

Impact of NYS cohorts programme on reduction of crime and violence in Mathare and Kibra

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Introduction

In September 2014, President Uhuru Kenyatta's administration relaunched and rebranded the National Youth Service (NYS) in a bid to resolve youth unemployment and lack of livelihood opportunities especially in poor urban neighbourhoods (Ayaga 2015). Notably, while rolling out the project in Kibra, the President explained: *'...we want to improve Kibera slum that had been neglected for a long time. The residents also have a right to better services...3,000 young men and women in Kibera will be engaged in the project where part of their wages will be saved into a fund to enable them to continue with income-generating activities after the programme ends (PSCU 2014).'*

The rebranded NYS, through its Youth Empowerment Programme (community cohorts programme), 'aims to provide gainful employment to unemployed community youth; support the re-socialisation of community youth; foster a sense of responsibility among the youth; support the youth to engage in economic activities through savings and training (NYS 2020a).' One of the pillars of NYS is Enterprise and Youth Economy, which 'encourages the youth to venture into self-employment and establishment of enterprises that create jobs for their peers by instituting revolving funds, registering SACCOs and self-employment promotion units as well as encouraging a savings culture among community youth (NYS 2020b).' By 2017, then Cabinet Secretary, Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs reported that 'under the NYS SACCO programme 92,135 youth have mobilised savings worth Ksh 1.5 billion in 102 constituencies across the country (Kinyua 2017).'

This policy brief analyses the NYS project's economic impact through job-creation and inculcating a savings

culture primarily through the SACCOs. Ultimately, it explores how the inclusion of youth in economic life through the NYS empowerment project contributed to the prevention and reduction of crime in Kibra and Mathare. It concludes that future youth economic empowerment programmes that aim to reduce crime can draw many lessons from the NYS Community Cohorts Programme in Mathare and Kibra.

The NYS cohorts programme engaged youth from Mathare and Kibra in various activities ranging from construction of halls, toilets and police posts to street clean-ups and agriculture for about three years. The cohorts were paid Ksh 1648 (Ksh 250 per day) and Ksh 141 was deducted from their payment every week and channelled to a SACCO as savings. The NYS cohorts working hours were fixed from 8 am to 5 pm and they were provided with t-shirts for identification, lunch and the necessary tools for their work. Additionally, NYS offered training on entrepreneurship skills, savings and investments.

Data for this policy brief is derived from a literature review, a quantitative household survey conducted by CHRIPS in April 2020, and personal accounts from former NYS community cohorts who participated in focus group discussions held in Mathare and Kibra informal settlements in September 2020. Eighty-eight (88) and 103 former NYS cohorts participated in the focus group discussions in Mathare and Kibra respectively, while 786 Kibra residents and 821 people living in Mathare participated in the household survey.

Both locations share similar poor socioeconomic conditions. Mathare with a population of around 206,564 (KNBS 2019:20) and Kibra's 185,777 residents (ibid:20) have been marginalised in a range of essential services provided to other areas by the government such as accessible/tarred roads, decent housing, garbage collection/waste management, piped water

and proper drainage channels, and police/security. They also have a large number of unemployed or underemployed young men and women. Most of them were enrolled in the NYS cohorts programme.

Youth, violence and crime in Mathare & Kibra

At the heart of the NYS cohort programme was an assumption that engaging unemployed (or idle) youth in economic opportunities would contribute (in) directly to the reduction of violence and crime. This is because of the association of high levels of youth unemployment, lack of income and livelihoods with violence and gangs largely formed by the youth. For example, according to a 2012 report by the National Crime Research Centre, there are different organised criminal gangs based in Kibra and Mathare. In Kibra, *Siafu*, *Kamukunji Pressure Group*, *Yes We Can* and *J-10* are associated with extortion, providing security, mobilising people to attend political rallies, resolving disputes, providing water and electricity illegally (NCRC 2012: 35). Mathare-based gang *Munyipi* is notorious for extortion (ibid: 35). *Wa Teresia* (2011) similarly argues that poverty is among the key drivers of crime in Nairobi's informal settlements including Mathare and Kibra, resulting in youth committing robbery, burglary and muggings.

Youths in Mathare and Kibra have also been associated with election violence over the years acting as 'KANU youth wingers,' 'vigilantes/personal militias' and/or 'criminal gangs' (Haysom & Opala 2020: 10-16). For instance, during Kibra's by-election in 2019, youths from one political party were accused of disrupting the process by blocking polling stations and hurling stones at their opponents' supporters (Vidija 2019).

Crime and violence broadly inform public perceptions and attitudes towards youth, and also police responses. Predominantly, security responses to crime issues in the informal settlements have involved extrajudicial killings, discrimination and profiling, stop and search measures, which has led to a tense relationship between the youth and the police. For example, Mathare Social Justice Centre's report (2017) documented that police indiscriminately killed about 803 male youths (average age of 20 years) between 2013 and 2015 in Kenya on suspicion of being involved in crime (ibid:10,13). Though not articulated explicitly, it was assumed that the NYS programme would keep young men and women from crime and reduce police violence in Mathare and Kibra.

