

Youth Inclusion and Violence Prevention in Nairobi

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Executive Summary

Limited access to economic opportunities for the youth and the effects on Kenya's security featured prominently in the aftermath of the 2007/2008 post-election crisis and subsequent post-election violence (witnessed in 2017). The need to address this challenge was identified as one of the key Agenda Four items under the Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation Accord of 2008 and subsequent policy instruments aimed at forestalling the use of young people in fueling post-election conflicts. For instance, how to handle the issue of unemployment among people, also featured under the proposed Building Bridges Initiative reforms under the banner 'shared prosperity'.

This research project assessed the extent to which the National Youth Service (NYS) Community Cohorts Programme in Kenya has contributed to youth inclusion in economic life and governance, and the impact of that inclusion on violence in Nairobi. Using the NYS as a case study, the research provides new insights on the impact of youth economic empowerment programmes on inclusion and violence prevention and reduction at the local level, thereby informing similar interventions targeting the youth in informal settlements. The study contributes to the broader scholarly discussions of youth empowerment and inclusion in Africa and the extent to which economic incentives and motivations contribute to prevention and reduction of violence.

Assessing Mathare and Kibera NYS Community Cohorts Programme as the two case studies, the objectives are three-fold:

1. To assess the extent to which National Youth Service Community Cohorts Programme in Kenya reached and provided opportunities for young men and women to participate in economic life and governance in their communities.
2. To assess the extent to which the National Youth Service Community Cohorts Programme in Kenya actually reached those youth most likely to engage in violence or illicit work.
3. To evaluate the local community impact of the National Youth Service Community Cohorts Programme - with respect to the inclusion of young women and men and on reduced levels of physical violence and criminality.

Data for the study was collected through a survey of 1,606 respondents (820 in Mathare, and 786 in Kibera), through key informant interviews as well as focus group discussions. Data from these sources was supplemented by a review of secondary sources including official government accounts on the NYS Community Cohorts Programme.

Data from the two case studies show that the NYS Cohorts Programme conferred benefits to individual youth taking part in the project as well as additional benefits to the community. At a personal level, the programme kept the enlisted youth members busy, they earned regular wages, accessed loan facilities through their SACCOs, while others used the earnings to start their own business ventures. The programme also enhanced

the social standing of the enlisted youth members in the community, hence feeling valued and appreciated by their communities. Some NYS Cohorts members also got involved in various community governance processes. The activities undertaken were appreciated by the community members as the neighbourhoods became cleaner, while the access roads and lighting improved the quality of life for the residents. Earnings by the youth also boosted business activities in the study sites as part of that money was used by the youth within these settlements.

Case studies data also show perceived reduction in crime in the areas where the programme was being implemented. By keeping the youth busy, they became less vulnerable to being lured into illicit activities, while the weekly wages ensured that they met their daily needs. However, as noted in the report, this linkage is at the perception level and much more data is needed so as to make any significant causal linkages.

An assessment of the research process for this assignment shows certain methodological innovations that added value to the overall delivery of the project outputs. One such innovation is the establishment of the Reference Group which provided technical backstopping for the research process and products. Further, the choice of Mathare and Kibera as sites for the case study also seems plausible. Community involvement may also have improved the buy-in by the local community on the research project. For instance, the inclusion of research assistants from these neighbourhoods made it easier to collect the data even in the face of Covid-19 at the time.

On the linkage between the research outputs, it is evident that all the research outputs are woven around the core research objectives and questions. The research methodology critique workshops, the two case study reports, policy briefs, newspaper opinion pieces, workshops with non-state actors and the validation forums were all weaved around the intersection between inclusion through provision of economic opportunities, crime and violence in the two study sites.

The research outputs speak to varied audiences such as the local community, state and non-state actors as well as academia. The findings were shared with the National Youth Service leadership, and relevant state actors such as the Nairobi City County Government, Ministry of Interior and the National Crime Research Centre. However, uptake audiences such as the private sector and critical state institutions should also be considered. In moving forward with the discussion on the linkage between economic opportunities among the youth and violence, CHRIPS may want to reflect on the following issues as potential areas for further research:

1. The Mathare case study report points out the difficulties in ascertaining peoples' perception of the nexus between youth unemployment and crime. The research did not collect crime data targeting these two sites to help corroborate the perception data. Thus, there is scope to collect crime data from official accounts in both sites before the project implementation; during project implementation as well as after the discontinuation of the programme. The data from secondary sources (e.g. police records) should also provide a profile of various types of crimes.

