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# PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH FOR ADVANCING YOUTH-LED PEACEBUILDING IN KENYA

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## About the Report

This collaborative report documents a pilot initiative to explore the utility and effectiveness of participatory action research as an approach for youth-led peacebuilding in marginalized communities. The initiative is both a product of and supported by the United States Institute of Peace Academy.

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[Youth from Kenya's low-income communities can play an active and positive role in making their communities better through generating knowledge that contributes to local peacebuilding efforts.]

## Summary

■ Since 2015, youth have emerged as new key actors in peacebuilding processes. Policies such as UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250—on peace, youth, and security— place youth at the center of community, national, and global security agendas.

■ Although small, youth-led groups make up the majority of the organizations in the peacebuilding sector, little research has been conducted on how to operationalize these youth-led peacebuilding agendas.

■ Innovative approaches for operationalizing UNSCR 2250 on the ground, supported by replicable youth-led methods, are required to overcome the barriers to youth participation in peace and governance processes.

■ An innovative approach of using participatory action research (PAR) as a mechanism for youth to engage proactively in their communities on key issues related to peace and security is especially promising.

■ An overview of three youth-led action research projects in Kenya, each with a different youth-determined topic, demonstrates that PAR is a practicable and effective approach for youth to proactively engage with their local communities and governments around critical issues.

## Introduction

Numbering 1.8 billion, today's generation of youth ages ten to twenty-four is the largest the world has ever known. One-third of them live in fragile or conflict-affected countries, including Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Nigeria.[1] As youth navigate the transition from adolescence to adulthood, they are more easily influenced by external parties, narratives, or ideologies. Circumstances including corruption, high unemployment rates, and discrimination enhance the likelihood that youth will participate in activities such as violent extremism.

Yet evidence suggests that young women and men can and do play active and valuable roles as agents of positive and constructive change. Youth demonstrate openness to learning, are more future oriented, are more idealistic and innovative, and are more willing to take risks—all of which contribute to their power and potential as peacebuilders.[2] Many young people living in conflict-affected communities facing these challenges are taking proactive approaches to resolving conflicts within their communities. These young leaders are using grassroots approaches to solve long-standing conflicts. Among their other efforts, they work to foster understanding across religious divides, enhance gender equality, encourage democratic participation, and provide alternative narratives to violence.

Today, even the most credible youth leaders face social exclusion as they try to create positive change. They often lack access to decision makers and the resources required to implement community-based change. However, with the emergence of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2250 on youth, peace, and security in December 2015 and the August 2016 UN-mandated Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security, early evidence indicates that when youth are provided avenues to participate in civic life and peacebuilding efforts, their participation in violence declines.

UNSCR 2250 urges the international community to give youth a greater voice in decision making at local, national, regional, and international levels. In support of this resolution, the United States Institute of Peace established a youth portfolio that engages youth leaders as critical partners in building peace. USIP's youth work aims to build a community of youth leaders in conflict-affected areas who bridge differences in their communities that strengthen inclusive societies. Through the Generation Change Fellows Program (GCFP), the Institute partners with youth leaders who have founded or manage youth-led peacebuilding organizations. In a two-year mentoring fellowship, youth leaders strengthen their capacity to manage conflicts nonviolently in their communities, address prejudice and discrimination as they build bridges across differences, and lead their organizations effectively. The GCFP community of practice facilitates peer-to-peer learning and mentoring through which Generation Change Fellows engage across countries and regions to partner on peacebuilding initiatives. USIP also leverages its convening and publishing capabilities to elevate and amplify the work of youth peacebuilders and ensure that youth are seen as producers of knowledge in the field of youth, peace, and security rather than as passive recipients of the knowledge generated by more traditional leaders. As part of its effort to increase the intellectual engagement of youth in the youth, peace, and security space, USIP's youth program piloted a participatory action research process in January 2017 that engaged Generation Change Fellows in Kenya. This report captures the key methodological aspects and research outcomes of that project.

—Alison Milofsky, director of Curriculum and Training Design, USIP Academy
—Aubrey Cox, program officer, USIP Academy

## Background

Since the introduction of UN Security Council Resolution 2250 in 2015, youth are increasingly viewed as key actors globally in peacebuilding work, not only as participants but also as leaders and facilitators of independent peacebuilding activities. Although much has been written about the potential of youth as peacebuilders, empirical research and documentation of youth-led peacebuilding processes remains limited.

The participatory action research (PAR) approach requires a shift from a deficit approach, in which youth are seen as problematic, to an asset approach, in which they are seen as creative problem solvers. Seeing youth as full partners leads the peacebuilding field to think more closely about the knowledge and experience that youth can bring to peacebuilding.

In Kenya, 75 percent of the country's 50.8 million citizens are younger than thirty—a demographic that is expected to only grow in the coming decades.[3] Because the majority of the population are classified as youth, any deliberation on governance, economy, or peacebuilding cannot be regarded as definitive without adding the voice of youth. Youth turnout in Kenyan elections has decreased over the past decade because of a widespread belief that election results are manipulated and that one's vote does not really count. Kenya's 2017 electoral crisis surrounding the presidential election has further intensified that perspective. Given these perceptions, young people view cooperation with established political institutions as "dirty" and prefer to work outside of the existing political apparatus.

Against this trend of political nonparticipation, a collective research process demonstrates that youth from Kenya's low-income communities can play an active and positive role in making their communities better through generating knowledge that contributes to local peacebuilding efforts and more active engagement with the state. The account that follows details three cases of participatory action research in the cities of Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu in which youth from low-income communities across the country came together to generate and implement their own research processes aimed at improving their lives, their neighborhoods, and their country.

## Building on Existing Work

The project engages youth in local peacebuilding through participatory action research, and should be discussed against the wider backdrop of the youth, peace, and security (YPS) platform. This emerging vision of youth-led peacebuilding was first crafted at the 2015 Global Forum on Youth, Peace and Security in Amman, Jordan. A product of the forum, the Amman Youth Declaration helps fill this engagement gap by articulating young people's commitment to forging a peaceful global society. The declaration, written by a global collective of youth peacebuilders, presents a common vision and roadmap toward a clarified policy framework to support youth in transforming conflict. The document highlights the present needs of youth so that they can sustainably contribute to building peace and identifies the local, national, and international actors who can create the required change. To that end, the declaration calls on local authorities, national governments, international agencies, donors, civil society, and other actors to engage on four urgent issues: youth participation and leadership, youth preventing violence and building peace, gender equality, and young people's socioeconomic empowerment.[4]

The YPS agenda was formalized in the December 2015 UN Security Council Resolution 2250. This landmark measure puts youth at the center of peace and security by:

> Affirming the important role youth can play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and as a key aspect of the sustainability, inclusiveness and success of peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts, [and]

> Recognizing that youth should actively be engaged in shaping lasting peace and contributing to justice and reconciliation, and that a large youth population presents a unique demographic dividend that can contribute to lasting peace and economic prosperity if inclusive policies are in place.[5]

These statements in the resolution are aspirational and lack specific recommendations for the full implementation of the resolution. Youth leaders are working to fill in the gaps. One document providing clear recommendations for the implementation of UNSCR 2250 is the secretary-general-mandated *Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security*.[6] Numerous civil society and international organizations have developed thematic background papers and country-level analyses to inform the study.

Realizing these aspirations is a tricky proposition. In terms of civic and political engagement, the youth in Kenya's informal settlements face what have been termed as *closed* and *invited spaces*.[7] A closed space is where only a few powerful individuals can make decisions based on their status in society. Such spaces are shut off to youth from low-income communities. An invited space is exactly that, meetings, consultations, and other forums in which youth are invited to participate. However, because youth are not actually setting the agenda in these spaces, their engagement is superficial rather than substantive. In these spaces, outcomes are largely predetermined such that youth inputs and voices do not really matter.

Although the expanding body of resolutions and declarations is encouraging and indicates growing momentum in the YPS field, these statements alone are not enough to create change. Innovative approaches for operationalizing these resolutions on the ground, supported by replicable, youth-led methods, are needed to overcome the barriers to youth participation in peace and governance processes.

