

Poverty, inequality and disease in Kenya

Our correspondent
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Kenya is one of the most unequal societies in the world. The richest 20 percent take 61 percent of rural and 51 percent of urban incomes. The bottom 20 percent of the rural population receive only 3.5 percent of rural income. The bottom 20 percent in urban areas receive just 5.4 percent of income. These disparities have widened since 1982 and the implementation of IMF structural adjustment programmes. More than 50 percent of Kenya's poor live on less than \$1 per day.

One in ten Kenyan children dies before reaching the age of five. There is limited access to healthcare because the poor are unable to pay either the user charges or the transport costs. Drugs and other essential supplies are simply not available.

The AIDS epidemic has reached tragic proportions, with about 75,000 AIDS sufferers. The number of HIV infected people is expected to reach 1.7 million, or 5.5 percent of the population by next year. AIDS patients occupy half of all hospital beds.

A quarter of the population is illiterate. The primary school completion rate is just 44 percent, while more than 53 percent of children qualified to enrol in secondary schools in 1997 could not get places. University enrolment has also fallen as fees have risen, leading to frequent strikes by students.



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