NYS Director General Nelson Githinji in 2015, a year after NYS was relaunched, stated that the residents in Kibra and Mathare (among other informal settlements) had started to reap the programme's benefits. He went on to say, '*When young people are involved, they have less tendencies of being involved in other vices...The immediate results we have received are that in some of the settlements, the levels of insecurity have gone down drastically* (Otieno 2015).'

The next section discusses the impact of the NYS economic opportunities before discussing the effect on crime and violence.

Impact of economic opportunities offered to NYS Community Cohorts

The focus group discussions and household survey showed that the loans, weekly savings and income offered various immediate personal and community benefits. In total, 94% of the respondents in the household survey from Kibra and 96% from Mathare joined NYS because of employment opportunities and earning an income. Some cohorts opened new businesses. '*I was able to save the money and buy a popcorn-making machine,*' said a female cohort from Hospital Ward (Mathare). Another noted that she started a coffee-selling business from the loans she acquired from the savings. While for others, their existing businesses were boosted, a cohort from Mlango Kubwa (Mathare) shared his experience: '*The project was helpful as I run an Mpesa shop and on payment days, the number of transactions was high.*' A cohort from Makina (Kibra) reported, '*It helped me with employment. I have two tuk-tuks and enabled others to have a job through me.*'

The income gained allowed the cohorts to attend to their expenses such as rent, food, household amenities, school fees as well as day-care fees for their children. The wages were also harnessed in the community as local businesses such as kiosks and entertainment joints thrived, especially on Fridays when the payments were made. Other cohorts also made investments, for example, a female cohort leader from Makina stated, '*Our SACCO was good. I got my Ksh 100, 000 loan and made my rental house.*'

The mandatory deductions from cohorts' payment encouraged a savings culture. This resulted in some of the cohorts joining other savings circles like *chamas* because they were sure about the NYS weekly payments. They used the NYS wages to make

contributions in these other SACCOs as demonstrated by a female cohort from Sarang'ombe (Kibra) when asked why she joined NYS: *'My reasons were simple... to earn money and use it in a SACCO group that I was a member of...it was a different SACCO, very local, consisting of willing members who had weekly contributions of Ksh 1000.'*

According to the respondents, these economic opportunities had an effect on crime. This is the focus of discussion in the next section.

Effects of NYS economic opportunities on the reduction of crime

Ninety four percent (94%) of respondents in the household survey in both Mathare and Kibra stated that about the time NYS was operating, crime reduced. 48% of the Kibra respondents and 56% of those in Mathare in the household survey listed reduction of crime among the community benefits from the NYS project. This was due to several reasons. Some said that owing to the nature of the NYS cohorts work, being manually-involving, it meant that they were tired and could not engage in crime at the end of the day. According to a cohort from Woodley (Kibra): *'NYS youth were fully engaged at day time, doing hard labour and in the evening due to fatigue had to rest. Hence, the youth were not engaged in any form of criminality.'* Female cohorts from Mlango Kubwa said the large number of youths working made it easier to walk peacefully in the area (especially from Mlango to Nambaa) without fear of being mugged because they were engaged in NYS. Similarly, others noted that Fort Jesus at Kibra ceased to be a crime-prone area. Consequently, the relationship between the youths (male youths especially) and the police improved. As per the household survey, 42% of the Mathare respondents and 43% of the Kibra respondents reported that they stopped being harassed by the police due to their participation in NYS. The youth recognised the aim of reducing police violence through NYS economic activities during recruitment. For instance, in Area 1 at Mathare, the community decided that more male cohorts than females should be registered in NYS to reduce the number of men allegedly killed by police. Likewise, one cohort from Woodley, who is also a chairperson of a local youth group focusing on youth reform, mobilised many youths to join NYS to divert them from crime and police violence.

Even after the NYS project ended, some of the young men and women have continued to use the skills and knowledge gained during the NYS programme to engage in activities that provide them with livelihood opportunities and deter them from engaging in crime. *'The project motivated us to hunt for opportunities rather than wait. This has positively changed us, and we can't go back to the previous life of drugs. We learnt a lot during our time at NYS and this has really motivated us,'* a female cohort from Mabatini (Mathare) narrated. Likewise, a cohort from Ngei (Mathare) explained: *'It (NYS) also helped in reforming some young men who were robbers but because of being busy in the job, they reformed.'* A participant in the Woodley focus group discussion asserted that, because NYS was now giving a large section of young people employment and an income, *'politicians could no longer come and bribe youth to support them with only 200 shillings.'* In Hospital Ward (Mathare), some cohorts formed a garbage collection group situated near Muthaiga Police Station and continue to operate and charge for the service. Similarly, youth from Makina (Kibra) earn an income from collecting household garbage every Saturday. Others hire out ablution blocks and halls built during the NYS project.

Skills or training offered by the NYS project, according to 21% of the respondents from Mathare and 43.9% from Kibra, contribute to their current economic opportunity. For instance, some Sarang'ombe (Kibra) cohorts used skills gained in NYS to get employment in related fields like plumbing, painting and construction. Makina cohorts reported that they are now mostly involved in sweeping and cleaning jobs obtained through the recommendation of NYS.

