



Consider this...

Daily Village Life in Kakayuni

In Kakayuni village, Kenya, five year old twins, Naima and Abdullah, supported only by their very overstretched grandmother, live in a mud shack with an earth floor. It is not large, but they spend most of their time outdoors in the spacious shady compound surrounded by trees. They have no toilet, and just use the bush. Their water is collected from a pond nearby - their grandmother can't afford the kiosk water that is available for a price. For health care they rely on a village dispensary, which is free but not always staffed. But they are not often sick, says their grandmother. Nutrition is a problem though; she owns no fertile land and so has to rely on whatever work she can find to feed the five children she supports. She prepares one meal a day, and the rest of the time the children forage for whatever they can find - mangoes when they are ripe, the kindness of neighbours. The household income is far below the international poverty line.

The twins and their two year old cousin have a large dirt yard to play in with trees and shrubs all around and paths leading to neighbours' houses. Today, Naima and Abdullah chased each other around, played with their younger cousin on a mound of dirt, and built a little house out of sticks. It was breezy and pleasant out under the huge shade trees.

Salim Lives in a Big City

In Mombasa, six year old Salim lives in rented accommodations with his parents and three siblings

just off Mwembe Kuku street, a very busy hawking and vending area. The small room they share has a cement floor and there is an electric fan in the room. They share a small cooking space with the other families in the hallway of the building, and there is a shared latrine down the hall and piped water from the municipality. Salim's father earns about \$300 a month at a regular job and his employer provides free health care for his family at a hospital near where he works. There is a community ECD centre (supported by MRCK) a few yards away, and he attends every day. By almost any standard - income, consumption, material assets, access to services, Salim is less deprived than his rural counterparts, who would certainly qualify as the poorest of the poor.

But it's not clear that Salim is actually any better off. Compared to him, the twins look almost robust. Salim is all eyes and bones, as is his small sister, and both cough constantly - a problem that their mother says is chronic. Both children are sick with malarial fevers about three times a month, and each time it takes a few days to recover. They have a screen on their one small window and sleep under a treated net. But the narrow alleyways that are the only space between buildings are filled with fetid standing water and mosquitoes breed freely. The free health care at the hospital is valuable, but it's so far away that transport costs more than just going to a local pharmacist. The latrine is close by, but sharing with six households is not ideal for maintenance, and

the children in any case prefer not to use the dark smelly space. Their mother just cleans up after them. The municipal water piped to the building for 300 KSH a month is a convenience that is unusual for many urban dwellers, but it is not safe to drink, and drinking water costs another 20 KSH a day. Rent, water and electricity add up fast, and all food must of course be purchased. The family has nowhere to store food easily, so they buy it in small quantities as they use it – not the most economical way alternative. ECD costs another 200 KSH a month. According to Salim's father, it's barely possible to survive on what he earns.

They're very lucky to have the madrasa right there. Salim's father is the caretaker, and the space makes a huge difference to their lives. Their own room, about 8'x8', is virtually filled by the double bed and the wardrobe where all the family's possessions are kept. But Salim's older brothers can do their homework in the madrasa and sleep there, if they wait until 8 pm when the space is no longer being used either for madrasa classes or meetings. The other great asset in their life, aside from the madrasa, is the social cohesiveness in their neighbourhood. All their neighbours come from the Lamu area, and there are none of the social tensions that often characterize life in poor urban areas. Neighbours are cooperative and friendly, and they count on each other a lot.

Perhaps the biggest difference between Salim's life and the twins' is in the quality of their play. Except when ECD is in session, Salim is restricted to the bed in their room, and to the narrow alleyways outside, filled with murky water and construction debris. His father says he will have to be much older before he can go out alone to the busy street beyond their small neighbourhood. His year-old sister spends all her time either on the bed or on her mother's hip – there's no place to put her down. Generally she is too miserable with her coughs and fevers to be put down anyway – she just clings to her mother. The twins and their two year old cousin, by contrast, have a large dirt yard to play in with trees and shrubs all

around and paths leading to neighbours' houses. While I was visiting, they chased each other around, played with their younger cousin on a mound of dirt, and built a little house out of sticks. It was breezy and pleasant out under the huge shade trees. Salim's house, even now in the coolest part of the year, is stifling and apparently becomes almost unbearable when the weather is hot. They have the fan and keep door and window open, but everything is so tight and close, there is no way for air really to move around.

The intention here is not to gloss over the difficulties in the twins' lives – their insecurity and deprivation are very real. But I saw no village children whose quality of life was worse than Salim's.

Source: Bartlett, S. (2010) "Children living in urban poverty: A global emergency, a low priority." *Early Childhood Matters*, 115.

Which of these children do you think have a better quality of life?

What are some of the positive and negative aspects of the rural and urban environments in the scenario for children?