

Lessons on youth inclusion from the National Youth Service (NYS) Cohorts programme in Mathare and Kibra

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Introduction

This brief examines how the National Youth Service cohorts programme contributed to youth inclusion in economic life, governance and its impact on violence in Nairobi. Youth inclusion includes the ability to make social contributions, and to earn recognition and dignity. It is also about the youth gaining confidence in and commitment to economic initiatives.¹ It has direct economic, political, social, and cultural implications, and requires the availability of institutional channels for active engagement in community and public life.

The National Youth Service (NYS) Community Cohorts Programme was launched in 2014 to provide gainful employment to youth, support their re-socialization and foster a sense of responsibility. It also aimed to engage young men and women in economic activities through savings and training.² By October 2017, the programme had engaged 236,250 community youth in 253 constituencies across all the 47 counties.³

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. 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.

i. Economic opportunities offered

The theory underlying the NYS Cohorts Programme was that young men and women would learn essential skills, engage in community work, and save some money from the weekly wages they would use after completing the programme. It was also anticipated that the skills would help them start a business, get another higher quality job, or set themselves up in self-employment.⁴

From the survey, 93% of the respondents (95% men and 91% women) agreed that there were equal opportunities for men and women, indicating that they did the same duties without any discrimination by gender. In some cases, men would volunteer for the more strenuous work such as construction and cleaning out the deep trenches while women carry the garbage and performed other duties.⁵ One respondent stated that “gender was never a barring

¹ World Bank (2014) *Tunisia: Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion*, Washington: The World Bank Group p.10

² National Youth Service “National Youth Service & youth resocialisation,” NYS, <https://www.nys.go.ke/portfolio-item/national-service/> (Accessed on 14 December 2020).

³ Speech by His Excellency Hon. Uhuru Kenyatta, C.G.H., President of The Republic of Kenya And Commander In Chief of The Defense Forces during the National Youth Service Recruits Passing-Out Parade At The National Youth Service College, Gilgil On 16th February, 2018 <https://www.president.go.ke/2018/02/16/speech-his-excellency-hon-uhuru-kenyatta-c-g-h-president-of-the-republic-of-kenya-and-commander-in-chief-of-the-defence-forces-during-the-national-youth-service-recruits-passing-out-parade-at/> (Accessed on 12 December 2020)
The programme came to an end in 2018 following reports of corruption.

⁴ Mutahi, P. and Ruteere, M. (2020), *Youth Inclusion and Violence Prevention in Nairobi A Research Agenda*, Nairobi: Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, p.7).

⁵ Focus Group Discussion, Makina Ward, Kibra, September 2020.

issue to work as you could find women and men doing all sorts of works even construction, but of course for hard labour that required more muscle, the men were supportive”⁶.

NYS cohorts earned an income of 1,648 per week, and according to the household survey, 82% of the respondents said that with this income, they were able to meet regular expenses and needs and make some extra income for savings. The former cohorts argued that the main benefits from the NYS programme were that they met their and their families’ basic expenses and needs, e.g., food, fees (65.3%); started/expanded their business (39.3%), and gained skills and work experience (26.9%). While 32.7% of survey respondents indicated that they acquired skills and training contributing to their current economic opportunity, 24.9% felt that the programme had not contributed to their current livelihood.

The opportunities offered provided youth with the economic means to participate in governance, play their desired roles in society, and live a meaningful life.⁷ Focus Group Discussion (FGD) respondents pointed out that while the programme was ongoing, NYS members contributed to the local economy since they had increased purchasing power. Former cohorts pointed out that community members thought highly of them because their work benefited the community, they earned a regular wage and could cater to their needs.⁸ They also enjoyed a better relationship with police officers since they were working on a government programme.¹⁰ Some youth were also able to secure both elected and community leadership positions due to their networks while implementing the programme.

ii. Levels and quality of participation in the NYS programme

Meaningful participation occurs where youth engage in activities, they have control over and autonomy and feel connected to their community.¹¹ In the exercises, young people need to initiate ideas and share decisions with each other and a larger public.¹²

Majority of FGD respondents agreed that the recruitment process for the NYS programme was open and transparent.¹³ An FGD respondent stated: “The process was free and fair as the names were written in a transparent way without any corruption. Everyone was eligible to join provided you were willing and had met the age requirement.”¹⁴

Nevertheless, like many other government projects,¹⁵ the NYS cohorts’ programme only engaged the youth as beneficiaries rather than as a credible constituency that could have shaped its conceptualization and design. It was implemented through a top-down approach where young men and women were informed of their activities and roles. The danger with this approach is that it frames young people’s desired outcomes without their input and tends to ignore their ongoing realities.¹⁶ In Woodley Ward (Kibra), one FGD respondent recommended that “it would be great next time if they (NYS cohorts programme) came back, let them assess our needs and prioritize first before implementing projects.”¹⁷ In an FGD with women in Sarangombe (Kibra), former cohorts stated that they would have benefited from various other skills such as soap making, salon, tailoring, baking, and motorcycle riding.¹⁸ Participating in designing activities relevant

⁶ Focus Group Discussion, Woodley Ward, Kibra, September 2020.

