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### **Building a Youth Development System in Kenya: Comparing Kenyan Perceptions of Local and National Issues**

**Lawrence R. Allen**

Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management  
Clemson University  
[lalln@clermson.edu](mailto:lalln@clermson.edu)

**Barry A. Garst**

Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management  
Clemson University

**Edmond P. Bowers**

Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management  
Clemson University

**Kennedy K. Onyiko**

Department of Social Studies  
Maasai Mara University

**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to begin a dialogue of developing a integrated and comprehensive system for youth in Kenya by identifying factors impacting the creation of a youth development system and exploring recommendations supporting and advancing such a system. The results of two collaborative assessments of the needs and strengths of Kenyan youth and the youth-serving programs based on the perspectives of practitioners, policy-makers, and scholars of youth-development are presented. The study was framed from the perspective of a systems approach to youth development in Kenya (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Overton & Lerner, 2012). Osgood (2012) identifies four steps for developing a systems approach for serving the needs of youth: (1) self-assessment, (2) goal identification, (3) planning, and (4) networking. The first step, self-assessment, was initiated through a SWOT analysis with two different groups of youth development professionals across a 2-year period (2014-2015). The 2014 SWOT analysis presented the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to developing a youth development system from a national level, whereas the 2015 SWOT analysis focused on these same factors but from a more local level of youth development programs and services. The results of these two analyses are presented and initial recommendations for building a more integrated and comprehensive youth development system in Kenya are presented. The need for further input and investigation is also discussed.

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## Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century has brought a growing recognition of the importance that youth play in the overall development of Africa. In some African countries, the youth population has grown significantly. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa more than one-third of the total population is between the ages of 10-24, and it is expected to continue to grow until 2025 (UNFPA, 2012). The challenges of serving this rising population of youth is no more apparent than in Kenya as youth between the ages of 18 and 34 account for more than a third of the population (UNDP, 2013). Policies, programs and services have been initiated since the turn of the Century to provide young people with a pathway to prosperity and to engage them in the advancement of Kenyan culture and society. The goal of these programs has been to support Kenya's youth as they move towards empowerment, education, and employment (Hope, 2012).

There is, however, a growing concern that the multitude of programs and efforts that have been implemented in Kenya have been done so in a haphazard and piecemeal manner (Mabala, 2011). Without a concerted effort among all stakeholders to build a coordinated and comprehensive system for youth development in Kenya, the efficacy of programs to promote the positive, healthy development of youth and their contribution to Kenyan society may be limited (Bennell, 2007; Hope, 2012; Mabala, 2011). Systemic, country-wide change in Kenya requires a sustained coalition of institutions and individuals pursuing a common agenda with a

shared set of goals based on the unique strengths and needs of Kenya (Kubisch, Auspos, Brown, & Dewar, 2010).

Therefore, the present paper aims to advance efforts to develop a more integrated and comprehensive system for youth development in Kenya by presenting the results of two collaborative assessments of the needs and strengths of Kenyan youth and the youth-serving programs based on the perspectives of practitioners, policy-makers, and scholars of youth-development. The goal of these analyses is to explore factors influential to the establishment of a supportive developmental system for youth (Zaff, Donlan, Jones, & Lin, 2015) within Kenya at both the local and national level and to provide recommendations for supporting and advancing such a system.

This study was framed from the perspective of a systems approach to youth development in Kenya (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Overton & Lerner, 2012). Because systems are complex infrastructures, a systems approach provides a way to examine complex nature of elements within a system to improve understanding and guide strategic decision making. Systems approaches provide context to content (Osgood, 2012). Osgood (2012) identifies four steps for developing a systems approach for serving the needs of youth: (1) self-assessment, (2) goal identification, (3) planning, and (4) networking. As noted by Osgood (2012), the 4-step systems approach provides insight into overcoming challenges within systems designed to educate and prepare youth for the future given the

discreet, disconnected, fragmented, idiosyncratic, disconnected, autonomous, insular and uncoordinated nature in which programs continue to evolve. With an entrepreneurial systems approach to program development, program sustainability shifts away from a supply-push strategy influenced by politics, institutional policies and bureaucratic hierarchies, to a demand-push strategy influenced by what students, parents and members of the community want. (p. 120).

Addressing the issues that face Kenyan youth requires a collaborative and comprehensive effort from stakeholders at the local and national level that can be guided by a systems approach. Young people interact with a system of multiple, integrated contexts in complex ways; therefore, single-issue approaches are not likely to be successful. In addition, these collaborations must move toward viewing children from a strengths-based, positive youth development (PYD) perspective (Lerner, Lerner, Bowers, & Geldhof, 2015) rather than the deficit-focused approach that has marked most research with adolescents. In a PYD perspective, young people are seen as resources to be developed rather than as problems to be managed. With this emphasis, a youth development system in Kenya can create the conditions within which all youth have the opportunity to thrive (academically, socially, emotionally, physically, vocationally, and civically). Therefore, there is a pressing need for an assessment of the characteristics of the present system for serving youth in Kenya, including the strengths and weaknesses of extant youth development efforts as well as the opportunities for, and threats to, a more supportive youth development system.

### **Youth Development Efforts in Kenya**

Kenya's formal educational system has played a critical role in attempting to prepare young people with appropriate work and life skills, and for assuming family and civic responsibilities. However, the existent system has not been sufficient for meeting these desired outcomes nor

has it been able to accommodate the needs of many youth in the country (Adams, 2011; Balwanz, 2012; Hope, 2012). For example, even though there now is free public education, the fees and costs for uniforms and school materials are still prohibitive for many families, the testing for continued education preclude several young people from furthering their education and the overall quality of the schools especially in the public sector remain problematic (Glennerster, Kremer, Mbiti, & Takavarasha, 2011).

In 2009, for example, more than 68% of secondary school age youth (14-17) were not enrolled in a formal education program in Kenya (Munga, & Onsomu, 2014). Only 31% of secondary students who sit for the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education examination achieve the minimum grades for university entry (Ng'ethe, 2016). Additionally, there has been a consistent dialogue suggesting that the curricula do not adequately prepare young people for employment (Balwanz, 2012). The United National Population Fund (UNPFA) (2012) has emphasized that improving school quality, and retention and completion rates for both boys and girls is crucial to build the necessary skills needed for Kenya's youth to contribute to their families and communities.

In addition to the challenges associated with Kenya's formal education system, Kenya's youth face a number of other obstacles (Hope, 2012) that limit their likelihood of future success, and consequently their contribution to the development of the country. As 5,000,000 youth annually leave basic and post-basic education and seek access to further training or employment (Adams, 2011), many find themselves unable to access these next steps because of Kenya's slow economic growth and the weak capacity of the economy to absorb available labor (Omolo, 2010). Some of the other most pressing issues facing young people in Kenya include drug use, sexual exploitation, HIV/AIDS, juvenile crime, gender equity issues, social isolation, and a growing sense of helplessness toward their future prospects (United Nations Population Fund, 2012). Of these issues, the UNPFA has identified the prevalence of HIV and sex before the age of 15 as areas requiring "urgent action" (p. 49). Other challenges facing youth in Kenya include: limited access to information and communication technology; limited and poor housing; limited participation and lack of opportunities; abuse and exploitation; and limited sport and recreational facilities (Kenya Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2007).

The need to supplement Kenya's formal education system as well as address youths' risk and health-compromising behaviors has created an opportunity for other entities to support the future success of Kenya's youth (defined within Kenyan culture as a person under the age of 34) (UNDP, 2013). Community organizations, government social services, faith-based partners, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are called upon to assist the public education enterprise in addressing the educational and developmental needs that exist among these young people. Many organizations have responded to these challenges by providing a multitude of problem-related and opportunity-focused programs and services (Balwanz, 2012; Hope, 2012), with many of these programs and services expressly targeting youth unemployment and entrepreneurship skill-building among the youth.

Three significant government-led entrepreneurial training and finance programs in Kenya include the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF), the Women Enterprise Fund, and the Uwezo Fund. These programs are designed to empower youth and provide them with access to affordable credit to start and build local businesses (Githinji, 2015; Okoth, et al., 2013). Evaluations of these high-profile Kenyan youth programs have questioned their effectiveness.

For example, Okoth, et al. (2013) found that the YEDF has not had a significant positive effective on the development of youth enterprise.

Additionally, other entrepreneurship programs have been developed by other countries in support of the needs of Kenyan youth. For example, the Young African Leaders Initiative, launched in 2010, supports young leaders by providing them with training, through various U.S. universities, in civil leadership, business and entrepreneurship and public management. But even these well-intended programs have met with minimal success (Balwanz, 2012; Hope, 2012; Mabala, 2011) because they have not been complemented by other programs and services addressing familial, social and emotional issues facing these young people (Okoth, et al., 2013). In describing the important work of these many agencies and programs, Mabala noted,

despite the successes, the good intentions and the hard work, much of the work being done with or for young people does not succeed as it should because it is piecemeal, haphazard and small scale, because it is not context specific and because it does not take into account the real wishes of the young people themselves (2011, p.157).

Thus, there is a growing concern that the multitude of programs and efforts will remain minimally effective without a concerted effort among all stakeholders to build a coordinated and comprehensive system for youth development in Kenya (Bennell, 2007; Hope, Sr., 2012; Mabala, 2011). Establishing a shared vision and coordinated effort across service providers that collectively contribute to the holistic development of youth in Kenya is necessary to fully realize the potential of these various programs and services. Agencies and services must appreciate that they can better serve the needs of youth and more effectively meet their mission and goals through collaboration rather than competition. The purpose of this paper is to begin a dialogue of developing a supportive developmental system for youth in Kenya by identifying factors impacting the creation of a youth development system within Kenya and exploring recommendations supporting and advancing such a system. This work reflected the first step in Osgood's (2012) guide to building a systems approach for serving the needs of youth: self-assessment.

## **Method**

A SWOT analysis approach was used with two different groups of youth development professionals across a 2-year period (2014-2015) to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats involved in a project, initiative, or business venture (Chermack, & Kassahanna, 2007). SWOT analysis, a common tool for strategic planning (Hill & Westbrook, 1997), was applied within the context of Kenya's youth development organizations to understand both current performance (i.e., strengths and weaknesses) as well as areas of future growth (i.e., opportunities and threats). The 2014 exercise examined the youth development system from a country-wide perspective whereas the 2015 exercise focused on an organization-specific perspective. Both efforts provided information for building a comprehensive youth development system in Kenya.

### **2014 Participants and Procedures**

One of the first steps in building a shared vision and collaborative system of youth development is to benchmark current youth development structures and opportunities (i.e., the youth

development system). In 2014, a group of senior youth professionals representing five NGO's headquartered in Nairobi City, the capital of Kenya, as well as educators from one public university, engaged in an SWOT exercise to uncover the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the present youth development effort in Kenya. Each of these professionals had significant years of experience working with youth and social issues in Kenya and were highly respected by their colleagues. The intent of the SWOT analysis was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conditions and circumstances surrounding youth development in Kenya in order that future efforts could be developed that maximize assets, effectively address deficits and minimize liabilities.

In the 2014 exercise, the following four questions were asked of each participant:

1. What are the greatest strengths of the existing youth development system that now exists in Kenya?
2. What are the greatest weaknesses of the existing youth development system that now exists in Kenya?
3. As you reflect on the existing youth development system in Kenya, what do you see as the greatest opportunities for advancement of the system?
4. As you reflect on the existing youth development system in Kenya, what do you see as the greatest threats to the advancement of the system?

In the 2014 exercise, a modified Delphi technique (Gupta & Clarke, 1996) was used to arrive at consensus among the participants. First, each individual identified a comprehensive list of factors impacting youth development in Kenya. The leader of this exercise collected all information and developed an initial list of comments including everyone's thoughts and ideas as they were presented. At a second meeting, this list was vetted by all participants through an open discussion of each comment made by each individual. Common themes were then established for each of the four questions and a final list of factors was presented to the group for confirmation at a third meeting. This list was then reviewed and checked by the three most senior members of the group for inclusiveness of all initial thoughts and clarity. Reviewers were instructed only to check that all distinct thoughts remained in the final list and that each statement was clearly presented.