2. While the research was not designed with the sustainability question in mind, the findings point at the particular concern. In both sites, there are concerns as to whether the Programme did manage to create long-term stable jobs beyond the life of the project; or whether the training that Cohort members received led to long-term improvement in their economic status. In addition, there is lack of clarity on the continuity of the SACCOs established by the youth and whether any of these remains operational to date. Tracking sustainability indicators in the programme would add value to the design of future projects aimed at enhancing the inclusion of young people in the community's economic life as well as promoting security.
3. The definition of youth and the inclusion criteria posed certain operational challenges. For instance, by their very nature informal settlements are habited by largely vulnerable communities (e.g. to consumption shocks, income shocks, poverty etc.). As the two case studies show, the definition of the youth applied in the selection of Cohort members may have led to exclusion of equally deserving and vulnerable young people in the community (e.g. those aged 15 – 17 years and not in school), some of them perhaps in a more dire situation. The use of the national identity card as a confirmation of citizenship also opens additional spaces for exclusion the NYS Cohort Programme did not cure. For instance, there are integrated refugees in urban spaces. There is also no clarity on the extent to which other sub-national identities that define youth impacted the programme, with ethnicity and religion being key.
4. Additional research evidence is also needed to shed light on the implications of continued structural challenges (e.g. poor provision of social services such as water) on youth employment and crime in the informal settlements. The reports allude to the issue of extortion in the provision of services such as water, electricity and security. It would be useful to profile which sectors in the informal settlements are attractive to criminal gangs and why and the potential of enhanced service provision bottlenecks in the sectors in question to address some of the security concerns.
5. Finally, it would be useful to document how young people in the informal settlements engage with the governance structures at the national and county levels in their everyday politics. Engagement is critical because it not only improves the agency of the young people but also provides a platform for the youth to demand accountability on the part of the leaders for some of the challenges in their neighbourhoods.
6. CHRIPS research effort was aimed at documenting at the micro-level the impact of the NYS Community Cohorts programme on youth inclusion and crime. However, over the years there have been many interventions aimed at tackling the challenges that young people face in the country. It is here where there is a dearth of impact level data on what these interventions have meant for youth empowerment and inclusion. Such a study on impact assessment would help enhance knowledge on the value of such targeted youth interventions often funded by the government.

Part 1: Introduction

Unemployment particularly among the youth remains a major concern for public policy in Kenya. This is compounded by the youthful nature of Kenya's population structure. The 2019 Kenya population and housing census shows that 75 percent of the population is aged below 35 years, of which 39 percent is aged less than 15 years, while those aged 15 – 24 years' account for 20 percent. These numbers imply that many young people are entering the job market each year, yet the economy has not expanded in tandem with the rising population. For instance, a report by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) (2020:1) shows that each year around 800,000 young people are entering the job market. The IEA (2020) report further shows that the unemployment rate for youth between 15 -19 and 20 – 24 years is five times that of the national average as of 2015/2016. As of the 2019 Kenya population and housing census, more than a third of Kenya's youth eligible for work have no jobs, with an employment rate of 38.9 percent.¹

The lack of jobs and exclusion in socio-economic opportunities have been cited as drivers of youth's vulnerability to crime and other acts of lawlessness.² The issue of youth unemployment was cited as one of the main drivers of their involvement in Kenya's 2007/2008 post-election crisis.³ Given this connection, youth unemployment has been subject to numerous interventions by both state and non-state actors in the country. One such intervention is the Kenya Youth Employment Opportunities Project (KYEOP) which was aimed at providing low skills jobs for the youth in rural and urban areas from 2014. The programme was administered through the National Youth Service but halted in 2018 following corruption allegations at the NYS.

