
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Critical Social Review on Community Poverty: Mabela, KrooBay and Kuntorloh Communities in Freetown, Sierra Leone

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| ABSTRACT

Long ago, scholars noted an inseparable link between poverty and the community, especially in works and social discourses concerning sustainable development and structural adjustment, although it is concluded that this link has not been explored systematically (Fur, 1991). The cost of the community is sometimes affected by the level and degree of poverty experienced by people living in urban communities. Bolay (2000) believes that slums are 'characterised by the precarious nature of their habitat; and that beyond this, it can genuinely be seen as 'hut house' of cultural creativity, economic invention, and social innovation.' This position underpinning slum dwellers has been translated as one that connects them to communal resources. In this regard, this article is grounded on two contradictory conceptual and social postulates: the Orthodox and the New Thinking Schools. Proponents of these schools acknowledge the fact that there is a degree of linkage between poor people and the community. However, the divergence in perception between the two ideologies lies in their conception of poor people in relation to the community surrounding them. For the Orthodox, the poverty-stricken situation of slum urban dwellers forces them to exploit and degrade the community. This, in turn, results in their impoverishment in a downward spiral. Scholars of the New wave of Thinking refute this stance by considering poor people as having the capability of salvaging the environment by adding value to it. For them, communal problems stem from some natural occurrences external to the community. A major characteristic of views from scholars on poverty and the community is that they take poor people as the causal variable who are forced by appalling circumstances to exhaust the communal resources.

| KEYWORDS

Social, Community poverty, Sierra Leone experience

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1. Introduction

In order for us to properly conceptualise poverty in relation to communal costs, a definition of poverty that is consistent with the community is necessary here. An early definition of poverty was provided by Adam Smith. According to him, poverty is seen as the inability to purchase necessities required by nature or custom (Austin, 2006). However, a more comprehensive understanding of poverty takes into consideration a number of variables according to the dimensions of the concept. On this note, Jensen (2014) sees poverty in the context of its multifaceted nature, pointing out that the concept, in terms of its definition, is complex; and that it is something that does not assume the same meaning for everybody at the same time. This observation thus highlights the circumstantial value of what is inherent in the construct according to the perception of the observer. Thus, six types of poverty are enumerated by Jensen (2014), which include situational poverty, generational poverty, absolute poverty, relative poverty, urban poverty, and rural poverty.

Kuo (2001) believes that participants' major life issues may be roughly characterised in terms of three themes: coping with poverty, coping with violence, and raising children under these conditions. It seems clear that the effectiveness with which inner-city residents manage these challenges will have important consequences for themselves, their families, and for society at large. For

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individuals and their children, the possible consequences of ineffective management of these issues include deprivation, injury, and death. For society at large, the consequences of ineffective management of these issues include increased demands on social services, the health care system, and the criminal justice system, as well as the loss of human resources. In other words, on the whole, all of these developments affect the community heavily by increasing the cost.

In Sierra Leone, the prevalence of poverty at the rural level seems extremely grave and damning. In order to capture the nuance of the poverty effect in the urban community, poverty should not be restricted to the lack of income of the individual. This is because such a definition does not reflect the many forms of deprivation that factor into rural and urban poverty, which accounts for the underestimation of nations and multilateral organisations as to how many people live in poverty and in what conditions. Poverty should, therefore, involve the lack of access to health, education, and other services found within the urban setting. When it comes to communal costs, however, the boundaries of poverty should be stretched further to involve the concept of the individual's or people's livelihood. Following the works adopted by Brundtland Commission on Sustainability and the Community, which popularised the term "sustainable livelihood," the costs of the community, in terms of human activity, has severe implication for development in an urban setting. As Shakespeare notes in Hamlet:

Whether 'tis nobler . . . to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, Or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep . . . to sleep, perchance to dream.

Human actions in terms of communal degradation, through a search for fuel, wood, and pollution, seem to have a counteracting effect forcing economists and communal scientists to raise the concern with regard to human social fortune. The cost of communal degradation has been blamed on the western developed countries, in search of natural resources through the establishment of factories, and pollution of the community by way of emission of carbon dioxide, and the excessive and incautious exploitation of the land, especially for agriculture. For instance, in Sierra Leone, the agriculture sector is said to employ 60 – 70% of the country's population (Africa Development Bank and Africa Development Fund (2005)). This means that there is certainly excess pressure on the use of the land for agricultural purposes.

Prior to the end of the acrimonious civil war in Sierra Leone, a large number of the rural population was driven to the urban areas. Most of these people moved in search of greener pastures, education, and other social facilities. Hit by poverty in the urban area, these people resorted to cutting down trees for domestic energy, such as charcoal. Their involvement in agricultural activities resulted in the degradation of the soil by removing the most precious nutrients. These people, who subsequently became agents of destroying the community, knew very little of the costs involved for the entire urban community.