## Purpose of the Research

Given that YPS as a recognized body of theory and activity is quite new—it has been framed this way only since 2015—empirical research in the field is limited. The research done by youth in their communities and the outputs that have followed will contribute to fulfilling the normative vision of global youth as peacebuilders as articulated in UNSCR 2250. Regarding youth peacebuilding as a field, a note of caution—the researcher's edict bears repeating: "absence of evidence is not evidence of absence." The lack of research and documentation on youth peacebuilding does not equate to a lack of work in the field, especially by youth. As a 2017 study by the United Network of Young Peacebuilders indicates, youth-led peacebuilding groups make up the majority of the peacebuilding field. These organizations may be small, and often informally structured, but they are many and their collective impact can be significant.

The lack of focus on youth-led research in the peacebuilding field is problematic on two levels. First, the research being done is exogenously driven and does not necessarily represent the concerns of those living in conflict-affected communities. It turns an outside lens on the situation and context that may potentially overlook or misinterpret important information from the community. Second, but equally important, the lack of independent research capacity among youth peacebuilders and youth peacebuilding organizations disregards the work of these organizations. In many cases, youth-led organizations are not equipped to document and write up their work in a way that is recognized and understood as legitimate by the wider, international peacebuilding sector.

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This dynamic does not go unrecognized by youth-led organizations, which often feel that they are exploited and co-opted by larger, better-resourced organizations that lay claim to youth-led organizations' practices and impact, and that ultimately receive the recognition and funding opportunities that should have gone to the youth organizations. The USIP pilot project was therefore designed with multiple layers of impact in mind. It aimed to help build the capacity of community-based, youth-led organizations to conduct their own research and support marginalized youth in direct engagement in peacebuilding efforts in their communities, and to create impacts at the community level that address the root causes of violence and radicalization. Achieving such grassroots goals required deep connections with the community. Engaging USIP's established cadre of Generation Change Fellows seemed the most effective way to proceed.

The Generation Change Fellows Program strengthens youth leaders' peacebuilding skills and creates a community of practice through which the fellows can learn from each other, mentor one another, share best practices, and partner on peacebuilding initiatives that build bridges across differences and contribute to inclusive communities. Through the program, small cohorts of youth peacebuilders ages eighteen through thirty-five are selected in a highly competitive application process. Tackling some of the world's most difficult challenges—from countering violent extremism to enhancing gender equality—these youth leaders have founded or manage youth-led peacebuilding organizations. Implemented in partnership with the University of Southern California's Center for Religion and Civic Culture, the program is currently active in Africa (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria), Asia (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, India, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), the Middle East (Jordan and Yemen), and Latin America (Colombia).

## Seeking an Alternative Methodological Approach

Participatory action research focuses on the co-generation of knowledge with community-level stakeholders. Rather than working from the outside to solve community problems through externally organized research and outward-facing outputs, PAR processes build the capacity of people living in the community and support them to gather information, analyze, and generate practical and applied solutions driven by their needs and aspirations. One of the core epistemological tenets of PAR as an approach is that local and community researchers have expert knowledge derived from their everyday participation in the contexts under investigation and their direct engagement with the issues under study. This concept is variously known as *cognitive justice* and *knowledge democracy*.[8] PAR as an approach refutes epistemological hierarchies that certain forms of knowledge are better or superior than others. In particular, PAR challenges the notion that academic knowledge has preeminence over knowledge created in practice and in the community.

PAR processes respect and seek the often-disregarded knowledge of youth and the poor. The poor experience the slums every day of their lives. As noted, because of this, they are the experts on low-income, marginalized communities and their own lives. Further, through PAR, participants actually create new knowledge by bringing together multiple perspectives and analyzing them collectively. In this process, they create a networked, aggregated form of power that draws on the knowledge of the wider community.[9] By allowing youth to find solutions to their problems by actively analyzing them and by engaging with multiple stakeholders, youth participation is strengthened. Putting youth into action in such challenging but important ways can minimize their vulnerability to being lured into joining radical groups. PAR projects with youth, however, cannot be successful without their buy-in and investment in the partici-

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patory process. Sharing power is particularly vital in working with youth who are subordinated to lower or lesser-than status in multiple realms of their lives.[10] The introduction of PAR provides participating youth a mechanism through which they can create a *claimed space* of their own design guided by their own agenda.[11]

PAR is not a tool but instead a holistic approach that can incorporate a variety of research methods. It is thus methodologically pluralistic. There is no one way to apply it and the list of tools that can be used to facilitate a PAR process is extensive. What defines PAR and other variants of community-based research are the principles that guide the work and provide a normative framework:

- recognize community as a unit of identity and shared gains or losses;
- improve the life of the community by building on their strengths and improving on their challenges;
- foster collaboration at all stages;
- integrate knowledge and action for mutual benefit of all partners;
- promote a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities;
- involve a cyclical and iterative process that involves trust-building and partnership development and maintenance in all phases; and
- foster shared learning.[12]

As noted earlier, UNSCR 2250, the Amman Declaration, and other YPS frameworks speak generally about youth engagement in developing and implementing YPS initiatives but are short on specifics for how to achieve them. Many spaces in which marginalized youth participate are invited spaces in which they have little power other than to input information into processes that have already been structured and bounded. They therefore have no real power. Against this prevailing dynamic, PAR aims to equip youth with the tools to make their voices heard by claiming political spaces in which their concerns and ideas are recognized and addressed.

## Research Flow and Implementation

This PAR process operated at several levels. First was a training and facilitation of a cohort of USIP Generation Change Fellows. Participating Generation Change Fellows (Amambia, Hamisi, Ogada, Okumu, Songora, and Zaid) and USIP authors (Bivens and Lancaster) assembled in person four times throughout the process: twice at the beginning of the process for initial introductory training and for project inception workshops; a third time toward the end of the research to support data analysis in each of the three cities; and a fourth and final time after the research activities had concluded to coordinate the publication writing process. The second level involved the youth researchers themselves. Participating Generation Change Fellows put out open calls to youth in their networks to attend the inception meeting for an introduction to PAR and the aims of the project. Those who were interested were encouraged to return for subsequent workshops. In total, the youth researchers participated in twelve formal workshops over the course of eight to ten months; numerous other neighborhood and data collection meetings were held throughout the period.

The twelve formal sessions were facilitated by the Generation Change Fellows and supported virtually by the USIP authors. This support included developing detailed curricula for each workshop; planning calls between USIP and the GCFP facilitator teams in each of the three cities to discuss the workshop curricula; and debriefing calls afterward to discuss the outputs and outcomes of the workshop, which informed the design of the workshop that followed. The curri-

**Figure 1. Hybrid PAR Model**

| February to June 2017 | July to September 2017 | October 2017 | November 2017 to February 2018 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Phase 1 | Phase 2 | Phase 3 | Phase 4 |
| **Inception and Collaborative Research Design** | **Data Collection** | **Collective Data Analysis** | **Delivery of Research Findings to the Community** |
| After two capacity-building trainings in January, GCFP facilitators conducted inception workshops to introduce PAR to community youth. In subsequent meetings, self-selected youth researchers analyzed data sets from the inception meetings to develop a research question and methodological design. | Youth researchers working in neighborhood -based teams implemented their research designs by carrying out data collection engage-ments using various techniques to generate data with key community stakeholders. | Youth researchers assembled data sets from all teams and community stakeholder groups to collectively analyze and identify key issues for each stakeholder group as well as cross-cut-ting themes that spanned stakehold-er groups. | Youth researchers organized sharing events in which the findings of the research activities were shared with the community in accessible ways (i.e., theater) to stimulate further conversation. |
| **Workshops 1-3** | **Workshops 4-7** | **Workshop 8** | **Workshops 9-12** |

**This model was implemented in three parallel but independent research processes led by youth researchers in the cities of Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa.**

*Source:* Authors' compilation.

cula were designed iteratively, as the processes unfolded, not in advance. Support calls were essen-tial to the process, hence three parallel processes unfolded in Nairobi, Mombasa, and Kisumu, which involved twenty-four hours of virtual support per research team. The twelve structured workshops advanced the research arc from inception to dissemination in a four-phase sequence:

1. Inception and collaborative research design: workshops 1–3
2. Data collection: workshops 4–7
3. Collective data analysis: workshop 8
4. Preparation and delivery of research findings to the community: workshops 9–12

The facilitator trainings began in January 2017 with a workshop to introduce PAR and ended in February 2018 with another to formally document the outcomes of the three processes. The PAR facilitators and youth research teams began their work with inception meetings in April 2017. The Kisumu team completed its research in eight months, finishing in

November. Nairobi finished in nine months, ending in December. Mombasa finished in ten months, concluding in January 2018.

