

**IMPACT OF NATURAL DISASTERS ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC
LIVELIHOODS IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN MATHARE
VALLEY SLUM IN NAIROBI COUNTY**

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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed at determining impact of natural disasters on the socio-economic livelihoods in informal settlements in Mathare valley slum in Nairobi County. This was of necessity due to the fact that, despite the continued growth and expansion of Kenyan economy, the effects of economic growth have still not been felt by a significant proportion of the Kenyan population. Informal settlements continue to increase in number and size particularly in the urban areas. This is mainly due to rural urban migrations as people search for employment opportunities in the urban areas. The inability for most of the casual workers in the urban centres to afford decent housing leads them to seek shelter in the informal settlements. The situation is further complicated by dense populations and lack of planning in the settlements. These living conditions in turn make the populations vulnerable to disasters both natural and those induced by human activities. The study was guided by the following objectives: To analyze the natural disasters experienced by populations in the informal settlements in Nairobi County; to evaluate the impact of natural disasters on the socio-economic livelihoods of the populations in the informal settlements in Nairobi County; to analyze the underlying causes of vulnerability to natural disasters among the populations in the informal settlements in Nairobi County and to identify coping mechanisms employed by the populations in the informal settlements to cope with natural disasters in Nairobi County. The study was carried out in Nairobi County with Mathare Valley slum being used in data collection representing all other informal settlements in the County. A descriptive survey design was followed to guide the study. The study population included all adult (18 years and above) residents of Mathare Valley slum. A sample of 40 respondents was used in data collection. The slum was divided in for sections and the sample size proportionately distributed in these section. The specific respondents in each section were then randomly selected. Both questionnaire and an observation guide were used to collect data. Data collected with the questionnaire was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in graphs and pie charts, while data from the observation guide was presented in a narrative form. Study findings indicate that natural disasters are regular occurrences in the slums. Floods and disease outbreaks are most common and significant natural hazards contributing to disasters. Other occasional disasters in the slums include landslides and cases of strong winds. The slum populations remain highly vulnerable as they lack warning information, information on disaster preparedness and the lack of support infrastructure and financial capacity to cope. Natural disasters have previously resulted to loss of life, destruction of property and hindered economic activity and reduced the quality of life of slum dwellers. The coping mechanisms of the slum dwellers remain temporary reprieve from the situations and the effects of disasters continue to be felt with their reoccurrences. Immediate actions would include: opening up pathways in the slums to enable movement for response in case of natural disasters, work on drainage systems particularly to reduce cases of flooding, ensuring no housing are built on too sloppy grounds or next to rivers, providing clean water sources to slum dwellers, providing slum dwellers with adequate information on impending natural hazards and to sensitized on disaster preparedness and response and improving disaster response speed to reduce damages resulting from the natural disasters.