This discussion so far has shown that to a large extent, the inclusion of youth in economic activities through the NYS project contributed to a perception of reduction of crime in Kibra and Mathare. However, the majority of the cohorts stated that as soon as the project ended, crime increased. During the Makina focus group discussion, one cohort quipped, *'NYS went and crime returned.'* Likewise, responding to a question on comparing the prevalence of crime during the NYS project with the period when the project was terminated, cohorts from Kiamaiko (Mathare) stated, *'The amount of crime rose very rapidly [after NYS].'*

Conclusion

The NYS cohort programme proffered an elaborate economic scheme that included many youths in a wide range of economic opportunities comprising jobs, a

regular source of income, a savings fund and training on investments. These yielded life-changing effects such as encouraging a savings culture, acquisition of skills for future employment, expansion of existing businesses which included employing their peers, and reformation from crime.

Although reduction of crime is not articulated explicitly as one of the aims of the NYS cohorts programme, the economic opportunities offered to the NYS community cohorts impacted directly on reducing crime rates, preventing/deterring youth from engaging in law-breaking, reforming young men and women, and improving youth-police relationships. Nevertheless, there is a need for the government to holistically make long-term interventions that address political, social and economic conditions that drive people to crime.

Recommendations

- The government should explicitly make the correlation between youth economic empowerment programmes, crime and violence while designing such initiatives.
- For better-targeted interventions, there should be an in-depth analysis of the different varieties of crime and violence and the extent to which they can be addressed through empowerment opportunities.
- The government should deliberately build a robust evaluation and learning mechanism in projects such as this to ensure that lessons can be harnessed for future programming.



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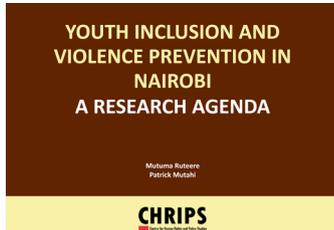
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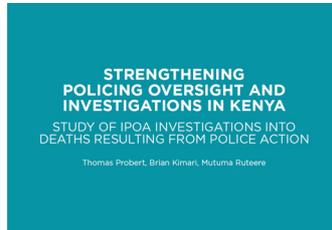
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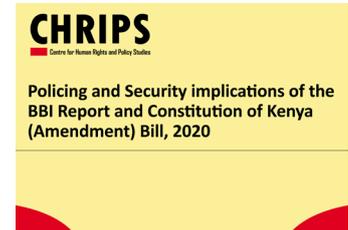
Youth Inclusion and Violence Prevention in Nairobi – A Research Agenda

This research addresses the theoretical and policy gaps on the nexus between economic opportunities, youth inclusion and violence prevention through an in-depth and critical research study of the National Youth Service (NYS) Community Cohorts Programme, which aimed at reaching thousands of youth in poor urban areas by offering them jobs to improve their neighborhoods and provide them with a new sense of purpose in their life. The methodology document outlines how using the NYS Community Cohorts Programme as a case study, fresh and new data will be provided on the impact of youth programs that seek to improve livelihoods through economic opportunities, as well as the challenges of violence and exclusion at local levels.



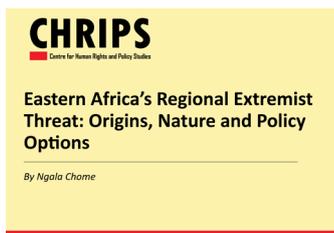
Strengthening policing oversight and investigations in Kenya

This report was written by researchers from the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS) and the Centre for Human Rights (University of Pretoria). It is based upon research undertaken as part of an EU-funded project implemented by a consortium of partners aimed at ensuring strengthening police oversight and investigations. In addition to CHRIPS and the Centre for Human Rights these partners are the Independent Policing Oversight Authority of Kenya (IPOA), the African Policing Civilian Oversight Forum (APCOF), and the Danish Institute for Human Rights (DIHR).



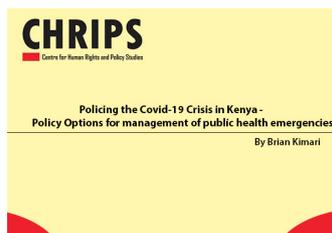
Policing and security implications of the BBI Report and Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Bill, 2020

The Presidential Taskforce on Building Bridges to Unity Advisory (BBI Taskforce) was appointed through Gazette Notice No. 5154, published on 31 May 2018. This was shortly following the 2017 general elections and was established following consensus between president Uhuru Kenyatta and Orange Democratic movement party leader, Raila Odinga. It was mandated to evaluate national challenges and make practical recommendations and reform proposals that build lasting unity in consultation with citizens, faithbased sector, cultural leaders, private sector and experts at county and national levels.



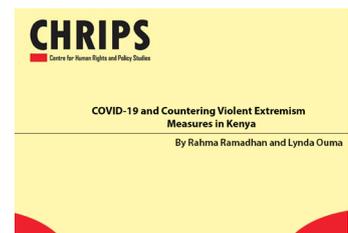
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