Thus so far, Sierra Leone's basic problem has been poverty. A growing proportion of the population (estimated at over 65%) in 1989 was considered to be living in absolute poverty. As the economy stagnates, the population continues to grow at 2.7% a year. At that time, few people could afford three meals a day. In Sierra Leone, poverty takes on broader dimensions. It may be viewed as being national, individual, institutional, and societal. For this reason, there is every reason to figure out the impact of such poverty on the community. This is indicated by the demographic complexion of the country reflecting a constantly higher ratio as a result of a larger youth population, largely dependent on communal resources, especially in urban communities such as Kroo Bay, Mabela, and Kuntorloh.

In Sierra Leone, it is obvious that people's livelihood is dependent largely on rice as a staple food. This is accentuated in work jointly conducted by the Ministry of National Development and Economic Planning and UNICEF:

"In this country, if you have no health problem and no police problem, if you can work and go home and eat rice, you are wealthy" (Ministry of National Development and Economic Planning and UNICEF, 1989).

It is, however, ironic that most of those living in urban slums do not directly embark on agricultural activity at a larger scale, mainly due to the fact that in some of these slum areas, such as Kroo Bay, Mabela and Kuntorloh, the possibility of land space for agricultural work is far-fetched. Consequently, activities such as fishing, rearing pigs, utilising sea bed areas are common practices among the people.

In extreme circumstances, the agriculturalist who migrates to the city finds himself in the same dilemma as in the rural areas because he is generally uneducated, unskilled, and unemployable. He then relies on the exploitation of the community at a high cost (Unicef, 1989).

2. Social Reflection of the Kroo Bay, Mabela, and Kuntorloh communities

The communities of Kroo Bay, Mabela, and Kuntorloh portray seemingly idiosyncratic social features that distinguish one from the other. Unique differentials are evident from the socio-economic and structural makeup of the communities and inhabitants,

although, as the current circumstances show, a degree of physical revolution has taken place. For instance, viewed from a descending order from Kuntorloh, there is a conspicuous fall in sanitary conditions where Kuntorloh stands in a better position, followed by Kroo Bay and Mabela. Life and living standards in these three communities are uneven, too, with Kuntorloh reflecting a vast improvement over the two. It has been observed that Kroo Bay, in particular, seems to have recorded some degree of progress from a state of total abhorring wreckage and ignominy to one of slight leap in terms of structural makeup, slowly catching up with Kuntorloh which has rapidly metamorphosed from a state of squalor to modern living standard (Abdulai, 2000). In terms of location, both Mabela and Kroo Bay are found along the seaside region (sea-bed), while Kuntorloh is situated on the hill-top at the east end of the city.

Despite these distinctions, the activities of the inhabitants tend to affect the environment in like manner, creating an equivalent cost for the people generally.

2.1 Kuntorloh

Kuntorloh is one of the communities described as a slum. Interestingly, though, this description seems to have little relevance at the time of writing in view of the rapidly unfolding development that has emerged in the community. Yet, one is still obliged to include this stunning settlement in this review on the grounds that it still portrays the vestiges of a 14th-century order. The Kuntorloh community is situated in the East end of Freetown constituency 100 ward 410, away from the hustles and bustles of the mainstream city centre. Unlike Kroo Bay and Mabela, the Kuntorloh community stretches over a vast expanse of land along the hill-side region. It is estimated to be more vast in size and dimension than Kroo Bay and Mabela. With a dense population in the area, electricity facility is almost a privilege, as well as other life-yearning facilities.

The current state of the community indicates that development and growth are a normal occurrence, reflected in the many emerging infrastructures, such as modern aristocratic houses, which are dominant (55%) and interspersed with few mud, board, and shanty houses (45%).

Kuntorloh environment conforms to good sanitary conditions, like other parts of the city, although few abnormalities remain extant. For instance, the problem of the sordid drainage system, compatibility of human settlement, lack of toilet facilities, and demeaning habitation is far removed from the experiences and practices of the inhabitants. However, despite these virtuous indications, the community continues to suffer from some inevitable environmental problems, such as the lack of adequate pure drinking water, deforestation, ineffective garbage collection and disposal sites and practices, and erosion of the soil, especially during the rains. These problems are immediately visible on site, yet there is a possibility of their disappearance in the near future from the point of view of the determination of the community people. The constant flow of electricity in the community, movement of vehicles, and other enviable occurrences have drifted Kuntorloh to the edge of modernity amidst the prevalence of its own backlashes.