### **2015 Participants and Procedures**

In 2015 the initial effort was expanded to include 35 youth professionals (early career as well as seasoned professionals) from Nairobi City County and Narok County. Nairobi City County is the major urban center for the country. Narok County is quite rural but developing into a major economic center with significant population growth. Under the new 2010 Kenyan Constitution, a devolution process occurred in which County governments have been given additional authority and funding to undertake more programs and services that had traditionally been offered through national government organizations.

Descriptive data were collected using a participant survey from 28 of the 35 participants (7 participants chose not to provide demographic information). Of the 28 participants for which demographic data were available, fifteen were male and thirteen were female. Their ages ranged from 21 to 55 years old. Sixteen participants resided in Nairobi, one in the Central province, one in the Eastern province, and ten in the Rift Valley. Sixteen participants represented county or city government, eight represented NGOs, and three had blended positions that involved both government and NGO responsibilities.

Participants were queried using a modified SWOT analysis format. The following four questions were asked of each participant:

1. When it comes to serving the needs of Kenyan youth, what does your organization do well? (Strengths)
2. When it comes to serving the needs of Kenyan youth, what could your organization do better? (Weaknesses)
3. What trends or changes do you see related to Kenyan youth that might represent and opportunity for your organization? (Opportunities)
4. What prevents your organization from achieving its goals? What factors reduce the likelihood of your programs and services being successful? (Threats)

The responses to the 2015 SWOT were analyzed by a four-person team of coders who split the data according to each question and analyzed the answers using conventional content analysis (Hsieh, & Shannon, 2005), a subjective interpretation of textual data using a systematic coding process to identify core themes. Reflexivity and a member check process were used to affirm the trustworthiness of the data. First, the coders used reflection (Lincoln, & Guba, 1985) to acknowledge and minimize bias by revisiting the data to ensure that the themes were representative of the participants' answers. Second, a member check process (Creswell, 2007) was used through which the major themes were shared with the participants to confirm that the coders' interpretations of the participants' answers accurately reflected the meanings of those answers.

As the team of coders were the human instruments [i.e., socially situated researchers (Denzin, & Lincoln, 1994)], in this study, the background of these coders is important to acknowledge. All coders have worked in youth development for most of their careers. The US based coders have worked with major youth serving agencies in the United States and now teach at a public university in the US. Collectively their experience exceeds 70 years. One coder is Kenyan and has worked in the country for more than 10 years and is now a lecturer at one of Kenya's public universities. Additionally, one of the US coders has worked in East Africa for the past six years and also served as a visiting professor at a Kenya based university in the fall of 2014.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **2014 SWOT Exercise**

Table 1 presents the emergent themes from the 2014 SWOT exercise. The strengths identified clearly suggest that there is broad support for addressing youth issues in Kenya from the national government and corporate sector to faith-based organizations and international NGO's and governments. The political environment at both the county and national levels is very supportive of youth initiatives and the overall information and communication technology (ICT) sector is viewed as a tremendous asset for communicating with youth and building an integrated youth system.

In reference to weaknesses, youth professionals suggested there is inadequate research and documentation of youth efforts across the country, and there is insufficient evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of existing programs and services. In addition, the results suggest that there is limited coordination among providers, and educational institutions are not sufficiently involved in the youth movement especially in relation to preparing youth-serving professionals.

The training that does exist is not matched with the true needs of youth and there is inadequate follow-up support once youth-serving professionals have received initial training. Further, youth-serving professionals are not engaging the private sector as well as they could and the entire youth effort appears to have a top-down approach that may not necessarily reflect the needs and best interests of the youth.