⁷ Nussbaum, M. C. (1997) ‘Capabilities and Human Rights’, *Fordham Law Review* 66: 273-300; Sen, A. K. (1999) *Development as Freedom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

⁸ Focus Group Discussion, Sarangombe Ward, Kibra, September 2020

⁹ Focus Group Discussion, Kosovo Ward, Mathare, September 2020

¹⁰ Focus Group Discussion, Laini Saba Ward, Kibra, September 2020

¹¹ Wierenga A. (2003) *Sharing a new story. Young People in Decision making*, Melbourne: Australian Youth Research Centre

¹² Hart, R. (1992) *Children’s Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*, Innocenti Essay No. 4, Florence: UNICEF, Innocenti Research Centre.

¹³ Focus Group Discussion, Mlango Kubwa Ward, Mathare, September 2020

¹⁴ Focus Group Discussion, Mlango Kubwa Ward, Mathare, September 2020

¹⁵ Njonjo, K.S. (2010) *Youth fact book: Infinite possibility or definite disaster?* Nairobi: Institute of Economic Affairs – Kenya.

¹⁶ Wierenga A. (2003) *Sharing a new story. Young People in Decision making*, Melbourne: Australian Youth Research Centre

¹⁷ Focus Group Discussion, Woodley Ward, Kibra, September 2020

¹⁸ Focus Group Discussion, Sarangombe Ward, Kibra, September 2020

to their own lives allow the youth to contribute to more sustained and prolonged engagement. It also enhances their skills, increased sense of self-worth, and enhanced self-efficacy.¹⁹

The NYS failure to consult youth in Mathare and Kibra meant that the programme missed a chance to consider unique contexts of the young men and women. For example, the NYS required everyone to be over 18 years and have a National Identity Card. However, some of the respondents said some underage men and women were registered using their parents, friends, or sibling's identification cards (IDs). This, according to respondents, is because all youth felt they had shared difficult socio-economic circumstances and hence deserved to take part in the NYS even if they did not have an ID card.²⁰ A former cohort leader put it that: "Of course some (underaged) made it in, but we did not take an issue with it. We are all struggling so if someone made it good for them. It is simple. We know these guys in the community so we cannot deny them a job because of ID."²¹ Similarly, another cohort argued: "The project was initiated to help the needy. Some are slightly above the age limit but very needy, so there is no way we were going to stop such people from getting the help they dearly need unlike me who is below 35 years but capable of meeting my daily needs for survival."²²

The NYS cohorts voted for 'cohort leaders' from amongst themselves, a process that respondents found to be open and transparent. "For Woodley, it was very democratic, we had an opportunity to elect our leaders, and no leaders was imposed on us."²³

The leaders had authority over some operational aspects, including supervising the teams and

assigning tasks to the cohorts. This helped the programme adapt to some of the emerging issues during implementation. For example, Mathare women noted, "women with infants could work with the baby on their back and others would leave the kids with their friends. NYS officials would also allow about an hour break for women to breastfeed. Initially, they did not give that allowance so women would hide and breastfeed. They called them ghost workers but later after women complained they understood and made that 1 hour provision. They could also apply for leave when kids were sick".²⁴ Cohort leaders also pointed out that they would allocate breastfeeding mothers' jobs near their houses to easily and quickly attend to the babies. To ensure they received weekly wages, the cohort leaders made sure the mothers sign the register even if they could not start or complete their duty.²⁵

Similar accommodations were made for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). FGD respondents pointed out that the PWDs would often be tasked with less strenuous work such as daily registration of cohorts and recording equipment used. One former cohort also pointed out that they could accommodate her as a mother of a fourteen-year-old child living with disabilities by allowing her time to escort him to school in the morning and visit the clinic three times a week.²⁶

However, the cohort leaders authority was purely symbolic since they did not have much power in the decision-making or the agenda-setting process, which had already been determined before the project was rolled out. Youth participation can be more beneficial if young people are involved in decision making and implementation of policies.

¹⁹ Jennings, L.B., Parra-Medina, D.M., Messias, D.K.H., & McLoughlin, K. (2006) 'Toward a critical social theory of youth empowerment', *Journal of Community Practice*, 14(1/2): 31–55; Subramaniam, A., & Moncloa, F. (2010) 'Young people's perspectives on creating a 'participation friendly' culture', *Children, Youth and Environments* 20(2): 25–45.