2.2 Kroo Bay

Of the three communities, Kroo Bay is said to be gradually improving with the emergence of brick houses sprouted across the river banks with streets passing through the bay. The houses are still classical, consisting of mud patched with dirt, interspersed with make-shift structures. Kroo Bay community is located in the Western Area of Freetown, along the coast line in Constituency 107 (Reffell, 2012) and it is fed by the mainstream, George Brook, and the minor stream, the High Bay Brook (Borbor Komboh) has its sources in the Peninsula Mountains to the south of Freetown. It is bounded by the West Kingdom Peninsula and to the east by Government Wharf. The Bay itself opens into the estuary of the Rokel river to the north (Aureol Paper No.3). In the Kroo Bay community, mosquitoes are bred, with a high incidence of malaria infection and the existence of the worst form of disposal of sewage. A large quantum of water empties into this community from the hilltop areas through a drainage known as 'Samba Guata' in Krio parlance. It is through this drainage and the stream located behind the houses that bring about flooding. The gravity of the destructive capacity of flooding here is unimaginable, most times inflicting severe damage to homes by sweeping away properties of every kind and dislocating entire families, with recorded death tolls. Kroo Bay is also noted for the rearing of animals, such as pigs, in a fashion that is both abhorring and detesting. The sight of these animals, and their living habits, sometimes in verandas of houses, results in some form of disease transfer. When this situation is aided by the onerous smell of exposed garbage dispersed everywhere, life becomes threatened. Also, the community people contribute to air pollution, by burning refuse and through the activities of blacksmiths. The lack of toilet facilities is also common, with inhabitants using abnormal alternatives such as defecating in the drainage, stream, and backyards of houses. These practices, and the presence of mosquitoes, heap varying ailments on the inhabitants, such as malaria, Ebola, cholera, and vomiting, among others. Although there is a high illiteracy rate in this community, life is gradually improving as a result of the intervention of local community organisations (NGOs) and INGOs. In this community, there is a semblance of ethnic diversity, yet the Temnes and Fulas are dominant. The practice of an extended family system results in overcrowding.

2.3 Mabela

Like Kroo Bay, the Mabela community is located in the Western Area of Freetown, along the coast line in Constituency 105, Ward 385 (Reffell, 2012). Historically, this settlement was originally founded by Pa Paul and became a spot where piassava was collected and peeled for exportation. It stretches from the sea bank towards the dry land. Mabela has become an amalgam of several small settlements, such as Dokoti and Susan's Bay. The boundaries demarcating these small settlements have virtually vanished as a result of poor planning of the dwelling houses there, some of which are clustered from a distance. Today, Mabela is much larger than Kroo Bay yet densely populated, making it a hot spot of rubbery and demeaning practices beyond human understanding.

Mabela readily fits the description of a typical slum as a result of its backward and unpalatable appearance incongruent with a decent living. It is a depot for the repository of garbage, human faeces, urine, and sting water, collected in the poor drainage system that runs through the community, between houses, and empties into the sea. While fishing and petty trading are the main economic activities of the inhabitants, their socialising habits revolve around Paddle Ojeh and Adabba societies.

3. Conceptual Framework and related literature

A study that focuses on poverty and the community requires an extensive and in-depth inquiry of existing literature that offers both broad and specific insights about the link that exists between the two and the impact that they have on the people generally. It, however, transcends the level of mere exegesis and narration and, instead, examines the principles and realities of the underlying poverty as it relates to the community within the ambience of theoretical and empirical frameworks. The review thus outlines the basic assumptions on which the study is based; those relating to the impacts that poor people have on the community.

Generally, this study contributes to the literature by providing strong debate in relation to the incidence of poverty as experienced by people in urban communities. It also sets out the stage where the multifarious contributions of writers on the problems and activities of poor people in the many spheres of their life experiences are populated and synthesised to provide clean and unobtrusive insight into the issues as they obtained within and outside of the home, and finally explores the remedial approaches suggested in the literature.

Although the literature is enriched with contributions on poverty, often offered by academics and sponsored research projects, very little attention is given to theoretical and robust empirical exploration. Most works on the experiences of poor people, such as those constituting the health policy literature and living standard, focus exclusively on their high mortality rate, exploring the causal factors while paying little attention to the house hold unit and the community at large as instrumental correlates in understanding their circumstances. A vast number of social science researchers endeavours to follow poor people on their experiences in relation to the community, but often gives a narrow picture of their problems. Given the ambitious focus of this study, it is obvious that the weak nature of the literature in theory and empirics poses extreme difficulty in fully explicating the issue of poor people and their interaction with the community. It is obvious that divergent theoretical underpinnings exist in the literature, such as the economic theories of poverty, psychological theories of poverty, the sociological theories of poverty, the anthropological view of poverty, and the political science perspective on poverty, among others. All of these perspectives are abstractions of poverty that do not provide a clear understanding of the practical experience of poor people (Austin, 2006). This review takes exception by exploring theories addressing poverty-community linkage.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

There is growing debate identified in the theoretical literature about the community and poverty. These debates form the starting point of the current work as it provides the theoretical grounds on which the work is grafted. There are two diametrically opposed schools of thought around which the issue of poverty and its effects on the community is based. The first is the Orthodox School and the New Thinking.

