

Kenya: mothers and children scratching a living on Eldoret dump

Extreme poverty drives some Kenyans to scavenge through rubbish dumps for materials to sell for recycling. At the main dump in Eldoret, a town in Kenya's Rift valley with a population of 280,000, people sift through debris, despite the risks of disease and injury, and the threat of violence. Even though primary education is free in Kenya, many children work at the dumps to help support their family

- [Zoe Flood](#) and [Louis Quail](#)
- theguardian.com, Monday 1 September 2014 11.52 BST



Sarah Nasimiyu is 45 years old and is pictured with her two-year-old Joshua on Eldoret's dump where she worked, Kenya. Photograph: Louis Quail

At the main rubbish dump in Eldoret, western Kenya, several dozen men, women and children sift through the town's rubbish. They separate plastic, metal and other materials that can be sold. Adults working on the site earn around £1-1.30 a day for tiring work in highly unsanitary conditions. Children as young as seven – some of whom have never attended school – work at the site every day.



Photograph:

[Louis Quail](#)

Sarah Nasimiyu, 45, holds her two-year-old son Joshua. Despite worries about his health, she takes him to the dump every day. She sorts through rubbish in the morning, and sells snacks to other workers, making around 30p a day. Nasimiyu is separated from her husband, who she says is a drunk. She has four other children, three of whom – aged from eight to 13 – also work on the site.



Photograph:

[Louis Quail](#)

A shoeless child at Eldoret's main dumpsite, where rubbish includes medical waste from the local hospital. Workers on the site describe injuries due to sharp metal, glass and syringes. Used dressings and sanitary towels are also scattered among the rubbish.



Photograph:

[Louis Quail](#)

While some of the site workers share one-room homes in the vicinity with family members, others sleep rough around the dump. Substance abuse is rife – workers sniff glue, smoke cannabis or drink potent, home-brewed alcohol.



Photograph: [Louis](#)

Quail

A woman sorts through rubbish. Some of the workers live in such extreme poverty that they are forced to eat the rotting food they find at the site. Trucks regularly arrive to dump rubbish; the workers sort through the loads before burning what remains. Many describe the respiratory problems they have as a result of the toxic smoke.



Photograph:

[Louis Quail](#)

Jane Wanjira, 35, picks plastics at ad hoc dumps around Eldoret, which are smaller but safer than the main site. She is pictured here with her daughter Sarah, 10, and grandson Dominic. When Sarah's not at school, she comes to help her mother. Wanjira's husband was killed in [Kenya's 2007-08 post-election violence](#) (video).



Photograph:

[Louis Quail](#)

Sarah sits in a classroom at Atnas Kandie primary school in Eldoret. A sponsor helped to cover the one-off admission fee and pays for her uniform and books. Sarah also benefits from a daily meal at school – her mother is not always able to provide food at home. School feeding charity [Mary's Meals](#) provides food to children at eight schools in Eldoret, including some of the pupils at Atnas Kandie, in communities where poverty and hunger would otherwise prevent them from gaining an education. Set up in 2002, the charity now provides food for more than 920,000 children globally each day.



Photograph:

[Louis Quail](#)

Alice Mboti, seven, has her hair braided by her friend Faith Linah at the main dump. Every day, Alice and her brother Allan, 14, walk from their house opposite the site to sort through rubbish. Neither Alice nor Allan have ever been to school – their mother prefers that they and their three siblings stay at home and help the family to earn a living.



Photograph: [Louis Quail](#)

Alice sits with her mother Florence Khalumbia, 46, at the main dump. Khalumbia wants her children to improve their situation, and hopes they can look after her in the future. Despite Kenya introducing free primary education in 2003, some families can't afford to buy uniforms for their children or pay one-off admission fees – or they need their offspring to help support the family.



Photograph:

[Louis Quail](#)

Alice; Fatila Navenda, 13; Sarah Celestine, 15; Vera Atieno, 18; and Alice Khanali, 19, at the main dump. Atieno and Khanali dropped out of school when they became pregnant in their early teens, and haven't returned. Some of the young women who work on the dump tell of the sexual harassment they experience at the site.



Photograph:

[Louis Quail](#)

Khanali started coming to the site after she became pregnant and had to drop out of school. Her daughter lives with her grandmother, but Khanali sends money to help with her care. The family receives no support from the child's father. Khanali also looks after Fatila, who works with her, protecting her from some of the men and boys. The two women are trying to save money to send Fatila back to school.



Photograph:

[Louis Quail](#)

Atieno sits at home with her two-year-old daughter Gloria. Atieno became pregnant when she was 15. She rarely sees her child, who lives with Atieno's mother. Atieno hopes to eventually live with her daughter.



Photograph:

[Louis Quail](#)

Lucy Wambui, 13, began sorting through rubbish when she was only four years old. She is now a pupil at Atnas Kandie and benefits from a free meal. Her mother, who is a single parent, is unwell, and often unable to feed the family. Lucy and her five siblings would sort rubbish to help put food on the table. On the rare occasions when there was money to allow the children to attend school, Lucy would struggle to concentrate, often going all day without food.



[Louis Quail](#)

Photograph: