

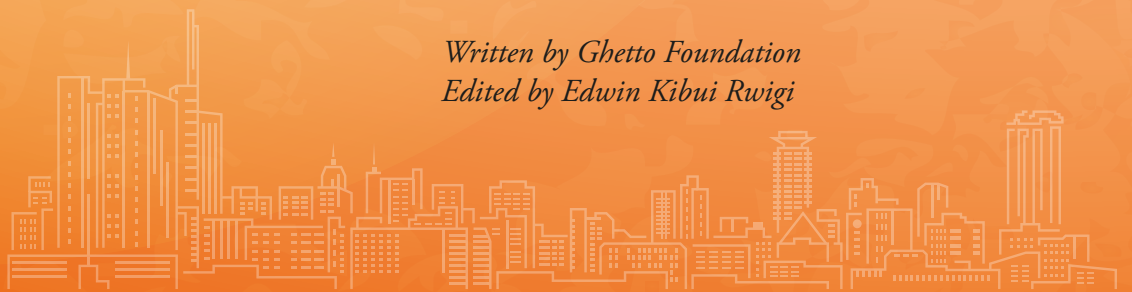


Narratives that Matter:

Community Led Research, Activist CBOs & Development Aid in Nairobi

LIFE as a YOUTH in MaHaRE

*Written by Ghetto Foundation
Edited by Edwin Kibui Rwigi*



Foreword

This book is one of the outcomes of a collaborative research project entitled “Towards Inclusive Partnerships: The political role of Community Based Organisations (CBOs) and the Official Development Aid System (ODA) in Nairobi, Kenya.” It brought together activists and scholars from the VU Amsterdam, HOYMAS, Ghetto Foundation and British Institute of East Africa. This research project uses what we call in academia, engaged scholarship. To sum it up briefly, engaged scholarship is research which works with those who the research concerns, unlike many other projects that are about a particular group. Engaged scholarship not only expects that through its methods it can make valuable theoretical contributions, difficult to obtain otherwise, but equally and perhaps at times even more important, it aims to make a difference for those groups and organizations involved in the research as well as have some broader social impact beyond the involved communities. One of the key principles on which it is grounded is that those who daily experience marginalization have a much better idea of what is needed, what stories need to be told than someone from outside. Thus, we combined our efforts in research. One way this was accomplished is through Community Based Research. It is through this method that members of the community are trained to do research, pose questions, get answers, dialogue and write it up. The results of this research process are found in this book.

This book is unique. It creates a space for two very different, but both marginalized and stigmatized groups to tell their stories: gay sex workers who are members of an activist Community Based Organization (CBO) HOYMAS and youth living and working in the slums of Mathare, who are members of the activist CBO Ghetto Foundation. Their stories are outcomes of a one-year research they conducted. While many of the readers of this book are familiar with the subjects, it is a rare opportunity to be able to read narratives told by those who live them daily. At the same time, the stories give insight into the community researchers’ awareness of what needs to be changed in society and how their CBOs are working to do this. In this way, the book tells the story of the difference it makes to be part of an activist CBO.

Finally, the book narrates the daily struggles of the members and their organizations for acceptance as activist CBOs in the official development assistance system. Most organizations in the Global South are dependent on the ODA system to thrive. These organisations are however required to comply with stipulations and demands of the ODA system that on some occasions hinder some aspects of community work. Thus, these narratives are filled with vision and ideas, which can give the reader a lot to think about. To say it simply, this book is a compilation of narratives that matter and I am very proud and happy that I could be a part of this process.

Dr. Lorraine Nencel , 24 June 2019, Amsterdam

Head of the research project

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Introduction

The Official Development Aid (ODA) System increasingly includes Community Based Organisations as partners in development arrangements because they are widely considered critical for sustainable and successful global development responses, especially in the field of advocacy and social transformation, yet they are rarely studied as actors in their own right. Mostly, they are considered as part of broader development arrangements such as strategic partnerships.

Insufficient attention is paid to the power relationships constructed within the ODA system, e.g. between CBOs, I/NGOs (hereafter referred to as NGOs) and inter/national donors, and very little is known about how CBOs on the ground grasp and are influenced by such power relationships in their work. What's more, despite the activist origin and character of most CBOs, research on CBOs involvement in activism is far from extensive while this is a growing field in planned development. To fill these (academic) gaps, and help answer vital policy questions in relation to future funding of CBOs, our research project investigated how the different positions of two activist CBOs in the ODA system constrain and/or enable their potentials to contribute to economic and social justice and inclusive development.

The research specifically looked at:

1. how access to funding influences the issues CBOs prioritize and the ways they address them;
2. the ways in which CBOs participate and contribute to policy making with government institutions;
3. how involvement in different networks and alliances strengthen and/or weaken CBOs political roles;
4. how CBOs' daily practices of dealing with urgencies, decision-making, capacity building, outreach work, donor demands, etc. increase and/or impede their political roles and;
5. what CBOs members' experiences reveal about their relationship with and effectiveness of the CBO in empowering their members to manage and navigate injustices.

This research focused on two specific cases: a gay sex worker-led CBO (called HOYMAS) and a social justice CBO focusing predominantly on police violence and economic justice (Ghetto Foundation). Both CBOs operate from low-income neighbourhoods in Nairobi. The former is well established in the ODA system, whilst the latter has only recently accessed it but has a long history of community organizing outside this system. The two different positions within the ODA system and organizational histories allowed for a comparative analysis on their positioning and ensuing political processes, relationships and strategies; allowing us to observe from the ground the different practices, interventions and projects that are developed and implemented from their different positions.

We employed various qualitative methods to investigate the everyday dynamics and practices of the two CBOs, their interactions with the communities they aim to serve and represent, with other community-based organisations, and with other (more powerful) actors in the ODA system. Our methods included a 3-month literature review and 15 months of empirical research. The empirical part involved a wide variety of qualitative methods, which were employed by five academic – and 20 community researchers from both CBOs. The research activities in this

period ranged from the more obvious (i.e. participant observations, ethnographic fieldwork, interviews with stakeholders, network mapping and document analysis) to the more unique, namely **Community Led Research and Action (CLRA)** which led to the production of this book.

Altogether, the research was structured as an intensive collaboration between academics, community researchers, CBOs and their members, with constant learning loops between all involved to ensure that the research was conducted incrementally and collaboratively. As a result, the research outcomes provide knowledges that support policy makers working in the ODA system to rethink funding practices and improve the positions of CBOs. Simultaneously, the findings aim to strengthen the capacities of CBOs to improve their positions within and outside the ODA system. The research this book is based on was keen to particularly understand the everyday dynamics and practices of CBOs and the communities they are embedded in from the perspectives of members and residents.

Community Led Research and Action

CLRA is designed and conducted by community members, i.e. those whose lives are affected by the issues being studied. Hence, they lead in all phases of research and action for the purpose of producing useful results and achieve positive changes. Community members thus decide on their own priority issues, and by using community developed and/or approved research approaches they themselves amplify the voices and choices of the wider community throughout the research process and action. The overall aim is to achieve locally relevant and meaningful outcomes that ultimately lead to sustainable social change.

CLRA strives to be:

Community-driven – the community owns the entire process of research and action, from design to knowledge collaboration and action to evaluation and continuation, thus promoting community self-determination.

Action-oriented – the gathered knowledge is translated by community researchers into action during the process of research to engender positive social change and promote social equity.

Long-term – The research and action leave a legacy, both in terms of the utilization of research results into action (and as such durable change), as well as in future collaborations among participants.

Basic principles:

- Community members identify relevant research topics.
- Community members manage the resources of the research and action (financial, expertise, etc.)
- The research process recognizes and utilizes the expertise that community members have.
- The research process is driven by values, including: empowerment, supportive relationships, social change, learning as an on-going process and respect for diversity.
- The research process and results are accessible and understandable to the wider community (i.e. non-participating community members).
- The research process and results consider and adapt to the context in which the research is conducted.

The role of formally trained (academic) researchers in CLRA:

Support ~ researchers support community control of the research and action agenda through facilitating their active and reciprocal involvement in the research design, implementation and dissemination. The research process recognizes and addresses power imbalances between supporting researchers and the community researchers (the participating community members). The formally trained researchers actively abrogate these by 'assisting from behind.' Hence, they facilitate the process by aiding the community researchers to create, synthesize and mobilize knowledge, with the aim of democratizing knowledge creation and dissemination and inform inclusive action towards sustainable change.

Triangulation with additional research methods ~ Formally trained researchers add to the knowledge collaborations of CLRA by conducting interviews, formal participant observations and surveys to have different sets of data speak to each other and verify factual, discursive and everyday accounts.

Through CLRA community members identify and explore particular causes, enablers and narratives of a particular problem in their own specific contexts. This sets the stage for teams to co-construct actionable knowledge together and develop contextualized initiatives to counter the problem at hand and develop resilience mechanisms that are recognized, owned and sustained by the individuals and groups themselves, long after the project period ends.

Through CLRA, participating youths start grasping their own experiences and perceptions of 'others' and of 'selves' as part of broader (historical, political, social and economic) narrative frameworks. This is a key step in opening up and actively developing new thought frames that allows them to take up alternative social positions in society. The second step is underpinning these new thought patterns and positions through long-term action aimed at capital enhancement. This type of research encourages the participating researchers to translate new knowledge into targeted and sustainable action at the tacit, behavioural, relational and system levels. The combination of self-led research and action fosters a distributed form of personal and group leadership while promoting and consolidating relevant (social, cultural and economic) capital and strengthening their senses of belonging to their communities.

CLRA and ethnographic research:

Ethnographic research is a qualitative method where researchers observe and/or interact with a study's participants in their real-life environment. This fully immersive, 'live and work' approach to ethnography is to get 'under the skin' of a problem (and all its associated issues) and thus achieve a comprehensive grasp of the problem as lived by people themselves.

In sensitive contexts, such as those marked by multiple marginalisation and criminalisation, traditional research methods such as surveys and semi-structured interviews are ineffective to unearth and grasp the 'unspoken'. Such methods often lead to socially desirable or acceptable answers. Consequently, research on local dynamics needs to focus on the behavioural rather than the discursive level if we wish to understand the subtleties and tacit knowledge and practices. In the case of community researchers, their insiders' perspective is considered crucial. Through this type of research, community researchers become aware of what they already know (i.e. their lived experiences and that of their peers) and use this as a basis for further knowledge creation, which then informs embodied action. Not only does this promote empowerment among the community researchers themselves, it also allows a profound grasp of highly complex phenomena. This type of ethnography (as conducted by community members) improves our understanding of the dynamics between individual and collective practices and broader social arrangements. In other words, ethnographic accounts allow us to transcend public debates and to focus instead on lived, embodied realities of current societal challenges, such as inequality, urban violence and exclusion of minorities. Through a conscious presence

in various spaces where peers gather, the community researchers (who are also their friends, neighbours, co-workers) are able to analyse unspoken practices.

Through **Community Led Research & Action (CLRA)** the project worked with members of our two partner CBOs, HOYMAS and Ghetto Foundation, as community researcher (CR) – 10 from each CBO. With CLRA the CRs build rich descriptive contexts of the two communities that the two CBOs work in. Through their research contribution in the CLRA process, the CRs show how CBOs connect to the everyday experiences and social emergencies of their communities in general and members in particular. Their findings as captured in this book describe the relationships between local development contexts and the CBO's activist roles.

While other participatory methods acknowledge the importance of community engagement, CLRA is unique in that it encourages CRs to take the lead at every step of the research and action process. It is both a method and tool encouraging individuals without a 'formal' research background to critically interrogate the nature of their reality. CLRA is a collaborative registry of voices articulating the lived experiences in the margins, which provides deep and personal accounts of social realities relevant to policy design interventions. This is in line with the Freirean tradition of 'problem-posing'. Through CLRA the project also sought to empower the two communities in knowledge generation for social change.

For a period of 5 months, the CRs collected both auto-ethnographic and ethnographic data. They kept personal journals where they recorded their reflections on everyday activities or experiences. They also recorded observations and conducted interviews in their communities. They thereafter shared and discussed their findings with each other at a weekly analysis session. From these analysis sessions the two teams highlighted themes emerging from their data. From these themes they would then propose new weekly research questions for further investigation. This was an iterative process, which cumulated into a large data set describing different aspects of community life through the eyes of community members. The two teams then embarked on a secondary cycle of data analyses in the three months that followed. The two teams chunked and coded their team's data set. Each CR then picked a unique theme emerging from these codes. In line with these code, the CRs further formulated propositions attempting to illustrate the relationships underpinning social phenomena in their community. These propositions guided their writing process. For this writing phase, essentially every CR was working with his or her team's collective data set giving another collaborative dimension to the writing up process. During this time, the CRs read their written research reports to each other in an exercise we called 'community peer review.' During these reading exercises, the CRs gave each other critical and constructive feedback in a process that both validated their findings and built on their writing. At the end of this last three months, the two teams produced 17-community research outputs, which have been put together in this volume for dissemination for a broad audience.

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Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research
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Table of Contents

	Pages
Organisations in My Community: Challenges in Community Development in Mathare by Calvin Shikuku	1
Government Negligence and Access to Healthcare Services in Mathare by Davis Lichuma.....	5
Youth and Unemployment: 'Entrepreneurial' Ourselves Out of Poverty by Edwin Odhiambo.....	7
The Life Of A 'Reformist': Getting in And Out of Crime in The Ghetto by Jojez	11
A Neglected Community: Disaster Management in Mathare by Jacob Omondi	15
A Gendered Community by Kate Wanjiru	19
Community Involvement and Development: National Youth Service projects in Mathare by Pauline Waigumo	25
Policing Our Community: The Normalization of Crime and Extrajudicial Killings in Mathare by Grace Wambui and Edwin 'Jeep' Odhiambo	29
Resources, Identity, Conflict and Peace Building in my Community by Tobias Orao	33



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1. Organisations in My Community: Challenges in Community Development in Mathare

By Calvin Shikuku

Mathare is a very highly populated residential area. It is home to more than four hundred thousand people occupying a three square kilometre strip of land. Many of Mathare's residents struggle to find decent livelihoods, as opportunities are very limited. The few that have an education or other professional qualifications aspire for lives away from Mathare. It is in this context of limited opportunities and even poverty that many organisations have been set up in Mathare to meet the various needs of the community.

Many people in Mathare have been impacted by the work of organizations in one way or another. Organizations have taken over most roles of the government in the community. Their relevance in the community is in meeting the needs of the residents resulting from government neglect. As such, residents have come to greatly rely and even grow dependent on these organisations. A Mathare youth reflected on the work of organisations in the community and impact on his life by saying:

They [organisations] have much impact on the lives of youths... Mathare is an area highly populated with a high number of youths. It is characterized by many challenges such as drug abuse, early marriage, crime and so on. So these institutions do collaborate by ensuring that the youth get support in life skills training, mentorship and ensure most youths go on with education. I have a few friends who were left out when an organisation I joined was recruiting youths for its programmes. The chances are limited to only a few people... This was a good opportunity for me. I have since bumped into people who missed out on it. We would now have been at the same level if they were also recruited. Some have lost hope in life. Some are helpless as they have families to fend for. I stand as a living testimony. I am a beneficiary of an organisation's sponsorship programmes. Many people lack facilities in Mathare compared to other areas like Runda and Lavington where people can afford some services like health, education and sanitation. That's why they [organisations] come in and help where they can.

With this and other interview excerpts we appreciated that for many youths, organisations are first and foremost seen as avenues through which they can access economic opportunities and meet some basic needs. These opportunities are however not guaranteed to all youths as was also reported by another respondent working with a local organization: "Every year we get many people who are new to our programmes. The enrolment process sometimes locks out some people because of the limited resources and facilities but we still manage."

Our research was keen to understand the value the community places on organisations in various community development efforts. We were particularly keen to hear from youths in the community. From our findings we classified organisations in the community into three broad categories: 'Organizations zakukam,' these kinds of organizations are not indigenous to the community, they are 'foreign' in this sense. Under this category fall the international organizations and many NGOs. Most of these organizations are based in the business district and affluent parts of the city. The second category is 'Organizations zamabeshte', these are organizations founded by community members, a group of friends in most cases. Most organizations especially indigenous Community Based Organizations (CBOs) fall under this category. They are organizations formed by a group of people who in most cases grew up in the same neighbourhood and are trying to meet a need in the community and also make a livelihood. The third category is 'Briefcase organizations.' These organizations do not fully 'exist'. They often do not have a physical address. Some may have an online presence. There

is no distinction between a briefcase organization and its founder. These organizations may or may not be legally registered but often do not have clear mandates. Their work tends to be situational – focussing on the circumstances of the season at hand, and opportunistic – motivated by the economic interests of the founders. As it would therefore be expected, community members have varying opinions of organisations. All in all, community members have learned how to also look out for their interests the best way they can when interacting with these organisations. A respondent captured this position aptly when he or she said:

It is true that some organisations are formed for personal gain of the founders but that should not be the single story used to throw a blanket of condemnation over all organizations. Basically, organizations are doing a good job in achieving a sustainable community for development.

It is in the context of these types of organisations and their work in my community that I discuss their successes and challenges in the community.

Our research findings revealed that all the different types of organizations play a big role in many people's lives. They are present in almost all spheres and stages of people's lives. They are present in education, health, security and many more. If one is lucky enough they may be supported almost in all stages by hopping from one organization to another. This has however made many in the community exceedingly dependent on organisations. This is an important aspect in community development because some of these beneficiaries in my community are left stranded in the event support is withdrawn. In such cases community members experience unprecedented vulnerability in their everyday life. According to a respondent, many youths assume that organizations will always be there for them. From encounters I have had in the community, I think many youths do not take responsibility for their lives. I attribute this to the 'dependency syndrome,' the attitude or belief that people have no contribution to make in solving problems in their community or their own lives. NGOs have taken full responsibility of people's lives, making them extremely dependent. In an interview a respondent said, "Youths in Mathare view organizations as places where they can go and get a sitting allowance whenever the organizations hold meetings." A local youth and a community tour guide also said: "Youths especially in the neighbourhood view organizations as instruments of tapping donations from the 'whites'." He further described community perceptions of his tour work by saying: "Whenever I am seen with some wazungus (white people) then it is definitely known that I have been given some money."

Many youths look to these organisations for employment or some form of livelihood. The feeling, however, in the community is that only a few locals have benefitted from employment offered by foreign organizations, 'Organisations Zakukam'. According to a respondent the locals only get manual and other unskilled jobs:

For me they [Organisations Zakukam] don't perform, only the slum organizations are the ones at least doing something because we come together to work on something. If you come to the community, majority of the people do not complete school and some do not even go because of some circumstances. So you find out that even if there is a job somewhere, unless its manpower, many people do not apply at all.

In another interview, a community member described the work of many organisations, especially Organisations Zakukam as not having a long-term impact. The respondent said:

My perspective of organizations especially in the slum is that many organizations give youths hope but they do not fulfil it. You find that they give you skills, you participate in forums but at the end of it there is no fruit.

The respondent went on to talk about the dependency organisations have created among youths in the community. He described this by saying the following:

It's like they give you fish when you are hungry but forget that tomorrow you will be hungry too. So instead of giving you fish why don't they teach you how to fish? That's why you find majority of the youth, when they hear about a forum all they think about is money because that is what they are used to. I have had a hard time convincing some youths about the benefits of being affiliated to an organization as I am. But I don't look the part. I do not look like one who benefits.

A respondent said that organizations sometimes focused on initiatives that were not directly beneficial to the larger population. He added that most initiatives focus on theory, which ends up not being beneficial to many people. He added that many programmes were theoretical in the sense that beneficiaries gained skills but were not in a position to utilise the skills because all they get as proof are certificates yet the most suitable need they have is acquiring hands on skills. Many people in his community have businesses and would love to be guided on how to make them better as an interviewee said: "I would love to see youths empowered through business. Technical knowledge is way better than theory which many organizations focus on. I would also love to see youths taught on investments and how they can run their businesses." The respondent also cited inadequate capital as a major challenge facing many youths.

The belief is that programmes of these organisations sometimes only temporarily address the needs of the society. Some of the programmes become obsolete almost as soon as they start. No elaborate measure is put to measure the relevance of a particular programme in a particular area before it is implemented. Rarely are initiatives based on research to support the operations. According to a respondent who works for a local organization, the issues they address are mostly based on the common challenges easily visible.

The work of Organisations Zakukam in particular was contrasted with indigenous CBOs. Many CBOs were described as embedded in the community. These were found to have a deeper contextual appreciation of community life. When explaining how their organisation was founded, a respondent also said:

Mwangaza* organization was founded by a group of people who were raised in the area. They as well lived in the small 10 by 10 feet houses. They as well lacked the space to study in their childhood. Having faced that similar challenge slum children face today, they wanted to make their community better by providing reading space... When the organization was founded in 2004, Mathare was known for all the wrong reasons. There was prostitution, rampant theft, rape, drug abuse and abortion. Our founder together with others came together to address these issues. So the programmes were selected because they would address the immediate problems the people were facing.

Our findings are that many individuals and youth in particular, have a great mistrust of organisations of all types. This has made running organizations difficult because many residents have lost hope in many organizations. This mistrust has escalated despite the fact that many residents still believe that there are genuine organizations out there that are working hard to better the livelihoods of many in the community. Some of our respondents felt as though organizations exploit the challenges faced in the community to make money. A community member said:

Organizations have become a source of income for a few individuals who have managed to create connections with those from abroad. They sell touching stories to them and whenever they are given money by the donors, the cash does not get to those they are supposed to help.

Many community members therefore feel that they deserve a share from the monies that local organisations make in their name. In describing this sense of entitlement a respondent said: "they believe organisations are getting rich using these stories and situations to get funds from donors."

The roles that many organizations in my community play are unmatched. Organizations collectively play a vital role in the community. Their impact runs deep. However, in this setup where many people largely depend on and in many cases even compete for opportunities offered by organizations, many things have gone horribly wrong. The mistrust exists because the community has very high expectations of organizations, which are often unrealistic. Be this as it may, many organizations do not conduct their affairs in a transparent manner. The working environment becomes poisonous because of the constant strife and the idea of survival. Organizations therefore have no choice but to deliberately customise the way they operate in the community in order to respond effectively to the challenges facing the community. In order to minimize the mistrust, the doors of organizations need to be more open to the community. This applies to both the foreign and the local organizations. Change is easily realized when the community gets a platform where it can find its own solutions. Bringing initiatives without the involvement of the community in finding solutions makes the community appear to be part of the problem.

Besides impact assessment, organizations need to conduct research and include community members in the design and implementation of their programmes. In this way organizations will better understand the relevance of any initiative even before it is launched. This is important because the resources can then be channelled towards programmes that bring more change to the community.

Calvin - SHOFCO an NGO with a branch in Mathare



2. Government Negligence and Access to Healthcare Services in Mathare

By Davis Lichuma

Two men in the matatu were talking about the famous handshake between the president Uhuru Kenyatta and former Prime Minister Raila Odinga. They were saying that the politicians are to blame for the bad state of the country. One of the men said that we ordinary Kenyans are to blame too because we fight for them. The other said that he had put his hope in Raila to fight for the people, but he was now a very disappointed man because the two guys are now eating together.

The general feeling people have in my community is that our politicians and the government do not think about poor people. The cost of living has gone up and many are struggling to survive life in the community. There is no government effort to support vulnerable communities to meet their basic needs. It is in the face of this neglect that we are forced to look for alternatives or get creative about things.

Access to healthcare services is a good example of how people in my community experience and respond to government neglect. Many people from informal settlements are unable to access decent healthcare services mostly because of costs.

Here in my community if I just look around I can say we don't have enough health facilities and we also lack adequate health personnel. You will often see long queues of patients at nearby medical facilities. Government facilities are inaccessible; they are mostly located out of the community as many other public utilities are. According to our findings, "government hospitals are out of reach" and the few that exist are "mostly neglected and are slowly turning to ruins." Public health facilities were also described as not being time efficient. Personnel at these facilities were accused of having a poor code of conduct in their service delivery – lax, seemingly unmotivated, and yet with secure job tenures. Like in many other aspects of community life, the absence and neglect of the government creates a huge gap in healthcare service provision. It is in this space that various actors step in to fill the gap. People in my community are therefore forced to seek healthcare services from privately owned medical centres as a community member explained: "Health facilities in my community... are either privately owned or are run by organisations."

For-profit or private health care providers come in different shapes and sizes. Many operate informally, while others appear to be formal, and yet others seem to be both. Because many of these facilities are unregulated by the government, often individuals with no formal medical training offer medical services in the community. Unqualified 'medics' or chemists also play doctor at some of these facilities. In describing the qualifications of people providing healthcare in the community, an interviewee said:

These medics have nothing more than a high school education, but nonetheless operate chemists and clinics. They are not trained in medicine. So I am not sure if they sell me the right medication or not.

People in the community prefer to go to some of these private facilities or clinics because of their affordability. At the more informal ones, patients can even negotiate treatment prices. Some of these healthcare providers also offer alternative remedies such as herbal medicines, which are even more affordable. These facilities are usually easy to get to especially in times of emergencies. People learn about the quality of their services by word of mouth from family and friends. Findings from our research highlighted Poa* Clinic and Kwa Dan* as examples of private health providers operating in the community:

Poa a known drunk is reputed for saving lives, but he is not a certified medical professional. He has won the trust of people with the little knowledge he possesses. Certification and licencing does not matter in the ghetto; trust does.

This puts the lives of many vulnerable community members seeking medical attention at risk. A community member said he was suspicious of medical services at these kinds of facilities. It was implied that the diagnostics of these facilities are poor, unreliable and even exploitative, "in the ghetto," a respondent said, "All deaths are attributed to malaria..." Another respondent spoke of an incident where a 'doctor' at a private clinic deliberately gave a wrong diagnosis to a healthy child with the intentions of making money out of their parent.

There is a need to improve access to quality healthcare services for the community. You see it is not many people who go to hospital when they're sick. The only thing the government can do right now is to add hospitals and to get us health personnel – qualified and well experienced personnel, not just any personnel. This will reduce the waiting period patients have to endure as they wait for treatment at hospitals.

Davis - A local chemist in Mathare



3. Youth and Unemployment: 'Entrepreneurial' Ourselves Out of Poverty

By Edwin Odhiambo

I was born and raised in Mathare. Growing up I was aware that my community grappled with petty crime, robbery, prostitution, and other issues. I later came to realize that these so-called social problems were actually means by which many in my community were surviving everyday life. I have come to appreciate how these issues are closely related to poverty and especially youth unemployment. They speak to the vicious cycle of poverty in informal settlements. Poverty produces conditions that lead to such concerns as insecurity, early pregnancies, drug abuse, and unemployment, which only make the situation dire.¹ Youth are trapped in the slum and in the informal economy where many are hardly making ends meet. Even the few with academic qualifications are struggling to find employment in the areas they were trained in.

In my community youths are for the most part seen as a problem to be contained, a threat to peace and security. The community has developed a negative attitude towards youths, as they are often associated with crime and insecurity, which are prevalent in the ghettos. The community throws blanket condemnation on the youth. A community elder during an interview described youths as follows: "These young boys and girls have lost direction; they can't just come up with a genuine way of making a living. Do they have to steal? Let them meet the bullet!" This statement also sheds some light on the community's sentiments on extrajudicial killings. They have mixed feelings. As much as this old man might be of the opinion that it is okay for the youth to 'meet the bullet' some think it is brutal. During our interviews, a respondent described their desperation by saying, "We are losing our fathers, husbands, brothers to unlawful and brutal police killings. They are only just trying to make a living. The government should provide jobs and various projects in the slum and they won't have to talk of youth involvement in crime anymore." I believe a fair assessment of life in the ghetto will reveal that youth involvement in crime is a symptom of the greater problem of limited access to economic opportunities. Youth unemployment in the country has reached a crisis level.² This problem is especially pronounced in Nairobi's informal settlements such as Mathare, which host about three-quarters of the city's population of four million.³ Ghetto youths attempt to come up with creative and innovative ways of making a living in spite of the odds stacked against them. Many are forced to navigate around legality and illegality to seek out opportunities to earn a living in the informal sector.⁴ Both government and development actors are consistently encouraging youths to create jobs for themselves, as employment opportunities are few and far in between in the economy.⁵ Starting and running a business has been presented as the only viable and perhaps legal way of getting out of poverty for many youths in my community. And so, many youths are trying their luck in business.⁶ When describing his ambitions in life, a local youth said: "The biggest thing

¹ Van der Westhuizen, "The Struggle against Poverty, Unemployment and Social Injustice in Present-Day South Africa: Exploring the Involvement of the Dutch Reformed Church at Congregational Level," *Stellenbosch Ecological Journal*, 2015, doi:10.17570/stj.2015.v1n2.a35.

² Tatiana Thieme, "Youth, Waste and Work in Mathare: Whose Business and Whose Politics?," *Environment and Urbanization* 22, no. 2 (2010): 333–52, doi:10.1177/0956247810379946.

³ UNFPA, "Kenya - Population," *Unfpa*, 2014, doi:10.1016/j.regg.2015.07.007; UNDP, "Micro, Small and Medium-Size Enterprises (MSMEs) as Suppliers to the Extractive Industry," 2015. ya que los ancianos son un colectivo de riesgo por sus características biológicas, psicológicas y sociales. A pesar de su alta re

⁴ Gideon K Kirui, "Determinants Of Youth Self-Employment In Kenya.," 2016.

⁵ Collins Omulo, "Create Jobs, Don't Just Look for Employment Young People Urged," *Nation.Co.Ke*, 2018, <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/Create-jobs--don-t-just-look-for-employment-youth-told/1056-4707362-q7v6m-hz/index.html>.

⁶ The idea of 'entrepreneurial out of poverty is borrowed from Ory Okolloh. See: <https://qz.com/afri->

I would like to achieve is to open a boutique that would help me sustain my family and meet my needs sufficiently.” Unfortunately, many youth-owned business ventures are struggling. The Kenya National Bureau of Statistics suggests that about 440,000 micro, small, and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) shut down yearly between 2011 and 2016 (KNBS, 2016). Starting and running a successful business is not as easy as many imagine. Youths in my community are, however, still encouraged to start businesses to empower themselves economically in spite of the odds for success. Youth employment and self-employment in my community could be described as vulnerable.⁷ Most of the self-employed youths in my community are in such ventures as food vending, public transport, hawking, personal grooming, private security and so on.

Different programmes have been designed and implemented to address youth unemployment in my community. The government in particular has attempted with such initiatives as the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF), the Uwezo Fund, and the National Youth Service (NYS) Slum Upgrading Projects (unfortunately many of these programmes have been rocked by allegations of corruption).⁸ NGOs and CBOs are also making efforts towards youth economic empowerment. This is for the most part done through business skills development as a respondent at a local organisation described it:

We have tested the idea of youth empowerment from the aspect of entrepreneurship in different slums and it all works, and so I believe the approach is efficient and fun and captivating. I would not say we have not found a few challenges here and there, yes we have! And we are working toward navigating through them to our main goal.

However, youth problems such as inability to take care of their daily needs in poor neighbourhoods have been worsening despite the initiatives offered by the government and other development actors.

The role of government cannot be understated in the effort towards job creation for youths in my community. I believe that the government needs to invest in informal communities and also make credit facilities more accessible to local youths. Frankly speaking, however, there is more to youth economic empowerment than just having youths start businesses. In order to help youths both the government and development actors such as NGOs and CBOs need to come up with holistic and integrated programmes whose development objective is to improve the livelihood of people living and working in informal settlements. At the heart of the youth unemployment issues is a question of wellbeing. Youth unemployment in the ghettos cannot be treated or solved in isolation. There is a need to also consider what makes an enabling environment for youth enterprise and employment. It is in this context that such concerns as decent and affordable housing, access to basic services, provision of physical and social infrastructure, peace and security (which also includes food security), wellbeing in other words, are also seen as relevant factors for an enabling economic environment. Secondly, the proposed integrated programmes need to have a good contextual understanding of the lives of youths in my community. These can only be achieved when the programmes include the participation of community members, youths in particular, in the design and implementation of economic empowerment projects. It is only fair that community members are involved in such processes that for all intents and purposes could impact on their lives. It is in fact our right to participate. Finally I would boldly say that there are opportunities for youth and this is something very evident from the research work and we should believe in. These include fields like agribusiness and urban agriculture, and the Jua Kali (artisanal and informal) sector. The

[ca/502149/video-ory-okolloh-explains-why-africa-cant-entrepreneur-itself-out-of-its-basic-problems/](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=502149/video-ory-okolloh-explains-why-africa-cant-entrepreneur-itself-out-of-its-basic-problems/)

⁷ UNDP, “Micro, Small and Medium-Size Enterprises (MSMEs) as Suppliers to the Extractive Industry.”

⁸ Kate Wanjiru, “Slum Upgrading: The Experiences of the National Youth Service Youth Empowerment Programme,” *Muungano.Net*, 2016, <https://www.muungano.net/browseblogs/2016/01/21/slum-upgrading-the-experiences-of-the-national-youth-service-youth-empowerment-programme>.

only big question is, how do we get youths ready for such kinds of opportunities and how do we create a conducive environment to favour them as they venture into these various fields?

Edwin Advine - A food kiosk along Juja Road, Mathare





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4. The Life Of A 'Reformist': Getting in And Out Crime in The Ghetto

By Jojez

Life is hard; it is especially hard in Eastlands. I had a difficult childhood. Countless times I went without a decent meal. Suffering is an inescapable reality in the slum. It gets really rough for youths who have not had education. Often these are drawn to criminal activities like theft, prostitution, and drug peddling to earn a living and hopefully escape the cruel hand of the slum. Youths engage in these things as a means of survival. There are not many alternatives to pursue. Many success stories in the slums have emerged from criminal activities. Opportunities are very limited. They are much more limited than they were long ago in the community. In the criminal industry, there is no need for academic certificates or any form of accreditation for one to find employment, to join and earn a living.

It is for these very same reasons that I too got caught up in criminal activities between 2008 and 2012. I was forced to leave this life behind under very interesting circumstances. My mother was struggling to feed and provide for the needs of her nine children. My big brother had at the time joined a gang. They would go to 'work' and so naturally I too joined the gang. My brother loved me so much. He cared about my wellbeing, he mentored me and I followed in his footsteps. At first I used to carry firearms in my school backpack for the gang whenever they had a 'mission'. What I liked about my brother's crew is that they did their things far away, '*walikuwa wanacheze mbali*, they never targeted our community. After a mission they would give me Kshs 1,000 (about \$10), or even Kshs 10,000 (about \$100) when a mission was very successful. A year later, I too started going for the missions, I was now older, *bazenga*, a man in my own right. I was not attending school regularly. I became difficult in school and the teachers even gave up on me. By this time I was a criminal through and through.

In the year 2011 my brother bought me my very own gun. Things were getting better day-by-day. I could now pay for my mum's rent and even take my siblings to school. 2011 was a 'blessed year'. Everything was working out great and life was getting really comfortable. All this would change in 2012. Many members of our crew lost their lives in 2012. I remember being chased by cops and watching some of these guys getting shot in front of my very own eyes. For those who were lucky to get away, we still kept at it. We took care of the families of those that left us. We supported them financially.

One October night in 2012, a friend, my brother and I were having fun at a club called Wazea. After spending all of our money on food and drinks we decided to leave the club at around 2 a.m. On our way home we bumped into a guy who seemed drunker than we were. We messed around with him and teased him. It was in this process that the man dropped a concealed gun he was carrying. We were startled. We did not know who this man was. We nevertheless saw an opportunity; we took his gun and beat the man up. After some days we heard talks in the community about a policeman who had been beaten up and his firearm stolen.

The area was now under very serious police surveillance. The policeman was able to identify our friend, who was arrested and tortured for information. He gave us up. He gave everything up. I too was arrested as the case was being investigated, but my brother managed to escape. I registered a fake name when signing the police OB, or occurrence book. I was released after three weeks. I quickly packed up my things and fled to Bungoma. I had put away some savings, which sustained me for about a year. I thereafter worked as a construction worker and a matatu tout. Life became rough and tough, I had gotten used to quick money. Anyway, in time I came to really appreciate the value and delight of money I had worked for. I learned how to manage the little that I made.

And so I got myself out of crime. In 2015 after things had cooled down I came back to Nairobi. In many cases poverty drives youths into criminal activities. During an interview, a local youth insisted that: "youths are willing to work... they can reform. Should the government want to work with them, it will find them ready." This youth went on to say that things were much better when the National Youth Service (NYS) slum-upgrading programme was running in the community. This programme employed local youths in its projects in Mathare. The youth said: "The NYS programme was helping youths by employing them for an income."

In other cases youths get into crime to prove themselves and make a name, to be sort of famous. Many, for example, get caught up in drug peddling and other criminal activities. It does not help that the police are often involved or complicit in criminal activities in the community. Some work and cooperate with criminals. These have a share in the proceeds of crime; there is something for them to eat. Armed robbers are known to hire their guns from police officers. Back in 2015, there was a robbery attempt at the area called Roundabout. The police foiled the attempt. They shot the suspected robbers dead. Two firearms were recovered in the process. It emerged that one of these guns was registered to an officer at the Kariobangi police post. The said officer was arrested while investigations were conducted. He alleged that this firearm had been stolen two months prior to the incident. The officer was released from custody after a couple of days, and he resumed his duties as a police officer. From how I know things work, he must have bribed his way out of the situation, *ni bribe ndio ilitambaa hapo*. It has also been reported that the police 'allow' crime in the community. Police are said to ask suspects they have apprehended, "What have you stolen?" so as to estimate how much they will demand from the suspects for their release. Should a suspect lie, they are likely to be unlawfully killed the next time they are caught in crime.

My community is divided in the matter of extrajudicial killings (EJKs). One segment of the community supports EJKs, "Let them die. We will give money to pay for funeral expenses incurred." Victims of crime in the community often have such sentiments. On the other hand the family and friends of youths in crime tend to empathize with them and are opposed to EJKs.

There is no due process when dealing with crime in Eastlands. The police often take matters in their own hands unlawfully killing criminal suspects instead of arresting and arraying them in court. Police like 'Hessy' have routinely been posting pictures on social media of dead suspects they have allegedly killed. In November alone police killed 24 youths in about 21 days. Some youths do not learn from all of these. They will keep at their criminal activities. It is said that youths in gangs are hardened by EJKs. Some think they are heroes bragging about the number of times they have escaped death in the hands of the police.

I had to look for employment after I had exhausted my savings while I was in exile in Bungoma. Work did not come easy. When I was working as a construction worker, carrying very heavy chiselled rocks, it felt like it was the end of the earth for me. Now you can imagine I was not used to this kind of life. I made very little money, but I had to persevere, *nilijikaza kimwanaume*, I had to be a man about it. It was during this time that I learned that I could achieve great things without getting into crime. Coming back to Nairobi was like starting a new life all again. I had to figure out new ways of earning a livelihood, make new friends and so on. Reflecting on this makes me wonder who is helping youths in their reforming journeys? I was keen to answer this question as I was collecting data in the community with my research team.

Different youths have different reform journeys or stories. Many start this journey after serving a prison sentence. Some youths have come out of prison worse than they were going in. Other youths have reformed after they were counselled and talked to. For others, they just seem to 'outgrow it' and just stop. All the same reforming youths face great challenges that often push them back into crime. Reforming comes with social stigma. Reformists often do not feel

welcomed or wanted in the community. One feels alone, the odd one out. It is also hard making new friendships. In our research findings, a local youth group member described this stigma in the following way: "The community does not trust reformed youths; it won't give you the chance to prove yourself. The community sees and judges you by your bad past. People change you know, but it would seem the community doesn't believe that." Another reforming youth said: "As you know life here in the ghetto *nikujitegemea*, it is all about self reliance." He reformed after serving a two-year prison sentence. When he got out he found employment with a Matatu savings and credit co-operative (SACCO). He however has 'criminal impulses'; he still has it in his blood as it were. When in a tight spot, he is likely to swindle or steal from people for quick money. In emphasizing the importance of support and help in reforming youth, a respondent described his experience as follows:


My parents and other relatives were concerned and troubled by my regular run-ins with the police. I was getting arrested every other day. I changed my ways to give my loved ones some peace of mind. A certain man talked me out of crime over time. He also found a job for me that kept my mind busy. Idleness can easily lead someone to crime.

But this is not the experience of every reforming youth. In narrating his struggles in reforming, another youth said in a nutshell: "You rarely find people to help you reform." The youth went on to also suggest: "If a deviant youth were to find help in say starting a business, then they are likely to turn away from crime. When one is feeding their own hustle it feels more relaxing than when you harm or steal from someone in order to have a livelihood and a happy life."

As I was collecting data I was also keen to know whether there are any organisations working to help youth in crime reform their ways. A Kiamaiko reformed youth said: "We had an organization here, people used to call it Centre. It used to bring youths together for counseling and life-skills training. They also empowered youths in the arts. But in the last two or three years the organization has not really been doing much. I think it is because of the management issues." In a different interview another reformed youth said: "Nope! I am yet to see or hear of an organization helping young men reform. If only the NYS project was still running down here in the community, this could have helped youths reform."

Recently CBOs working on issues of social justices, especially in the matter of extrajudicial killings (EJK), have emerged. I like the work these local organisations do. I however think that some need to change their approach. People in the community are suggesting that these CBOs are only concerned with EJK, looking out for the rights of crime suspects but never victims of crime. They are not doing much in reforming youths in crime. These organisations are not addressing or offering solutions to crime in the community. Secondly, their confrontational tactics in their paralegal and human rights work has been cited as getting community members in police custody into even greater trouble. Police are known to tamper with case files and escalating charges when they see a suspect 'has people' helping them in their case.

Youth groups too are playing an import role in reforming youths in crime. When I, like many other in their reforming journeys, did not have a place to go I joined a youth group in my neighbourhood. My youth group runs a carwash business. Almost every member in the group is a reformed youth. There are also some local organisations working with youth groups. These offer training in information technology, business skills, research, peace building and much more. In an interview, a youth identified Ghetto Foundation as one such of these: "They have been coming down here looking for the 'hard-to-reach' youths in the community. They have been convening community dialogues to discuss issues facing youths in the community. They have also been conducting trainings that empower the youths in many different ways."



My youth group is one of the few that has stably been running for a long while now. There is solidarity and oneness in the group this has sustained our work. Many youth groups fail because of lack of capital for business ventures.

Organisations need to consider offering support to reforming youths. They can do this through mentoring programmes. There will be significant impact in the community if organisations and the government particularly worked with youth groups to reform youths out of crime.

5. A Neglected Community: Disaster Management in Mathare

By Jacob Omondi

In Kenya, we have very inadequate disaster preparedness and management structures. This was especially seen in the Solai Dam tragedy in August of 2018 where scores of Solai residents lost their lives after the dam broke. There was a public uproar condemning government's poor disaster response and the shoddy construction of the dam. But this is how it always is. We as people are outraged, but only for moment. We quickly move on and forget the matter as soon as the victims are buried, then resurrect the outrage when the next disaster hits. It is a cycle that never yields any change. In urban areas, communities living in informal settlements are the most vulnerable to disasters and conflicts over strained resources.

There are both natural and unnatural causes of disasters in Mathare. But even so, disasters of whatever kind are better understood when one looks at the social economic conditions of communities living in informal settlements. People live in such settlements, and Mathare specifically, because they cannot afford good housing. Mathare, like any other informal settlement, is unplanned, congested and has strained social amenities. The government has done little to invest in the public infrastructure such as roads. This makes the community prone to disasters, which are often poorly managed because of the poor planning. In Mathare, fires are the most common disasters, which pose great health and safety hazards that cause loss of lives and property damage. Fire outbreaks are so frequent in the community as a community youth reported: "fire is the most common disaster we face every day. Personally, I witnessed three this month." Most of these fires are caused by "electricity mishaps," as an interviewee called it. Most of the electricity in the informal settlement is supplied on poorly and illegally connected power lines. Another respondent in commenting on the frequency of fires and the uncertainty they cause said: "Sometimes people go to work but by the time they come back, they find their houses burnt to the ground." She went on to also suggest that: "The only safe bet is not to accumulate so much property in Nairobi because you can never really guess when a disaster will happen." Disasters such as fire in Mathare have also been associated with conflict over scarce resources in the community. Quite a number of fires in the community are believed to be acts of arson where there is dispute over land or some other resource. Powerful individuals, the tycoons of Mathare, are known to use this tactic when they want to grab land for themselves.

After fires, flooding is the next common disaster in the Mathare. Mathare River, or *Rúi* (pronounced roh-eh) as is popularly called in the community, bursts its banks from time to time. Recently the river carried away a young boy; to this very day his body is yet to be found in spite of community efforts to search for him downstream. When Mathare River bursts its banks it sweeps away structures erected along the river, leaving many residents homeless. A Mathare resident narrated her experience with floods as follows:

Only last year we were living on the banks of Mathare River. We moved away because of the frequent flooding. Floodwater would often get into our home especially during the rainy seasons. When I was younger floodwater actually swept away our house and most of our property was lost.

House rent along the riverbank is usually much cheaper than in other parts of the community. There are families that have lived there for decades because, "Rent is much cheaper along the banks of the river," as our respondent, told us. She further noted that, "Most of the people still living there always have a hard time when it rains." In the past, the government has given caution to those living within 30 metres of the river. Yet still families are found along the banks of the river.

The reason as to why these people remain is that most of them are poor and could easily be rendered homeless should they be ejected away from the river.

In the case of fire outbreaks, the government is known to respond late to calls for help. The fire truck tends to show up late and often without enough water to put out a fire. Then we have to wait for another fire truck to come with more water as the fire rages on. There is hardly any effort from government in response to flooding. The government seems to care about us only when the election period is approaching, the reason as to why I say this is that no one seems concerned with the welfare of the poor people of Mathare. No one heeds our grievances. We turn to NGOs for help when the Government neglects our needs, as a community member reported during an interview: "It's up to organizations that are within the slum areas to help with disasters to prepare and empower the community for disaster response and management." In another interview a respondent added that: "Most organizations in my community have hotlines. In case of an emergency, organizations are always the first to assist." She further reported that: "It never matters whether the organization specializes on that issue (disaster management)."

Organisations have been instrumental in the management of disasters in our community much as there are no organizations especially dedicated to dealing with them. The existing organizations all the same offer some form of support to those affected by disasters, "Organizations mostly come in to assist after a disaster," as it was reported during an interview. This respondent went on to give an example: "During the last concluded elections, there was violence in Mathare. Ghetto foundation organized and supplied food to some victims." Another community youth also described the contribution of organisations to disaster management in a similar manner:

Most organizations are not that into disaster management programmes and if they were it would be for a season for it depends on the area and through analysis of what kind of disasters are prone in that area.

During an interview with a local community organiser it emerged that CBOs operate under very constrained budgets. As such, many are unable to implement any disaster management projects. They are only able to mobilize community members to respond to disasters or for charity work to help victims. This respondent believed that NGOs have the resources needed to meet this need in the community, but might be unwilling:

I cannot say that as an organization we are prepared for disasters; we don't have such capacity. We are just a CBO, which doesn't have any funding. We rely on well-wishers and solidarity kitty for our sustainability. And oh, the other thing that I can say about disaster management in Mathare, no NGO is taking disaster preparedness seriously. I cannot put CBOs in that issue because they don't have the capacity. But NGOs, most of them have the capacity; they interact directly with donor funding.

Our findings also show that these organizations (including both NGOs and CBOs) often collaborate with each other whenever a disaster occurs in terms of offering support to the community. The community also self-organizes in response to disasters, which is not to be understated. Whenever there is a fire in Mathare community members normally try their level best to put it out. Young men are often in the forefront trying all they can to fight the fire and rescue property while women and children supply them with water. Some other youths keep watch over rescued properties before the police arrive at the scene.

Organisations working in the community have been found to play a big role in disaster response. The community leverages on the influence and connections of organisations to get relevant state departments to respond to disasters. An interviewee described this role as follows:

I don't see many organizations focusing on that area (disaster management projects) but whenever there is disaster, most organizations come in handy because they have the power. For example if there is a fire outbreak or any emergency, response will be quicker if an organization makes the call. Organizations have bargaining power and have a lot of information on various things. They also understand how best to handle an issue. Some even have first aiders because members of organizations undergo a lot of trainings.

The figure below shows how the community responds to disaster:

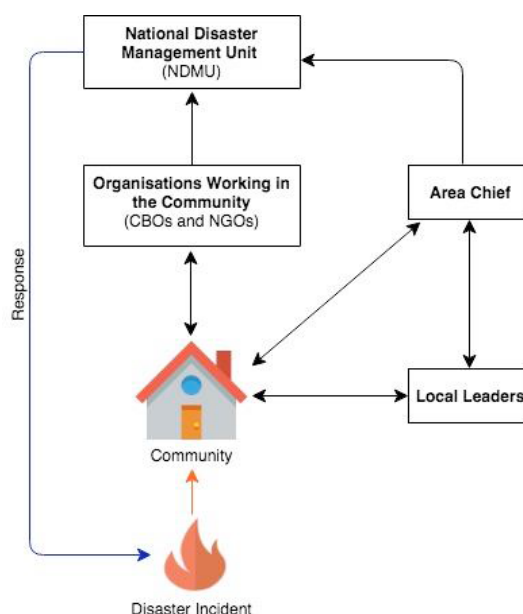


Image Source: Author

A few organizations were cited as training people in the community on how to deal with especially fire outbreaks. I have personally been part of a fire and safety training offered by SHOFCCO and G4S security. I learned a lot and I feel that they helped us in preparing for disasters. The local Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) chapter was also applauded for its efforts in providing emergency medical services when disasters strike, "They come very fast if you call them," as a community member said. Kenya Red Cross has also in the past recruited and trained community volunteers to form response teams. These teams were said to be very effective when they were formed. A community youth described his experience as follows:

A few years ago when I was in high school, Kenya Red Cross was recruiting youths to form a disaster response team. Emergency response centres were established and equipped with equipment to combat disasters. So many youth were selected as volunteers to form the community quick response team. The project was effective for a few years. It helped minimize loss and damage whenever there was a disaster. I no longer see these teams in the community. I guess they are no longer in service.

Another local youth also recalled his experience at a training workshop conducted by a local CBO:

A while back Ghetto Foundation was conducting first aid lessons on some weekends. I was taught how to administer first aid on someone who is unconscious after inhaling carbon monoxide or after a drowning accident.

It's a high time that Mathare as a community should be educated about on how to curb disaster, I think the government with the help of NGOs and local partners should be in the forefront of teaching the community on how they should manage disaster like fire and floods which are so rampant. The government should also establish a fire station in Mathare in order to prevent the massive loss of lives and property. The government of Kenya had established a national disaster management commission, which was mandated with the duty of mitigating disasters. Their presence has not been felt in my disaster prone community. The national disaster management team should be in the forefront of teaching the community of Mathare on safety measures when it comes to curbing disaster.

Jacob - Homes on the banks of Mathare River



6. A Gendered Community

By Kate Wanjiru

Not too long ago I was reflecting back on the days when girls were not sent to school because some parents thought it was a waste of school fees. Many of these girls also get married at an early age, parents thought that girls were only good for the dowry they attracted. A single mother brought me up and I remember how she worked hard to give us the best education possible. Some neighbours criticised her saying girls don't need education. My mum knew its benefits and she never lost hope in getting my siblings and I through school. We are seven girls in my family and no one dropped out of school because of school fees. Today, we are all grown up and we are doing the same for our children because without education you won't go anywhere. While doing research I found out the role gender plays in different situations in everyday life in my community. I looked at how debates and discussions on equality, development programmes, politics and leadership, and violence are gendered in my community. During a field interview, for example, a respondent said:

When it comes to gender equality I think Kenya as a nation is trying. The constitution is giving women the chance to vie for political post and it has also set aside women representatives posts where women could compete on who can best fight and advocate for the rights of women in parliament. The new constitution was designed to empower women. The president of Kenya Uhuru Kenyatta must appoint at least a woman whenever he appoints personnel. Thumbs up Mr President.

The interviewee went on to also say, "The 'boy-child' has been forgotten, in that, many organizations are focused on women empowerment forgetting the 'boy-child'." It is interesting that questions of gender in the 'city-scape,' outside of the ghetto, are deferred to the authority of the constitution, while in the 'ghetto-scape', in my community, are left to NGOs and CBOs. It is in this context that this interview sets the stage for a discussion on gender in the community. In my research, I show how broader gender equality discourses at the national stage do not necessarily reflect the reality in my community.

Big strides have been made towards creating gender equality in Kenya. But has gender equality been achieved? Are men and women equally represented, can they both access the same opportunities, do they equally enjoy their rights? I think yes and no. Women have been empowered, we now know our rights, and we have improved representation in politics looking at the current make up of parliament. In the past there was only a handful of women, people had not understood the value of electing women in elective posts. In the last elections, we also saw young men campaigning for a woman. She has since won the elections and is now our local Member of County Assembly (MCA). Much as this is the case, life in my community remains very gendered in some ways more than others. During our fieldwork, an interview described gender concerns as follows:

Gender equality is not all about women issues alone as many describe it. Gender equality is about all human beings irrespective of gender equally enjoying social, economic and political rights in society. Patriarchy, however, discourages women from progressing in life and taking up leadership position.

I furthermore find this quote interesting because it shows that things are not as straightforward in my community. With gender equality in my community it would seem that there are yesses and noes and in-betweens in the matter. This was especially appreciated when I was sharing my findings with the rest of my community research team. During our community peer review process, where we collectively analysed our research data, a lot material was nuanced. Good insights were generated, debates were had, and collective conclusions were achieved in some cases and in others were not. It is from this process that I share the reflections that follow.

Culture is also dragging women behind, whereby it is believed that women should not take leadership positions. In the African culture, women are used as baby making machines. A woman's place is at home, taking care of the children and pleasing the husband. She is there to be seen and not to be heard. When it comes to voting, most are supposed to ask for permission from the husband, and if given, they are told who to vote for. In terms of representations in various committees in the community, women are rarely fairly represented. We have never seen a scenario whereby we have more women than men or representation where there are as many women as there are men, a ratio of one to one. The few women that get to participate in local leadership process, especially in decision-making, are used as tokens to legitimise the process. During an interview a local youth leader and a woman said that:

When it comes to gender equality, women are used as 'rubber stamps' to give the impression that women were included in a process. They often go for the 'weak' women, those that will not bring trouble. Even in *chamas* (community meetings) young women are assigned as secretaries. And when it comes to politics, however much a woman is strong, she will still be fought left and right and her personal life will be attacked and scrutinized, especially her family. Her self-esteem could be affected in the process. Men don't face these issues and that's why very few women survive politically.

In Mathare, so many young girls don't get a chance to participate in youth groups. Some become young mothers. Being a mother in a way makes one feel that they no longer count as youths. This means they can therefore not access youth focussed development programmes or opportunities, which include college opportunities or other forms of economic empowerment. I have the dream of starting a girls' empowerment programme in Mathare. The main target group will be vulnerable girls in their teens. I want to try and empower them to get up and take up opportunities around them. I will also try to find support from other organizations and friends who would want to empower girls.

During our research we saw how sexual violence, rape in particular, has been used as an instrument to assert power over others. It was for example suggested that in the past police officers have raped women in the ghettos as a means of 'punishment'. From the data the team collected, we learned that major conflicts between different groups in the community had come to be associated with sexual violence. An interviewee, for example, said that, "Many rape cases occur when there are skirmishes or political clashes." She went on to also report that; "Sometimes policemen rape women whenever they are running a security operation, *msako*, in the community. These *msakos* have come to be associated with sexual violence."

During another interview a respondent described his experience during a territorial skirmish as follows:

We saw smoke covering our neighbourhood. In no time my phone was ringing. I received calls from about eight different people, most of whom were older women in my community. 'Felo, where are you? They are burning down the neighbourhood.' Then I would ask, 'what is going on?' No one would say. As one would hang up the phone, another would immediately call. So my friends and I made for the community in hurry to find out what was going on... I learned that there was a fight, and a ginye (a Gisu person) had stabbed some other guy. It had now turned into an ethnic and territorial fight in the neighbourhood. My guys and I got into it too. I got stabbed in the process. I called out to my friends, 'Ehh, I have been stabbed!' Some guys rushed me to Blue House for first aid, then to Kenyatta Hospital. While at Kenyatta I found older Gisu women, about seven of them already admitted. They had been raped during a revenge attack. One of these women narrated to me how it all happened. She told me, 'Felo, I have been raped.' She told me that she had been gang raped; they even put a bottle inside her. It was such a devastating story. I no longer thought much of my own injuries after hearing it all.

A while back it was reported that a 30-year-old man had defiled more than ten pupils from Kiboro Primary School. The said man was luring the pupils into sex by giving them gifts and money. He used a young girl of about 12 years to bring other pupils from her class. She would give them money or gifts from the rapist, and daily deliver two girls to him. Sometimes it is good to have a nosy neighbour. The woman next door of the rapist figured out what was going on and brought the matter to public attention. This rapist had defiled more than eight girls and to make matters worse he was putting them at the risk of contracting HIV. In our research discussions we appreciated how much sexual assault has been normalized in the ghettos. There is a silence on the matter, which could perhaps be associated with the shame victims feel after being violated. A respondent thought that: "most of the people hide or just choose to keep quiet about the matter; they feel like it is a normal thing." "But it is not normal, but it just goes without being reported," the respondent continued to say. A different interviewee reported that, "there are cases whereby women are raped but they tend to keep quiet because they don't want their husbands to know because they might leave them." In further commenting on the normalization of sexual assault, the interviewed described harassment in her neighbourhood as follows:


I live in a neighbourhood where *chang'aa* (local moonshine) is produced like a 'cash-crop'. The women who serve as waiters are sexually harassed but they don't see it as a big deal because they don't want to lose their jobs or maybe customers.

It was for example suggested that there is public uproar only after a minor is a victim; it becomes a "collective justice" concern. On the other hand no one seems to take much interest when a 'grown' woman is raped, "perhaps their relatives will help them out, but adults are generally forced to pursue justice all by themselves..." It was also reported that, "If you are especially a single woman, it is seen as though you were done some favour" when you are raped. This idea of "friendly rape" was described as the kind of assault where the victim for whatever reason downplays their assault and abuse. Often in such cases the community members are discouraged from taking any action on the victim's behalf. During our review discussions, the research team thought of this phenomenon as a case of internalized trauma, which numbs victims to repeated hurt and abuse.

The causes and remedies for sexual assault in the community are a contentious issue. Dress code is one such issue that has brought division. Many people believe that the rising number of sexual assault is as a result of indecent dressing. During my research one of our interviewees said that: "Women will always claim that their dress is their choice. Men will always blame the women for provoking them by dressing indecently."

But the question is who should be blamed? Some claim that young girls should also be advised on the best time to walk at night especially in Mathare, where sexual harassment is rampant. This is something very sensitive and we have to even protect our children against sexual predators that prey on small children – sadly these are often relatives. How are we to handle sexual abuse issues in the community? Is it only through training and awareness? How are we to deal with perpetrators living amongst us?

The question of the forgotten 'boy-child' proved to be a hotly debated matter. The general feeling is that discussions on gender equality tend to focus only on the 'girl-child,' women. Girls are growing up empowered in different way while the boys are not getting any attention. A lot has been done to give the girl child her voice. Organisations and activists come together with many projects that are all about helping the girl child unshackle the chains keeping her down. But the boy child has been left behind. While the girl child is enjoying her freedom and coming out of her shell, the boy is fighting to be treated better. Many people in my community share this sentiment. I respondent described it in the following way:



So far I can say girl child is much more empowered than the boy child in the society. Yes, a while back the boy was more empowered than the girl child but we have come to a point where the focus is on the girl child, girl child, girl child, so the boy child is left behind. But you see the society has forgotten that as much we are supporting the girl child we still need to empower the boy child as much as the girl child is empowered. We should not stop talking about the boy child we need to talk about all genders.

The role of NGOs and CBOs was particularly highlighted when discussing gender equality in my community. To some degree organisations were seen as responsible for the neglect of the 'boy-child'. A respondent put it in the following way:

Organizations should stop neglecting the boy child. They need to try to come up with programmes that empower both. The more they keep doing what they are doing the boy child will lose their way. So they should look for some resources and something else and involve boy child and stop leaving him behind.

There is however apprehension when trusting organisations with gender equality work that targets both the boy and the girl. The feeling is that the work of organisations is motivated by the agenda of their donor funders. They are keen to come up with programmes that match the interests of the donors. A respondent described this concern in the following way:

The truth of the matter is that some organizations are just there to write reports about their women's programmes to make their donors happy. They do nothing to promote gender equality. You will never find some of these organizations near the community or addressing community issues.

I believe a girl is more likely to talk about issues she is dealing with than a boy. A boy mostly bottles up every bit of anguish or pain. He has been brought up to not show weakness, most cultures believe a man keeps his issues to himself. Should he come out and talk about it, his peers will call him weak, he will be told to deal with it on his own, that only women cry and expect to be helped. The sad truth for their silent agony is because very few listen. Rather than be shunned for speaking out, he will secretly deal with it. Men have to prove themselves to the society, and "be a man." When a man feels like they cannot measure up they are likely to act out in undesirable ways. Some men take unfortunate measures when proving their manliness. Most don't want to show vulnerability or look intimidated by life. Some violently take out their issues on women in their lives to for example prove that they are still the heads of their homes. The fact that society seems more focused on the girl child is rapidly suffocating the male child. He is just as vulnerable as the girl child. As the needs of the boy are disregarded he looks for remedies often in harmful ways, both to himself and the community. The boy is prone to sexual assault and suffering as any other child. For solace, the boy is turning to vices. It would seem that issues that seem to affect men for the most part in the community go unattended. I interviewed a youth from my community and he said that:

When you think of criminals you never think of women, it's always men whenever there is a msako, a police crackdown, the most targeted are men and it's even worse when a man is found loitering at night, men are always the first suspects while women walk freely.

Our issues on the other hand are given more prominence since it's assumed men can handle their issues. The men have to figure it out and deal with their issues on their own. Many men turn to narcotics and alcohol abuse as well as crime as a result. Society sees this but brushes it off, as boys will always be boys. But when girls are found in such situations, activists come out guns blazing saying it is because they have been ignored. They defend the girls and seek help for them. The boys are left to go back to their old ways. This needs to stop. Intervention is crucial before our young male generation gets devoured. A child is a child.



Kate - SDG 5: Gender Equality

In conclusion we have come to appreciate that gender issues can be contentious, but are nonetheless necessary to address. There has been some progress in some ways and in some others there is more to be done. All in all, it should be remembered that no gender is superior to the other. Girls have been seen as the weaker sex for ages, but as they get stronger we must remember to also care for the boys. It is wrong to empower one sex at the expense of another.



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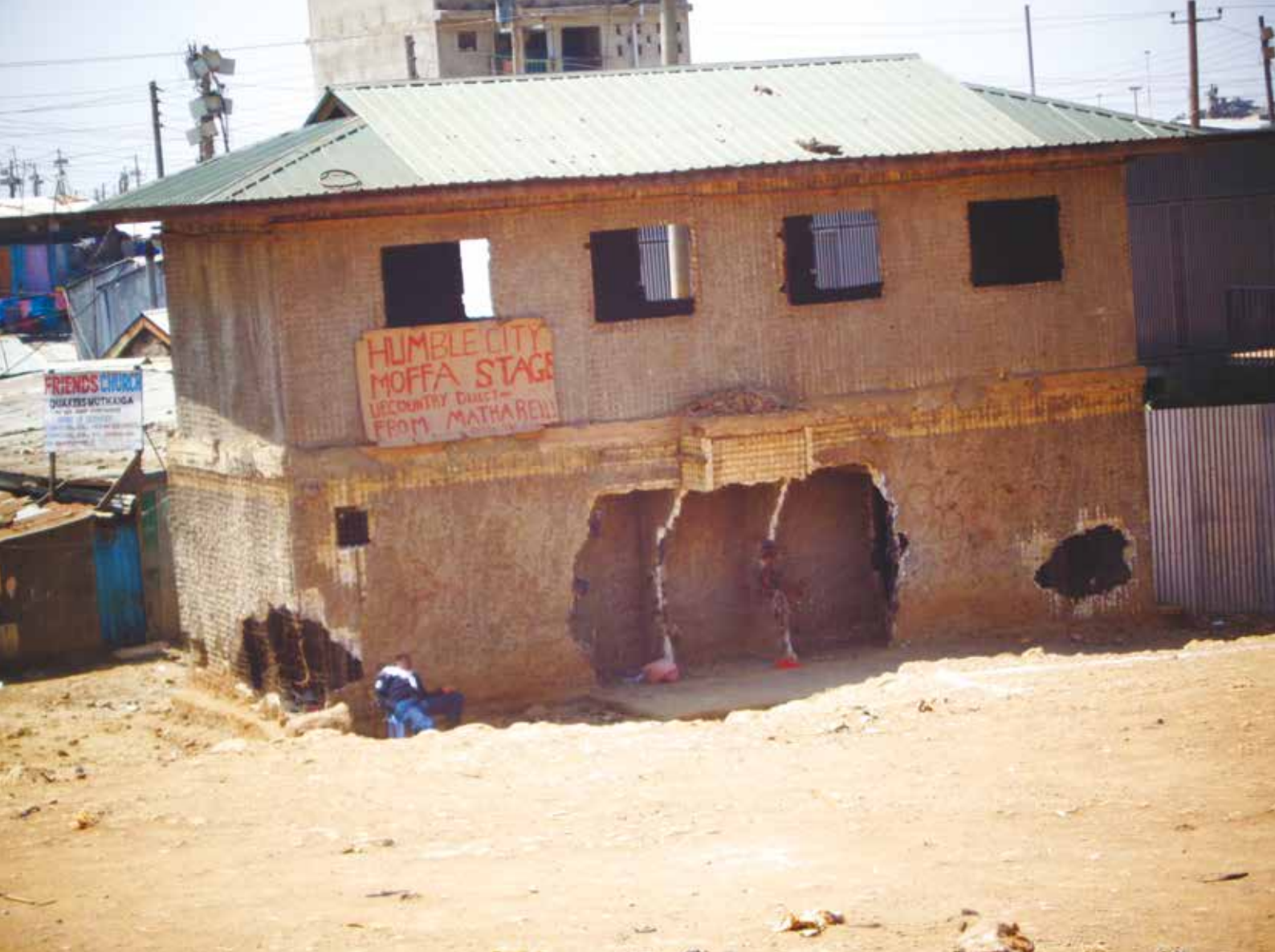
7. Community Involvement and Development: National Youth Service projects in Mathare

By Pauline Waigumo

The National Youth Service (NYS) was established by an Act of Parliament way back in September 1964. Its mandate then was to train Kenyan youths in readiness for employment and to inculcate national values in them for nation building. In 2013, the government restructured the NYS through its five-point vision. With this restructuring, the NYS would now be a major driver of youth empowerment in Kenya. In 2014 the Kenyan government through the newly restructured NYS initiated the Slum Upgrade Initiative in Nairobi. This project was piloted in Kibera and then Mathare in 2015. This initiative had three main areas of focus: youth economic empowerment through employment and MSMEs training; construction of basic public infrastructure; and provision of waste disposal services. The NYS initiative was highly rated in the community up until all NYS related activities were suspended across the country following a major corruption scandal that rocked the service in 2016. After the start of the NYS project in Mathare, many youths had lots of hope in the project and it was seen as the game changer for the many youths who were unemployed and no skills. The daily life of the youths was perfect and they had their own plans and ideas during the project. The project ran smoothly without any back and forth, until it was stopped unexpectedly. A respondent explained:

NYS was like a tap of water that went dry because of the messes (corruption scandals) that occurred. Many projects were left incomplete. Many youths were left jobless. Garbage is no longer collected frequently and drainage systems have blocked. Crime is high due to lack of jobs.

The NYS project was introduced in Mathare to bring back the beautiful face of the community. The idea was to start by cleaning up the community and unblocking the sewer lines and also building youth facilities in the community. Through the NYS project community halls, health centres, good public toilets and fresh water points were built in the community. NYS recruited local youths to form cohorts of labourers. More than 3,000 youths were engaged in the initiative as paid labourers, having been recruited from all the Wards of Mathare. Mathare as a community embraced NYS whole-heartedly. Many people, youth and women included, were so proud to be part of the project. The NYS, for the time it was running, empowered quite a number of youth who also learned how to be self-reliant and entrepreneurial. NYS would remit a weekly wage of Kshs 1600 (about \$16) every Friday to all its participants. Some of the youths were given leadership roles as cohort leaders. These leaders helped manage teams implementing the NYS projects. The NYS also took the cohorts through an entrepreneurship-training course. They were taught how to save their money and form savings schemes. 30 per cent of their weekly earnings were put into the community savings scheme. From this scheme many youths got the chance to borrow loans to start small businesses. The NYS initiative had far reaching impact in the community. The local economy of the Mathare community was energized. A significant number of youths were now earning and spending money within the community. This gave small businesses in the community a boost. "During the implementation of the project, incidences of crime in Mathare had gone down," an interview explained. This respondent went on to also say that, "when the NYS initiative was stopped, there was a resurgence of criminal activities." The interviewee attributed this rise in crime to youth unemployment. A local youth described his experience with the NYS project as follows: "Through NYS, youths were empowered; many developed leadership skills as some youths were given roles as youth cohort leaders." Another youth further explained: "The money transfer to the youth was also very positive because some of them changed their livelihood for the better, they were introduced to saving with the bank, they were also introduced to agriculture in small spaces, they also joined SACCOs and some still continue with the loan scheme."



Pauline - Stalled NYS project in Mathare

There was, however, one big flaw in how the NYS executed its initiative in Mathare, and informal settlements for that matter. The community was only involved during the implementation of the projects. As far as I can tell the community had no say in the design of the initiative, which was adapted from the Kibera pilot. The NYS came with their plans all figured out. I believe that the challenges the projects faced during implementation were as a result of not involving the community in all stages of the project process. The NYS had ready projects, all they needed was space and labourers to install the projects as was reported during an interview: "The community was involved in identifying spaces in which things were to be built." Mathare, for example, as a community had many already constructed toilets that were done by the previous MPs and there was no need to build other toilets in the community. My opinion is if the NYS had conducted sincere public participation they would have perhaps renovated some existing facilities or invested in something different altogether. I also believe the NYS did not appreciate our social context, we see for example how the NYS's savings scheme, much as it was widely celebrated, did not hit it off with youths as much as they had imagined. Not as many youths benefitted from the savings scheme due to restrictive policies. For one to borrow a loan one had to get guarantors to assure the NYS that one would repay their loan. Many youths in the community have issues with trust. Not many were well informed about these kinds of criteria and procedures. There was therefore a certain fear associated with getting a loan. During our fieldwork I asked my respondents whether the community was involved in the decision-making process before implementation. An interviewee said, as many did: "No it was the NYS that came up with all projects that were to be implemented. But for us we preferred toilets and bathrooms that would have helped us so much." The NYS, like many other development actors in the community had ready-made solutions for what they imagined are slum problems.

As well meaning as the project designers might have been, they never considered the priorities and contexts of communities living in different informal settlements. This betrays a kind of development work done as a matter of course; without debate; it is the obvious. A local youth perfectly described this manner of community development, which treats us as clueless children in the following way:

I wouldn't say much was done when it came to community involvement on deciding on what really was important to people in the different neighbourhoods. I think it was a general ruling, being that it was a slum, we had several problems that were kind of automatic. Example, there is no need to ask a slum resident whether he or she is facing a housing problem. So I think that is the reason why the community was not activity involved.

It would seem that programme design was perhaps to a big extent informed by assumptions and stereotypes of what a 'slum' is or needs. Another interviewee also highlighted the absence of community voices in project prioritization said:

Speaking the truth NYS never involved the community. You know when someone thinks of slums or Mathare what comes in their mind is toilets and garbage. So they generalize informal settlements. They made assumptions about the needs of Mathare by looking at Nairobi as a whole. So they thought community cleaning is just as needed and good whether done in Mathare or in Runda. By just looking at our community, they decided that garbage collection should be given priority. So the NYS came in through garbage collection making sure the community is clean. At this point they involved the community by getting youth cohorts to clean. If they had asked people for their priorities, the NYS initiated projects could be running up to now because someone might have said 'let's have a theatre or video hall,' another might have said 'let's build a community centre that people can come and dance,' or 'let's open a big grocery business for our mothers.' The people of Mathare would have responded to these and NYS would still be alive even if there were no funds from the government.

Walking around in Mathare you can clearly see some of the projects that NYS had started have been vandalized and or unutilized, contrary to what was intended in the master plans. In an interview a respondent described this sort of community development as merely throwing money at a problem. He thought that this often brings about no sustainability as was implied by my previous interviewee. In describing the state of NYS project at the moment he said:

Currently most of NYS projects, to speak the truth, don't work – that's the reality on the ground. The reason being is that most of them were driven by an inflow of money. So when the cash was no longer there the project lost steam. A sustainability plan was not considered. They didn't have a long-term plan for continued impact.

I feel that, other than the cleaning up of the community and setting up a youth savings scheme, most of the other NYS projects were not a success. In our area, for example, no project was implemented; there was no free space to build anything on. The NYS' strategy for community development was to reclaim public land covered under mountains of trash. There was no appreciation of the politics of land ownership in Mathare, which an interviewee described as follows:

Someone would claim every space that was proposed. So when something was constructed it would soon thereafter be brought down. We did that like three times... Our village elders would intervene in these matters, but would advise that the construction work stops. They were bribed to do so. They used us the youth to clear garbage on the spaces and then take over. The NYS manager was also involved in the corrupt dealings. They were given money for the



garbage-free public spaces NYS youth had worked on.

It was not uncommon to learn of a youth cohort cleaning up a space they thought was public land, only to have someone claim it as his own. It is believed that some of the community leaders sold all public spaces way before the NYS programme came to the community. Village elders, as another example, are said to have sold the space allocated for Mathare playing ground and the land that was left behind for some families who did not have the information on the land. Another respondent narrated a similar experience in her community:

In our area, Mathare 3C, the NYS faced a lot of difficulties related to land. Anywhere the NYS was to build a piece of public infrastructure someone would claim ownership of the space. So nothing was put up. Mabatini and Mlango Kubwa areas were lucky enough to have projects put up. For us we could only do 'sack-gardens.' We would grow kale on these sacks. Unfortunately livestock, goats in particular, ruined most of our produce.

In conclusion, I believe that for a project to succeed, the community must be involved not only during its implementation, but also in the design process. This is very important because this makes the community own the project. Ownership of the project comes with sustainability of a project and involving the community before the start of the NYS project would have been very important in regards to the NYS project.

8. Policing Our Community: The Normalization of Crime and Extrajudicial Killings in Mathare

By Grace Wambui and Edwin 'Jeep' Odhiambo

In our weekly research sessions we discussed quite a number of things affecting us here in the community. It, however, astonishes us how often the police seemed to feature in our conversations. You just never know, especially as a young man, when your next police story will occur. There was this day, for example, one of our colleagues, Jeep, was arrested at Kariobangi Roundabout for no apparent reason. The police officers at Kariobangi Roundabout are notorious for terrorizing the public; they have been doing it for a while now. Jeep had just alighted from a bus and needed to board another at the Kariobangi Roundabout. At the Roundabout, Jeep saw police officers arbitrarily apprehending young men who were walking their way. These officers were forcing the youths to sit on the ground. Jeep would soon enough join them, but was luckily let go after pleading with one of the officers. Jeep recalled seeing a young man, a fellow passenger in his bus, pleading and begging a woman, both strangers to each other, to let him carry her bag for her. It was as though the young man was forcefully insisting on helping the woman with her load. This turned out to be a strategy to avoid arrest at Roundabout. Jeep heard the young man explaining to the woman, "I cannot get past roundabout alone, the police will surely arrest me. But if I carry your bag for you, and it looks like we are together the police will not have any reason to arrest me." The woman refused, she was suspicious of the fellow. And just as the young man had foreseen, he was apprehended as soon as he got at Roundabout. An older gentleman who also witnessed all of this would later say to Jeep, "we are better off with thugs than these lazy police offers making random arrests... Thugs will rob you but let you go your way, but the police rob you and still lock you up in a cell and later take you to court." It would seem that police officers are inevitably part of our lives.

At another weekly discussion we discussed how policing in the ghettos is notorious for youth profiling, as was described, "*Evidence ni wewe kijana*," meaning your youth incriminates you. Generally the police are suspicious of all young men. Like in the above story, a young man in Mathare is one of two things: a criminal or a potential criminal. Relations between young men and the police are so poor such that they see each other as their sworn enemies. Here in Mathare, the sheng word for the police is 'mabeast' or 'beasts', "this is because of the kinds of things they do in the community are otherworldly." The police are likely to arrest young men without cause should they find two or more of them seated or standing together. There is an assumption of guilt where young men are in groups. Many youths have been arrested while hanging out in their neighbourhoods, with some unfortunately being unlawfully killed thereafter. For example, during our interviews, a respondent described how young men were shot dead at a baze¹⁰ in the neighbourhood:

Some young guys were hanging out at the baze; some were known petty thieves, when they saw police officer on patrol. Out of fear they all attempted to run away but were all shot down by the police.



¹⁰ Networks of friends and the locality of their hangout in Sheng, the Swahili-English based 'creole' language of Nairobi

Youths instinctively tend to run away from the police, as most of their interactions tend to turn violent or even fatal. We are not condoning crime and burglary, but we feel that the extrajudicial murder of young men is not a solution to the problem of crime in our community. Many families have lost their loved ones from EJKs. Police are not following due process when handling crime suspects in the community.

The social and economic context of Mathare makes conversations on crime and policing complicated. During our discussions we came up with the term 'Slum Power of Arrest.' We thought this aptly describes the conditions of life in our community. For many residents life is a race for survival, which has been repeating itself with every generation. Many families are stuck in a cycle of poverty and need. For many the odds are stacked against them. It is very telling that when someone in the community wants to know the sex of a new baby they will ask "ni dingo au kuro?" or "is it a thug or a sex worker?" This speaks to the kind of opportunities and aspirations that are accessible to many in the community. It is with this context that we believe the conversation on crime and policing should be had as a community elder suggested during an interview:

The thing with this issue is that youths are unemployed. They need jobs. They should be employed. If a youth is employed, if you keep him busy, he will have neither the mind nor the energy to participate in criminal activities. It is unlikely for a youth to be a criminal if he rises up at six in the morning to go to work, and comes back in the evening tired. Otherwise, an unemployed and idle youth will sit and wonder where he will get money and the easiest way is to grab it from someone who has already made their own.

"The rate of crime is increasing with every sunrise," this is according to one of our respondents. "Mob justice incidences are becoming a daily occurrence," he continued. From our interviews and discussions we believe that both crime and violent policing (which includes EJKs) have been normalized in our community. Kamau, an acquaintance of another colleague in the research team, and his three baze friends recently snatched a mobile phone from a passer-by at night. The victim reported the incident to a police officer on patrol. She took the officer to the spot where the theft had taken place. Surprisingly they found a drunk Kamau seated there. The police arrested Kamau and his friends too. The following morning the young men were all found dead in Mlango Kubwa. These kinds of incidences have affected many people in the community in one way or another. EJKs are so common in our community. It seems a week does not pass

without an incident being reported. Youths are often the targets of EJKs, young men in particular. We are afraid that we might lose most of our men in the next 10 years. There is a general mistrust of police officers in the community. "I feel very unsafe around... policemen," a local youth commented. She continued to say, "The police should be a symbol of peace and security in the community..."

We are now used to the sound of gunshots filling the air. People tend to carry on with business when shots



are fired, as though nothing had happened. During an interview, in expressing sorrow over his own loss a young man said: "I can't help but think about the many childhood friends I have lost whenever I hear gunshots." This respondent went on to describe the circumstances under which he lost some close friends at yet another baze:

There is this incident that I vividly recall. Some friends were chilling out at the baze, chatting and chewing khat. Some Policemen came to the baze and arrested them. We thought they were arrested for maybe possessing bhang or something. Their parents went to the police station looking to get them bailed out but their sons were nowhere to be found. We later came to learn that the policemen executed these guys at some open field.

This is but one of the many stories of EJK in our community. "Hivyo ndio kuenda! That is just how it is here," this is according to another interviewee in the field. The respondent also said that, "The death of young men in their teens is not such a big deal" in the community.

Young women too are getting caught up in criminal activities. For example there is this incident of a bodaboda (motorcycle taxi) operator who was carrying a young woman. When they got to the woman's destination, she asked the rider to wait for her for a little while she was getting back. After some few minutes the girl came back running with police officers chasing in pursuit. She was now carrying a bag with her, which she threw right in front of the bodaboda rider while fleeing from the police. The police got to where the rider was and inspected the bag. The found some guns in the bag. The rider was immediately arrested but the woman had fled and was nowhere to be found. A number of our female friends from our childhood are now involved in crime.

People in the community are sharply divided on the matter of EJKs. Some applaud police officers for killing criminal suspects, while others condemn them for not following due process. There are three general perspectives on the matter. The human rights perspective championed by grassroots organisers and activist CBOs, the disaffected perspective espoused by locals fed up with growing rates of crime and insecurity, and the conflicted middle, where community members feel that both violent policing and human rights advocacy for known criminals are very problematic. In the first scenario, community members sympathise with murdered youths and their families. They are critical of how policing is done in the community, finding it to be in violation of human rights. A local community youth leader commented on human rights campaigns in the community by saying the following:

At this moment it seems as though the rights of the thugs are being defended and fought for. However, in the real sense, these are your rights being defended and fought for. You never know, you could find yourself implicated in a crime you played no role in...

On the other side you will find community sentiments cheering on police officers that 'take matters in their own hands.' Many people who hold this sentiment have in one way or another been affected by the rising rates of crime in the community. "These youths should be killed because they bring trouble in our community," this is according to a community member. So community members looking at the matter from this perspective have also been critical of the work of local CBOs advocating for the human rights of local youth. These feel that the rights of victims of crime in the community are ignored. In an interview, a local youth recalled an interaction with a friend, where they discussed the role of CBOs in fighting or enabling crime:

I was speaking to my friend Stanley the other day. I told him how I felt about the so-called social justice organisations operating in the community. I think these organisations are missing the mark! Stanley told me something that stuck in my mind. He said, 'has Jibril, the notorious killer cop, ever killed an innocent man, can you name any one?' 'No, I don't think so.' 'So, why are we up in arms about extrajudicial killings?' Stanley went on to say,

'by the time the cops are killing a thug the thug must have killed a number of innocent people.' 'These organisations are presenting older woman grieving for their children, crying for justice. But who will cry for the victims of these thugs and who will picket for them?'

In the middle, you will find community members who are conflicted about everything. These do not agree with either of the first two approaches, but however acknowledge their motivations or logic. Some of these just hang on the fence:

A friend asked to know my reason in wanting to participate in a protest march condemning extrajudicial killings. He did not see the sense in it. He told me that a certain guy in that organisation is an active thug. The leadership at the organisation are familiar with his ways but they do not talk him out of it, they don't say to him, 'Change your ways. Join me in this or the other activity, and you will live a long life.' What these guys do is just wait for the young criminals to die, and then they can come out to picket and protest his death. I thought he had a valid point. I participated in the march all the same, but I did not wear the branded t-shirt. I went to observe the event, like a news reporter.

Others feel that the police can do a better job at keeping public order, but also feel that more should be done to dissuade youths from participating in criminal activities. These feel that local CBOs have a role to play in for example rehabilitating youths not just running human rights campaigns:

The local human rights defender organisations play an important role in the community. All the same, we also need to rehabilitate youths caught up in crime. We need more than one solution when tackling crime in the community. It seems the bullet is the only existing 'solution' at the moment. We are yet to explore other approaches in dealing with crime. We should give rehabilitation a shot.

Our community and law enforcement has had a long tenuous relationship. This relationship can best be understood from a broader economic and wellbeing perspective. In many ways our community bears the marks of state neglect and abandonment. It is in this neglect that community members, especially youths make attempts to earn a livelihood. These efforts take many forms anywhere in the wide spectrum between the legal and the illegal. It is in

this sense that criminality is normalized. Unfortunately the state responds to the conditions resulting from the privations it created with brutal police force, which too has become normalized in the ghettos. There is need for more sustainable solutions to crime and insecurity in my community. These solutions should particularly re-evaluate the manner in which police officers interact with the community, and especially youth. CBOs should make efforts to better bridge the divide between law enforcement and the community. This should be done in such a way as to balance their interests in human rights observance and efforts aimed at reforming youths in crime.



9. Resources, Identity, Conflict and Peace Building in my Community

By Tobias Orao

During the research project we learned how to listen and pay attention to stories in and about our community. Stories we heard and as well those we have told or re-told. Interrogating these stories and narratives made us deeply understand how different people make sense of their lives here in the community. Their motivations, fears, aspirations and lived experiences were laid bare as we collaboratively looked into this shared space we call home. I was particularly keen to listen to stories about conflict in the community – its causes and mechanisms employed to resolve it. As I did my work with my colleagues in the research team I was able to note the following drivers of conflict in my community: participation in the so-called illicit economy, identity politics, territorial conflicts, and crime and violent policing. My report highlights stories and narrations from the community to interrogate these themes.

In my community we have constructed various identity categories in which we group each other. Unfortunately, many of the conflicts we have had have stemmed from these very identities. This is especially the case during the election period. During our research process my colleagues and I identified the following as factors around which identity categories have been constructed in the community: ethnicity (e.g. Luo, Kikuyu etc.), territory or residence (e.g. Shantit, Bondeni etc.), community membership or belonging (e.g. native and migrant). A fellow community researcher in my team is fond of describing the peace and security situation in Mathare as “calm but not peaceful.” According to him Mathare can deceptively appear calm, but without warning, chaos erupts. It is usually a matter of time. It is as though things are always on the edge here. Another colleague aptly captured this idea of looming unrest hidden under calm when recalling inter-ethnic conflict in her area of residence:

My late sister was a very headstrong character. There was this time as she was walking she bumped into some kids playing a game of bladder in her narrow pathway. There were also some guys close by; they were getting high on weed. So she had to squiggle her way between and around the kids and the guys to get to the other side. In the process she broke the bladder line. The guys took offence, “Hey, watch your step!” They then demanded that she mend the line back together. As I said, she was hard headed. “I won’t do it!” She retorted. “Did you just say that you wouldn’t mend the bladder line?” One guy asked threateningly. “I won’t do it.” It got really messy in no time. Some other people got into it. This little squabble quickly escalated into a quarrel pitting two ethnic communities living in that area against each other. The guys were from one community and my sister another. “One tribe will have to move out of this area today, we will square it out,” some people said. Some people out of fear moved out of the area. While all this was going on, my sister had long sneaked away and was back in our house hiding under a bed!