Analytically, the research operated at two levels. The first of these was the youth researchers and their three inquiries. The collective aim was to enable youth teams to conduct their research autonomously and with a clear degree of rigor, which in PAR connotes recoverability rather than adherence to predetermined protocol.[13] Although the support offered was significant, directly from the PAR facilitators and indirectly from the USIP team, the research in each case belonged to the youth. The various forms of support, mentoring, and workshop curricula all aimed to create a vessel into which the youth could pour whatever ingredients or concerns they prioritized as a group. In the overall work, the concern is about the absence of claimed spaces for youth in Kenya within which they can operate based on their agendas and goals without being co-opted or directed by others based on other agendas. Our intention was thus to provide independence to the youth researchers in terms of their research as well as support and tools to take their research inquiry forward, so that they could ultimately complete the research process and share their knowledge with the community. At the second level, the research interest centered on the utility of youth-led PAR within peacebuilding contexts. Much of this analysis is about the effectiveness of PAR in terms of its impact on participants, stakeholders, the wider community, and any policy outcomes that may have resulted from the youth having their own independent platform to speak and engage with political or governmental systems.

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## Case Studies

Although the primary aims of this report are to further the UNSCR 2250 agenda by demonstrating the skill of youth as local peacebuilders and providing empirical proof of concept of PAR as a peacebuilding approach, the report would be incomplete without a deeper exploration of the work that the youth researchers completed in their respective processes in Nairobi, Kisumu, and Mombasa. Each of these case studies was originally written up in full by the PAR authors. Only about 10 percent of each study is included in this synthesis report. Additional information related to the youth researchers' personal commitments for follow-up activities after the research is included in the appendix.

The cases ground the analysis of PAR and youth agency in peacebuilding in actual, contextualized work in each community. These cases also provide a clear window into the voice and analysis of the PAR authors. However, given the limited space in this report, the USIP authors made no attempt at comparative analysis across the cases despite the potential for rich analysis.

### Nairobi

Weak economic growth, uneven access to development, and burgeoning populations have led to an explosion of informal settlements in Nairobi, most notably Kibera, Korogocho, Mathare, and Mukuru. These disadvantaged, low-income settlements are densely populated: more than 2.5 million people live in about two hundred informal settlements across the city, representing some 60 percent of Nairobi's population yet occupying just 6 percent of its land area.[14] Kenya's 2009 census places this population at closer to three million. The populations of these communities continue to grow rapidly. This growth is driven on the one hand by educational and employment opportunities in the city and on the other by restrictive land ownership that in combination make acquiring land very difficult for all but the wealthiest and politically connected.[15]

The disadvantaged settlement areas continue to mushroom because no viable living alternatives exist for those migrating into the city. Most households live on less than $1 per day. Because service delivery by the government is poor, employment, health, education, and security are not enough to meet the needs of these growing populations.

Access to health care is a serious challenge in these communities because there are too few public health facilities in them. The government health sector provides only four public hospitals in Nairobi—Pumwani Maternity Hospital, Mama Lucy Kibaki District Hospital, Mbagathi District Hospital, and Kenyatta Hospital—to serve this population of nearly three million. Quality health service is provided only at private hospitals, which are expensive and nearly impossible for low-income residents to afford. Even in public facilities such as Kenyatta Hospital, the largest referral facility in eastern Africa, poor patients from low-income informal settlements are frequently detained for unpaid hospital bills.

Many school-age children in informal settlements are unable to access education; when they do enroll, their retention rate is low, mainly because of socioeconomic factors.[16] Despite the declaration of free and compulsory primary education in 2003, more than 60 percent of the populations in Nairobi living in informal settlements have been denied the right to basic education.[17] Both the Constitution and Basic Education Act of 2013 guarantee and provide legal mechanisms to ensure that every Kenyan citizen has access to basic education and other economic and social rights. However, numerous social problems are associated with living in marginalized neighborhoods. It is estimated that only half of the children in informal settlements globally attend school.[18] Very few public secondary schools exist in Nairobi's informal settlements. This, as UNESCO reports, severely curtails further education beyond primary school: "In two of the poorest slums, Korogocho and Viwandani, young people make up almost a third of the population. With no secondary schools in the slums, only 19% of men and 12% of women have attended secondary school in Korogocho."[19]

An emerging trend of violent crime in urban areas reflects an increase in youth participation, which is associated with the rising unemployment rates and school dropouts among youth. These issues are far more extreme in Nairobi's urban informal settlements. Various reasons have been identified as influencing youth involvement in criminal activities, but poverty and survival are primary drivers.[20] In Kenya, as in many other African countries, young people are viewed as being—and frequently are—among the main perpetrators of crime. More than 50 percent of all convicted criminals in Kenya are young males between sixteen and twenty-five. Most crimes committed by young people in Kenya, as elsewhere in Africa, are financially motivated.[21]

## Research Question

In April 2017, youth from the marginalized communities of Majengo, Mathare North, Ruraka, and Makuru came together in Mathare North for the first phase of the project—developing a research question. More than sixty youth participated in this inception workshop. They were asked, "What is the most pressing issue affecting you and your community?"

In May 2017, twenty of the sixty youth researchers from the first workshop met a second time, this time in the community of Majengo, the home area of several youth researchers. This engagement entailed analysis of the data generated during the inception meeting. Multiple rounds of collective coding and sorting helped generate key themes for what the research topic might be so that the question would take into account not just the concerns of those in attendance at the meeting, but also the views of the wider youth community that had attended the workshop.

The themes generated included governance, youth awareness, tribalism, and politics. Focus was on the relationships among these themes in their communities and why they would be identified as the most pressing issues affecting youth. How the issues influence others in the communities—parents, police, government officials, local chiefs, religious leaders, and others— was also considered. Among the findings were that a well-informed community can demand better governance and that a community that is not informed becomes fragmented and fractious. This seemed to be the present condition, especially in that moment of political activity and intrigue surrounding the Kenyan presidential election set for July 2017.

Several weeks later, the third meeting considered how the four themes raised in the inception meeting—tribalism, politics, youth awareness, and governance related to each other. Governance came out as the holistic issue that linked tribalism, politics, and community awareness. Either bad or good governance in a community influences the level of awareness and the community's ability to respond adequately to other issues, such as tribalism and violent political infighting between parties, especially youth affiliated with parties in the slum communities.

Governance was a conveniently large and dynamic theme that could encompass these several other issues simultaneously. Conceptually, understanding of governance was based on the UNESCO definition:

> structures and processes that are designed to ensure accountability, transparency, responsiveness, rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation of citizens. Governance also represents the norms, values and rules through which public affairs are managed.

Whether governance in a locality or country is good or bad can be gauged by how well it meets the needs and expectations of citizens, as well as by how it meets international norms for transparency, equity, and compliance with the law. Governance is thus not just government institutions and processes, but also the social and cultural environment that shapes a country's citizens-state relationship: "In a broad sense, governance is about the culture and institutional environment in which citizens and political leaders interact among themselves and participate in public affairs."[22]

After the general theme of governance had been established collectively, the youth researchers generated a number of potential research questions and deliberated until they reached consensus. The guiding question chosen was, "As a community member, what are your roles and responsibilities in enhancing good governance?"

## Data Collection

To gauge the wider community's view on this question of good governance, stakeholder groups were assembled based on their reputation as the key actors in governance processes in the respective communities and as those who would be the most knowledgeable about the realities and nuances of the research question. The thought was that these stakeholders would be responsive and might even commit to implementing some of the recommendations the research would yield. The stakeholders fell into five key groups: religious leaders; local business owners; human rights advocates; community opinion leaders, including youth and women; and government administrators at the county level.

