Space for Change

Partnership examples: Local Government and Youth
Claire Wilkinson
In acknowledgement of the young people who lead by example with creativity, innovation and flair.

I would like to recognize the two mentors of this project, Dorothy and Sabina. As my teachers, both gave and shared so much to assist and enlighten me in Nairobi. I would also like to thank the United Nations Human Settlements and Cities- Partners and Youth Division for hosting my internship (Anantha Krishnan, Malinda Mungai, Paul Wambua). Thank you Doug Ragan for your patience, advice and belief in youth and for your connections to friends from the University of Colorado, Children Youth and Environments Centre for Research and Design. I am very grateful to those who have taken the time to review and provide comment to this document.

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Masters Project
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This research project centres around the topics of participatory planning and community development. It specifically investigates and illustrates the contributions of youth through their participation in initiatives that contribute to the improvement of the communities in which they live.

According to the United Nations Human Settlements and Cities statistics, the global population has quadrupled since 1950 and cities of the developing world account for over ninety percent of the world’s urban growth. The measures also highlight that the world is also more youthful. Even as decreasing birth rates and longer life spans are influencing an overall trend toward population ageing, in absolute numbers, there are more people under the age of 25 today than ever, nearly 3 billion or half of the total global population (UN-Habitat 2007).

The purpose of this project is to address what planners can do in cities where youth, or those aged under 25, are the age majority of the urban population. The research:

- investigates what issues are associated with such demographic trends
- questions what facilitates successful youth participation
- questions how local authorities can create opportunities given this situation
- examines what role physical space can provide.

A mixed methodology is used to examine and present one case study of a space called the One Stop Youth Information Research Centre (One Stop) which exists in Nairobi, Kenya. The One Stop is a hub for youth to engage in cultural and physical activities such as music, theatre and sports, allowing them to interact positively with their community and their peers. The research was conducted in 2006 and 2007 using interviews, site visits, observational analysis, an architectural study of space and supplementary data analysis. These were conducted as part of an internship project with UN-Habitat. The One Stop case example is part of the UN-Habitat Global Partnership Initiative.

At a local level, it has been used as a strategy to facilitate meaningful youth participation within local government and community. To introduce the case study, particular emphasis is given to existing studies that have investigated youth empowerment, engagement, participation, and support mechanisms. The case study demonstrates how young people have the ability to take the lead in determining what action is needed to address the concerns that they face, and are demonstrating this ability through meaningful initiatives. It also demonstrates the passion and energy of young people when they are engaged in a collaborative effort to bring about transformation in improving their world. Underpinning this research is the assertion that providing a formalised, physical space can be the fundamental catalyst for positive youth action and development.

The examples, observations and recommendations from this project have been documented for UN-Habitat, and also the Nairobi City Council, who operationalised this initiative in Kenya. The findings and profile may also be of use to other local governments, policy makers, civil society and those who share a willingness to take action and generate an investment in youth, and an interest in reaping the associated rewards and dividends.
Introduction

If cities are seeking to be responsive to a large youth demographic it is important to understand what this means. To comprehensively introduce this research project, background literature and studies that address what is meant when referring to youth are presented. Many international programs already exist and have relevance to youth. Part A of this project acknowledges this, and focuses upon the initiatives of the United Nations, particularly the strategies of the Human Settlements and Cities division. To support the relevance of this, it is important to give an overview of current demographic trends and provide brief mention of some key contextual issues that impact youth in the region where this research project takes place. Part A also touches on what researchers identify as fundamental requirements to support youth, and the important role that local agencies can play, and are currently playing.

DEFINITION OF YOUTH

The terms 'adolescents', 'youth', and 'young people' are used differently in various contexts. These categories are associated (where they are recognized) with different roles, responsibilities and ages that depend on local cultures and realities. The United Nations, for statistical purposes, defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. This definition was made during preparations for the International Youth Year ([1985]), and endorsed by the General Assembly (see A/36/215 and resolution 36/28, 1981). All United Nations statistics on youth are based on this definition, as illustrated by the annual yearbooks of statistics published by the United Nations system on demography, education, employment and health.

