhile, cluster heads have an official mandate to report incidents of SGBV, tenant and landlord conflicts, and other small-scale conflicts in their village through the local government system. The cluster head resides in the community with the residents and understands them and their needs. One of the cluster heads from Grogan A confirmed that “we handle conflict cases and crimes every day. It is not easy, but we have decided to help our community.”⁷¹ A lack of conflict resolution skills was, however, a noticeable gap among these cluster heads, as they themselves pointed out. They are recruited and given this mandate, but without the skills to manage conflicts that they are expected to handle on a daily basis in their neighbourhoods.

One peacebuilding programme that was mentioned – although only by a small number of respondents – was an empowerment programme, mainly targeting women, training participants on the role they can play to promote peace in their communities.

Another initiative rehabilitates youth who have been involved in crime. With its slogan, “*Vijana tujiue wenyewe juu change ni sisi*” (“youth should view ourselves as agents of change because change starts with us”), it encourages young people to solve their problems, and abandon political or other leaders that manipulate them to cause violence. Born out of garbage collection and clean-up exercises, as reported by youth in the FGDs, it has become a connecting point for Korogocho youth and has created a green park in Korogocho, accessible to all residents.

Respondents, especially the youth who participated in informal group discussions, acknowledged that their involvement in *Maskani* (‘base’) groups had helped them view each other as one group, regardless of the ethnic groups they belonged to. This was partly because the perception of *maskani* had changed from a gathering for idle youths to being a place of work. One of the youth leaders had started a ‘men’s corner’, a platform targeting all men to discuss their issues including politics, encouraging them to embrace one another despite their ethnicity and to help each other: “If one has more to share with those that do not have and view each other as neighbours and not

⁷¹ Male cluster head, key informant interview, Korogocho, February 2021

as rival ethnic member.”⁷² They also encouraged men and boys to start small, legal income-earning ventures instead of turning to crime.

The initiatives described above doubtless represent only a small proportion of peace-promoting activities, among many other, similar initiatives that have helped – or have the potential to help – improve collaboration and social cohesion among Korogocho communities, or address conflict problems such as crime. What they show is that residents and public authorities were well aware of the need for such initiatives before the pandemic hit, and that some had already had an impact. Respondents also noted, however, that all these initiatives had been undermined by the pandemic, particularly by the restrictions imposed to reduce COVID-19 transmission. This suggests that they may need an additional boost of support when restrictions are lifted, and that any external assistance should largely be directed towards supporting local initiatives, designed and executed by those who know their communities.

⁷² Youth leader, key informant interview, Korogocho, February 2021

4. Conclusion

The economic impact of COVID-19 and the measures imposed to limit its spread in Korogocho are clear: respondents in this research estimated that household incomes had fallen by more than half as a result of losing jobs and other sources of income. This has had, and will continue to have, an impact on poverty and wellbeing, especially in a context where most households rely on the informal sector for their income. Governmental and non-governmental initiatives going forward will no doubt focus heavily on redynamising the economy and supporting people's socio-economic recovery, but the research findings show that the pandemic has had a major impact on social cohesion in Korogocho too.

Conflicts and violence typically increase when fragile societies and communities are placed under additional stress. This research demonstrates that there were already signs of fragility and conflict in the Korogocho community before the pandemic hit; rates of poverty were high, as were crime rates. Public policy had combined with a history of evictions and political conflicts to create instability and conflict around the ownership of land and housing, as well as conflicts between landlords and tenants. These conflicts were interwoven with an uneasy multi-ethnic demographic mix, subject to its own historical and political tensions. These tensions in turn were subject to exploitation and manipulation by national ethno-political leaders, in the shadow of widespread and severe violence that had occurred following the 2007 elections, in Korogocho as elsewhere. Properties appropriated from Kikuyu landlords at that time have yet to be returned, which has remained a source of conflict. Meanwhile, an ongoing, stop-start process of allotting government land to private owners in Korogocho has also stirred up conflicts. These tensions have been further exacerbated by the prevalence of corrupt local political decisions creating persistent grievances among members of ethnic groups who felt they were being excluded from public resources and opportunities. Young people also expressed grievances at being excluded, as they saw it, from economic opportunities by corrupt village elders. The police were widely viewed as corrupt, involved in organised crime, and using brutal tactics.

This is not to say that Korogocho had not also shown signs of improvement – of becoming somewhat less fragile and more resilient – in recent years prior to the pandemic. The presence of large numbers of daily commuters, travelling into Korogocho from other areas for business or work, is an indication that the economy was dynamic in many respects, despite the persistence of poverty. Respondents to the study gave examples of a number of successful initiatives designed to improve security, stability and social cohesion. Nevertheless, despite this evidence of progress, if social cohesion is a product of trusting and functional vertical and horizontal relationships, then there is plenty of evidence that these were fragile and under continual strain. Korogocho was in many ways a fragile community, lacking resilience and at risk of conflicts becoming violent, even before the pandemic hit.

The impact of COVID-19 on social cohesion and fragility in these circumstances is concerning. The incidence of SGBV has increased, including against young girls. This is partly because of changing patterns in household and public behaviours due to social distancing and other restrictions, and because reduced household incomes have affected domestic relationships. Tensions between landlords and tenants have also increased, as people have found it harder to pay their rent. These tensions have been coloured by ethnicity, because rental properties tend to be owned by members of only a few ethnic groups, thereby exacerbating conflicts between them and the other groups who rent housing and business properties from them.