The implementation plan for collecting data from each group required thought as to which research tools would be appropriate for which group. Tools such as open space (stakeholders create and manage their agenda around the research question) and forum theater (the audience is invited to actively engage in reshaping the story by stopping the performance and stepping

**Table 1. Themes and Findings, Nairobi**

| Cross-Cutting Themes | Findings Statements |
|---|---|
| Tribalism | Tribalism drives the political agenda and the political agenda reinforces tribalism. Thus political parties are most often masks for tribal identities and agendas. Religious institutions are the same. Religious leaders are politically biased, wrapping communities and religious institutions in tribal cocoons in which everything is politicized. |
| Service delivery | Because of poor government service delivery, members of the community opt for alternative service providers, including international nongovernmental organizations, private-sector entities, and (increasingly) the black market. When the government does not provide services, desperate populations in the poor communities seek whatever options are available to them. |
| Corruption | Corruption is evident in society, enabling the black-market economy to thrive. Lack of integrity and professionalism by government officials and other public servants lead to misallocation of public resources. This leads to distrust among the people, who are no longer consulted or engaged by local government officials, who are looking to serve their own interests rather than those of the populations in the informal settlements. |
| Security | The ongoing state of insecurity in poor communities, including high levels of police brutality, lead to low levels of trust among the citizenry toward the government. People live in constant fear. Police use violence and intimidation to promote the government's security agenda. This leads active resistance, when young people join gangs and radical groups to secure some degree of protection and defense. |

in) require large groups to work effectively. Considering the number of stakeholders likely to attend a data collection activity and the stakeholder group's relative status or level of power in the community helped clarify which tools would be used in meetings with which groups. The tools included interviews, preference-ranking techniques, open space, and learning circles. To complete this data collection plan, four smaller teams of about five to seven researchers, one team for each of the four neighborhoods (Mathare, Majengo, Ruaraka, and Makuru), worked inside their own home areas. This accomplished several tasks. It enabled use of local contacts and reputations to gain access to key stakeholders. Working locally also saved time and expense in eliminating the need to travel across the city for each data collection activity. Moreover, because people are most knowledgeable about their own communities and neighborhoods, working close to home meant that researchers were well informed about the current situation and could ask nuanced questions based on their experiences in the area. During the data collection, the focus on the research expanded slightly, delving into stakeholder views of the causes of poor governance, as well as the original stakeholder roles and responsibilities that contribute to good governance. In the process of data collection activities and hearing answers from stakeholders, questions became more refined and focused. Confidence in research skills increased with each engagement. The period allotted for data collection was substantial. Between June and September, the four data collection teams collectively organized thirty data collection events with the five stakeholder groups. Information was gathered directly from more than seventy-two stakeholders across the four low-income communities, including twelve religious leaders, one local business owner, twenty-two human rights advocates, thirteen community opinion leaders, and eleven government officials.

*Because people are most knowledgeable about their own communities and neighborhoods, working close to home meant that researchers were well informed about the current situation and could ask nuanced questions.*

### Findings

The final step in the analysis was to look for linkages between and across the stakeholder groups. Using collective analysis of the data, the coding of the key themes, and identified critical ideas for each stakeholder category, cross-cutting issues across all the stakeholder groups in each of the communities were identified. This exercise identified four issue areas—tribalism, service delivery, corruption, and security—that spanned almost all of the stakeholder groups.

### Recommendations

- Efforts to train and sensitize citizens, especially youth, on their human rights need to be increased so that citizens can critically engage when their rights have been abused (such as police brutality), using nonviolent civic action (such as protests, petitions, and the like).

- More civic education and training should be made available to community members so that they better understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

- Interreligious dialogue about countering violent extremism needs to be ongoing among youth in urban, low-income communities.

- Religious institutions should organize intentionally diverse youth gatherings to educate youth, and by extension the communities, on how to live harmoniously without tribal tensions.

- Administrators and government officials at county levels should be better versed and more knowledgeable about the communities they are serving.

- Multisectoral consultations should be held and spearheaded by national and local administrators to identfy gaps and breakdowns in service delivery. These forums will aid in sensitizing communities to available government services and policies.

- Local business owners in low-income communities are encouraged to form associations or unions to aid each other in doing business effectively in the selected localities.

- Parenting coaching is needed to create awareness for how parents can understand and engage with their children in a healthy and productive manner.

For further information about youth-led solutions for governance in individual communities, see the appendix.

### *Mombasa*

Mombasa County, the second-largest city and economic zone in Kenya, has an approximate population of more than one million.[23] Mombasa is Kenya's largest port. Offering safe and deep harbors in the Indian Ocean, Mombasa has been a seat of wealth and cultural diversity for hundreds of years. The region is also an important tourist destination. Despite significant income generated by the shipping and tourism industries, the majority of Mombasa's population remains extremely poor and crowded into low-income communities with very limited public services. Poverty has been exacerbated by contentious political dynamics between national political parties, Mombasa being an opposition party stronghold. This dynamic has resulted in poor intergovernmental working relationships between the national and county governments. Mombasa's youth, who account for 75 percent of the county's population, are

especially hard hit by the current economy, which has left most unemployed.[24] Seeking opportunity and relief from the harsh realities of life in poverty, many youth, male and female, fall into drug addiction and criminal gangs.

In recent years, Mombasa's proximity to the sea and transportation lanes has also made it a hotbed for violent extremism. For the past two decades, the county has been susceptible to more and more terror attacks due to increased al-Shabaab militia recruitment. Al-Shabaab actively recruits Mombasa's disenfranchised youth to fight for the organization in its war in Somalia and to organize attacks in East Africa against governments, including Kenya's, that engage in peacekeeping missions that pit peacekeepers against al-Shabaab militants in Somalia. Extremism has thus become an attractive path for many. National and county governments have attempted to raise the awareness of youth to avoid extremist groups, but such messages often come from outside the community and do not include substantive alternatives. As a result of the government's heavy-handed interventions against terrorism and violent extremism, Mombasa's residents have experienced human rights violations such as extrajudicial killings, forced disappearances, terror profiling of suspects (especially Muslims), and police brutality during protests and raids. Compelling incidences such as raiding of the Masjid Musa mosque in Majengo by Kenyan police have planted seeds of marginalization within the wider Muslim community. Some extremist groups have mutated over time into local organized criminal groups that terrorize the community as they seek vengeance against the police and the government for past grievances.

## Research Question

In May 2017, almost thirty youth from the subcounties of Likoni, Kisauni, and Nyali were supported through a multistage analysis process that enabled them to sort the data generated in the earlier inception event, in which PAR was introduced. The goal was to discern the main ideas and concerns that the larger group of youth researchers had expressed in the previous engagement in response to the question, "What is the biggest challenge your community is facing?" By the end of the process, four issues were identified as the most pressing. In a ranking exercise activity, youth researchers physically positioned themselves at different points in the room to indicate their preferences. Facilitators wrote the four themes on cards and placed a theme in each corner of the room. Workshop participants were then asked to vote with their feet and to move to the theme they believed was the most important. After the group had divided into their chosen corners, they were invited to engage and discuss further in these small groups. They reflected on the value of the research theme they selected, discussed why each topic was important, how researching this topic would help the community, and how researching the topic would help them as individuals and as youths. They were then given an opportunity to choose a leader from their groups to present their arguments to the larger group. After each subgroup had made a pitch for why that theme should be the research focus, each participant was given two note cards they could use to vote on the two themes they most preferred. The voting process revealed two clearly favored topics, which were selected for further discussion. The larger group discussed in depth the relationship between the two themes, the relationship of these themes to the community, and how these themes influenced each other. Potential research questions were developed for each theme. Again, through dialogue and a process of elimination, one research question was identified for use over the coming months to guide and focus the research. By the end of the process, the following final research question was determined: "What is the role of the community in mitigating youth involvement in violent extremism and community crime groups?"

## Data Collection

Eleven stakeholder groups in the community who would be able to offer insights on the question were identified. The team decided to focus their efforts on five groups only. These key groups were parents, returnees who had fought for al-Shabaab, youth, community leaders, and local police and security personnel. Debate was lively as to whether to include the police because communities often view the police as not responsive and not open to any reform.

To minimize travel expenses and save time, data collection teams were formed for each of the three subcounties where the youth researchers lived. Each team selected the appropriate stakeholders to engage and created the questions they would ask. This initially seemed like a large responsibility but added to the ownership of the process. Although somewhat daunted by these tasks, the teams seemed inspired to take on the work, which they felt was significant, and to feel the power and responsibility of shaping the research. During the data collection, the researchers encountered various challenges. Most of the people they interviewed were suspicious about responding to the research question. One parent from Kisauni observed, "So many data collectors have come to ask us about the same things you people are talking about, but then when we give them answers, they disappear, and we don't know what they do with our information."

