

Constraints Facing Youth Groups in their Endeavour to Reduce Poverty in Mathare Slum, Nairobi

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Abstract

Kenya has a youthful population with 75% under thirty years. This calls for efforts to involve them in the development process. This study focused on the urban poor youth in Mathare Slum Nairobi. The specific objectives of the study were to: examine constraints faced by youth groups in their endeavor to reduce poverty in Mathare slum; determine lessons learned from group activities that may inform policy makers and other stakeholders; and make recommendations on how the youth through youth groups can be brought more effectively into mainstream developmental programmes. The survey was carried out using both qualitative and quantitative tools of data collection.

Findings reveal that youth groups face internal and external problems. Internal problems take the form of poor leadership, lack of resources and laxities among members while external problems are police harassment, lack of community support and interference by politicians. In the key informant interviews and focus group discussions, agencies working with groups such as the government, NGOs, churches and community members were called upon to help groups solve their problems.

The study recommends the need for a clear youth policy framework covering all areas of youth development interests. It is imperative that counseling services be provided to youth. Nevertheless, girls should be accorded special attention and encouraged to participate in youth group activities. In addition, national sports bodies should make a point of helping youth groups while Nairobi City Council should extend provision of services to slums.

Introduction

Many African countries have become greatly concerned with a high population growth rate and especially the critical situation created by the fast increasing number of the youth. Kenya has a youthful population with 48.9 per cent under fifteen years and 60 per cent under twenty years (Rep. of Kenya, 1996:2). The current statistics indicate that about 75% of the Kenyan population is aged below 30 years (Rep. of Kenya, 2002: 4). Majority of these young persons in urban areas live in informal settlements/slums. The study took an interest in these youth because they form a large part of the urban poor population.

The youth in the slums unlike other youth living in affluent areas and the youth in rural

areas are exposed to economic, environmental, social and cultural hardships. Economic problems among the young people living in Mathare Slum manifest through unemployment, low paid jobs and lack of credit facilities. These problems are caused by increase in population, introduction of structural adjustment programmes that led to widespread retrenchment of workers in public and private sectors and withdrawal of financial Aid to Kenya, consequently causing poverty. The youth in slums live in poor houses where overcrowding, lack of recreational space, poor sanitary conditions, uncollected garbage and un- constructed roads are evident. One of the major causes of this is the illegality of their

settlement. A study by (Ngau, 1997) revealed that there are:

"... no other legal document to show ownership other than a letter from the Chief. In a way, the Chief is the title deed and the village elders are the beacons Because of corruption, the provincial administration in collusion with officers in City Hall can allocate any plot to people with money. When this happens residents are evicted within a very short notice or none at all."

The informant explained that when such land is allocated to private developers, the allottees use all kinds of crude methods to get them off the plot. Sometimes, they hire thugs to set their structures on fire at night (Ngau 1997: 29). Faced with these conditions, residents cannot do much to improve their environment since they can be evicted any time. This denies the youth a reasonable environment that they deserve.

Some of the social problems that the youth face include lack of basic education, vocational training facilities, frustration, loneliness and lack of understanding from responsible authorities. Some of these problems are due to the government's introduction of cost sharing in provision of social services. In education, the report on the presidential working party on education and manpower training for the next decade and beyond and its adoption by the government contained in Sessional Paper No. 6 of 1988, outlined the firm recommendations and decisions on education expenditure. The report led to the adoption of the cost sharing policy in education, although the new government declared Free Primary Education in the year 2003, parents are still faced with the burden of feeding their children in schools, paying boarding fees and expanding school physical facilities. Other problems associated with education are lack of income and lack of awareness among parents about its significance. Frustration and loneliness facing the youth of today are caused by the psychological and physiological changes taking place in young people. At this stage they are neither adults nor children and nobody

seems to understand them including parents (Omari, 1982: 39).

The breakdown of traditional family setting and values is also accelerating social problems among the poor urban youth. In the traditional African setting, children belonged to an extended family which gave them very wide and varied experiences on how to relate with others. In initiation ceremonies that marked an abrupt change from childhood to adult status, the youth were taught their societies lore, moral codes, beliefs and taboos. This abrupt change and exposure to vital facts of life pertaining to adult status at the onset of puberty enabled them to enter adolescence with clear vision, knowledge and status and therefore without some of the major psychological conflicts experienced by adolescents of today. The breakdown of traditional family and kinship systems and the prevalence in African society of marital problems, broken marriages, rural to urban migration, single parent household, conflicts in religious teachings and contradictions between African and Western cultures have adversely affected the process of socialization leaving the youth with multiple problems and unable to face the world (Weisner *et al*, 1997).

Impact of hardships on the youth: Problems facing young people have led to deviant behaviors among the youth living in slums. They engage in illegal activities like drug and alcohol use and abuse, indiscriminate and random sexual liaisons, criminal activities such as pick pocketing, mugging people and joining violent gangs. Other characteristics seen among the youth include, prostitution among young girls, which may be caused by overcrowded housing that expose them to early sexual intercourse as an imitation of what adults do, and/or are exposed to incest by relatives living with them. Poor environmental conditions lead to contagious diseases like typhoid, diarrhoea and dysentery. Due to the general hostile conditions, young people in slum areas tend to suffer in all aspects of life thus they become hardcore, deviant, yell, abuse, and fight unnecessarily.

Suggested Interventions: To deal with the above problems, young people are required to participate in activities that would restore their personal and social integrity. These activities which are rehabilitative in nature can rightly be referred to as social defense mechanisms, which have social, economic and psychological implications to the participant. They develop or empower both the individual and the community. As for psychological defense mechanisms, it is said that under normal circumstances, individuals are socialized to be able to control, postpone, or delay instinctual desires until conditions prevail that are favourable or suitable for their gratification. When there is an imbalance between instinctual desires and their gratification, individuals experience anxiety, a signal of danger. In order to protect the psyche from experiencing pain, a pleasure principle is triggered, the purpose of which is to deflect psychological, physical or social pain of discomfort.

The process by which this pleasure principle modifies or rechannels the libidinal energy is what is referred to as the psychological defense mechanism (Weisner *et al.*, 1997). The study concludes that youth groups are used as both social and psychological defense mechanisms which are meant to alleviate the problems and pains experienced by young members living in Mathare slum. The intention of this study is not to look at youth as a marginalized and problematic category, but to give attention to the positive and dynamic aspects of "youth and those underprivileged youth (in terms of being unskilled, unemployed and living in a slum area) and their strategies to make their living and get a way into a brighter future. This study therefore analyses constraint of youth groups as an intervention in youth problems.

Initiatives to solve youth problems: Many African countries including Kenya have acknowledged problems of the youth and their effects. The Commonwealth Seminar on Youth and Development held in Nairobi in 1970 for example, emphasized on ways and means of curbing unemployment. In the

seminar, Mwai Kibaki, the then Minister of Commerce and Industry asserted that: "Youth is one of the biggest problems afflicting all developing countries in the Commonwealth. Youth is ambitious and energetic, yet frustrated because its talents are being wasted through unemployment."

During the seminar, it was proposed that, training for self-employment or for employment in self-supporting groups, would offer greater prospects or satisfactory results in solving some of these problems. Although the problems of youth have been there since independence they still persist in the current situation with worse impacts because of population increase and the advent of HIV/AIDS.

In trying to solve the problems of the youth, the Kenya government took an initiative immediately after independence in 1963. The National Youth Service (NYS) was started to look into the problems of unemployment and self-discipline. Training in good citizenship and vocational courses have since been offered. The pre-university national service scheme was initiated in 1984 after several postponements. It ran for two years before being abandoned. This is a scheme that could have been very useful to people since it was training young persons aspiring to join universities to be disciplined and patriotic. The new NARC Government is making good use of the NYS by recruiting youth who were formerly roaming on the streets to learn skills. In Nigeria, NYS has been lauded as having contributed immensely to national integration and patriotism (Shivutse and Akong'a 1980). The Government has shown interest in problems of the youth as seen in their commitment in National Development Plans, working papers and the recent draft on the National Youth Policy Paper. However, youth groups as an intervention in problem of the youth have not been explored. This study focused on the constraints youth groups are facing in handling the problems of the youth. The results could help policy makers to implement corrective policies to boost this intervention.

Statement of the problem

Development entails growth and therefore a country's development encompasses contribution from every individual be they children, youth and adults. A country's meaningful development will depend on her national capabilities to promote welfare measures that will improve the physical, economic, social and mental wellbeing of youth before and after joining the national work force. The urban youth not having found their place in the new economic, social and cultural set up face complex problems. In addition, the urban youth problems are pressing and demand immediate attention if worse situations are to be avoided. Accordingly, urban youth groups formed to solve youth problems have more roles and encounter bigger problems in their attempts to address youth problems.

This study therefore surveyed problems faced by youth groups in their endeavour to alleviate poverty and recommendations were made by the researcher on what should be done to improve the involvement of youth groups in development through participation. The specific objectives were to: (i) examine constraints faced by youth group in their endeavor to reduce poverty in Mathare slum; (ii) determine lessons learned from group activities that may inform policy makers and other stakeholders; and (iii) make recommendations on how the youth through youth groups can be brought more effectively into mainstream developmental activities or programmes.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Mathare one of the largest and poorest slums in Africa. The development of Mathare slum can be linked directly or indirectly to employment opportunities. Majority of the villages have been formed by employees working in the vicinity, either at homes of rich individuals in affluent estates, quarries, industries, construction sites, nearby large scale agricultural farms or proximity to the city center or the industrial area. Most of the

working residents walk to and from work because they cannot afford public transport.

The study made use of the descriptive research design utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The descriptive design applicable because it provided in details constraints youth groups are facing in trying to solve youth problems in Mathare slum. The study aimed at getting information from three categories of youth group's i.e. those initiated by churches, NGOs and communities. Four youth groups were sampled – two representing those organized by the community and two others representing Church and NGO initiated. Purposive sampling was used to choose groups from the preferred categories. Government officials from the study area provided privileged information. They included, the divisional officer, the KANU youth chairman central division, Mabatini area security chairman and an officer from the social development office Nairobi Province. Three data collection instruments were used, namely, Key Informant Interviews, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and the questionnaire survey.

Key informant interviews: This method was used to obtain information from five key persons (the programme officer of Mathare Youth Sports Association (MYSA), Mabatini area security chairman, KANU youth chairman Mathare division, The District Officer Central division and The Social Development Officer Nairobi province) dealing with youth groups in Mathare Valley.

Focus group discussions: To crosscheck information from the key informants and therefore to sidetrack the disadvantages of the Key Informant Interview, Focus Group Discussions were held with various groups. The groups were formed on ad hoc basis to reduce fear and encourage free involvement in the discussion. The technique was used to elicit opinions, attitudes, and ideas from youth group members and their leaders. Two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), one with leaders and another with the group members were held for three of the groups that took part in the study. It was not easy to separate leaders and players

from the MYSA group since the discussion was with a football team that had united players from different parts of Nairobi. To interview groups that had both leaders and members, appointments were first made with the leaders; mainly to inform them about the survey, get their opinions and book appointments with members.

The questionnaire survey: The questionnaire was administered to youth group members only. In most cases, questionnaires were filled on the spot. Only in the case of Ngei One Youth Development Group (NIYDG) did members request to remain with the questionnaires because they were tired after a clean-up exercise. A total of thirty-five questionnaires were filled, ten by Maendeleo Mabatini, seven by MYSA and nine by Talanta and another nine by NIYDG.

Since the study used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection, analysis was done according to the technique employed. To begin with the questionnaire, data analysis involved development of a codebook, cleaning of the data, coding of the filled questionnaire, data entry and finally analysis using SPSS. The qualitative data was recorded in the language used during discussion. In this case, the data had to be transcribed and translated from Kiswahili and Sheng' into English. The qualitative data was then analyzed manually using the study objectives as a guide.

Findings and Conclusion

Constraints of youth groups

In Mathare, as in other slums, the rise in the number of poor urban youth is associated with the phenomenon of rapid urban growth, especially of growing / sprawling slums and shanty towns. The problem of the poor urban youth springs from these conditions of urban poverty in which he or she is brought up. Any organization willing to help these young people should make a point of looking into their lives in these settlements. Help should be focused to the entire living context of poor urban youth that is their: economic, social, political and environmental set ups. All these

problems facing slum dwellers are reflected in the operation of youth groups as discussed below.