3.2 The Orthodox School

This school began its thinking in the '70s by positing that poverty and the community are inextricably linked. This is reflected in the words of the World Commission of Community and Development (Brundtland Commission):

Poverty is a major cause and effect of global community problems. It is, therefore, futile to attempt to deal with communal problems without a broader perspective that encompasses the factors underlying world poverty and international inequality.

However, three basic conceptualisations are discerned from this line of thinking, viz; population growth and technological change, economic marginalisation and breakdown of harmony, and a downward spiral of impoverishment and communal degradation. First, population growth and economic marginalisation are held culpable of exacerbating communal degradation, a view that was long initiated by Malthus. This trend can only be terminated by what Boserup (1981) considers technological advances. The next shade of thinking revolves around the explanation of economic marginalisation and the breakdown of harmony. Following this argument, scholars of varying orientations have blamed the actions and misfortune of poor urban dwellers on the prevalence of

inequality stemming from the so-called “economic marginalisation and breakdown of harmony” that had existed among them. Such exclusiveness from access to communal resources (one which common property theorists see as a total crisis) is singled out as a source of disharmony. In this circumstance, it is poor workers, such as those relegated to the realm of slums, that suffer the most, especially in the face of mounting hazards from technological activities. The third aspect of this thinking holds that poverty often results in damaging the environment in a ‘downward spiral’ (Forsyth et al., 1998). They present poor people as agents of destruction rather than rational beings capable of protecting the natural community. This line of thinking also views poverty-stricken people as reactionary, capable of wrecking damage to the environment by degrading landscapes in response to population growth, economic marginalisation, and existing environmental degradation. Hence, a situation referred to as ‘the downward spirals of impoverishment and communal degradation.’ This thinking influenced different shades of institutions and individuals. For instance, the World Commission of Community and Development (Brundtland Commission) expressed this line of thought in its writing:

Many parts of the world are caught in a vicious downwards spiral: poor people are forced to overuse environmental resources to survive from day to day, and their impoverishment of their community further impoverishes them, making their survival ever more difficult and uncertain (Forsyth et al., 1998).

This link is seen by this writer as self-enforcing rather than a natural occurrence, and the entire concept is exclusively assuming and imprecise.

Clearly, then, the devastating and undulating trend of the community was initially blamed on the very actions of poor people, such as those who lived in urban slum areas. The forces of natural externalities were completely dusted from this occurrence, at least as portrayed by this orthodox synthesis. It is here that the greatest attack on this old explanatory version was then launched, notably by the ‘New Thinking’ school of thought.

4. The New Thinking

The new thinking on poverty-community linkage seems to face stiff resistance from the orthodoxy as a result of the long-enduring and penetrating nature of this old conceptualisation which has been strongly ingrained in theories such as the Himalayan theory of soil erosion and deforestation, the fuel wood crisis, desertification and the negative impacts of shifting cultivation (referenced in Forsyth et al., 1998). The thrust of this thinking is that (poor) people’s entitlement to environmental resources is essential since they can adopt ‘protective mechanisms through collective action which reduce the impacts of demographic, economic, and communal change. They believe that external natural forces result in changes in the community rather than the poverty situation of people living in urban slum localities. Here the belief of orthodox academics in a downward spiral of poverty and communal degradation is rendered void in the light of an advocacy of poor (local) people’s empowerment through their legitimate access to resources present in the community. A cornerstone of this thinking is the role of institutions, social structures, and networks, which are believed to enhance people’s access to those resources (food, forest, agriculture, etc.). Conceptually, though, it is argued that communal problems are differently experienced by people, which must be addressed as such rather than as a whole. An important element in this thinking, therefore, is the sustainable livelihood of the people, which can enhance their way out of poverty.

This study has argued against this belief and instead urged that communal problems and poverty need to be seen as highly differentiated and experienced differently by varied groups. As a consequence, poor people may experience their own variety of communal problems, which need to be addressed separately from communal policies seeking to satisfy less poor sections of society.

From the review of the literature, there is evidence of a clear link between poverty and communal degradation. In order to ascertain this relationship, an understanding of the meaning of poverty is appropriate here. Milton et al. (1993) define poverty in terms of those human needs that are not met. In this regard, poverty scale estimates are drawn for African countries that often run too low. Nevertheless, a clear relationship is assumed by this definition. However, three conditions have been established by Duraiappah (1996), which suggests a situation of no communal degradation, no indigenous poverty, and the existence of exogenous poverty. Indigenous poverty is one caused by communal degradation, while exogenous poverty is poverty caused by factors beyond communal degradation.

