Understanding the Tipping Point of Urban Conflict:

Violence, Cities, and Poverty Reduction in the Developing World
The case of Nairobi, Kenya

Policy Brief

I. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Recent studies have attempted to determine the "tipping point" of urban conflict – i.e. the moment when conflict turns into a large scale break out of violence, but these generally have been conceived in quantitative terms, with increase in poverty, the number of youth, levels of political exclusion, or gender-based insecurity beyond a certain threshold, seen to lead to a sudden change in social conditions. This study, which is a part of a four country study on 'tipping point of urban violence' introduces a qualitative dimension, and has the following objectives:

- To understand the nature of the qualitative tipping points;
- To determine the range of potential means to prevent urban conflict from tipping over into violence; and
- To identify policy entry points that would allow the implementation of initiatives to reduce the risk of violence and/or break the strategic links within violence chains.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research combined quantitative city-level secondary data with qualitative sub-city level primary research on perceptions of people affected by violence, using Participatory Violence Appraisal (PVA) methodology (see Moser, 2011). This was based on purposive sampling from a range of focus groups, representative of community members in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, economic activities and other culturally specific variables. The community-level participatory approach provided insights into the experience of violence among low-income groups that complimented city level analysis. PVA allowed poor groups to identify the extent to which violence-related problems affected their well-being, as well as assessing the causes and consequences of violence. The methodology assisted them in identifying interventions from their perspectives; rather than from that of policy makers or academics, thus enabling a bottom up policy discourse.

Research was undertaken in three informal settlements in Nairobi, namely: Kawangware, Kibera and Mukuru. Data was collected from 420 residents. These included youth, women, gangs, politicians, religious leaders, elders, community health workers, CBOs, NGOs, business, tenants, landlords, and school children. Focus group discussions (FGDs) focused on perceptions of conflict and violence, prevalence of political violence, hotspots, and the roles of institutions in escalating and mitigating political violence. In addition to the 74 FGDs, 8 in-depth interviews were conducted.

Elders analyzing violence using the PVA
in Congo Village, Kawangware

III. DEFINITIONS

The following definitions were used in the study:
Conflict is a situation where individuals and groups have incongruent interests that are contradictory and potentially mutually exclusive [Moser & Horn, 2011].
Violence is forcible impositions by one individual or one group of their own interests to the disfavor or exclusion of other individual or group interests [Moser & Horn, 2011]. The study identified various types of conflict and violence, namely: political, domestic, economic and landlord-tenant.
Violence hotspots are the physical places where violence occurs.
Tipping point, popularized by Gladwell [2000] refers to small shifts in human behaviour that result in radically altered circumstances within a short period of time.

Recent research that has sought to determine the tipping point of urban conflict has been quantitative terms e.g. increase in poverty, number of youth, and levels of political exclusion. But there are also studies showing that urban conflict can tip over as a result of qualitative factors such as the particular articulation of one or more contextual factors [Moser & Horn, 2011]. In this study both qualitative and quantitative factors of urban political conflict are analysed.

Violence chains build on the notion of a 'commodity chain', with 'chain' referring to the way goods and services are produced by a sequenced set of activities, split across varying economic enterprises [Humphrey and Navas-Aleman, 2010]. In this study, the term 'chain' is a metaphor for connectedness. While 'value' refers to processes within the chain that increase the value of product, violence chains refer to processes that increase the scale, and sometimes even the type of violence.

IV. MAIN FINDINGS

1. Types of violence

Table 1: Types of violence at sub-city and city level

Sub-city PVA	City Profile
Political violence is the dominant category of violence (26%), domestic is second, and ethnic, and economic are also important (see Table 2)	Data focuses on crime; therefore tends not to address other types of violence Recent PEV studies have mortality statistics
Political violence is not homogeneous; it affects diverse groups differently.	Lack of disaggregated violence data means effects on youth, women and groups – ethnic, tenants etc not addressed
Policymakers' focus on political violence means that other forms of violence are often 'normalized' or 'invisibilized'	Historical narrative prioritizes colonial and post-colonial political injustice and associated violence
Communities with less political violence are seen as less violent	Historical differences in formation and land titling patterns in informal settlements.

The Sub-city study shows that political violence is perceived by the FGDs in three informal settlements as the most important type of violence they experience. At the same time it is not the only type of violence; domestic violence, often invisibilized, is the second most important type, followed in equal measure by economic and ethnic violence, often normalized. Since the latter, ethnic violence is most frequently linked to either political or landlord violence, ultimately these static categories are less important than the chains that link one type with another (see below). These findings from three settlements contribute to debates about city level processes.