Economic problems: Youth groups face economic problems such as unemployment, majority of the youth interviewed are not employed. The few who have jobs are not paid enough to meet their basic needs or to lead a decent life. This problem in itself limits youth group operations in that; members are not able to make meaningful financial contributions. Most of the groups involved in the survey, charge members a weekly subscription of Ksh 10 or Ksh 20. During problems and misfortune such as death of a member's relative or arrest by police, members are called upon to make financial contributions. Closely related to unemployment is the limitation of finances. The income received from groups' projects is meagre. MYSA, one of the four groups surveyed receives donation and funding from civil society agencies and friends, but they also cited lack of finances as a hindrance to their operation. Lack of equipment and facilities was given as another limitation to groups' performance. All the groups interviewed complained about this. For instance, NIYDG, cited lack of money to buy and replace handcarts used to transport garbage, together with recycling of paper bags used by clients to throw in rubbish. Clinically, it is unhygienic for such papers to be re-used. To cope with this shortage of paper bags the group washes the plastic paper bags and re-uses them. MYSA on the other hand, voiced the same problem of inadequate equipment, which delays clean-ups for their zones. It uses the same equipments; wheelbarrows, machetes, hoes, tractors and gloves in rotation among the zones. Talanta Youth Group observed that, their main limitation is lack of thread, needles, sewing machines and cardboards for their fine art projects. Maendeleo Mabatini at the time of the study had neither started on their project of clean-ups nor achieved their goal of starting a library due to lack of resources.

On the question of whether groups have access to credit facilities the answer was unanimously on the negative; most of them

affirmed their inability to access loans from banks and other financial institutions because of lack of collateral and clear policies. In addition to the above problems, youth groups lack markets for their goods/products because of poor marketing strategies and production of inferior goods that are not competitive. Several voices were quoted to further explain economic limitations. For example, MYSA members observed that:

You just know the donor fatigue, they never give us enough money. It is also difficult for the organization to make money, since most of the activities undertaken by groups are on voluntary basis and not for income generating.

While Talanta group members agreed that:

There is no way youth can access loans, unless they steal or use 'ngeta' (mugging) a person.

Another one said that:

The biggest problem of the youth is unemployment, which consequently leads to other problems.

Social problems: All the groups cited lack of playing grounds, space for dumping, meeting joints and recreational facilities. From observations made, MYSA uses Pangani police line fields to practice for competition while Maendeleo Mabatini uses the KANU office Mathare, as their meeting point. During the visit to Ngei I, youth and children were playing football on a heap of garbage. They were exposed to health hazards let alone limiting their full physical growth. Talanta youth group holds meetings in classrooms belonging to St Teresa's Catholic Church. Members complained of lack of disco places, instead the area is full of bars. There seem to be few 'safe' recreation facilities for upright youth upbringing.

Another social problem mentioned was the attainment of little formal education. From all the members interviewed, only a handful had reached form four. One young person belonging to NIYDG had completed form four and was in college taking a course in accounts at the time of the study. On the issues of inadequate education, a member of Maendeleo

Mabatini said: "I wish I had money to further my education. I would be far in life, but all that needs money. When I was in school, I lacked key necessities such as books, school fees, uniform and pens".

In this particular group (Maendeleo Mabatini), only two members, the chairman and the secretary, had attained secondary education, while the under 16 united team of MYSA had youth who had dropped out of school due to financial limitations. All the boys in the MYSA team had wishes of going back to school. They confided that: "Most of us have dropped out of school because of lack of school fees, but if we can get sponsors we will go back to school, we can also join non-formal schools and training institutions".

The voices of these boys and many others in the slum stress the importance of education. Education has long been recognized as a central element in development. It is now widely accepted that the process of development can be painfully slow without education. Educated people are known to have the skills necessary for sustainable economic growth (World bank, 1988). It is in view of this that youth groups should be given education support such as training and enrolling members in informal schools to boost their knowledge and skills base.