A child reaches out at a shop counter in Korogocho © Reuters/Natasha Elkington/Alamy

Meanwhile, ethnic tensions linked to governance have worsened due to widespread accusations of ethnic favouritism and exclusion in the registration for and distribution of COVID-19 relief. Some of the relief programmes have been conceived and executed conflict insensitively. Some have relied on corrupt local governance structures, which has further worsened tensions and divisions. Vulnerable people for whom the relief was intended have not received it. This situation has further undermined trust in local government, and led people to be less willing to help their neighbours, despite the increased need for mutual help during this period. Respondents used strong language when referring to the behaviours of people from other ethnicities. Social cohesion has been frayed, as both vertical and horizontal relationships have been weakened by the way the relief has been provided.

Crime patterns have also been affected by the pandemic. The incidence of some crimes such as burglary and mugging is said to have reduced, even if perhaps only temporarily, while opportunistic petty crime is said to have increased. Some respondents felt that young people were being newly drawn into crime, including into the membership of gangs, due to the loss of other sources of income and the closure of schools. Respondents accused the police of using the enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions as a licence for corruption and human rights abuses, further undermining people's trust and confidence.

All this suggests very strongly that social cohesion – resilience – has decreased, at the very time when it is most needed, and that fragility, and therefore the risk of conflicts and violence, has increased. At the same time, some of the community initiatives intended to improve peace and cohesion have suffered setbacks, impeded by social distancing and other restrictions. Korogocho has not experienced major episodes of politically inspired violence since 2008, but given the causal links between national political rhetoric and local unrest, there is a concern that increased

local fragility means the settlement may be at greater risk of this happening in the future, for example, during the 2022 national elections.

There is a need to mitigate this erosion of social cohesion, and purposefully restore and strengthen it. This is the subject of the recommendations that follow.

5. Recommendations

The fragile social cohesion in Korogocho has been further eroded by COVID-19 and the measures taken to limit its spread. The recommendations emerging from this study are therefore based on the premise that mitigating this erosion and purposefully strengthening social cohesion must be central to all relief and recovery efforts. In particular, this means protecting and strengthening horizontal and vertical relationships, i.e. promoting trusting and functional relations between and within social groups, and between citizens and those in positions of authority. Learning from the negative impacts of some of the relief efforts currently in place, all of these recommendations need to be conceived and implemented conflict sensitively – so that they heal, rather than worsen social cohesion. They also need to be gender sensitive, paying attention to improving gender relations and to the different opportunities and vulnerabilities of women and men of different ages and social situations.

These recommendations were developed by International Alert, but they draw on and reflect suggestions made by respondents. They are grouped into two categories: short-term initiatives designed to improve the impact of relief and mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on social cohesion and longer-term recovery measures. They are aimed at governmental and non-governmental bodies in a position to implement the recommendations in Korogocho settlement, but it seems likely that they are also relevant to other informal urban settlements in Kenya.

Short-term measures

Local and national government, and others engaged in supporting Korogocho communities during the pandemic, should make fairness and inclusion key criteria in the design and implementation of all they do.

- **Local government should establish transparent procedures for identifying and registering beneficiaries, and monitoring performance**, coordinated by committees made up of representatives of village elders, women, youth, and other relevant groups, and with a view to ensuring ethnic representation. All relief initiatives should be part of this mechanism, making their plans and progress reports publicly available, along with beneficiary selection criteria.
- **All COVID-19 relief initiatives, whether privately or publicly funded and delivered, should be conflict sensitive**, explicitly designed to maintain and improve social cohesion. They should consult with communities to understand local peace and conflict dynamics, target those most in need, and take measures to avoid nepotism, ethnic bias or corruption.
- **The police should investigate, and where appropriate prosecute, all cases of SGBV**, ensuring accountability of perpetrators and justice for victims. Victims should be supported by social and health services and civil society. This may necessitate training to improve the understanding of how SGBV risks have been affected by COVID-19, and how to respond.
- **Government, donors and NGOs should keep young people from crime**, by sustaining and expanding counselling and social and economic support initiatives during this critical period.
- **Government, donors and NGOs should support ongoing peacebuilding initiatives**, building collaboration and cohesion between and among social groups during the pandemic, and preparing to expand activities as soon as it becomes possible to do so.

- **Civil society organisations should hold the authorities accountable** for fair, transparent decision-making and distribution of benefits, advocate for justice in cases of SGBV, and call out improper behaviour and human rights abuses by the police.

Longer-term measures

Initiatives designed to support post-pandemic recovery should make healing and strengthening social cohesion a core goal, alongside economic recovery. This is a complex task needing consistent attention over the medium term, with leadership from local and national government, and from across all communities in Korogocho.

- **Local government should make building social cohesion a core strategic priority**, with buy-in and leadership from political, civil society and business leaders including representation of different gender, age and ethnic groups.
- **National and local government, with support from civil society, should improve the functioning of and trust in local government** by encouraging transparency and regular changes in local representation through elections to village elder posts and councils.
- **National and local government and civil society should build greater awareness of democratic norms** through civic education, especially for young people, including how to avoid top-down political manipulation that undermines local cohesion and development.
- **National and local government, working with businesses and civil society, should establish sustained social and economic programmes** to reduce the vulnerability and exclusion of women, young people, people living with disabilities and HIV/AIDS, and other vulnerable groups, ensuring benefits are distributed fairly and transparently.
- **National and local government, donors and NGOs should support the expansion and improvement of local peacebuilding programmes**, designed to improve inter-group relations, to address historic grievances and unfairness in access to services, infrastructure and economic opportunities, and to redress gender imbalances.
- **NGOs should provide training and support to local government representatives in conflict sensitivity, conflict resolution and conflict early warning**, including for local cluster heads, who deal with conflicts on a regular basis.