Table 2: Types of violence in the three research communities, by percentage

Types of Violence	Kawangware	Kibera	Mukuru	Average
Political	26	32	19	26
Domestic	10	20	28	19
Tribal	17	22	15	18
Economic (esp. robbery)	27	12	16	18
Tenants / Landlord	20	10	18	16
Religious	0	4	4	3
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

Source: Data on listing, grouping and ranking from 12 focus groups in Kawangware; 23 in Kibera; and 13 in Mukuru

In all 3 communities virtually everyone was ruthlessly harassed by the Administration Police and chiefs, but with specific differences. In Kibera, politicians used youth as a cheap method to unleash violence on competitors; in other areas tenants occupied structures for at least 5 years without paying rent and churches were razed in devastating fires. In Mukuru, most tenants were displaced or had to move to areas perceived as safe for each ethnic group. In Kawangware tenants from the Luo and Luhyia ethnic groups were subjected to increased rent up to 400 percent by their Kikuyu landlords.

At the city level different violence categories have not been disaggregated, with the primary focus on the economic violence associated with crime. Yet other types of violence are critical, and well represented in the historical narrative associated with the country and city. **Political violence** is closely associated historically with the contestation of power amongst dominant communities (Lonsdale, 2008; Ochieng & Ogot, 1995), with the presence of tribal militias (Kagwanja, 2001) and criminal gangs linked to politicians and political processes (Kagwanja, 2001; Kagwanja, 2001, 51-75; Anderson 2002, 531-535). Some of the worst manifestations of political violence in the city are recognized as the 1982 coup, and the 2008 post election violence.

Although historically, city level politics have been ethnically driven, thus providing the conditions for **ethnic violence**, underlying this is attainment of individual economic and political gain. Limited ethnically disaggregated city level data, by the National Cohesion Commission's research highlights the ethnic composition of government employment. With 40% of public sector jobs held by the Kikuyu's and the Kalenjin's, the five main ethnic groups, namely the Kikuyu, Kalenjin, Luhya, Kamba and Luo account for 70% of public sector jobs. The remaining 37 Kenyan communities share 30% of public sector employment (Kerrow, 2011).

City level informal settlement employment statistics point to conditions of **economic violence including robbery**. With 25% employed in the formal sector, the unregulated informal sector employs 75%, the majority of whom live in informal settlements. Economic conditions are deteriorating fast for Nairobi's residents, with those living below the poverty line in Nairobi increasing from 26% in 1992 to 50% in 1997; to the current estimates of 73% (World Bank, 2006).

Landlord tenant violence at city level is linked to the lack of land reforms (Konyimbi 2001) and poor housing situation in Nairobi. 82% of city dwellers are rent payers, of which 92% are in informal settlements where only 3.6% have formal rental agreements.

2. Spatial manifestations of violence

Table 3: Spatial manifestations of violence

Sub-city PVA	City Profile
Focus groups clearly identified hotspots of political, economic and gender-based (rape) violence in all settlements	Focus primarily on making the CBD safer
	Some provision of lighting of some of the settlements

Figure 1 provides a visual representation of one of the hotspots in Kibera. These were identified in all communities showing the spatial distribution of violence. Chiefs are finding these maps of immediate value in identifying how to address violence (see policy entry points).