We also came to appreciate that some community members have exploited these kinds of identities for their selfish and individual agendas. These identities have been used to insist on one group’s rights and privileges while denying another group the very same rights and privileges. We, for example, have also created identities around the duration of one’s stay in the community. We have the native and the migrant resident in the community. These are usually very flimsy and fragile identities, which are relevant in one season and not the next. With this one resident will insist on his or her rights over another person’s. For example a person interested in running for a local political office will make a case for their candidacy by proving his residency credentials, “I am native to this area. I was born here. I am so and so’s neighbour.” There have also been cases of, for example, natives (irrespective of their ethnic heritage) ganging up and unjustly dispossessing migrant residents of their property.



Tobias - Community meeting in Mathare

Interestingly, it is believed that migrant residents own many of the successful business ventures in the community. A community member described this dynamic as follows:

That is just how it during elections season. People sort of rediscover that some amongst us are wazaliwa, natives born in the community, and others are wakukam, migrants or aliens in the community. At these times different people are incited against each other, "Did you know that this guy is a migrant? We have got to figure out how to expel him from the community." It is especially nasty when a migrant is believed not to support the area's preferred candidate. These are found to be suspect and seen as political spoilers. For some, this environment is seen as an opportunity to forcefully and illegitimately acquire the property of the migrant. The migrant becomes a *mradi*, an 'economic project' so to speak. A targeted migrant could even turn out to be a fellow tribesman, but that might not count for much when someone is eyeing your property. Many migrants have been known to move out of the community in anticipation of the elections and possible attacks. The air is rife with tension during elections. Any small incident could easily set off a big conflict... Many migrants tend to do better than the natives. Some people get jealous. The migrants bring good when they move into the community. But they are often the first casualties of whatever bad thing that happens in the community.

In another way, individuals have constructed identities around their areas of residence. Many youth groups, for example, coalesce around neighbourhood bazes, which tend to be territorial in their memberships. From our work we appreciated that bazes have conflicted with each other over resources and opportunities in the community. Should a baze overpower another, members of the former take full reign of the territory and resources of the latter. In an interview a community member narrated the following experience of territorial conflict in his village:

I used to live in Mlango Kubwa before moving to Bondeni. I had only been at Bondeni for three months when one night as I was watching TV in my house I heard someone calling out, "All men get out of your houses! All men, out now!" When I got out of the house I learned that my village, Bondeni, and the neighbouring village, Shantit, were in conflict. Some Shantit youths had violently attacked a Bondeni resident with a machete. Luckily the victim survived the attack. And now Bondeni youths were seeking to revenge this attack. Shantit youths got wind of the planned revenge attack, so they armed themselves in readiness. I used to be quite the hot-blood back then. I realized that the Bondeni youths were afraid and did not have any one to lead them. I was carrying a machete. No one else did. It made me really stand out. I told them, "Why do you allow these people to trouble you this much? Let's all go and face them head-on." I worked them up and they heeded my call, and I led them to the fight. We were quite a big crowd. We chased the Shantit guys back into their village. They however came back. We were now at a standoff. I told my guys, "This is not yet over." I told the women bystanders, "Don't just watch us, gather rocks and bring them to us, we can then hurl them at the other group." There were also some men bystanders. I hit two of them with the flat side of my machete. This gave everyone a fright; some people at first thought I had hacked the first man. I asked these two, "Are we to fight for your safety while you watch and do nothing?" And so the rest of the men joined in, each picking rocks too and hurling them at Shantit. We were at it till 3:00 a.m. At this point police officers from Pangani Police Station had arrived. They joined us. Many of these officers were fearful. At that time Shantit had a very bad reputation as a haven for armed criminal elements. An armed cop and I had taken cover behind some structure. Someone on the Shantit side was shooting arrows at our side. The standoff persisted and so the police officers asked for reinforcement from the Red Berets. I never want to mess with this unit. The Red Berets got into Shantit and dealt with the youths there. Knowing how ruthless they are, I told my guys, "Hey, nothing much is left to do, I am going to get some sleep now." And just like that the group disbanded with each person heading to their home.


Some youths have gone as far as to self-organise themselves into neighbourhood security groups. These have had various results. In some areas these groups have been accused of vigilantism and even extortion and in some areas they have found legitimacy as recognised security actors in the community. Some police officers have since learned the value of working with some of these security groups in keeping and maintaining order in the villages.

The manner in which the police enforce law and order in our community is very concerning. They have a reputation of using excessive force in their work and also unlawfully abusing their power. Many residents and especially youths have been victims of police harassment, unlawful arrests and extortion. I remember for example a fellow community researcher telling us of the many run-ins he has had with the police at Kariobangi Roundabout over flimsy issues. In many of these interactions the police had tried to extort money from him. This is not uncommon, as so many people in the community have had similar experiences. It has also been rumoured that some rogue police officers have manipulated or threatened 'reforming youths' back into a life of crime. The youths are essentially made to 'work' for the rogue police officers.

There have also been many cases of violent policing in the community. Some of these have resulted in the extra-judicial killings of especially youths. There are times it feels as though they do the exact opposite of what they are mandated to do. Their work in the community has on occasion been very disruptive, often not following due process and contributing to, if not creating, disorder in the community. Just recently, on Wednesday, 3rd April 2019, police were engaged in running battles with residents of Mathare 3A. Angry youths were throwing stones at the police and burnt tyres shouting, "Mumetuzoea!" You think we are pushovers! The police were in turn shooting teargas canister back at the youths. The police were attempting to enforce

a longstanding ban on the production of illicit brew in Mathare. Mathare 3A is a small village in the middle of Mathare 3C and 3B and adjacent to the Eastleigh Air Base. Alcohol brewing is the main 'cash crop' or most vibrant economic activity in Mathare 3A. Unlicensed alcohol brewing has been in Mathare for as long as there has been a Mathare. This 'underground economy' has been active in all of the four administrations in Kenya, from Jomo Kenyatta in the 1960s to his son Uhuru Kenyatta today. It is sort of an open secret. Much as this local alcohol production industry is outlawed, the administration has allowed it. The powers that be, however, from time to time forcefully reassert their authority and power by enforcing the laws prohibiting the unlicensed production of alcohol in Mathare. This is what everyone in the community knows and believes. Every so often police officers have been raiding brewing dens when orders from above instruct a crackdown on illicit brew production. At other times, these same officers are known to regularly collect 'tango', bribes and protection fees from the alcohol distillers. It is a racket that everyone in the area knows about. As a result, alcohol brewers and distillers have over the years been known to be very powerful and connected individuals in the community. Chaos has always erupted in Mathare 3A whenever the interests of these alcohol producers have been threatened in the past. Alcohol production is a very lucrative venture for those involved in it. With this last crackdown, brewers particularly took offense – how have they been paying tango to the very police officers that led a crackdown against their business ventures? It was during the running battles with 3A residents that it is believed the police perhaps accidentally set a furniture store ablaze. The fire quickly spread to nearby iron-sheet houses, burning down a significant section of the village. A local school was also razed to the ground. It was a very chaotic scene. The air was filled with noise, people crying, shouting and gunshots being fired. It took almost an hour for the fire brigade to get to the scene. At this point the fire had destroyed so much.

There could be many agendas and interests in my community, which bring about conflict between people. But I am a firm believer in dialogue for peace building and conflict resolution. I believe dialogue calms down and even brings healing to the wounded lion. People may have both real and imagined grievances, or may be motivated by different factors, but it is only when the community sits together to talk and listen to each other that lasting peace can be achieved. Various organizations operating in our community have been on the forefront of championing for peace and even engaging in conflict resolution. But many of these do this as side-activities; not many local organisations are particularly dedicated to designing and implementing activities promoting peace and co-existence in the community. Often, the organisations running peace campaigns in the ghettos have different missions and core-objectives. Their work in either peace making or building is for the most part incidental. Peace building is a slow painstaking engagement; it is not a one-off kind of thing. Unfortunately many big organisations working in the community have taken a very reactive approach. Many of these have been waiting for election time to talk about peace. Very few are approaching this as a long-term investment for sustainable outcomes. Right before the 2018 elections there was a series of peace dialogues that brought together different stakeholders in their processes. Not everyone, however, responded to these efforts positively. During this time there were some community members instigating violence between the different ethnic identity groups. Some people took offense with for example a youth-led peace-building process that some of my fellow community researchers were part of. It had been assumed that a narrative of peace was a ploy to downplay grievances they felt were going unaddressed. Much as is the case, the efforts of some organisations like Ghetto Foundation have been very deliberate. Ghetto Foundation through its 'Ngumzo Mataani' peace dialogues stands out in this regard. Through these dialogues, Ghetto Foundation has mediated conversations between conflicting youth bazes such as Gaza, Kigoma, Hong Kong and Rounda in the past, this is especially at the times of elections. The involvement of youths in peace advocacy has been a very effective approach. In the last one year Ghetto Foundation has been organising community dialogues at bazes all across Mathare and even beyond. They have even brought together rival youth groups for



peace and security dialogues, “They get to talk and address their grievances with each other and suggest how they figure these grievances can be addressed.” In an interview a respondent also said that, “Ghetto Foundation came to my community in Kay. There were fears that there was going to be inter-ethnic conflict between the Somalis and Kikuyus in the area.” Ghetto Foundation has been approaching even notorious gangs for productive engagement:

For example, Ghetto Foundation has worked with a group like Gaza, which is very feared in that area. We have been to their base for peace and security dialogues. This is how we do it. We notify them that we will be paying them a visit on a certain day for a casual conversation. We show up and have the conversation. They speak their minds and do not hold anything back. After creating a safe and trusting space we then get to encourage them to pursue alternative paths in addressing their grievances or challenges.

Indeed ‘prevention is better than cure.’ But looking at the conflict and insecurity situation in our community, we need measures that both seek to prevent and also cure. My recommendations are a mix of both. Firstly, I think the local administration should be open to working with community security actors and especially with youth groups. The government, which includes the police and local administration, should also actively engage in the various community dialogues that local organizations are organizing towards promoting peace and unity. As a true believer of dialogue I know the truth hurts, but it also heals and brings closure. And this is the foundation of true reconciliation and community resilience. This is the purpose of these dialogues. I also believe there are some good police officers that mean good for our community. But that is not enough. We need police officers that also understand our lived experiences. This way they will be better equipped at serving our needs here in the community. This is not to however suggest that the police are solely responsible for peace building and conflict resolution in our community. I like to think of it as shared responsibility between law enforcement and the community. There is a very big potential for collaboration between government departments, the community and local organisations in the area of peace building and conflict resolution. I would also advise that all actors and organisations of goodwill keen on participating in this space should be careful to meaningfully engage and involve local organisations in their initiatives. This way, interventions will have a better understanding of the different dynamics propelling conflict and insecurity in the community.

Afterword

This book has been written to bring out pertinent issues that affect two marginalized communities in Nairobi – male sex workers and youths living in informal settlements. These CBOs occupy different positions in the international aid chain, with HOYMAS being integrated in the official development assistance (ODA) system, whilst Ghetto Foundation, for the most part, operating outside of it. These positions have interesting implications on how the two CBOs work with and in the communities. It is hoped that this book will guide and motivate local and international donors as they review their operational guidelines. The findings and analyses in this book are a result of a bottom-up research approach that sought to understand the aid chain and the issues that these communities find relevant and value, and to find out how these issues relate to these organizations. Moreover, in the book, community members discuss issues that they consider important to them, which are generally excluded from donor funding. The bottom-up approach allowed them to give narratives of matters that affect them directly including how different players within and outside their communities take advantage of their vulnerabilities (e.g. police, organisations, health centres, youth programmes etc). Further, the narrations include self-reflections as well as what the community researchers see as solutions to challenges they face.

Several contrasting values between the two communities are evident in the community researchers' presentations. Members of Ghetto Foundation for example tend to articulate their lived experiences in structural categories; understanding life's challenges as consequences of systemic forces. HOYMAS members on the other hand give intimate and personal accounts of life as gay men and sex workers in Nairobi seeking to maximize their personal freedoms and rights. The two teams also share some similarities in their presentations. Most notable is the feeling that their communities exist in the margins of society. Both teams also appreciate the role of their CBOs within an ecosystem of development actors ranging from the state to NGOs, (inter)national donors and other CBOs. CBOs are at the very bottom of every aid and development configuration as local implementers. In many projects CBOs are taken to be local liaisons and implementers. This comes out where community members feel tokenized since decisions are made regarding their wellbeing without any meaningful consultation. In HOYMAS for example, they feel that programmes are designed to respond to donor priorities and not to those of the community. While most attention is directed toward HIV/AIDS management little to no attention is paid to the many struggles that the community consider essential, especially mental health, stigma, discrimination and marginalization. This book therefore, is the voice of the affected, vital for the ODA situational analysis, and is important in strengthening advocacy on issues that are important to the two communities.

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