The opportunities identified in the results tend to focus on maximizing the strengths that were previously mentioned in this analysis such as engaging the private sector to a greater degree through a focus on being responsible corporate citizens. Related to this emphasis is a more concerted effort to build public-private partnerships by taking advantage of the resources of corporate Kenya. For example, this effort might include developing greater collaboration with the National Youth Service and the Youth Development Enterprise Fund. Further, there needs to be an effort to tap the political good-will that exists now in the country and the strong interest in youth that has evolved at the county level through the devolution process. Finally, the strengths of the ICT system in the country can be utilized more effectively in communicating with all youth as well as a resource for building an integrated and coordinated youth system in the country.

The SWOT analyses process also identified participants' perceptions of threats and/or barriers to success. The greatest threats to the youth development effort in Kenya actually relate directly to why a youth development system is needed; there is great fear that the lack of educational and employment opportunities are leading youth into a life of crime, drugs and other high risk behaviors, and, of course, the high level of unemployment just exacerbates these negative youth trends.

Further, there is the perception that much of the information about youth and youth services is inaccurate and quite misleading. Some felt that much of this misinformation was due to a perception that future financing would be lost if funders felt the youth situation were getting better in the country. Also, there was the perception that youth themselves were expecting too much from the programs and services that were offered. The participants suggested that the youth expected a "free handout" where they would not have to build their own skills and opportunities to be successful. There was a feeling that a sense of dependency might be developing as a result of the emphasis now being placed on youth.

Finally, there was a concern expressed that several entities were getting involved with youth programs and services to take advantage of the funds and interest presently existing in the country, but they lack the skills and expertise necessary to be effective in working with youth. These new players may be promoting some of the inaccurate and misleading information as well as ineffective programs previously discussed.



**Table 1**

*2014 SWOT Questions and Associated Themes Related to Youth Development in Kenya*

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <p>What are the greatest strengths of the existing youth development (YD) system that now exists in Kenya?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Favorable political environment-at both county and national governments</li> <li>2. Kenya has a strong youth agenda that has devolved to the county's structure through Ministry of Devolution and Planning</li> <li>3. Private sector institutions are interested in youth development issues as a way of fulfilling their corporate social responsibility (CSR)</li> <li>4. Internet getting more accessible; overall ICT is an asset for mobile learning</li> <li>5. There are many programs in Kenya but little documentation</li> <li>6. Strong interest in youth development by religious institutions and international NGO's-UNESCO, USAID, etc.</li> <li>7. Financial institutions and market institutions interested in youth development programs.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <p>What are the greatest weaknesses of the existing youth development system that now exists in Kenya?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inadequate research on impact of youth development programs.</li> <li>2. Limited documentation of programs, outcomes and impact</li> <li>3. Poor coordination among providers</li> <li>4. No university/adequate training for workers supporting the youth development programs.</li> <li>5. Corporate social responsibility not being fully utilized</li> <li>6. Training courses not market focused and are focused more on academics- with less rural outreach</li> <li>7. Youth do not get support on hardware after receiving software skills</li> <li>8. Youth development is highly top down with facilitators/providers prescribing type and mode of support.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>As you reflect on the existing youth development system in Kenya, what do you see as the greatest opportunities for advancement of the system?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engage private sector via corporate social responsibility programs</li> <li>2. Opportunities for public-private partnerships</li> <li>3. Take advantage of devolution of government-counties will commit funds</li> <li>4. Utilize political goodwill-use politicians because YD has broad interest and appeal</li> <li>5. National Youth Service program is available</li> <li>6. National Youth Enterprise Development Fund has been established by the government</li> </ol>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <p>As you reflect on the existing youth development system in Kenya, what do you see as the greatest threats to the advancement of the system?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Idleness leading to crime, drugs, unemployment</li> <li>2. Too much misinformation and miseducation from internet-sometimes deliberate</li> <li>3. Following the current trends in education systems where many youth do not get opportunities for higher education.</li> <li>4. Others institutions supporting the idea of formal training for youth workers without standardization.</li> </ol>

### 2015 SWOT Exercise

Whereas the 2014 exercise focused on a national perspective, data collection in 2015 explored the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of individual organizations involved in youth services as well as the role of youth development professionals. Table 2 presents the results of the 2015 SWOT exercise. There is considerable consistency among the responses across both exercises, but some clear differences in perceptions also emerged.