The researchers explained the entire PAR approach and process to stakeholders, telling them that eventually, after data collection and analysis, the stakeholders would be invited to learn about the research findings and would see what had been done with their contributions and ideas. Over the course of two months, the participants organized sixteen data collection events. They covered the Nyali, Kisauni, Likoni, and Mvita subdivisions and managed to interact with 338 stakeholders, including nineteen parents, fifty al-Shabaab returnees, 159 youth, thirty-five community leaders, and seventy-five police and security personnel. The teams became adept at documenting the data, capturing most of it in real time on notepads and later transferring it to flip charts so that the data was more manageable for collective analysis at a later date.

*During the data collection, the researchers encountered various challenges. Most of the people they interviewed were suspicious about responding to the research question.*

## Findings

Each data collection team provided its key themes and big ideas for the two stakeholder groups whose data they had analyzed. A subsequent round of cross-cutting analysis involved identifying issues, concerns, and ideas that spanned stakeholder groups. Understanding of the wealth of data collected was clear because the researchers had spoken directly with the stakeholders themselves and understood the different perspectives. This analysis process yielded a series of ideas captured as phrases that were shorthand for more complex ideas. These ideas were then unpacked into something more easily digestible for a community audience. As a starting point, all cross-cutting issues were converted into findings statements. The findings statements articulated the key information in a concise but accessible way.

## Recommendations

- Security personnel, especially police, should host dialogues between youth and police to enhance their relationships.
- Police need to target chronic extremists including gang members, not the average youth on the street.
- Youth should dialogue with youth involved in crime to motivate and mentor them.

### Table 2. Themes and Findings, Mombasa

| Cross-Cutting Themes | Findings Statements |
| --- | --- |
| Poor parenting | Poor parenting is one of the major factors contributing to violent extremism in Mombasa because there is no collective responsibility for raising children. Parents suggest that it is essential for communal parenting to be observed and reintroduced. |
| Education | Young people do not want to actively engage in school, which leaves youth vulnerable to manipulation by religious leaders as youth are conditioned to misinterpret religious teachings. Youth do not know their rights and responsibilities to society, which pushes them to be involved in extremist networks and criminal gangs. Participation in violent extremism can be reduced by intensive civic education. |
| Drug abuse | Drugs and substance abuse are underlying factors contributing to youth involvement in violent extremism. Under the influence of drugs, youth feel powerful and superior because their normal body functional ability is altered, pushing them to indulge in extremist and criminal activities. |
| Mentorship, negligence, and peer pressure | Fame held by gang leaders lures youth into joining criminal gangs, hence broadening their numbers and networks. Parental neglect of youth and children leave them vulnerable to peer pressure, especially from gang groups that introduce them to violent extremism. Mentorships, professional development, and career support to both the youth and their parents would help reduce youth involvement in violent extremism. |
| Security | Insecurity has risen because cooperation between law enforcement and the community is weak. This situation has led to youth involvement in violent extremism because the police are not trusted. Joining gangs and extremist groups is protection against the expectation of violence. |
| Revenge | Because of police brutality, youth develop hatred toward the police, resulting in the formation of radical or gang groups wanting to take revenge on the police. |
| Gender | Young women face greater insecurity than men. Facing constant threat of assault, they join radical or gang groups to seek protection from other criminal gangs. This contributes to rapid growth of involvement of women in violent extremism. |
| Police | Poor housing, underpayment, and deplorable working conditions are contributing factors to police corruption and mistreatment of youth to extort money or funds to make their lives less uncomfortable. Police actions such as intimidation, excessive force, enforced disappearance, and extrajudicial killings contribute to the formation of gangs and expanding violent extremism. The mentality of the police is that they are above the law. This has contributed to an increase in police harassment, intimidation, and brutality to youth in the community. |
| Political tension | High political tensions in Mombasa County divide the community across tribal lines through political hate speech. This leads to the formation of political militia groups that politicians in the communities use to intimidate and control. |
| Unemployment | Youth are involved in violent extremism to meet their basic needs. Unemployed youth are a vulnerable target for radical groups. Unemployment is exacerbated by a lack of information on how to access government financial assistance. |

- Community leaders should organize community outreach to youth to create aware-ness about violent extremism. Likewise, local chiefs could hold forums (barazas) to better educate the community about the consequences of violent extremism.

- Courses on leadership and addressing violent extremism should be offered to Muslim leaders.

- Religious leaders should sensitize youth on the importance of religious education and provide them proper interpretation of religious texts.

- Religious leaders should hold joint meetings among parents, security personnel, and youth to facilitate communication and positive relationship building.

- Youth should engage in income-generating activities to promote economic empower-ment opportunities for themselves.

- The government needs to create more jobs for youth.

- Parents should set up networks that mentor young people to ensure they do not engage in violent actions.

- Parents should monitor their children in school and out of school.

For more details on Mombasa's "We Lead" solutions, see the appendix.

## Kisumu

Kisumu County has been marginalized economically by the national government in Nairobi since Kenya's independence in 1962. This is partly explained by the region's long history as an opposition stronghold aligned with ideologies that counter the national government's develop-ment agenda and manifestos. Both nationally and internationally, Kisumu has been identified as a hotspot during electioneering periods, with young people perpetrating much of the vio-lence, which is attributed to limited opportunities to earn a living. The situation has derailed development plans in Kisumu—whether increased industrial development or financial corpo-rate support—because the Nairobi government of the day has suppressed economic growth.

The Kenya Youth Survey Report 2016 puts unemployment among youth, those ages eigh-teen through thirty-five, at 55 percent. Employment rates were lowest among those without postsecondary education, at 15 percent. By comparison, 32 percent of those with postsecondary education were unemployed. One in two graduates were unemployed and only one in five youth with university degrees were self-employed. Youth between the age of eighteen and twenty-five were twice as likely to be unemployed as their counterparts ages twenty-six to thirty-five. According to the Kisumu County Integrated Development Plan for 2013 through 2017, the total labor force (those ages eighteen through sixty) numbers 211,077, of whom 55 percent are men and 45 percent are women. The total county unemployment rate is estimated at 12.5 per-cent. Youth employment statistics are not provided in county and national employment reports.

### Research Question

The research team was comprised of twenty-two young people between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five from Manyatta and Migosi estates. These youth came from two community groups, Amazon Theatrix Ensemble and Talanta Africa. Amazon Theatrix Ensemble is a youth-led organization that uses arts to conduct advocacy, build young artists' capacities in creating sus-tainable livelihoods in art work, and create awareness programs for positive change in the local communities in Kisumu. Talanta Africa is a youth-led performing arts and media organization

that engages creative approaches to address communal setbacks. Formed in December 2015, Talanta Africa has endeavored to create a culture of inclusivity for young people.

During the first engagement, youth researchers were asked to highlight the topics they wanted to investigate in their communities. Their suggestions included topics such as health and sanitation, drugs and substance abuse, poverty, unemployment, early pregnancies, insecurity, and governance. In a participatory consensus-building process, each participant was given three voting cards to identify their top three areas of concern. The priorities were poverty, unemployment, and drug and substance abuse. In the second engagement, researchers developed questions from those topics. Three smaller teams were each mandated to handle one topic and to develop five questions for each of them. The fifteen questions were then reduced to one question per topic. Again, a ranking method identified the one question the team thought would best serve as its research question. This initial research question was, "What are the causes of drug abuse among youth in Kisumu County?" Later, during the third workshop, the researchers decided to change it to, "What are the causes of youth unemployment in Kisumu County?" because the team believed that unemployment was the primary factor that led to drug and substance abuse and therefore was a more significant issue than other reasons for drug abuse. The question of unemployment was also a practical matter for many of the researchers who, coming from marginalized and poor backgrounds in Kisumu, felt that they were without political goodwill to access jobs and opportunities. In investigating unemployment, they would uncover and research other issues as well, including drug abuse.

## Data Collection

Researchers sorted into four data collection groups to gather information from four local neighborhoods—Manyatta, Migosi, Magadi, and Kosawo. Each team was assigned two groups of stakeholders for their data collection, which was conducted between August 20 and September 30, 2017. In total, sixty-six stakeholders were engaged. These included parents (nineteen), youth (twenty-three), county government officials (two), nongovernmental organization leaders (twelve), and religious leaders (ten).