Housing is a basic human need and therefore its availability and quality along with access to other basic amenities determine to a large extent the welfare status and quality of life of the occupants. However, most of the youth interviewed confirmed that housing was a big problem faced by young persons in the slum. Most of them feel they are too old to live with their parents in the same house while at the same time they cannot afford to rent a small room of about 10 by 10 feet which ranges between Ksh 500-1000. Rooms with cemented floors and supply of electricity and which are close to the main roads are charged highly. The youth noted that they couldn't afford even the poorest quality of those houses. To solve these problems youth live in groups of three to five in order to share the rent. Approximately (90%) of the members interviewed live with

friends. Sometimes they go back to their parents for financial and material assistance. It was reported by members in focus group discussions that: "Boys who do not belong to a youth group use their houses as hideouts and places to plan for thefts. They stay in one house as many as eight people". This means that the youth who do not belong to youth groups are prone to criminal activities than their counterparts in youth groups. Maybe Mathare will have less crime if most of these boys were to join groups.

Also cited, as a social limitation was the problem of access to health services. Mathare slum does not have a government hospital. Patients and their relatives have to go to either Kenyatta National Hospital or Mbagathi District Hospital. Although government health clinics are supposed to be free, attending them involves expenses, for example patients are frequently asked to buy missing medical supplies like bandages, syringes and cotton wool. Since the area lacks a government clinic, residents are treated in private clinics that are very expensive. Treatment costs in these clinics were approximated at Ksh. 600.00, inclusive of Ksh. 50.00 (registration fee), Ksh. 500.00 (for consultation) and Ksh. 50.00 for medication.

This is expensive for people living in the slum given their low income. The most common diseases suffered are typhoid, amoeba, tuberculosis and malaria. All these diseases are linked to environmental factors.

Group attendance is a problem to the performance of groups in that the youth group members fail to attend group meetings as required or do not turn up to perform duties. NIYDG confirmed that during garbage collection sometimes they employ non-members to stand in for missing members. A number of members also joined groups expecting quick monetary gains which if not forthcoming leads to lethargy and apathy among group members. Gossip among members came out strongly as a limitation to groups' activities. These problems call for sensitization to members to know the importance of groups so that they can work as a

team towards fulfillment of their goals. It is also important for youth group leaders to receive training in management to enable them control members.

Key informant interviews with government officials revealed that youth groups are also faced with the problem of drug abuse and HIV/AIDS infections. This is an interesting finding since all the members interviewed never mentioned drugs as a problem instead they stated rehabilitation of drug abusers as an achievement of the groups. However, youth also agreed that HIV/AIDS was a big problem affecting young people. Two out of the four groups interviewed acknowledged losing members to the pandemic.

Political problems: The youth also face political problems emanating from the Provincial administration, the police and youth group leaders. For instance, government officials had grabbed the dumping site that was in Mathare slum. The youth are now forced to dump garbage far away, about 10 kilometres from their bases. This was found to inhibit the clean-up efforts of groups. An important finding was that all the boys interviewed cited police harassment as a big problem to the youth living in the slum. They had various accounts of their encounter with police. They claim they are sometimes accused wrongly. Sometimes the police plant drugs and weapons like knives on them and take all their money. Often their business premises are closed down. This is in line with the finding that one objective of the youth groups is to raise money to bail their friends from jail. While visiting Maendeleo Mabatini group, it was revealed that:

Many young boys would rather meet thieves than policemen because the police will always have something to accuse you of even if you are innocent. They can either plant drugs or arms on you. For example, xxx was arrested wrongly; they put drugs in his pockets because he did not have money to bribe them.

To facilitate his release the group had to contribute Ksh 3,700 to pay for his bail. Another problem raised mainly by government

officials was that the slum is losing many young members in police shootouts due to their criminal activities. With the advent of multipartism in Kenya, groups sometimes reflect the political scene in the country. Groups have been politicized. For instance, different ethnic groups will support a candidate from their ethnicity, thus dividing the group. Some politicians in a bid to have a large following use youth groups to cause fracas for them during elections. They buy drugs and alcohol for group members to make them violent and hyperactive. During the landlord/tenants fights in the neighbouring Kibera slum, (November/ December 2001), youth groups took an active part in fighting for both landlords and tenants. This shows the exploitation and vulnerability of groups to outside influence like that of politicians.