By this definition, children are those persons under the age of 14. It is, however, worth noting that Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines 'children' as persons up to the age of 18. This was intentional, as it was hoped that the Convention would provide protection and rights to as large an age-group as possible and because there was no similar United Nations Convention on the Rights of Youth.

Internationally, a number of additional classifications exist when defining and speaking to young people. Many countries draw a line on youth at the age at which a person is given equal treatment under the law often referred to as the "age of majority". This varies between countries from 18 to 21 years old. Once a person passes this age, they are considered to be an adult. However, the operational definition and nuances of the term 'youth' often vary from country to country, depending on the specific socio-cultural, institutional, economic and political factors. Simpson (1997) articulates this point particularly well. He asserts that definitions of childhood and youth are social and cultural constructs that vary according to geography, gender, ethnicity, and class.

An Expert Committee on Health Needs of Adolescents in 1976 recognized adolescence as a formative period for behaviour patterns and activities important to health. In the mid 1980's a study group of the World Health Organization in Geneva drew on the expertise of medical sociologists, health promotion experts, researchers, and clinicians to extrapolate from the general youth definition of the United Nations (Bennett/Tonkin 2003). It was felt that the ages 15 to 24 excluded consideration of the special characteristics and needs of young adolescents. The World Health Organization thus proposed a composite-age range of 10 to 19 to formalize this important time of human development and growth.

For the purposes of this research report, what appear to be the most commonly used definitions, in different demographic, policy and social contexts are used. These are - Adolescents: 10 to 19 years of age, Youth: 15 to 24 years of age, Young people: 10 to 24 years of age.
UN-HABITAT: THE GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE
This research project examined and assessed one particularly interesting project within this system. It is an initiative of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), the agency which aims to promote socially and environmentally sustainable towns and cities with the goal of providing adequate shelter for all. It is also an agency that regards young people as a major force in a participatory approach to promote employment, training, and crime prevention. Guided by the Habitat Agenda which was adopted by 171 countries at the 1996 City Summit in Istanbul, Turkey, UN-Habitat has many programmes that engage with youth. The Global Partnerships Initiative on Urban Youth Development (GPI) is the leading youth programme within UN-Habitat. Launched in 2003, the GPI seeks to integrate the goals of the UN’s economic and social development programmes at the city level focusing on and working with urban youth, local governments, civil society and other relevant United Nations agencies.

One of the core programmes of the Global Partnership Initiative has been the creation of resources centres for youth. UN-Habitat and local governments have set up computerized “One Stop” Youth Information Resource Centres in several African cities to prepare young people for employment through training in entrepreneurship, computer technologies and apprenticeships. The centres also provide health-related training and prevention programmes and activities, as well as information on local governance. The Centres are hubs for youth to engage in cultural and physical activities such as music, theatre and sports, allowing them to interact positively with their community and their peers.

It is the purpose of this Masters research project to take one example of a “One Stop” Young Information Resource Centre, in Nairobi, Kenya and discuss the results of creating partnerships within a local context and profile what challenges exist.

YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS
As aforementioned, the importance of research focused on young people is reinforced by the realities of today’s global situation. Statistics support and reinforce the fact that a significant proportion of the world’s population is young. The 2007 State of the Worlds Cities report illustrates that nearly half of the world’s population - more than 3 billion people - are under the age of twenty-five, with 1.2 billion of these beings younger than 15. It is clear that youth embody a significant proportion of the world’s human capital, but 85% of those who are of working age live in the developing world, primarily in Southern Asia and Africa where more than 500 million live on less than 82 a day (UN-Habitat 2005) and employment opportunities are far and few between. Africa comprises the largest segment of young people. Available estimates show that in most African countries, including Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia, the youth and children aged 25 years and younger constitute around or above 70% of the population.

ISSUES FACING A DISPROPORTIONATE POPULATION
With so many youth coming of age in the grip of poverty and facing the peril of illness and disease such as HIV and AIDS, the lives of young people are pressured by a combination of intense human injustice and inequalities. There exists well documented studies of critical conditions facing a vast proportion of humanity’s struggles in daily existence. These, are obvious factors which disadvantage youth. The critical nature of this situation is further compounded by continued global and regional trends that impact communities in ways that serve only to further disadvantage the capacity of large parts of society to access even basic necessities.