Despite the interventions undertaken, the issue of unemployment among the Kenyan youth remains high. In part, this explains the identification of this issue as one of the challenges to the country's shared prosperity under the Building Bridges Initiative (BBI). The BBI Report points out that 'the single most important matter facing Kenyans when it comes to shared prosperity is generating enough jobs and employment, particularly for young people.'⁴ The BBI Report further notes that it is not enough to merely improve economic output and present rates of investment, but that the country must entirely transform the way the economy operates if it is to deal with the present lack of jobs.⁵

¹The Business Daily, <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/bd/economy/census-39pc-of-kenya-youth-are-unemployed-2281430>

²One of the factors that predispose urban youth to crime is poverty. See for instance recent work by wa Teresia (2021). Juvenile Delinquency and Crime Nairobi Slum Areas, Kenya, in East African Journal of Arts and Social Sciences, 4 (1, 22 – 38.

³Kenya National Dialogue and Reconciliation, 2008, p. 2

⁴Building Bridges Initiative Report, 2019, p. 62

⁵Building Bridges Initiative Report, 2019, p. 13

The issue of youth inclusion is an important one given the narrative that alludes to an intersection between lack of economic opportunities and violence, especially among the urban youth.⁶ It is this thinking that informed a study on the National Youth Service Community Cohorts Programme by Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (CHRIPS), to help shed light on the co-relation between youth inclusion and violence. The focus was on Kibera and Mathare settlements, Nairobi. The assumption is that empowerment projects that provide economic opportunities to young people in urban spaces not only enhance inclusion but also reduce the risk of falling into illicit conduct.

The overall objective of the study was to analyze the extent to which the National Youth Service Community Cohorts Programme contributed to youth inclusion in economic life and governance; and the impact of that inclusion on violence in Nairobi. The specific objectives were three-fold:

1. To assess the extent to which National Youth Service Community Cohorts Programme in Kenya reached and provided opportunities for young men and women to participate in the economic life and governance of their communities.
2. To assess the extent to which the National Youth Service Community Cohorts Programme in Kenya reached those youth most likely to engage in violence or illicit work.
3. To evaluate the local community impact of the National Youth Service Community Cohorts Programme- with respect to the inclusion of young women and men and on reduced levels of physical violence and criminality.

This brief provides insights on the lessons that CHRIPS can pick from the implementation of the study on the National Youth Service Community Cohorts Programme in both Kibera and Mathare in Nairobi. The next section provides a critical reflection on this issue.

⁶World Bank (2010) Understanding and Supporting Community Responses to Urban Violence, Washington, DC: World Bank. xv

Part 2: Critical Reflections

The section details how the project was executed and the delivery of the project outputs. Particular reference is given to the research process; how the research findings link with the project outputs; linkage between policy and the findings of the study; identification of lessons learnt; and finally, establishing emerging issues that can be pursued as future projects by CHRIPS.

Research Process

The research process adopted by CHRIPS in the delivery of the research undertaking was well thought-out and solid to deliver a credible output. We take note of the inclusion of the Reference Group as an endeavour toward enhancing the quality of the research output. The Reference Group comprises of experts in a diverse set of fields including economics, gender, governance, youth matters as well as those with specific expertise on methodology. The logic behind the selection of Mathare and Kibera as the two cases of interests seems plausible.

Other notable methodological activities taken include: a research methodology workshop; pilot study; development of research tools; ethics and security protocol; actual data collection; writing retreat as well as dissemination. We find the iterative nature of the methodology workshops between 27 and 28 May 2019 and that held on 24 September 2019 as a good practice in solidifying the methodological edifice. Further, data collection through online tools like Survey ToGo not only creates efficiency in the data collection process but also minimizes sources of errors.

The research also coincided with the notification of the first Covid-19 case in the country on 12 March 2020.⁷ However, the team managed to collect the data, albeit in circumstances not envisioned in the initial project design. Thus, the research team was required to adhere to the then prevailing Ministry of Health protocols including social distancing and use of hand sanitizers among other measures. This may have added an extra unintended cost to the project.