Environmental problems: In addition to economic, social and political problems, the youth in Mathare slum also face environmental problems, prominent among them are lack of sanitary facilities. Toilets and bathrooms are too few for the number of people who use them communally. From the focus group discussions, young members unanimously agreed that due to lack of bathrooms they bathe inside their houses or make temporary bathrooms using polythene bags. Toilets were also said to be lacking, one has to pay for the use of the few available toilets. Members of Maendeleo Mabatini youth group lamented that:

... To use the toilets, one has to run to the bus stage (which is about 1 km. away) that is where we have public toilets. All the toilets in this village have fallen down; only two are left for all these people living in Mabatini village.

Another group complained;

... We live in the village (Mathare slum), to use the toilet one has to pay five shillings, but incase you are given apiece of tissue you have to pay ten shillings.

From discussions, it was evident that every area charges different amounts of money for the use of toilets, depending on the number available. Another environmental problem

facing youth in Mathare slum is the presence of garbage everywhere. Most members blamed this on city council workers who fail to do their work and also lack of dumping sites. Thus residents' dump rubbish virtually anywhere. The community also lacks awareness about safe disposal of waste. In addition, it was established that they did not seem to appreciate efforts made by groups. NIYDG and MYSA that are directly involved in cleaning the slum commented that:

It is the people who are bad; they should be advised to throw rubbish in one place not everywhere. After clean ups, people pour rubbish in the cleaned area at night. At times when we are doing voluntary cleanups, people just sit on stools to watch they never take part.

It was found out that the drainage system in Mathare slum is very poor. A lot of washing is done outside and the space to absorb the large volumes of surface disposed water is very limited. The sewage flows inside and outside plots making access to their houses difficult. Members of NIYDG solve this problem by making a 'bridge' of stones to assist them in entering their houses without stepping in the sewage. This situation of poor drainage is worse during the wet seasons.

Water is one of the most basic necessities of life. Water availability and its quality are also very closely related to the quality of sanitation and environmental health. The question of availability of water in Mathare slum received mixed reactions from members. A few of them observed that there is no water problem except the usual city council rationing. The feeling was mainly by residents of Ngei I and Mabatini, while residents of Mlango Kubwa (Talanta group members) complained that water is a big problem. They buy it everyday at Kshs. 5 for a twenty-litre jerrican, which is quite expensive, considering that the average family size is big and that most of them live below the poverty line. Cumulatively, large portions of their daily expenses have to be spent on survival requirement, toilets, bathrooms and water not to mention food.

Coping strategies of groups

In relation to the constraints mentioned in the previous section, groups have devised coping strategies. Although it is essential to note that some of the problems are beyond their coping strategies. In trying to solve financial and material problems, several means have been put in place. To begin with, groups have developed proposals which they give to institutions, organizations and individuals for funding. Other groups receive sponsorship from organizations such as Ford Foundation, Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA), National Council of Churches and Mathare Youth Sports Association. Individuals in the society have also given material and financial support to groups. Groups also establish income-generating activities like shoe shining, selling water and providing transport among others to solve financial problems.

Police harassment was cited as a big problem facing the slum youth. They deal with the constraint by avoiding idleness since the police target idle youth. Many members engage in the groups' activities as a way of keeping themselves busy. Also, if a group member is arrested, other members contribute money to bail them out. Sometimes money is withdrawn from the groups account for the same purpose. Problems posed by leaders are dealt with by training them to be more accountable and transparent. They are also reported to the Chief incase of misappropriation of funds where they are punished. To avoid misappropriation of funds, leaders are asked to provide financial statements periodically.

There are several penalties given to members who break group rules. Lazy members are suspended from groups while others are warned. Some groups strictly adhere to their constitutions as a way of streamlining members. The problem of drug abuse is dealt with by exerting peer pressure and adherence to group rules, together with members monitoring each other. Other members, who are not drug abusers encourage drug abusers to stop the habit. In addition, seminars and workshops organized by churches and other

organizations teach the youth on negative consequences of drug abuse. Films to discourage drug use and abuse are also shown.

