

Chapter 10

Is Street Begging a Result of Poverty, Budding Trade, or the Manipulation of Sentiments by Some Vested Interest Groups? Exploring Street Beggary

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ABSTRACT

Street begging is a social problem and has negative implication for both the development of towns, socio-physical environment, and the wellbeing of beggars themselves. The daily increase in the population of beggars in Kampala city constitutes an environmental threat and health hazards to the surrounding, predominantly with carriers of communicable and transmittable diseases. Begging is a serious social problem with grave development implication for Kampala city and the national economy because beggars contribute nothing apart from begging. Begging leads to social relegation of the city and life of beggars as well as subject them to stigmatization.

INTRODUCTION

Today, population growth largely means urban population growth. UN projections show the world's rural population has already stopped growing, but the world can expect to add close to 1.5 billion urbanites in the next 15 years, and 3 billion by 2050. How the world meets the challenge of sustainable development will be intimately tied to this process. For many people, cities represent a world of new opportunities, including jobs. There is a powerful link between urbanization and economic growth. Around the world, towns and cities are responsible for over 80 per cent of gross national product. While urban poverty is growing around the world, this is largely because many people – including the poor – are moving to urban areas. The opportunities there extend beyond just jobs. Cities also offer greater opportunities for

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social mobilization and women empowerment. Many young people, especially young women, regard the move to cities as an opportunity to escape traditional patriarchy and experience freedom. Urban areas also offer greater access to education and health services, including sexual and reproductive health care, further upholding women's empowerment and the realization of their reproductive rights. This contributes to significantly reduced fertility in urban areas, helping to restrict the overall population growth. The urbanization process – which is particularly pronounced in Africa and Asia, where much of the world's population growth is taking place – is also an enormous opportunity for sustainability, if the right policies are put in place. Urban living has the potential to use resources more efficiently, to create more sustainable land use and to protect the biodiversity of natural ecosystems (Plouffe & Kalache (2010). Whereas rising urban poverty is evident in the developed world, this trend is more pronounced in developing countries like Uganda.

Urban land is expanding much faster than urban population, a phenomenon known as urban sprawl. It is driven in part by increasing urban land consumption by the wealthy and the increasing separation of rich and poor communities within cities. Sprawl undermines the efficiencies of urban living, and it marginalizes poor people in remote or peripheral parts of cities, often in dense informal settlements or slums. This phenomenon can eliminate the very opportunities people seek when they move to cities. Many people in slums lack ready access to health facilities. The urban poor also face risky and unhealthy living conditions, such as heavy pollution or high vulnerability to disasters. The total estimated number of slum dwellers is rising – from over 650 million in 1990 to about 863 million in 2012. Almost 62 per cent of the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa lived in slums in 2010, the highest proportion of any region. Nevertheless, slum growth is not the same as urbanization. Most evidence suggests that global urbanization is an inevitable trend, while slum growth results from the decisions to limit poor people's access to cities, through limited service provision to informal settlements or by forced evictions and resettlement of the urban poor to peripheral or under-serviced locations. Squatter and slum settlements have formed mainly because of the inability of city governments to plan and provide affordable housing for the low-income segments of the urban population. Hence, squatter and slum housing is the housing solution for this low-income urban population. In the mega urban regions or metropolitan areas, part of the problem would lie in the coordination among different authorities that are in charge of economic development, urban planning, and land allocation. Such coordination issues also exist between the city and national governments (Ooi & Phua, (2007).

The determinant of what constitutes “urban poverty” varies from universal metrics of income and wellbeing to more relative and perception-based scales. A common definition includes those living below the poverty line in each urban area which is set at purchasing parity prices of \$1 or \$2 per day. Urban poverty is also usually defined in two ways:

As an absolute standard based on a minimum amount of income needed to sustain a healthy and minimally comfortable life, and as a relative standard that is set based on average the standard of living in a nation (McDonald & McMillen, 2008, p. 397)

Urban poverty today, as driven by globalization and rapid uncontrolled urbanization, needs to be recognized as a social, political, and cultural process that has profound impacts on public health. Therefore, excluding the urban poor from the benefits of urban life will not only foster citizen discontent, but breed a fertile ground for political unrest. Because, within the broader context of health and human

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