The participants in the 2015 exercise felt that the funding for existing vocational training programs and enterprise development programs was a strength among their agencies. The academic programs offered through the polytechnic institutions and the overall youth mentoring efforts were also viewed as a strength. These results appear to contradict the perceptions of participants in the 2014 exercise.

Further, there was the perception among the 2015 participants that there was good collaboration among youth serving agencies which included strong public-private partnerships. Finally, there was the perception that there were effective programs sensitizing youth to the dangers and consequences of high risk behaviors (e.g., drug use, criminal activities, sexual exploitation, membership in radicalized groups).

Unemployment again was a dominant concern expressed in this group as with the 2014 participants. Also, lack of access to training and training institutions especially at the local or grassroots levels was stated by this group. Even though there was strong support for the national enterprise development efforts, there still was the perception that there were insufficient resources as follow up to the training programs. Also, this group stated that there was a lack of coordination among the various agencies which appears to be in conflict with their response related to the strengths of their agencies. This may suggest that there are strong feelings on both sides of this issue. Finally, although stated differently from the participants of the 2014 exercise, there again was a concern about the attitudes and behaviors of young people.

There was considerable consistency across the two groups related to the opportunities to advance youth development. Again, the ICT system in Kenya is seen as an asset for youth development across agencies.

Further, agencies need to take advantage of the strong government support, media attention, and political and public good-will related to youth issues in the country. Also, participants see opportunities to expand the vocational and entrepreneurial training that now exists including enhanced mentorship efforts. Finally, there is the view that there are still opportunities to utilize the youth enterprise funds that exist in the country more effectively.

The threats related to agency success again ranged from issues directly related to the youth themselves to agency problems and national issues. Unemployment was viewed as a cause of several youth problems, and drug abuse was again raised as a serious issue. Interestingly, the participants cited peer pressure among the youth as a threat to their agency's success. They were suggesting that there was considerable peer pressure not to participate in some of the

programs offered by these agencies. Additionally, concern was expressed regarding inadequate support for youth to attain the education they needed and desired. Participants also mentioned the politicalization of youth efforts was interfering with their success and there was inadequate training for youth professionals themselves. Finally, there was the perception of insufficient funding for youth efforts locally and nationally, and there was inadequate infrastructure nationally to support an effective youth effort.

Some of the 2015 responses related to threats appear to be in conflict with the responses these professionals gave regarding the strengths of their organizations and they appear in conflict with the perceptions from the professionals responding to the 2014 exercise. Perceptions can be real in the mind of the participants (Stefanucci, & Proffitt, 2009); thus, building an integrated system of youth development will require continuous and effective communication among all stakeholders to determine the true state of the system with acknowledgement from all of the circumstances of the present system.

When comparing responses to the 2014 and 2015 SWOT exercises, it was noted that views of youth development from a national and more localized level lead to different perceptions and different conclusions. These differences may reflect natural human inclinations toward preferences toward one's own organization [i.e., one's "in-group" as discussed by Tajfel (2010)]. From the perspective of social identity theory and the minimum group paradigm, very small differences can create perceptions of "us" versus "them" (Tajfel, 2010). These differences in perceptions must be worked through with more comprehensive dialogue among all levels of youth professionals.

**Table 2**

*2015 SWOT Questions and Theme Related to the Role of Youth Development Organizations and Professionals in Serving Kenya's Youth*