Participants made suggestions on what should be done by the various agencies working in the area to improve the effectiveness of youth groups. The agencies addressed were: the government; Non-governmental organizations; Churches; The community; and to the Youth group leaders and members.

a) The government

The government is a very important agent in the operation of youth groups. Groups in the sample were registered at the Social Service department, after clearing with the Chief and District Officer. The government can also support youth groups by giving them land, finances and scholarships. Recommendations given to the government to make them improve groups' activities included:

- Increase groups' access to credit by providing loans to youth groups without demand of collateral.
- Get more involved in youth groups activities. For example, visit the group at their areas of operation. Social development officers were accused of negligence since they never visit groups in the field.
- Register as many youth groups as possible since registered groups are considered genuine and bonafide.
- Provide space to groups for starting projects, play grounds and recreational facilities. Land in informal settlements is owned by the government and a few individuals
- Draft a policy paper that actively involves the youth in the country's development process, in addition to giving the youth a chance to be represented in the national assembly.
- Train the youth, provide free education to children and youth in urban slums as well as starting projects for youth in youth groups. One of the security chairman had this to say: "The

government should start projects for youth, in the slum; since there are no jobs, factories are closing down, more people are getting retrenched. All those losing jobs are moving to the slum which creates a security problem".

b) Non- governmental organizations

As mentioned earlier, some groups receive support from NGOs, although the assistance given is not adequate. The following suggestions were given to NGOs to improve their support to youth groups.

- Provide more financial and material aid to groups and to start projects for groups.
- Look for more ways of reaching the poor urban youth. Some members reported that NGOs neglect them. Youth groups are forced to look for money to call or visit NGOs instead of being looked for by NGO workers.
- Involve members in decision-making. For instance, youth group members should be given a chance to state their priorities and needs in relation to project implementation.
- Provide support to youth to start self-employment ventures as a way of reducing poverty in the area. Members suggested that NGOs should have their offices located in Mathare slum. Most of them have projects in Mathare while their offices are located in rich/posh areas of Nairobi.
- Provide capacity building skills to youth group members and leaders through training.

c) The Church

On a few occasions the youth mentioned the church as one institution that assists their groups. For example, NIYDG commended the Catholic Church for praying for their group. Talanta Youth Group on the other hand was grateful to St. Teresa's Catholic Church for giving them a meeting place. In spite of the above help, members felt that the church could

do more. The following suggestions were given on the role of the church in youth groups:

- To give assistance to the youth by counseling and guiding them against drug taking and HIV/AIDS.
- It was suggested that the church should differentiate between the youth and children since they have different needs. They are always lumped together.
- To provide meeting places, play grounds and other material support to groups.
- To involve the youth in church leadership as a way of representing their views.
- To understand the problems of the youth as being different from adults and children.

d) The community

Out of the four groups that took part in the study, two of them were community initiated. Also all groups rely on the cooperation of community members for success. It was in view of this that the following suggestions were made:

- Community members were asked to trust the youth, believe that they can change and be useful. They should avoid accusing the youth falsely. Members of NIYDG commented that: *"The community should view the youth as part of them and not criminals or special persons"*.
- To cooperate and help youth groups carry out their activities like clean-ups. They should be sensitized about the importance of having a clean environment.
- Give support to group projects by buying their goods, paying for the use of toilets and bathrooms together with buying water from groups.
- To join hands with the government, NGOs and youth groups in constructing public facilities like hospitals and schools.

e) Youth group leaders

Leaders have a big role in ensuring the success of a group. Several suggestions were put forward to them as a way of helping groups advance.

- They were asked to act as role models by being good examples to members and not to engage in immoral activities like drinking and exchanging girl friends.
- Give members a chance to give suggestions and views and also to allow members to mould their projects since they are the main beneficiaries.
- To adhere to group defined goals, objectives and constitution to avoid colliding with members.
- To be open, transparent and accountable in the groups finances and other affairs.
- Should be ready to face challenges and not be discouraged by criticisms.
- Leaders should not look for experienced youth to give opportunities. Members should be treated equally without any favouritism and should be given a chance to exploit their talents and skills.
- Network with other groups to learn better leadership styles and ways of solving problems.

f) Youth group members

Like leaders, members are very important in a groups' success. They are the backbone of any group. They were advised to:

- Interact with community members in a friendly manner as a way of enticing the community's support to the group activities. Also as a way of improving security of the slum.
- Sponsor their leaders for leadership courses for them to acquire better leadership styles, in addition, to giving support to their leaders.
- Cooperate and unite as members of a particular group to help in the group's growth.