The focus of Nairobi level infrastructural projects is primarily on formal areas with high economic potential rather than informal settlements. A priority is making the CBD safer, mainly to serve business interests, rather than targeting informal settlements. There are some infrastructural interventions, e.g. lighting.
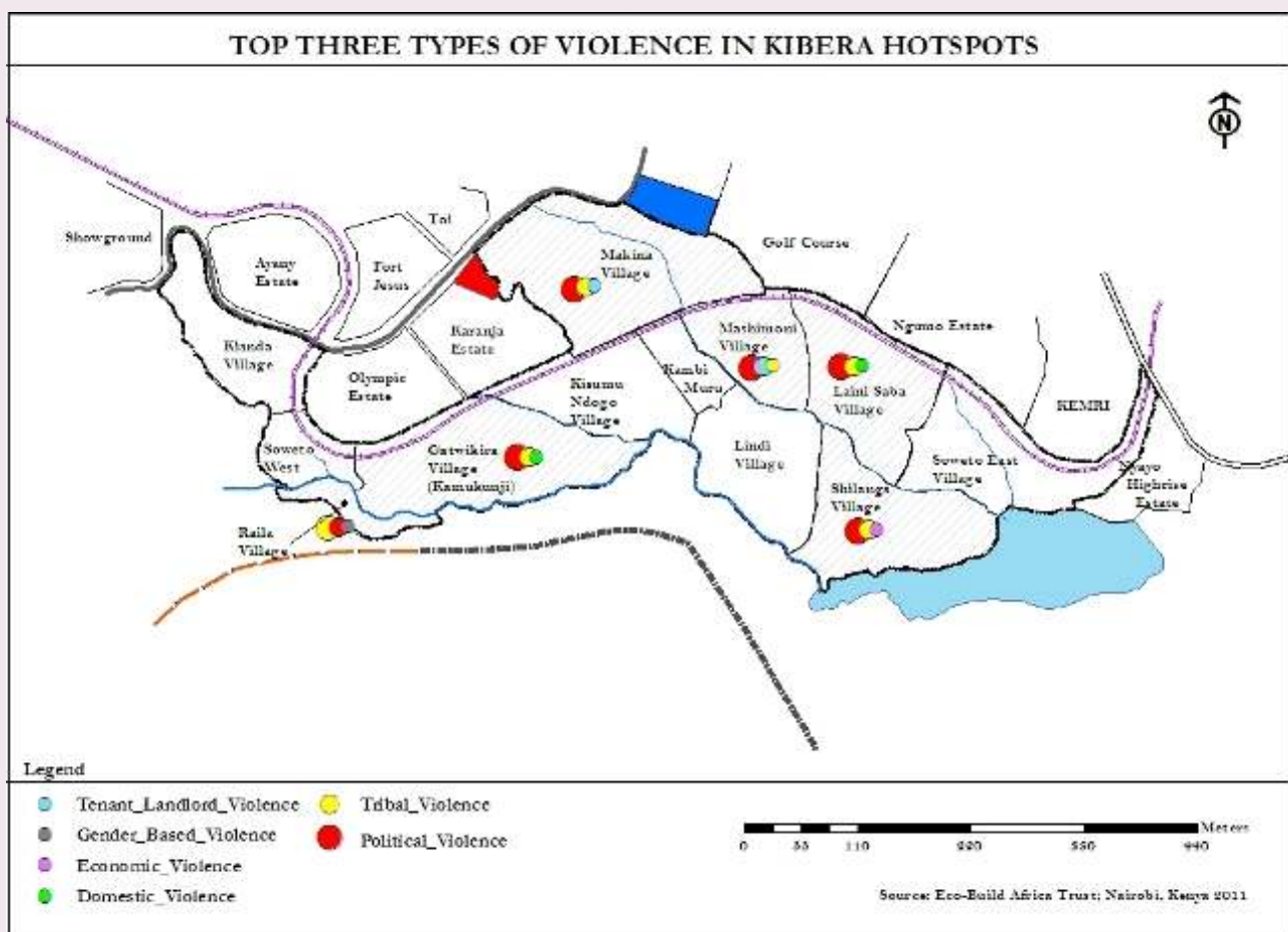

Fig 1: Visual representation of violence hotspots in Kibera.

Table 4: Institutions that tip conflict into violence and tip violence out to conflict

Institution	Settlement							
	Tip conflict into violence			Total	Tip violence out to conflict			Total
	Kawangware	Kibera	Mukuru		Kawangware	Kibera	Mukuru	
Government	5	2	7	14	4	1	1	6
Political organizations	4	2	0	6	0	0	0	0
Local groups	0	4	0	4	0	0	0	0
Criminal groups	0	4	2	6				0
Media	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1
CBOs	1	0	0	1	1	2	1	4
Individuals	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	2
Hospitals	0	0	0	0	2	2	1	5
FBOs	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	4
NGOs	0	0	0	0	7	6	4	17
Total	12	12	9		16	15	10	

Source: Focus group discussions in three informal settlements

3. Tipping points of violence

In all the 3 communities, the OP was identified as playing a critical role in causing and fueling political violence. However in working to tip violence back to conflict, FBOs and NGOs together with sections of the OP were important.

City level analysis shows different causes of conflicts tipping into violence. Political conflicts tip into violence especially during political campaigns. Economic conflicts tip into violence as a result of CBD cleansing and restoring order in service provision through use of force. Landlord tenant conflicts tip into violence as a result of evictions, rent boycotts, rent increments, improvement of structures, invasion of housing and land. Tipping points at city level involve both individual actors and institutional actors.