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<p>When it comes to serving the needs of Kenyan youth, what does your organization do well? (Strengths)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Subsidized vocational training</li> <li>2. Programs in Kenya offered through polytechnics</li> <li>3. Youth mentorship programs</li> <li>4. Ongoing trainings on entrepreneurship and employability skills</li> <li>5. Credit services to the youth groups</li> <li>6. Providing youth with business development skills (e.g., Youth Enterprise Development Fund, Uwezo Fund)</li> <li>7. Linkages and collaborations between youth organizations</li> <li>8. Public-private partnership and research on youth affairs.</li> </ol>	<p>When it comes to serving the needs of Kenyan youth, what could your organization do better? (Weaknesses)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Address youth unemployment</li> <li>2. Lack of training/training institutions <i>"Introduce more training institutions at the grassroots level to access all youths"</i></li> <li>3. Lack of awareness, visibility, outreach, information distribution <i>"Distribute information to the community effectively and timely"</i></li> <li>4. Lack of resources that support youth enterprise <i>"Youth need financial support to start their own businesses"</i></li> <li>5. Lack of organizational collaboration</li> </ol>

<p>9. Ongoing sensitization programs on topical issues (substance abuse, youth radicalization)</p>	<p><i>"Lack of coordination among agencies"</i></p> <p>6. Poor attitudes among youth</p>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>What trends or changes do you see related to Kenyan youth that might represent an opportunity for your organization? (Opportunities)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Take advantage of the advanced ICT infrastructure in Kenya</li> <li>2. Build on strong government support via positive youth policies</li> <li>3. Take advantage of the political and citizen goodwill related to youth issues</li> <li>4. Expand/enhance vocational training infrastructure that already exists</li> <li>5. Significant youth funds in Kenya</li> <li>6. Expand and enhance existing mentorship and entrepreneurship programs</li> <li>7. Take advantage of strong media interest (although message not always balanced)</li> <li>8. Take advantage of the many talented and self-reliant youth in Kenya</li> </ol>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <p>What prevents your organization from achieving its goals" What factors reduce the likelihood of your programs and services being successful? (Threats)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inadequate funding</li> <li>2. Political interference/politicization of the programs</li> <li>3. Youth joblessness/unemployment and the consequences</li> <li>4. Inadequate human resources/resources for training or education</li> <li>5. Peer pressure by youth not to participate in youth services</li> <li>6. Inadequate infrastructure from the top down and inadequate materials</li> <li>7. Drug abuse among the youth</li> <li>8. Financial constraints for youth (i.e., to get education)</li> </ol>

## Conclusions

Building an integrated youth development system is much more complex than establishing a series of programs and services with independent goals and processes that may or may not necessarily re-enforce and/or support each other. Such a systems approach has been foundational in developmental science (Bronfenbrenner, & Morris, 2006) and reflects the cutting edge of approaches to promoting positive youth development (Lerner, et al., 2015; Zaff, et al., 2015). Further, the benefits and outcomes of unitary efforts cannot achieve the same level of impact that could be realized if these programs and services were working in a system of shared vision, common goals and re-enforcing efforts (Zaff, et al., 2015). A coordinated youth development system allows for maximization of resources and outcomes that is greater than the sum of the individual programs and services.

To build such a system requires an open dialogue among all players and a level of trust that respects the independence and mission of each entity but also realizes the greater good that can be achieved from collaboration and coordination. Further, the initial efforts in building this system must include an honest assessment of where services and programs are today. This project was an initial step in undertaking the assessment of the present situation. By no means is this process complete. However, the recommendations below, albeit limited, provide initial thoughts and suggestions of what would need to be done to build the integrated system as discussed in this article.

The responses from both groups provide a sense of direction for building a coordinated effort but there also are many areas not addressed; these areas relate more to how the system could be built. The processes and procedures for building the system still remain to be determined and articulated. That said, based on these data and theoretical and empirical evidence from prior youth development work, the following recommendations are provided to stimulate the necessary dialogue and to take full advantage of the expertise and resources that exist across agencies, services, and programs to maximize the overall success and well-being of youth in Kenya.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered to initiate the discussion of a comprehensive system of youth development in Kenya.