From these examinations, it holds true that poverty accounts for the actions of urban dwellers that affect the community directly. Some of the ways in which those relational actions are manifested include logging, agricultural or pastoral encroachment and expansion, and fuel wood fetching (Duraiappah, 1996). Extensive research work on this subject indicates logging as the principal activity responsible for communal degradation.

Although it is extremely cumbersome to locate extensive theoretical projections in the literature that conceptualise poor people’s problems in post-war societies, it is certain that this gap can be filled by drawing from a fairly recognisable strength of research

conducted on this subject. These investigations provide plausible results and findings that somewhat verify or deviate from the theoretical accounts on which the current study is grafted.

4.1 To assess the link between poverty and the community

The existing literature illustrates, theoretically, the link between poverty and the community. This link is indisputable irrespective of the heated divergence between the two schools dominating the field – Orthodox School and New Thinking. The argument separating these two thinking is really about castigation and defence of the rural-urban poor. The discourse on the poverty-community linkage is explicit in the empirical literature. So far, it is evident from the theoretical literature that a link exists between poverty and the way the community is being degraded. It has been argued that one key way that such a link exists is the extent of the exploration for tree cutting. Along similar lines, Anderson (1989) asserts in his study that logging was the primary cause of unsustainable deforestation in many parts of Sierra Leone and some West African countries, while Repetto (1990) attributes commercial logging as the number one agent for unsustainable tropical deforestation.

A profile of slum dwellers suggests a picture of people who are mostly unemployed and poor. Actions inter alia that need to be taken to address communal challenges include community capacity building for communal protection; increased community participation in water and sanitation projects; providing alternatives to firewood consumption; increased regional cooperation in conservation; economic empowerment for slum dwellers; and reform of land tenure. Sierra Leone already has all of these practices embedded in the slum areas. Based on an assessment of urban slums such as Kroo Bay, Mabela, and Kuntorloh, differences in income, living conditions, access to services, and opportunities for development are seen as major sources warranting their access and use of resources in the environment.

Thus, the empirical literature suggests practically that there is a link between poor people and the community through their diverse activities. For instance, studies conducted in Nepal clearly suggest the connection between poor people and communal resources:

Population growth in the context of traditional agrarian technology is forcing farmers onto even steeper slopes, slopes unfit for sustained farming even with the astonishingly elaborate terracing practiced there. Meanwhile, villagers must roam further and further from their houses to gather fodder and firewood, thus surrounding villages with a widening circle of denuded hillsides (Ives and Messerli, 1989).

The research shows and illustrates the downward spiral phenomenon expressed in the theoretical literature, which contributes to deepening the poverty situation of people engaged in exploiting environmental resources inexorably. Forsyth (1998), however, questions the research postulated by the Orthodox think tanks that upland agriculture results in erosion which in turn poses a problem for the dwellers. Instead, it is believed that poor people are aware of these situations and therefore try their best to avoid them. Forsyth (1998) also noted research findings of the Orthodox school, which attributed the decline in soil fertility to land exhaustion.

4.2 Explore the impact that poverty has on a sustainable social community

As indicated earlier, a sustainable community is determined by the level of the eradication of poverty of urban slum dwellers. Based on the review of the school of thought that sees slum dwellers' involvement in activities in their community, it becomes clear that the sustainability of the community is determined by the eradication of poverty among the people. The conditions of slums pose several negative effects on the dwellers. According to Baeza and Packard (2006), slum dwellers are particularly vulnerable to illnesses caused by poverty. Moreover, as a result of health shocks, Viegas (2006) stresses that numerous slum dwellers embark on a vicious cycle in which poverty and illness lead to prolonged access to the exploitation of the community and subsequent readmission and or death as a result of extreme poverty and lack of adequate coping mechanisms. The problem of slums remains one of the greatest challenges for city managers. Neito (2012) reports that almost a third of the world's urban population lives in slums where it is generally little or no access to basic services and where substandard housing, overcrowding, poor water and sanitation systems, as well as unemployment, co-exist with crime and violence. For these people, reliance on the community is a natural occurrence which makes it difficult for the sustainability of the community. Thus, it is believed that this situation offers the people "nothing save suffering" as economic progress and the eradication of poverty are untenable, with only the amplification of social inequality ever assured. Dr. Zotov (1985) cited instances of the suffering and problems that urban dwellers face as a result of the prevalence of poverty. For instance, in the early period of the 1980s in Asia, about 15 percent of poor people were said to suffer from non access to communal facilities, with their mortality rate 300 times higher than in the United States of America. These statistics bourgeoned in other parts of the world, where poverty gradually became ingrained.

This school of thought believes that happiness and freedom, as a result of increased communal activities, are assured in a society where rapid economic and cultural progress is bound to be realised, with poverty given a permanent farewell. Thus, the masses enjoy the fruit of their labour as exploitation becomes a fairy tale. In this tradition, then, it is obvious that the problems that poor people face, as part of the caucus of the ordinary man, are eradicated. It is obvious that the view of society, in the light of poverty,

centres on the process of the restoration of their dignity, of placing them in the proper context of their status as important corollaries of the development of society.