- Members should take activities seriously and participate in all group activities including attendance of meetings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, regardless of the benefits that young persons gain as members of groups the youth in general and youth groups in particular, still face major constraints. A close look at their activities shows that they are uncoordinated. Yet some youth groups are limited by sheer lack of capacity such as leadership skills of group leaders and counselling skills needed for the rampant problems of drug addiction and spread of HIV/AIDS. To solve these constraints, a holistic approach has to be undertaken. Individuals, group members, leaders, the community, the government, church and NGOs should all take an interest in the groups and look for ways to alleviate their problems. The groups have looked for ways of solving the above constraints. Some of them range from making appeals to organizations and individuals for financial and material support to starting income-generating activities and relying on members to make contributions when need arises. Although efforts made by youth groups in handling problems are commendable, they are still inadequate and a lot needs to be done for them to succeed.

Policy Recommendations

Youth groups need encouragement from NGOs, the church and the community in order for them to operate well. Adults should provide counseling services to youth groups since young members need help from adults to operate successfully. The community should be sensitized and mobilized to give support to youth groups through advertisement at the chief's office, announcements in Chiefs' *barazas* and the churches. Also, during cleanups, the church, mosque, community leaders such as the Chief and Counselor should be present to give young members support and encouragement in their activities. In a small

way, people should begin a culture of supporting one another.

The government should draw a clear policy document on the youth and youth groups. Currently, there is no laid down policy on youth. The department of social services is in the process of drawing a policy paper for the youth, it has come up with a draft copy of the policy paper which is awaiting approval, although it is not clear when it will be ready. Youth policies are spread in various government documents and departments dealing with youth affairs. Some of these departments include, education, health, Juakali, KANU and culture and social services. It is important for a clear policy document to be drawn, to fully include the youth in development issues since they form a large part of the Kenyan population.

Policies should be made to ensure children and youth are provided with education since it is the key to development. Kenya is aspiring to achieve Education For All (EFA) by the year 2015. Measures should be put in place to ensure that children and young people in slum areas receive this education. The current move by the government to introduce Free Primary Education has been lauded as a step towards the achievement of Education For All. However, much needs to be done in regard to ensuring that all children are enrolled. Recent studies indicate that teachers and younger pupils have not been sensitized to accept the youth who enrolled and are above primary school age thus many who had enrolled have dropped out due to stigmatization. Those youth who are already past the school going age should be taken to training colleges and informal schools. In addition, employment opportunities should be provided to all young people living in the slum. This is the only way to create peace and happiness for children and young people living in anxiety. The policy document should also include ways of solving environmental problems that young people face in the slum areas such as poor sanitation and drainage systems, huge piles of garbage, lack of dumping sites and rampant sewage leaks. The city council workers should not

segregate the slum areas with an assumption that they are illegal settlements since these areas are in jurisdictional boundaries of the provincial administration and the Electoral Commission of Kenya.

Agencies and individuals working with youth groups should organize professional counseling services. Counseling should not be left to young members especially in difficult circumstances like those of the youth living in slum areas. The slums have made these young persons into adults therefore we need a master plan to organize counseling services against drug abuse, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and child sex among girls. Currently, peers who are not trained provide counseling services. They lack the expertise to make a recognizable impact. The government, NGOs, the church and community members should make plans to train youth group leaders to be able to identify those who need specialized counseling.

Youth group leaders need assistance to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge required in managing groups. Most of them lack these skills since they were elected on the basis of being founder members. All leaders involved in the running of the group's affairs should be trained. Entrepreneurial skills are important since most groups have income-generating activities. Personnel with relevant skills should be hired or seconded to groups to boost productivity of their activities. Last, but not least youth groups need to re-examine the activities they establish, they should have a mixture of activities such as blending income generating with other activities such as sporting, environmental clean-ups and solving social problems of members. For groups to achieve these goals they need to attract people from outside to give them moral, financial, material and training support. Most of the groups surveyed are practicing this theory of attracting members from outside. MYSA, for instance has what they call "friends of the organization" who are not youth. While Talanta and Maendeleo Mabatini youth groups requested the researcher to be a member of their groups so as to give advice to young members.

Research should be carried out in different geographical settings such as in the rural and urban rich settings to investigate constraints of youth groups in such areas. Similarly, with the introduction of free primary education, a study to be carried out in Mathare slum to determine the impact of free primary education on young persons in the area.

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