## Findings

*One clear reason for Kisumu's limited economy is the few employment strategies (and opportunities) available for youth.*

One clear reason for Kisumu's limited economy is the few employment strategies (and opportunities) available for youth. Competition is intense. As a result, many job seekers, especially youth, are faced with corruption in the forms of bribery and nepotism. Many unemployed youth find it difficult to participate in bribery because they do not have the necessary social and financial capital because they come from marginalized and low-income communities. They are also unable to navigate the complex bureaucratic processes that lead to job interviews or employment. Faced with barriers on all fronts, these young people are attracted to political violence, in part because they can derive small handouts from those orchestrating the violence for political ends. These findings show that it is imperative to engage young people in constructive employment initiatives.

## Recommendations

- Youth need to increase their resilience in using their talents to earn a living. They should be ready to embrace casual jobs as one way of being employed. More emphasis needs to be on creating self-employment. Youth need to find ways to develop creative ideas together that will support innovations of programs that can create sustainable

**Table 3.  Themes and Findings, Kisumu**

| Cross-Cutting Themes | Findings Statements |
| --- | --- |
| Inadequate youth employment policy and strategic frameworks | Legal and policy frameworks that provide guidelines for youth employment within the county are lacking. Despite a national policy that youth, women, and people with disabilities should be given 30 percent of all government contracts and tenders at both the national and county level, it is yet to be realized in Kisumu County policy. |
| Corruption, bribery, and nepotism | The greed of some employers leads them to ask for and accept bribes from qualified and skilled youth who are in need of those jobs. After being shortlisted for various job positions within different sectors in the county, youth are often asked for bribes to be invited to interview. This disenfranchises poorer youth because they are skilled and qualified but have no money to offer as a bribe. |
| Gender parity | Employment rates of young women are lower than those of their male counterparts because of cultural assumptions and biases that certain jobs are not meant for women and that therefore give men a higher priority in employment. Most youth stakeholders, especially young women, spoke of painful experiences about being asked for sexual favors by male employers in exchange for employment opportunities. These women had the appropriate qualifications for the job positions they had applied for. |
| Complex bureaucratic processes and trying to navigate these processes | Several bureaucratic channels make the registration of business startups difficult for young people in Kisumu. Those wishing to start businesses are required to have active bank accounts in order to register their business entities. This is a daunting task, however, because most youth do not have individual bank accounts. After successfully registering their startups, accessing loans and other financial support from banks and microfinance institutions is also a challenge. Youth are required to produce collateral for the loans but do not own property that could serve as security. Youth then depend on grants, donations, and individual savings to start their businesses. |
| Drugs and substance abuse | Because many youth do not have jobs to keep them busy and make them useful in society, they may end up engaging in and abusing illegal drugs, such as marijuana (bhang), and alcohol. These drugs are readily available within their communities and the unemployed find them a great consolation. Because drug addiction makes handling intensive jobs difficult, it locks youth out of employment. This cycle makes any sustainable solution for unemployment a difficult effort. |

employment for themselves. Parents need to support, encourage, and motivate their children to use their talents as income-generating activities.

- Religious leaders need to develop faith-based programs geared toward reaching out to unemployed youth. Religious leaders should also provide entrepreneurial, leadership, and mentorship training and educate youth on the importance of leading sustainable livelihoods in developing communities.

- The county government of Kisumu should develop strategic plans and policy frameworks to provide an enabling environment for young people to access available jobs, and to initiate different individual ventures that will promote self-employment. It also needs to invest more in practical studies and research work within schools for young learners to develop skills needed in the job market once out of school.

- Nongovernmental organizations should involve youth when developing their training curricula and ensure that they design and offer training that will give young people space to build their creativity along with skills learned.

- These NGOs should help youth incubate ideas, raise funds, and develop sustainable programs that will create jobs for them and their fellow unemployed youths. NGOs should develop programs on behavior change that will curb drugs and substance abuse among the youth.

## Wider Impacts of the PAR Process

Participatory action research is designed to promote development and emphasize community-led solutions. Its core premise is that the people most affected by an issue are those most knowledgeable and most able to adequately solve the problem when equipped with the appropriate skills and tools to leverage that knowledge. Therefore, to understand the impacts resulting from PAR processes, a wider analysis should be made, one that looks beyond the policy uptakes from the research outputs.[25] This evaluation framework is based on Bivens' five levels of change framework, which was formulated as part of a global participatory consultation involving more than seventeen countries. Change should be considered at these levels:

- *Research.* Does PAR encourage practitioners and organizations to conceptualize and use research differently?

- *Research practitioner.* Does PAR lead practitioners to work differently, including having greater confidence in using research, understanding that some forms of research can be collaborative, and using participatory tools in nonresearch contexts?

- *Organization facilitating the research.* Does PAR lead to the institutionalization of new approaches in the organization or to the development of new programs premised in the use of PAR or participatory methods generally?

- *Community where the research happens.* Does PAR create impact in the community, either through the research outputs produced or by influencing participants or community researchers through the collaborative nature of the research process?

- *Policy.* Does PAR generate new ideas, knowledge, and analysis that influence policy-maker actions?

In this section we will analyze the results of this PAR process along these five levels of change.

### Change in Research

When the Generation Change Fellows signed up for this project as PAR facilitators, they knew very little about PAR processes. All six had been heavily involved in conventional research—carrying out different tasks as enumerators within their communities and working as consultants to a variety of research projects. Despite their leadership roles, their methodological experience was limited to using questionnaires or surveys and structured interviews to gather information. They were implementers—not involved in the design of the research pieces in any way, or the analysis, which happened elsewhere after the data they had helped collect had been sent off to the principal investigator. A significant shift in understanding and conceptualization of research happened with the introduction to PAR workshop in February 2017. In previous efforts, lead investigators had developed research questions in advance of the projects. PAR uses a different

strategy together. Community participation is fundamental in PAR. It is vital to have the community lead in developing solutions on issues that affect the community every day.

Because of this process, the PAR facilitators are also reconsidering the relationship between research and action and change. In conventional research—their previous experience—research created impact and change after the fact, at high levels in government and civil society. Research was likely undertaken to inform those in authority, but the influence the work had was not seen by community stakeholders. PAR is altogether different. The community is at the center. The youth researchers are of the community. They are actively trying to address the problem at the heart of their research by engaging with the wider community and looking for answers and suggestions. The process encourages people to get involved and look for answers and actions that they can take to make change. The findings events brought the community together and demonstrated how the research had energized the youth researchers, who made personal commitments to the community. The findings catalyzed further commitments from key stakeholders. The PAR process has thus helped clarify the linkages between knowledge and power and research and advocacy. The PAR authors no longer see research as distinct and separate from action to create change in the community, but as one integrated process.

### Change in Practitioner

In this reconceptualized view of research, the PAR authors saw their approaches and attitudes toward research shift. Previously, research appeared as extremely hierarchical, with PhDs and other specialists at the helm. Serious research seemed beyond the reach of small, local NGO leaders. Being part of the PAR process has changed this view. They are now more confident in using research in their work outside PAR processes. They have practiced key tools and techniques dozens of times throughout the research process. They have seen that they can organize a research process from start to finish.

As they developed these specialized skills, they became increasingly recognized for their unique skill set and were sought out to consult on projects where they could use participatory tools and methods. After the findings-sharing events, local government officials recognized that PAR could help them listen better to the concerns of citizens, and have engaged the PAR authors and community youth researchers to help them conduct community data gathering. One PAR author was hired by the Mombasa County government to create and implement a new countering violent extremism (CVE) strategy for the county. She was asked to use her participatory skills in drafting the strategy in consultation with the community. The PAR authors also used their newly developed skills to do unpaid consulting for groups and organizations to which they already belong.

### Change in Organizations Carrying Out the Work

All of the PAR authors had created their own local peacebuilding organizations before working with the PAR pilot project. Therefore, the opportunity to create research profiles for their organizations proved the realization of a dream. From the start of the project, they began embedding PAR practices into their organizations. This and multiple other impacts have been noted at the organizational level.

*Embedding PAR into organizations.* These organizations have integrated PAR within old programs and core institutional practices, used reflective practice methods to assess efficacy of their organizational approaches to peacebuilding, incorporated participatory methods into meetings

*Local government officials recognized that PAR could help them listen better to the concerns of citizens, and have engaged community youth researchers to help them conduct community data gathering.*

and decision-making processes to ensure that all staff members have a voice, and used PAR tools to better measure impacts empirically, even unanticipated results. Two PAR authors renamed their organizations to clearly demarcate that participatory approaches are key to their work.