In strengthening future research processes, CHRIPS may want to reflect on the following aspects:

- a. The pilot study was conducted in both Mathare and Kibera settlements. Often, it is important to conduct a pilot in a site separate from where actual data collection is to be done. In this regard, there is need for CHRIPS to explore the implications of conducting a pilot study on the same study site where the actual data collection is to be implemented. One danger with such an approach is the potential for

⁷See Ministry of Health, Kenya, <https://www.health.go.ke/first-case-of-coronavirus-disease-confirmed-in-kenya/#:~:text=Port%20Health%20Services-,FIRST%20CASE%20OF%20CORONAVIRUS%20DISEASE%20CONFIRMED%20IN%20KENYA,in%20China%20in%20December%202019.>

contamination hence exposing potential study participants to the questions and thereby possibility of biasing the findings.

- b. As part of the research process, CHRIPS developed ‘ethics and security protocol’ and the research teams were trained on the same before embarking on actual data collection. This is a good practice because collecting data in Kenya’s informal settlement does carry with it a security risk. However, the available documents do not provide details of what this did entail. The case studies were conducted in relatively underprivileged communities with many sources of vulnerability (e.g. livelihood shocks given high levels of poverty in the area). In this regard, it would have been useful to document safeguarding measures that the research team took into consideration. Part of the safeguarding measures should entail the protection of rights, safety and privacy of the research participants as well as the researchers.
- c. The application document for this research undertaking has identified the academia and policy makers as critical users of the insights generated through the study. Increasingly, as we collect data from the communities, there is always the question of ‘what is in it for the community’ or ‘how does the community from whom the data is collected stand to benefit from the research enterprise.’ Fortunately, the dissemination meetings held between June 7 – 10, 2021 were done with NYS Cohorts from the two study sites. Beyond policy briefs that may inspire action from right holders, it would be useful for CHRIPS to think of popular versions of the policy briefs so as to generate material for local level advocacy.
- d. The survey dissemination meetings held between 4 – 17 September 2020, lack clarity in terms of focus. It is unclear whether these were data collection forums, validation forums or both. If these forums were treated as focus group discussion meetings, then, survey validation forums would have been held separately. This way, we reduce potential sources of biases in the resultant data.

Linking Research Findings with Project Outputs

The project was expected to generate a number of outputs. These outputs included:

- (i) Research design and methodology paper
- (ii) two case studies
- (iii) a special journal issue
- (iv) a research report
- (v) three policy briefing papers
- (vi) newspaper opinion pieces
- (vii) 3 policy dialogues
- (viii) 2 validation meetings

- (ix) Researchers and data enumerators training
- (x) 4 critic forums
- (xi) 3 workshops with non-state actors
- (xii) 1 international workshop.

A reading through the key outputs from this project shows a measure of coherence and consistency. It's about how the NYS Cohorts Programme addresses the question of inclusion among the youth and the implications of that intervention on crime and violence in Mathare and Kibera informal settlements. The research methodology critique workshops, the two case study reports, policy briefs, newspaper opinion pieces, workshops with non-state actors and the validation forums were all weaved around the intersection between inclusion through provision of economic opportunities, crime and violence in the two study sites. In particular, the newspaper opinion pieces were spot on and shone the spotlight on the question of unemployment crisis among the youth and the need for policy-makers to pay attention to the unfolding social challenge.

The validation forums first with the former NYS Cohorts members, and also with the non-state actors dealing with youth violence and inclusion offered a useful platform for a broader discussion of the findings and implications. The forums raised additional nuances that improved the case study reports. It is instructive to note that the two week volunteering period that perhaps acted as a screener may have locked out many vulnerable youth from the project. In the case of study reports and other project reports, this issue of the volunteering period does not feature prominently, yet it could have undermined the inclusionary potential of the programme.

Linking Research Findings and Policy

As part of the outputs, CHRIPS committed to development of three policy briefs. Through the project, CHRIPS has produced two policy briefs, one in January 2021 and the second in February 2021. The former highlights the impact of NYS Cohorts Programme on reduction of crime and violence in Mathare and Kibera; while the latter identifies lessons on youth inclusion from the NYS Cohorts Programme. The dissemination meetings with the NYS leadership, Nairobi City County Government, Ministry of Interior, and the National Crime Research Centre were all targeted at influencing the policy space at varied levels.