Hotspot Bridge in Mukuru

Table 5: Sub-city and city level tipping points

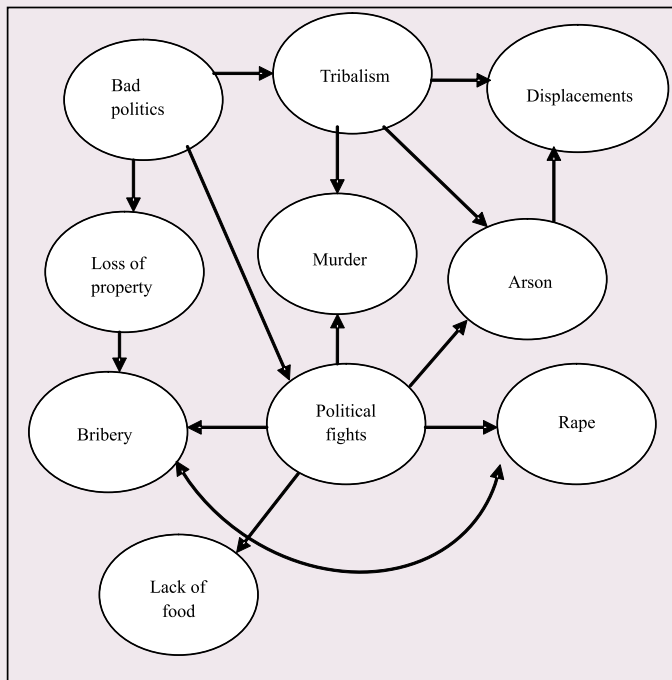| Sub-city PVA	City profile
Tipping points when small shifts in human behaviour resulted in radically altered violence occurred when: • Politicians use abusive language; • Disagreements occurred between followers of various political parties; • Perceptions of rigging of elections are unacceptable; • Police harass citizens • Messages of hate and ethnic attacks are received • Crude ritual killings are considered widespread	Council plays a bigger role in tipping conflict into violence OP at city level plays a bigger role of tipping violence back to conflict Role of civil society in tipping conflict into violence not yet adequately understood
Landlord-tenant conflicts tip into violence when; • Squatters do not have further space for development; • Rents is perceived to have been arbitrarily and unfairly increased; • When tenants refuse to pay rents Chiefs/OP sometimes can keep landlord -tenant conflict from tipping into violence	

4. Violence chains

Figure 2: Chains of political violence at Stage 56, Kawangware

Table 6: Sub-city and city level violence chains

Sub-city PVA	City profile
Chains vary in strength; where there are stronger chains, communities are perceived as more violent	City level data generated by individual categories rather than chains
Where there are stronger chains, ethnic violence is frequently the driver, determining linkages in chain from political to landlord-tenant violence.	City level politics is ethnically driven;
Communities with weak links, where ethnic violence is not a driver, are seen as less violent.	Historically ethnicity has been used for economic and political gain

Violence chains are useful in showing linkages rather than categories of violence. In Kawangware, the violence chains show that bad politics tipped into tribalism, political fights and loss of property. On the other hand bad politics resulted in murder, resulting into violent displacements, and arson.

From the causal chain in figure 2 shows how, in a specific community, political conflict first tips into political violence, which in turn produces a complex and sequenced chain of violence. These chains result in an increased scale of violence, and sometimes even generate other types of violence.

At the city level the principal linkages in the violence chains are political leaders and criminals. For example, landlord tenant violence is transformed into ethnic violence mainly by political leaders and criminals gangs such as the Taliban and Mungiki. They shift economic violence by representing these as political and ethnic.

V. LOCAL LEVEL RECOMMENDATIONS INFORMING CITY LEVEL POLICY

Table 6: Communities' perspective of important strategies to address urban violence

Strategy	Percent	Rank
Civic awareness/duty	28	1
Strengthen governance processes	19	2
Youth employment	17	3
Intermarriage among hostile ethnic groups	11	4
Support local CSOs involved in peace building	9	5
Regularise informal settlements	5	7
Construction of police stations	5	7
Others	6	6
Total	100	

Source: Listing and ranking from 74 focus groups

Community perspectives on strategies to address violence are important in themselves (see table 6). In addition they can also make an important contribution to potential city level recommendations as follows:

1. **Recognition of the importance of political violence**
    Local communities identified political violence as the most serious violence-related problem they face; but equally they recognized that over 70% was non-political violence.
    *   Policy makers need to recognize political violence as an ongoing phenomenon in Nairobi, by identifying forms of violence beyond crime statistics
    *   Institutions beyond Home Affairs and OP need to collaborate on generating robust statistical evidence; for instance the Gender Commission has responsibility to generate statistics on GBV

2. Identification of potential means to prevent urban conflict from tipping into violence
The two main strategies can be identified:

a) *Addressing the spatial manifestations of violence*
Local communities suggested that police personnel are more important than building more police stations to address violence. They also identified the need to enhance community policing by supplementing the available security solutions to reduce public spaces becoming violent hotspots. This requires linking local police stations and police personell, community organizations and emergency services in regulating the use of space.