*Creation of new PAR-based programs.* PAR changed the way the PAR authors design programs for their organizations. Both participatory tools and the larger participatory approach are woven into their work. Project participants are now considered active collaborators in programs rather than passive recipients. PAR authors redesigned their peacebuilding training so that participants acquire PAR skills as part of the skill set needed for local peacebuilding work.

*Increased profile and contracting opportunities for organizations.* The organizations of the PAR authors became more visible because of PAR, creating new opportunities. Using PAR tools to carry out the work, a Mombasa fellow's organization served as a convener in the development of the CVE strategic action plan for Mombasa County. One of the Mombasa authors was also selected as a member of the steering committee on the implementation of the county's new five-year CVE strategic plan.

*More respect and recognition of youth-led organizations.* As noted earlier, many peacebuilding organizations are led by youth and have small budgets. Although they do the bulk of the grassroots work, they are often overlooked by funders who tend to engage only with large, well-established organizations. The PAR process and community findings-sharing events have distinguished their organizations, particularly in the peacebuilding and CVE sectors. Most of the large NGOs outcompete small, youth-led organizations in the competition for funding and publicly dismiss these small organizations for lack of capacity. Now the perception is that the organizations of the PAR authors have research strengths and capacities. Some of the larger organizations have even requested training on participatory approaches and tools.

### Change in the Community Youth Researchers

The youth researchers are at the heart of this project. Their enthusiasm and commitment were outstanding across all three processes. Empowerment was a primary goal in working with these young people, but numerous other outcomes also emerged, including increased confidence and agency. Youth researchers demonstrated heightened confidence, analysis, public speaking, and facilitation. Although enthusiastic after the inception workshop, when first introduced to the PAR work plan, the youth researchers felt it was an almost impossible undertaking to learn PAR and to actually carry out a project of their own design on a rapid timeline. After eight months of consistent engagement and incremental growth, those initial concerns were overcome. The researchers learned and used all of the participatory tools offered to them. They completed the projects they designed. They engaged with dozens, even hundreds, of community stakeholders, and presented the findings onstage in front of large crowds of community members and dignitaries.

PAR authors observed not only increased confidence but also an increase in a sense of agency to address challenges at the local level. In each of the three cities, the youth created various networks during the data collection activities and are now collaborating with those stakeholders in implementing joint programs to build their resilience through research, youth organizing, and community development. Moreover, PAR has been replicated and extended into the youth researchers' programs and mentoring activities. The youth researchers do not see PAR as limited to the particular research process they first experienced. Rather, they have practiced and understood the methods and sensibilities involved to such an extent that they are replicating these skills in their own spaces, in their own projects, and in nascent organizations.

They now recognize the value of community knowledge. The PAR process has taken the youth researchers out of their social comfort zones. The data collection required the community youth researchers to engage with a variety of new groups beyond their age range and social circles. They have engaged with local government officials and religious leaders, people whom they perceived as holding significant power, as well as entities they have feared, such as the police. They have come to recognize that these groups also have knowledge and experience that are both important and valid. PAR recognizes and respects their knowledge as youth, and they have reciprocated when engaging with the various stakeholders, listening and incorporating their perspectives for analysis even when they disagree. Ultimately, this PAR project has resulted in an increase in respect and recognition for youth researchers. Just as the youth learned to appreciate the voices and perspectives of stakeholders in the community, they earned significant respect from their communities and among officials in government.

### Change in Policy

Influencing policy is a long-term process and the full impact of this recent project is yet to be determined. However, this PAR process has been significant in mobilizing civic and policy engagement by youth in the communities and informal settlements from which these researchers come. Previously the youth researchers had limited tools for engaging with government. Even invited spaces such as local administrative offices were often, for all intents and purposes, closed to youth because they could get no traction or follow-up from officials.[26] As a result of PAR, interaction has increased between policymakers and youth in all three cities in which the work occurred. Government officials have responded positively in all instances. In Kisumu, youth from the PAR project have been consulted directly in the development of the 2017–2022 Kisumu County Integrated Development Plan. In Mombasa, youth researchers have been asked by the government to share their research outputs on reducing violent extremism in other parts of the county. In Nairobi, when the research findings put government officials on the spot, rather than attack the messengers, a county commissioner in attendance at the forum acknowledged problems, offered suggestions, encouraged accountability of their own staff, and showed willingness to engage in additional conversations with the youth researchers.

Through the findings-sharing events, the research shifted power dynamics with the government and the police. Both government and police officials attended these events, claimed spaces that the youth researchers had created. Following the events, additional government officials sent messages to the groups expressing interest in their work. They expressed hope that PAR processes like these could help improve strained relations between the government and the communities in the informal settlements. Further, PAR has provided a replicable process for creating a claimed space, owned by the community and the researchers, that was of interest to local officials and stakeholders. PAR tools enabled the youth researchers to aggregate community knowledge, their own and that of other relevant stakeholder groups. This information—effectively analyzed, synthesized, and communicated—was of value to all stakeholders, including the government. The youth set the agenda and, through their dedicated, structured efforts, won the interest and confidence of the local government officials and others.

Government officials made commitments to provide programs and resources to the community as a way of responding to criticisms and recommendations made. In Kisumu County, where the research team had focused their efforts on youth unemployment, county officials pledged to build a local recording studio where young people interested in music and produc-

*This PAR process has been significant in mobilizing civic and policy engagement by youth in the communities and informal settlements from which these researchers come.*

ing artwork could work and create livelihoods for themselves through their creative abilities. Also among the promises were more bursaries and scholarships for the youth to gain admission into tertiary and vocational training institutions and programs.

Further, the government has asked the youth researchers to ally with them to use PAR to design better programs for youth and communities based on collaborative ideation and dialogue. In Kisumu, the youth researchers have been invited to different public participation spaces within the county to apply PAR techniques on behalf of the county government in evaluating and refining various county plans and initiatives. This has been compensated consulting work for the youth researchers. Likewise, in Mombasa, during the research team's findings-sharing event, the youth representative at the Mombasa County Assembly spoke before the assembled audience and noted that the PAR format of formulating and representing youth-led research is important and innovative and that the assembly will investigate how PAR approaches and tools can be adopted for use in formulating future policies. At the Nairobi event, the police commissioner, responding to findings about police aggression, approached the youth researchers with an idea to set up a Youth Security Council to develop ideas about how to improve peace and security in the slums using PAR techniques. In Mombasa, where the youth researchers used drama to communicate the core findings of their research around how communities can combat youth radicalization, government officials were enthusiastic about the findings and the format and engaged the youth researchers to take their drama on the road so that it could be performed again in all of the subcounty districts. By the end of September 2018, this research-based play had been performed more than a dozen times and reached more than two thousand audience members.

As noted earlier, after having developed capacities to facilitate PAR processes, a few GCFP authors have received new positions. Hamisi has been appointed as the acting director of CVE programs in the county government of Mombasa. Mombasa County has an action plan for countering violent extremism that is founded on nine pillars, one of which is research. Hamisi intends to use the research pillar as a gateway to mainstream PAR more broadly in the county's CVE activities. Hamisi's PAR co-facilitator Songora has also been selected to be a member of the advisory council on the development and implementation of the five-year CVE plan.

## Conclusion

This process of youth-led participatory action research in low-income communities has contributed to the nascent body of practitioner-oriented youth peace and security literature. The project has several dimensions that are quite significant when considering how to mobilize the global youth population to contribute to peacebuilding activities at the grassroots level, in alignment with the goals and aspirations of UNSCR 2250. In particular, participatory action research has proved valuable as a methodological approach for youth and community peacebuilding. Five factors are especially salient:

- PAR skills can be learned quickly by groups with limited formal education or limited literacy.
- PAR mobilizes citizens within the poorest and more troubled areas to take on systemic challenges directly.
- PAR requires minimal resources to implement.
- PAR legitimates often marginalized or suppressed community experience and bottom-up grassroots knowledge by using recognized research tools to analyze and synthesize many perspectives.

- PAR outputs are catalytic to local authorities because research carries weight and bears credibility from their perspectives as policymakers.

The recommendations generated by local PAR processes are highly contextualized and specific and have a high level of community ownership, having originated from within the community, so are likely to be implemented at the household, neighborhood, and community levels.

As PAR facilitators and founders of youth-led, community-based organizations, the GCF authors learned considerably from this process. They have new levels of recognition within the community and government. They have also embarked on journeys to significantly transform how their organizations function to create more inclusive and participatory processes. These lessons are significant in light of the majority of the world's peacebuilding organizations being small, youth-led organizations.[27] PAR represents an opportunity to help such organizations grow in their methodological sophistication, achieve greater impact, and thus reach more sustainable levels of funding.