4.4 The problems of communal degradation

The harsh realities of life that characterise post-conflict societies, found in the socio-economic, political, and demographic circumstances, often account for the displacement of urban people from homes, the very ultimate domain and stronghold of their existence. It is certain that thousands of slum dwellers are out of homes in the world today. The United Nations Human Rights Council Session (March 2011) reveals a general picture of people living away from their homes and parents, with their time permanently spent in slum areas in countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. The research conducted gives both general and specific accounts of people found in the slum communities. In Sierra Leone alone, it was estimated that the total population of eleven slum communities in Freetown, excluding Kroo Bay and Kuntorloh, is 45,720 (Reffell, 2000). In Ghana 21, 040 headcounts of slum dwellers are uncounted for, while about 10 – 12 000 homeless people are found reliant on communal exploitation. The UN Human Rights Council Session highlights several factors responsible for the movement of people into slum areas. The most important of these are social and economic poverty and exclusion. These factors are considered within the framework of the community. The list is, however, not exhaustive.

The population found in slum areas causes serious problems as a result of degrading the community. Bolay (1998) noted that the degrading of the community is reflected in the type of shanty buildings of inadequate quality and the very poor infrastructure found in those areas. According to Bolay (1998), about 25 and 70 percent of urban dwellers in developing countries live in irregular settlements. Additionally, the degradation of the community results in erosion and flooding. It is even the belief of Bolay (1998, Dinye, 2013) that environmental degradation causes changes in landscape and distortion in the weather condition (communal change). Degradation of the community also poses the problem of poor community quality, expressed in the form of acute water scarcity (Dinye, 2013). This problem has become almost universal as most slum dwellers experience water shortages. According to findings from research conducted in Kenya, only 5% of poor households have a residential water supply, while in Nairobi slums, only 19% of the population have their houses connected to a water supply (Gulani et al., 2008).

Further problems associated with communal degradation include an increase in the expenditure of slum dwellers. For instance, an empirical study conducted in the Kroo Bay community noted that For water services, 71% spend Le 10,000 – Le 20,000 per month; 21.2% spend Le 20,000 – Le30,000; 2.4% spend Le 30,000 – Le 40,000; 1.2% spends Le 40,000 – Le50,000; and 4.1% spends above Le 50,000 (Shack Dwellers International, 2008).

5. Findings from the Literature

Many research efforts have been identified in the literature, which examines various aspects of the state and experiences of slum dwellers in Sierra Leone emerging from brutal conflict. From the outset, it is discovered that there is a scarce availability of comprehensive and all-encompassing theories that help to explain the problems that people face in different settlements as a result of poverty. For instance, only a small number of research works identify people as belonging to the wider class of exploiters of the community through tree cutting, agricultural activities, and fuel wood seeking. However, there is evidence of a semblance of a match between theory and empirics, which shows that the literature is based on a strong scientific framework.

In connection with these findings, the following results were inferred from the literature:

First, the number of people in post-conflict societies characterised as slum dwellers is higher and continues to inflate as a result of some emerging factors that are socio-economic and directly related to the community.

Second, although those living in slums experience many problems in post-war situations, the prevalence of poverty and poor health conditions account for the heavy pressure heaped on the environment in places such as Kroo Bay, Mabela, and Kuntorloh.

Third, the exodus of people into slum communities is due to the continuous drift for communal degradation.

Fourth, there are many problems encountered by people living in slums in Sierra Leone. These problems affect them seriously to the extent that they put humanitarian and development practitioners on their toes. The involvement in tree cutting, an extreme form of agricultural activity, as part of the abhorring practices, create frightful images in the minds of communal practitioners.

5.1 Urban Dwellers in Kroo Bay, Mabela, and Kuntorloh

Sierra Leone's experience of poor urban dwellers and their problems is enormous and cumulative in spite of the natural fortunes that the country possesses and the legal injunctions available that underscore the use and exploitation of the community. In those slum communities, poor people are at the rough edges of socio-economic crisis, heavily tortured by malnutrition and endemic diseases, often forcing them to exploit the community through fishing, piggery, sea bed treatment (as in the cases of Mabela and Kroo Bay), and some gardening activities resulting in casual deforestation as in Kuntorloh community. Generally, there is a high

number of people living in Kroo Bay, Mabela, and Kuntorloh, as recorded by a household demographic survey conducted in 2004. According to Statistics Sierra Leone, the number of people has increased to 3.6% of the total population of 5 million. This increase is recorded in the post-war years following the peaceful settlement of families in those three settlements. However, the high number of people in the communities is due to some demographic factors. In the communities under review, it is observed that there is a high birth rate among women, and the number of surviving children both at birth and during their childhood stage has astonishingly improved. This accounts for the staggering rise in the population in those communities.