- At city level the high priority given by local government to spatial slum improvement programmes (such as KENSUP; KISIP), provides an opportunity to 'mainstream' security/violence reduction component into interventions to build physical and human capital through the provision of water, sanitation, housing and roads.
- Spatial manifestations can also be addressed through violence-specific interventions such as Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED).
- Local chiefs recognise the hotspot as a problem, requiring more information. They wish to identify violence reduction measures. Their participation suggests they are an effective entry points for community solutions, while also enabling access to the provincial administration.

b) *Ensuring conflicts do not tip into violence*
Local communities recognize their responsibility in permitting conflicts to tip into violence. Their most important strategy is to strengthen civic awareness. While church leaders were identified as potential institutions to implement measures, politicians were not considered helpful partners.

- At city-level it is important to recognize that the Political Parties Act will not be a vehicle to address sub-city violence
- Institutions that support conflict reduction measures require support. Examples such as the Reconciliation and Peace Building Committee (RPBC) in Kibera, recognised as important in reconciling conflicting ethnic groups faces technical and financial constraints.
- Creation of inclusive social amenities that are multi-cultural/religious/ethnic can play a role in reducing conflicts.

3) Initiatives to break the strategic links within violence chains
With four out of seven strategies recommended relating to the importance of breaking violence chains, the study shows that this undoubtedly is the biggest challenge to face. It also highlights the limitations in separately addressing individual types of violence.

a) *Strengthening governance structures*
Communities definitively identify the importance of 'strengthening governance structures' if the strategic linkages between violence chains are to be broken. Embedded in this term are phenomena identified in the causal flow diagram such as corruption, political fights, bad politics, bribery, and bad leadership.

- At city level current governance structures are fragmented, with civil servants in OP and City Council working at cross-purposes to city politicians. There are no easy answers in addressing such political constraints.

b) *Regularize informal settlements*
The contested ownership of land, especially in Kibera and Mukuru, was identified by focus groups as a major cause of conflicts between tenants and 'landlords'/structure owners, between neighbours, businessmen, the local communities and the provincial administration, as well as often linking to ethnic and religious violence in a chain. An important recommendation was the need for the government to regularise these settlements, and implement inclusive redevelopment. They also identified the need for government to regularise ownership/occupation documents so they could be used as collateral to access micro-enterprise finances.

- At city level Tenancy Guidelines for informal settlements need to be developed.
- Also associated with informal settlements is limited access to water and sanitation facilities and services, trading spaces and circulation channels, all identified as a major cause of conflicts
- The City Council of Nairobi and other agencies need to invest in social infrastructure and allied facilities, which would significantly reduce political conflicts and/or violence in informal settlements.
- For example, in Mukuru settlement, focus groups recommended pro-poor tariffs for electricity and water. Infrastructure for electricity and water would also forestall the internecine violence between residents of Mukuru and staff of the City Council and utility companies.

c) *Addressing youth unemployment*
This is a key factor predisposing youth to violent endeavours relating to their procurement by politicians linked to ethnic groups. Lack of income is a major reason why youth were prepared to be hired.

- At city level a skills audit is proposed
- Establish data base at local youth centre to be used by employers

6

d) *Intermarriage among affected communities*

Focus groups acknowledged the intractability of tribalism and its catalytic effect on political violence, with considerable support for intermarriage to prevent the increase in violence. In Kibera, political violence is said to occur mainly between people from the Luo and Kikuyu, in Kawangware between Luhya and Kikuyu, and in Mukuru; between Luo and Kikuyu communities. Such intermarriages will significantly alter the existing tribal organization of space and in the settlements.

- At city level there is need for increased recognition of the importance of intermarriage, coupled with reduction of stigma. This can be done through NGOs, elders and churches. Finally, there is need to further explore proactive local initiatives for inter-ethnic cohesion with role for the National Cohesion Commission

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