This report makes the case for international agencies and governments to see the role of young people differently in relation to peacebuilding by recognizing their potential for agency and political subjectivity and the substantial existing work already done by youth-led organizations to contribute to peace. Just as the United Network of Youth Peacebuilders' mapping exercise demonstrated that youth organizations are not peripheral to the peacebuilding field but instead make up the majority of them, the explicit documentation of the role and voice of youth peacebuilders in this report underscores that youth are not bystanders to peacebuilding in their communities, but are instead already active and eager to engage. They are an underserved population in search of change. Given methodological guidance in organizing and preparing for engagements with government and political institutions, this project provides further evidence that youth are highly effective agents of change in affecting communities and local government policies, even in fragile and conflict-prone communities. PAR is a tool that catalyzes youth to be more effective by aggregating their experience with that of other community groups, but the knowledge, determination, and courage of youth to support peacebuilding is both extant and abundant.

## Next Steps

Given the multiple levels of impact that this process has generated, from the facilitators and their organizations to the youth researchers to the government responses that have resulted from this project, clear empirical evidence is now documented that PAR can be an effective approach to youth-led community peacebuilding. The USIP authors recommend the following actions to expand and deepen knowledge about PAR as a peacebuilding tool and to develop new tools and recommended practices around using these approaches:

- Disseminate the findings of this project so that youth researchers can communicate their experiences directly with youth in other communities and countries.

- Encourage others to replicate and innovate based on the model described here to begin mainstreaming youth-led research as a key approach to peacebuilding and preventing and countering violent extremism.

- Engage those who led the PAR processes in this project to lead PAR training for the wider USIP Generation Change Fellows Program network and for youth-led peacebuilding organizations in Kenya. As additional youth and organizations develop their PAR capacities, efforts and resources should be devoted to building local and regional PAR peacebuilding networks globally.

The USIP authors also find significant value and opportunity in PAR in the formulation of policy. PAR puts youth and their knowledge at the center of policymaking processes. Policy-making spaces have been, by and large, closed spaces where youth voices have very little volume or influence. In this project, PAR provided reliable tools for enabling youth and community members to raise their voices and to organize their experiences and ideas in such a way that these commanded the attention of those in positions of authority.

This project demonstrates, in three parallel examples, how typically marginalized youth from poor, informal settlement communities can find their voices through a systemized process of research. This research inquiry helped them to be seen, heard, and responded to as representatives of the wider youth community. This important transformation from passive to active citizens simultaneously enhances inclusion, builds citizen engagement, provides alternatives to violence, and leverages research-based activism to improve the responsiveness of government at the volatile coalface where citizen and state meet in the world's poorest communities.

Youth are the majority of the world's population. PAR puts the power of research into their hands. This shift in power dynamics can put young people on a steadily climbing path to making certain that they have a political and peacebuilding voice equivalent to their demography.

## Appendix: "We Lead" Youth Solutions

### Nairobi: Roles and Responsibilities in Enhancing Good Governance

- Stephen Otieno from Mathare committed to engage youth and others in his community so that they may learn about the importance of peacebuilding.
- Frank Otieno committed to continue educating his community on Christian values as an individual and as a youth committed to keeping peace in the community.
- Ann Ruaraka committed to educate women in her community on entrepreneurship skills, and involve more women and youth from diverse backgrounds in peacebuilding processes so as to promote cohesion, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among the different tribes in Kenya.
- Judy Waithera organizes peace clubs in a local high school. One of the peace club programs is peer learning, in which alumni from the institution give inspirational talks and presentations to students as a way of motivating them. She looks forward to strengthening this program through the knowledge she has gained on PAR.
- James Awidhi from Mukuru committed to continue using art to educate the community on matters of good governance.
- Walton Olungata pledged to continue using community theater to educate his community on their rights, and also to address the rampant issue in his community, which is sexual and gender-based violence.
- Barack Ambrose committed to continue using sports, soccer in particular, to build unity among diverse groups to fight tribalism in his community.
- Salim Juma from Majengo committed to continuing a sustained dialogue with youth vulnerable to exploitation by extremist groups and to continue educating youth on nonviolent approaches to solving challenging issues in the community.

- Peter Mapour, a South Sudanese immigrant, committed to using participatory learning tools to strengthen his work toward the inclusion of more South Sudanese youth in peacebuilding processes in his community.
- Mike from Ruaraka committed to continue organizing church events with youth in his community so as to influence positive personal transformation and increase their participation in local governance and community development activities.
- Coach Orantes committed to ensuring more inclusion of youth participating in civic and peacebuilding forums in Majengo.

### Mombasa: Mitigating Youth Involvement in Violent Extremism and Community Crime Groups

- Nuru Abdulaziz: I pledge to arrange community outreach events to create awareness about violent extremism.
- Clare Kwekwe Dzuya: I will hold youth forums on the dangers and consequences of violent extremism.
- Kennedy Kala Lenjo: I pledge to mobilize youth through social media platforms (e.g., Whatsapp groups) and hold online education sessions about the effects of violent extremism.
- Juma Mohamed Mwaboye: I pledge to facilitate a forum on civic education between youth and youth in crime.
- Ali Amani Babu: I will initiate dialogue meetings between the youths, police, parents, and the local community leaders to curb the insecurity in my community.
- Nassoro Mohammed Maningi: I pledge to do mentorship activities with the unemployed youths, especially those that are considering joining radical groups.
- Hassan Mumia: I will sensitize my fellow youth to join positive youth action groups and to nurture their talents.
- Joseph Nazareth: I pledge to initiate and facilitate dialogue between youths and youths in crime on violent extremism.
- Hamisi Abdalla: I will organize a fashion event to inspire youth to think about their own talents.
- Amina Ali Mwachalume: I will hold forums to inspire youths and to nurture their talents.
- Allan Bean Wangulu: I will use my knowledge in life skills and business/economic empowerment to advise youth to live positively and find/create business opportunities.
- Esther Ndarigho Kyangangu: I pledge to create awareness in parents to monitor their children on the signs and symptoms of violent extremism.
- Jefferson Ngatia Mwasangu: I will form a youth group that will use talent as a tool to create awareness on matters related to peace in my area.

## *Kisumu: Youth Unemployment*

The Kisumu PAR team members pledged to:

- Mentor other youth who have a strong interest in art and performing theater to nurture their talents.

- Organize street performances in Kisumu City to address the causes of and offer solutions for youth unemployment through their art performances.

- Talk with parents to enlighten them on the importance of guiding their children while making their career choices at school, and in encouraging their children to pursue their talents and passions.

- Volunteer for different programs with NGOs and also encourage fellow youth to do the same.

- Engage in graffiti and art postings in the form of pledge walls to create awareness in the community on the importance of collective action among young people to engage in sustainable livelihood programs to offer employment for them:

   *"I love painting and drawing on walls. People appreciate my art and even invite me to their events to paint for them, where I also earn from my artwork," said a participant during the data collection engagement.*

These solutions came up as a result of the wide impact the project had on the Kisumu PAR team members. PAR facilitators also observed various levels of change exhibited by both team members and the other stakeholders involved. These were covered under the wider impacts of the research work.

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## About the Institute

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan institution established and funded by Congress. Its goals are to help prevent and resolve violent conflicts, promote postconflict peacebuilding, and increase conflict-management tools, capacity, and intellectual capital worldwide. The Institute does this by empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as by its direct involvement in conflict zones around the globe.

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At 1.8 billion, today's generation of youth—those ages ten to twenty-four—is the largest the world has ever known. One-third of them live in fragile or conflict-affected countries. Susceptible to the sway of external parties, narratives, and ideologies, they are influenced by their circumstances—enhancing the likelihood of their participating in violent extremism. At the same time, however, evidence suggests that young women and men can and do play active and valuable roles as agents of positive and constructive change. UN Security Council Resolution 2250, issued in December 2015, urges the international community to give youth a greater voice in decision making at local, national, regional, and international levels. In supportive response, USIP established a portfolio that engages youth leaders as critical partners in building peace in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. This report documents the utility and effectiveness of a pilot participatory action research project conducted in 2017 in Kenya as an approach for youth-led peacebuilding in marginalized communities marked by violent extremism.

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