Three media articles informed by the findings of CHRIPS study of the NYS Community Cohorts Programme also highlighted the challenge posed by youth unemployment in the country and also what can be done to arrest the situation.⁸ As the findings show, the NYS Cohorts Programme impacted positively on the economic situation of the targeted

⁸See for instance: <https://www.pd.co.ke/opinion/commentaries/how-kenya-can-resolve-youth-unemployment-crisis-14684/>; <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/analysis/ideas/How-Kenya-should-tackle-youth/4259414-5402912-gw31j5/index.html>, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/article/2001354643/skilled-youth-need-decent-jobs-are-we-creating-them>

youth as well as on their immediate communities. This is consistent with expectations on how targeted large scale social protection schemes should impact on the community.

Given the unsettled nature of the debate between crime and lack of economic opportunities, it would be useful if future studies corroborated community perception with crime related data in the areas under observation. Such additional evidence would be useful in providing directions on the causal linkage between the want of economic opportunities and crime. This means, tracking crime data for the period shortly before such an intervention is instituted (i.e. NYS Cohorts Programme), crime data during the Programme implementation period; and collecting crime related data after the end of the Programme period. As the reports show, public perception of the rate of crime reduction in the study areas is high (94%).⁹ This should be nuanced with secondary data sourced from crime reports in the areas under study.

A review of various project outputs shows a relatively well thought out research uptake strategy. Of particular significance is engagement with the local community including Mathare Special Planning Area group and a host of non-state actors working with the community. The research process would have benefited from the inclusion of a robust uptake strategy from the inception of the project. This means embracing the community and other critical stakeholders in co-designing the case study, including the questions to be asked and a conversation on the utility of the resultant data. In this regard, uptake should be seen as a continuous process throughout the research cycle so as to enhance utility of the resultant data and findings. The reports are also thin on the involvement of critical state actors such as Nairobi City County Government, national departments that touch on youth affairs (e.g. ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs) as well as the private sector. The research outputs are particularly silent on the role of the private sector.

Lessons Learnt

Drawing from various outputs resulting from the research project, several lessons stand out, especially regarding the research process as well as linking research findings with outputs and policy. These lessons may be useful in informing future similar studies as well as enhancing research uptake. Some of the key lessons are:

- a. Having a well-thought-out research plan improves the delivery of credible research outputs. Having a Reference Group as well as holding joint methodology workshops helped create a common understanding not only of the research strategy but a mapping of key issues of inquiry. In particular, the diversity of the expertise inherent in the Reference Group (economist, gender, governance, inclusion experts) all added value to the overall research strategy and the quality of outputs.

⁹Mungai (2021). Impact of NYS cohorts programme on reduction of crime and violence in Mathare and Kibera, CHRIPS Policy Brief 1, January 2021, p. 3

- b. Having a well-thought-out research strategy helps overcome changes in the environment that may impact the timely delivery of research outputs. In this regard, doing research in the context of stringent measures announced by the government to stem the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020 was possible given initial planning that had gone into rethinking the entire research process. A case in point is the prior identification of people within these communities to work as research assistants. This made entry easier as these are people known locally and were subject to less suspicion given the then prevailing health situation where people were hesitant to interact with those that they knew less about.
- c. Having prior relations with community-based organisations was helpful in getting entry into the two study sites. A key lesson is the need to nurture this and more relations to enhance intervention spaces.
- d. The research process embedded uptake after the preliminary findings. Research uptake must be embedded in the entire research process i.e. from design through the findings. This may help in guiding the research process to ask questions whose answers various stakeholders require to inform their interventions, or just to enhance utility of the resultant findings.
- e. The research outputs demonstrate the importance of having clarity on the concepts before undertaking actual field research. This is useful in helping clarify the kind of data to look for and why.
- f. On the research findings, we note that the framework used by the NYS Cohorts Programme to identify youth to be included did not provide opportunities to reach out to the 'hard to reach' youth. For instance, the emphasis on the Constitutional definition of youth may have led to exclusion of equally needy young people. In addition, the informal settlements are habited by people, the bulk of them vulnerable to various consumption-related shocks. It is therefore critical that public-funded social protection programmes targeting these areas expand their scope to include all vulnerable people, but improve on identification and targeting so that only the most vulnerable benefit.
- g. The proposal to have a special journal issue based on the findings from the NYS Community Cohorts study is invaluable in knowledge sharing and expanding spaces for uptake.