²⁰ Focus Group Discussion, Hospital Ward, Mathare, September 2020

²¹ Focus Group Discussion, Kosovo Ward, Mathare, September 2020.

²² Focus Group Discussion, Mabatini Ward, Mathare, September 2020.

²³ Focus Group Discussion, Woodley Ward, Kibra, September 2020

²⁴ Focus Group Discussion, Kosovo Ward, Mathare, September 2020.

²⁵ Focus Group Discussion, Ngei Ward, Mathare, September 2020.

²⁶ Focus Group Discussion, Mabatini Ward, Mathare, September 2020.

Lessons learnt

1. Consulting and involving youth in programme design and implementation

There is a need to ensure that the youth are consulted and involved at all stages of the programme. However, this participation must be meaningful and not merely tokenistic. The activities they are engaged in must be relevant and essential to them and their community. They should experience control and autonomy and feel connected to their community.

2. Empower youth leaders

The NYS cohorts programme largely owes its success to the youth cohort leaders who were able to anticipate and respond to the youth's needs. Investing in these crucial partners will grow their leadership skills and encourage the feeling of community ownership in the programme.

3. Affirmative action for the most vulnerable categories

Interventions seeking to foster youth inclusion should simultaneously address a range of exclusionary dynamics to enable greater voice and participation of youth in the decision-making processes.²⁷ This can be achieved by putting in place affirmative action steps to eliminate existing barriers that affect the participation of vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, homeless, young parents and school dropouts.

4. Diversify training

Youth programmes should diversify and focus on offering youth the skills that are relevant and sustainable, with regards to their current realities. Deciding on the training should take on a bottom-up approach informed by a needs' assessment before any interventions are made.



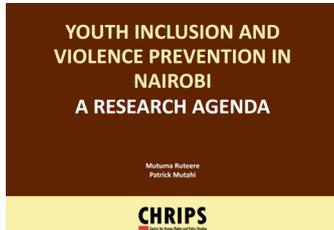
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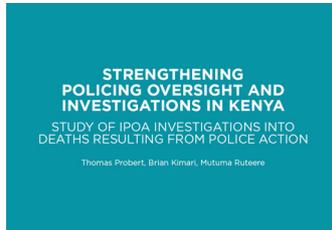
²⁷ World Bank (2014) Tunisia: Breaking the Barriers to Youth Inclusion, Washington: The World Bank Group, p.5.

Other Publications by CHRIPS



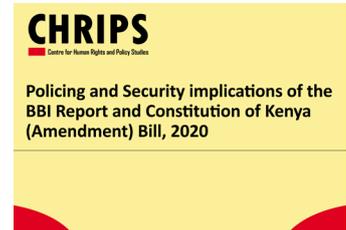
Youth Inclusion and Violence Prevention in Nairobi – A Research Agenda

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.



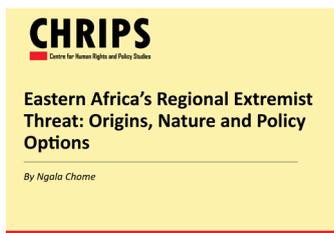
Strengthening policing oversight and investigations in Kenya

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).



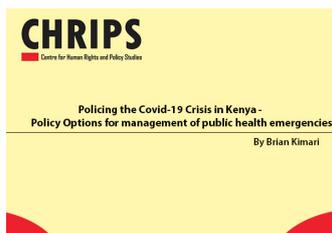
Policing and security implications of the BBI Report and Constitution of Kenya (Amendment) Bill, 2020

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.



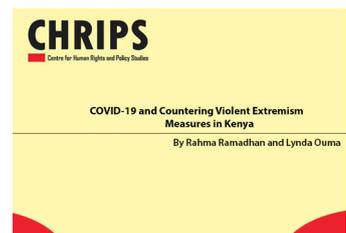
Eastern Africa's Regional Extremist Threat: Origins, Nature and Policy Options

This briefing paper discusses the potential for al-Shabaab and other jihad Islamist organisations to increase their geographical reach and lethality in Eastern Africa, and examines the local Islamist trends in the region that these organisations can and have tapped into to create a regional security threat.



Policy Brief 1 May 2020 Policing the COVID-19 Crisis in Kenya

This Brief offers a review of the legal, regulatory and policy framework for the management of COVID-19 in Kenya and how the police have enforced them. It proposes a number of policy options that speak to how policing of the COVID-19 as well as other public health emergencies can be enhanced.



Briefing Note 1 May 2020 COVID-19 and Countering Violent Extremism Measures in Kenya

This brief draws from discussions at an online forum convened by CHRIPS on "Tackling Terrorism in Kenya Amid COVID-19".

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