In light of these developments, the number of people has therefore bloated tremendously. This situation has exerted serious pressure on the community with a negative impact. With poverty and other social realities prevailing among the people in the said settlements, most of them are at a disadvantaged point, with the majority found permanently living in destitution. Responses to the problems that poor people face today in those communities seem to influence the view that their situation is at the center of the priority of the government (Kopoka, 2000). Although this may be true in this context, any generalization would be an overstatement when one considers the state of poor people in the communities against the backdrop of the present dangerous and poignant standard of living of the people. Among the many problems that these people face in those communities is the lack of adequate food, improper sanitary conditions, little access to pure drinking water, and a lot more.

The three communities of Kroo Bay, Mabela, and Kuntorloh represent one of the most graphical antitheses between those communities and the experiences that the people face in terms of normal existence. Although the composition of suffering people in many communities reflects both those emerging from an extreme poverty background and those of relatively affluent family units, this is not the case for people in Kroo Bay, Mabela, and Kuntorloh. In reality, the majority of people in those communities under study come from households that are literally hit by overarching poverty and other painful social crisis. This is evident from their outward appearance and disposition. At home, they suffer from acute hunger and intermittent diseases, which affect their normal existence.

Hence, in the three communities, people are treated as the major variables from which the bulk of the information for the study is derived. Being key players and subjects of this research, they encounter severe problems as a result of the extent of the socio-economic crisis prevalent in the communities. They are representatives of the destitute and deplorable condition that a multitude of Sierra Leoneans lives in, a situation that is characteristic of the post-war period.

Generally, poor people are mostly entrapped in the web of crisis, with little attention given to their suffering by the state and other stakeholders in the country. Where attention is given to them, it has mostly been in the form of cursory gestures that often appear ephemeral. This practice has resulted in the fact that poor people in the three communities miss out extensively when it comes to social and developmental projects. For instance, findings by UNICEF and other organisations show that about forty-five percent of people are out of normal life, with the majority of that number found dwelling in slum communities. These people are also exposed to all forms of endemic diseases and other socio-economic malaise. In the streets, especially in Kroo Bay, the majority of the people interviewed admitted to having dropped out of their homes for a long period, merely surviving on environmental exploitation. Their reasons for this unfortunate experience are similar, pointing to poverty and other pressures from home and the community.

6. Community Skills Gap

The vocable skill refers to pragmatic proficiencies, competencies, and abilities that a graduate of a given course of the programme has acquired as a result of undergoing training, either formally or informally. A "Skill" can also be described as "the capability to carry out a job assigned to a threshold of competence, and this can be built upon through learning" (OECD, 2019). A skill gap is defined as an important gap between a community's contemporary capabilities and the skills it needs to achieve its goals and meet customer demand. It is the point at which a community may not be able to grow or remain competitive because it cannot feel critical jobs with inhabitants who have the right knowledge, skills, and abilities (Bano and Shanmugam, 2020). According to community employer's perspectives skills gap is when inhabitants or the existing community populace possess inadequate skills in meeting the economic aspirations of the manufacturers and Small and Medium Enterprises, this is termed the internal community skill gap or where current inhabitants come out to be skilled but absolutely, they are not skilled (Olusa, 2019). His definition describes the said community's scenario in Sierra Leone, where the formal education system does not evolve to keep pace with the transformations that are gradually and continuously taking place in the community's economic terrain. There are many community careers that did not exist a decade ago that are flourishing now that require current understanding and skills. There are also already existing careers that enquire new modern understanding and skills to remain relevant in Sierra Leone employment. The growing community skills gap requires proactive intervention.

In the last decade, the Sierra Leone community skills gap has become a significant matter of discussion in the construction industry in the whole of Sierra Leone. A range of national studies from nonprofits and businesses cite the community skills gaps, and while science, technology and engineering, and math are certainly part of the community challenge. It is the Sierra Leone government and foreign investors to understand the community skills gap that is having and would have on factories and respective Small and Medium Enterprises. According to a report from the Institute of Governance Reform (twenty-twenty), without Sierra Leone

government intervention in bridging the community skills gap, the shrinking community workforce and unreliable productivity growth rate could lead to a 9% decline in the standard of living in these communities by 2025. To address the challenges of the community skills gap, a holistic approach to preparing Sierra Leoneans in these communities to go to work with relevant skills and knowledge for community jobs that exist now and in the future is crucial.