Potential for Future Research

The research outputs generated thus far have given useful pointers to what a social protection programme targeting young people in informal settlements can achieve in enhancing inclusion, economic opportunity and reducing vulnerability to recruitment to illicit behaviour. The research findings also provide new insights as to what new evidence is needed in helping address the challenge of youth unemployment, crime and violence, especially in informal settlements. What follows is an outline of potential areas for further research as a consequence of the presented findings:

- a. The issue of linking crime and violence to youth unemployment is a contested terrain, given the inherent additional structural challenges that predispose young people to crime. The Mathare case study report points out the difficulties in ascertaining people's perception of the nexus between youth unemployment and crime.¹⁰ The research did not collect crime data targeting these two sites to help corroborate the perception data. Thus, there is scope to collect crime data from official accounts in both sites before the project implementation; during project implementation as well as after the discontinuation of the programme. The data from secondary sources (e.g. police records) should also provide a profile of various types of crimes. This way, it would be possible to link trends in reduction or increase of particular crimes in the programme intervention continuum.
- b. While the research was not designed with the sustainability question in mind, the findings point to that particular concern. In both sites, there are concerns as to whether the Programme did manage to create long-term stable jobs beyond the life of the project; or whether the training that Cohort members received led to long-term improvement in their economic status. In addition, there is a lack of clarity on the continuity of the SACCOs established by the youth and whether any of these remains operational to date. Tracking sustainability indicators in the programme would add value to the design of future projects aimed at enhancing inclusion of young people in the community's economic life as well as promoting security. It would also help address the question of value for money from the public resources used in the programme at the two sites.
- c. The definition of youth and the inclusion criteria posed certain operational challenges. For instance, by their very nature, informal settlements are habited by largely vulnerable communities. As the two case studies show, the definition of the youth applied in the selection of Cohort members may have led to exclusion of equally deserving and vulnerable young people in the community (e.g. those aged 15 – 17 years and not in school), some of them perhaps in a direr situation. Use of the national identity card as a confirmation of citizenship also opens additional

¹⁰Mutahi, Patrick and Mungai, Melissa (2022). "NYS ilikuwa sure bet!" National Youth Service Cohorts Interventions in Mathare Report, p. 15

spaces for exclusion the NYS Cohort Programme did not cure. For instance, there are integrated refugees in urban spaces. There is also no clarity on the extent to which other sub-national identities that define youth impacted on the programme, with ethnicity and religion being key. This calls for future studies to ‘unbundle’ the concept of youth i.e. which youth?

- d. Additional research evidence is also needed to shed light on the implications of continued structural challenges (e.g. poor provision of social services such as water) on youth employment and crime in the informal settlements. The reports allude to the issue of extortion in the provision of services such as water, electricity and security. It would be useful to profile which sectors in the informal settlements are attractive to criminal gangs and why and the potential of enhanced service provision bottlenecks in the sectors in question to address some of the security concerns.
- e. Finally, it would be useful to document how young people in the informal settlements engage with the governance structures at the national and county levels in their everyday politics. Engagement is critical because it not only improves the agency of the young people but also provides a platform for the youth to demand accountability on the part of the leaders for some of the challenges in their neighbourhoods.
- f. CHRIPS research effort was aimed at documenting at the micro-level the impact of the NYS Community Cohorts programme on youth inclusion and crime. However, over the years there have been many interventions aimed at tackling the challenges that young people face in the country. It is here where there is a dearth of impact level data on what these interventions have meant for youth empowerment and inclusion. Such a study on impact assessment would help enhance knowledge on the value of such targeted youth interventions often funded by the government.

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