1. Take advantage of the broad-based support; establish coordinating councils at the national, county and district levels that are linked and promote collaboration across all service providers
  - a. These councils become the backbone of the integrated system of youth development in Kenya that support and promote continuous communication, formal and informal training, program documentation, collective action, transparency in operation and program accountability.
  - b. The Ministry of Devolution and Planning through its multiple services, offices and funds supporting youth should be a key architect and leader in building this integrated system of youth coordinating councils.
    - i. The councils should be representative of all areas of youth development and substantively include youth issues beyond education and employment
    - ii. Ensure that youth are adequately represented on all coordinating councils
    - iii. Promote and establish a system of collective action with a shared vision, common outcomes, coordinated resource utilization, and collective recognition.
2. Formally engage Members of Parliament and the County Delegations in endorsing and funding a coordinated system across all levels of government and community structures
3. Build a national ICT system connecting all services providers at all levels while building a consistent database of youth services and statistics documenting programmatic information that will encourage and facilitate evidence-based decision making and greater collaboration among service providers.
4. Encourage all funding programs and sources to support collaborative efforts that are vertically and horizontally integrated with a shared vision focused on common outcomes.
5. Maximize the sensitivity of corporate Kenya to fulfill its corporate social responsibility through support and endorsement of integrated youth development efforts.
  - a. Establish an employee loan program to provide expertise to youth development organizations in their areas of expertise (finance, marketing, planning, ICT, etc.)
  - b. Establish an employee-youth mentorship program
6. Engage the higher education system in youth development by encouraging them to develop a coordinated effort of on-going training and professional development opportunities from introductory to advanced levels.
  - a. Build an internship and apprenticeship system with Kenyan corporations and government agencies

7. Develop a social marketing campaign that supports and promotes an integrated system of youth development and articulates the outcomes of this effort in a manner that resonates with the average Kenyan.
  - a. This effort should be coordinated with the ICT system that is established and insure that all stakeholders including the general public are kept abreast of the successes and challenges of the new system.
8. Provide technical assistance to the formal educational system including vocational training programs and youth employment efforts to more effectively adopt a holistic youth development strategy within their systems that provides the complementary skills and attitudes for youth success.

### **Limitations**

These results and recommendations are not representative of all the perspectives of youth workers or youth-serving organizations in Kenya, yet this is one of the first published studies assessing these SWOT-related questions and proposing what a Kenya youth development system might entail. This limitation notwithstanding, the intent and purpose of this discussion was not to draw conclusions or to be exhaustive, but rather to offer an opening dialogue of the present situation as perceived by practicing youth professionals with the intent of continued dialogue, refinement and consideration. In addition, even though this study reflected the work of an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural group of scholars, three of the four authors are approaching these findings from their perspectives as Caucasian males from the United States. Although the first author has spent significant time in country as a faculty member at a Kenyan University, these authors' perspectives may not fully represent nuances of the Kenyan youth development system.

### **Future Directions**

It is our hope that this article will provide initial insights for further discussion among professionals and other concerned decision-makers in Kenya regarding the best strategies for effectively addressing the challenges facing youth in the country today. A next step may be to convene a team of Kenya youth development professionals and organizations to review the recommendations and seek further input from an expanded group of professionals and other stakeholders to confirm, refute and/or expand these recommendations. Following this expanded process, a detailed action plan identifying specific actions, resource needs, timelines and outcomes could be developed with a cascading system moving from the national level to the county, district and even to the municipal levels. This strategy would facilitate a more consistent and uniform system of youth development that would have a shared vision and common outcomes which would build coordination and collaboration both horizontally and vertically across the system. This shared process would ultimately provide the greatest probability of improving and enhancing the overall well-being and success of youth in Kenya and further support the overall development of the country.

Respondents indicated that there is a lack of research and evidence of what programs are out there, and there is insufficient evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of these programs. A critical component of this future effort would be the development of a core-competency model for Kenya youth development professionals that supports the system identified herein. The results of both SWOT analyses indicated the deficiencies of current training content and models for promoting success and healthy positive development in the youth of Kenya. Establishing shared profile of what a successful Kenyan youth looks like as well as the necessary skills of a

youth-serving professional tasked with promoting those outcomes would be an essential step in this process. The shared vision and common outcomes would be very beneficial to tertiary and university institutions that are providing academic training in youth development. This coordination between and among the educational institutions and organizational providers obviously would greatly enhance the effectiveness and impact of the youth development system in Kenya.

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