In today's economy, which is predominantly driven by knowledge, quality talent and advanced skills have become the most critical competitive advantage for community manufacturers and SMEs. India, one of the upcoming third-world countries in industrialisation, has progressively been advancing towards becoming a "knowledge economy" by concentrating on the advancement of community skills relevant to the emerging economic community. Both the Central and State Governments are trying multiple approaches to skill the community workforce to meet the demands of the community job market (Bano and Shanumugam, 2020). These Sierra Leonean communities should emulate this trend of skilling their workforce to meet the modern demand of the labour market to be able to achieve vision 2025.

In today's fast-growing Sierra Leone, the employability community skill gap is the main problem faced by both community inhabitants and employers. A national study conducted by an alliance of economist associations showed 68% of the community workforce feel the need to constantly reinvent themselves to stay ahead of the community curve. In the Indian technology industry that employs nearly four million community people and has revenues of more than \$ 150 billion, up to three million current ranks will be lodged by 2025. But it would require retraining 60% of the community's existing workforce (Ramanathan, twenty-twelve). In order to control the unemployment crisis in these communities, it is imperative for the government, manufacturers, and community stakeholders to provide training and community skill development programme to both educated and uneducated community inhabitants. Community skills gaps exist in all community employment sectors, affecting inhabitants in residence, as well as those working in warehouses or factories, SMES, and construction sites.

6.1 Sources of Data

The principles of research assume that the reliability of data for a specific phenomenon is determined by the accuracy and precision of the materials and the individuals from which the information is obtained. However, it is obvious that the availability of precise materials alone does not guarantee the degree of reliability of the data for a particular study. Rather, it is the role of the researcher to sieve through the information and the techniques that are used and critically analyse them to suit the circumstances and situation surrounding the problem that underlie the logical basis of the study. Bearing this fact in mind, the researcher drew information from both primary and secondary data in order to examine extensively the problems that people encounter in the three communities of Freetown. The surveying of theoretical literature at the early stage of the research equipped the researcher with adequate information, perspectives, and insights into what theories exist about the variables and the possibility of determining the study area and population. The study was, therefore, initially preceded by the collection of information from a wide range of existing literature on both the general and specific variables. Both published and unpublished materials, such as textbooks, monographs, and journals, were voraciously reviewed to determine the nature of the problems that people wrestle with in Sierra Leone and elsewhere. These materials were obtained from the Sierra Leone Library Board, Fourah Bay College Library, the American Embassy Library Section at Fourah Bay College Library, personnel from key organisations dealing with environmental problems, and, of course, the internet.

The secondary data were supplemented by information gathered from field research by interviewing those individuals that constituted the sample. As an integral part of a case study research, the researcher believed that by speaking with the residents, those specific variables would shed light on the different characteristics of poor people's circumstances and social orientations. Thus, both structured and unstructured questionnaire instruments were used to gather information from the respondents. The fact that this study is extensively based on a qualitative research strategy attracted the use of unstructured questionnaire instruments for gathering information. The use of such an instrument created room to hear the views of the respondents themselves (collectively) and to take a lead role in not only identifying their own problems but having the opportunity to take control of the intervention that will follow. However, this research further draws from structured research instruments to strike a balance in methodology in recognition of the fact that elements of the qualitative strategy are necessary for any exposition of poor people, their problems, and their circumstances. This mixture of research strategies enables both subjective and objective analyses of the problems and experiences of people.

7. Conclusions

The interaction between poor people and the environment in which they live is an ongoing process. Its occurrence can be seen as both accidental and incremental, determined by the degree of the poverty level. In the three communities of Mabela, Kroo Bay, and Kuntorloh, there are still seeming traces of vestiges of slum attributes, reflected in the prevailing infrastructure, human congestion, poor drainage system, and absence of standard road network, ineffective electricity supply, the dearth of pure drinking water, and unavailability of an adequate medical facility. For instance, there is only one moderate community health centre found in each of these localities, built with the support of non-governmental organisations such as Planned International. This situation

is exacerbated by the ravaging havoc heaped by nature, such as deadly diseases, flooding, and violent storms, sometimes precipitated by the negative actions of the people themselves.

At the crossroads of these happenings, human beings are at the mercy of poverty and hunger. The inconceivable strive to have a morsel of food forces them towards deep environmental exploitation, with little concern for the dangers underlying their actions. Hence, this is the reason why the idea of a 'downward spiral' still finds relevance in the discourses of poverty and the environment.

Certainly, there are many faces to the problem of slum communities whose solution can never be found in a monolithic approach. This is why Bolay (2000) notes that "the 'urban question' is thus clearly multi-faceted and multi-dimensional." Its complexity, therefore, lies so much in the nature of the poverty confronting them and the circumstances of environmental pruning. However, the lack of sound, lasting solutions are influenced by the very piecemeal approach adopted by different state and non state actors, which continues to fan the flames of slum crises. Hence, as Bolay (1998) has rightly stated, "cities are both a 'paradise and a jungle' for their residents and those who aspire to become residents, hoping in their turn to benefit from the accumulation of opportunities that cities embody.

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