Acknowledging this, there are four critical points that provide contextual background to this research report. These relate to the location of this undertaking within Africa, the external and internal characteristics that define this region of the world, and more generally, consideration of the impact of social values and the perception of how life should be lived.

LEGACIES OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY
During the empires-building that occurred in Africa at the end of the sixteenth century, European powers staked claims to the entire continent. At meetings in Berlin, Paris, London and other capitals, European statesmen and diplomats bargained over the separate spheres of interest they intended to establish there. The result today is a continent where sustained conflict presents huge challenges for communities. Wars of independence have been replaced by civil war. One example is Angola in an extreme case, where war has become an ever-present feature of life for almost fifty years. Civil wars in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Uganda have also devastated many communities for over twenty-five years. Sporadic coups, counter coups and revolutions have destabilized individual countries and neighbouring countries, such as those between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the Great Lakes Region and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Territorial conflicts have devastated human life and property, spiralled influxes of refugees across African landscape and deepened human suffering and poverty. Such legacies have left war-affected children, child soldiers and displaced people and cultures in small arms. Corruption has also bankrupted many post-independence states, such as Nigeria, Chad and the Democratic Republic of Congo. This is the context within which young people find themselves.

PRESSURES ASSOCIATED WITH URBANISATION
According to UN-HABITAT, the year 2007 marked a turning point in human history where the world’s urban population for the first time equaled the world’s rural population and the number of slum dwellers exceeded the one billion mark. Now is a time when one in every three city residents lives in inadequate housing with no, or few, basic services.

The global urban population has quadrupled since 1950, and cities of the developing world account for ninety percent of the world’s urban growth. Current trends reflect the number of urban dwellers will keep rising, reaching almost five billion by 2050. Economically, it is highlighted that cities have tremendous potential as the main engines of economic and social development as well as the main source of countries’ jobs. The flipside of this is a situation where cities generate and intensify social exclusion.

The UN-Habitat Strategy Paper on Urban Youth in Africa discusses how existing urban areas are not equipped to accommodate such rapid population increases, emphasizing the lack of investment in infrastructure and its maintenance, and outdated city plans as key factors that compound problems (2006). Repeatedly, global research to date warns of how cities in the developing world are characterized by a lack of access to basic essentials such as housing and shelter, core urban services such as clean water, sanitation and electricity, as well as to education and health-care. The harsh realities are that the unplanned and overcrowded settlements and informal housing areas that provide accommodation also present chronic difficulties for the delivery of urban services.

In Nairobi for example, the location for this research report, sixty percent of the population live in informal settlements. These housing areas are squeezed into less than six percent of the cities’ land, and the vast majority of plots in these settlements have neither formal water connections (UN-Habitat, 2001). A study of the Kibera slum in Nairobi found that while 14 public primary schools were situated within walking distance of the slum, the schools could only accommodate 20,000 of the more than 100,000 primary school-age children living in the area (UN-Habitat 2007).

DETERIORATING HEALTH, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS
There exists well documented studies of critical conditions facing a vast proportion of humanity’s struggles in daily existence. There, are obvious factors which disadvantage youth. The critical nature of this situation is further compounded by continued global and regional trends that impact communities in ways that serve only to further disadvantage the capacity of large parts of society to access even basic necessities.

For an excellent and comprehensive chronological account spanning the entire continent – see Meredith, 2006 for a narrative of Africa’s political trajectory since independence.
depends on improvisation. In cities of the developed world, more jobs are being created in the financial sector and in information technology as a result of globalization, while in the developing world, trends point toward an increasing ‘informalisation’ of the urban economy, as the formal sector fails to provide adequate employment opportunities for the number of young people and adults seeking work. This observation is reinforced by the International Labour Organization who has estimated that 85% of all new employment opportunities are created in the informal economy. It is in this precarious environment that the majority of youths are socialised, and many have not had a family member with a contract or steady salary in the last two generations. The correlation between poverty and social exclusion is not new, particularly the negative effects distinguished by limitations in access to education and health care and also poor access to power and decision making structures. (UNICEF 2002).

NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF A COMMERCIAL WORLD

The portrayal of life in developed countries is a scenario where privilege and success is increasingly characterised and complemented by social values which encourage competition and consumption, rather than community and reciprocity. These values are impacting the lives and cultures of young people throughout the world, even in countries where economic and social conditions are rapidly deteriorating. They affect all aspects of life, including relationships, attitudes and behaviour. The consumer world presents youth with an image of a society in which people are valued on the basis of their assets yet fails to grant them access to those assets. One of the manifestations of urbanization is the disintegration of existing normative structures, (UN-Habitat 2005).

PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Despite what appears to be overwhelming negative pressures, the situation remains that youth are at a formative stage in life, with energy, curiosity and openness to acquire knowledge, learn skills and absorb values. Shale and Tschiselsk (2002) suggest a number of common protective factors which strengthen children and young peoples’ resilience in the face of difficult living conditions. These include a supportive and safe family and care environment, a healthy and supportive home environment, a healthy and supportive environment in general, and good school achievement. In the situations where protective factors may exist to encourage resiliency such as positive role models and peers, supportive community, safe living environment and access to opportunities for education or learning.

Internationally, the 2007 World Development Report provides a schematic model of many of these factors and identifies youth development taking place in overlapping and interconnected spheres. They point to the home, family, school and community environment and profile the enabling factors in any youth’s environment. The strategy also reinforces how youth play a pivotal role themselves.

At its core, the framework identifies nine interlinked building blocks as key areas of intervention along the life cycle. The upper four blocks, ranging from education to healthy behaviours and youth employment, contain policies and programs geared towards youth up to 25 years of age. According to these observations, increased synergy is needed among sectors with specific attention to three broad categories to create an enabling environment for the well-being of children and youth.

In discussing the concept of ‘demographic dividend’, Bloom speaks of the economic benefits that a large youth demographic can provide in terms of potential labour and income generating capacity that younger populations contribute (2002). Landberg and Lam go on to point out that for large youth populations to translate into economic growth, governments and the urban formal economy must provide opportunities, capabilities and chances for young people (2007). Essentially, these opportunities must foster the protective factors needed for increased capacity, involvement and decision making. This research paper speaks to the role that local government and youth themselves can also play in the improvement of relationships, and of building communities. The disintegration of ubuntu is occurring at a number of levels, but is especially significant in relation to the family, the school and the local neighbourhood (UN-Habitat 2005).

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Cities are the places where injustices and the negative impacts that correlate with poverty and the pressures of urbanisation are most obvious. It is in this context where the issues are laid bare and impacts are most immediate. At this level, the local authorities are often inadequately equipped or prepared to develop policies and programs to respond. Questions worth addressing are, how can this role also be something that is positive, and what mechanisms can be used as a means for empowerment and constructive response to the issues and disparities faced by so many.

In a compendium of papers discussing responses to the youth challenge in developing world cities, different authors speculate on approaches to reducing poverty and conflict (Bubel, Tulchin et al 2001). Within this compendium, Millar examines youth employment and in doing so touches on some important reasons as to why local government is an important interface. His observations and conclusions are aimed specifically at job creation for youth, but they also speak more generally to the fundamental importance that local governments have. They include:

REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT.

Cities are involved in the development of policies and programs, zoning regulations, regulations governing the establishment of enterprise, regulation on the commission of public contracts and tendering procedures, and regulations linked to the delivery of, and provision of, infrastructure and support services. These are important grounds to acknowledge, given their propensity to give youth legitimacy through a formalized framework of local strategies and regulations that foster contributions from youth in a way that is fair and equitable.

INFORMAL ECONOMY

City governments can also act as a key place to improve and give recognition to the urban informal economy. Particularly in areas where unemployment is high, this is a crucial supplemental to the formal economy and workforce. In addition to the provision of basic infrastructure, support can be facilitated through places providing training, microfinance initiatives, and by acknowledging the informal-sector workers and enterprises and assisting with ways for them to grow, improve working conditions, organise and create representative associations.

ALIANCES

City governments have a unique perspective in their ability to form local partnerships to create alliances in favour of supporting particular interest groups. Whether it is small business, youth, minority groups or other sectors of diverse communities, the local government is the body closest to the community where the notion of public-private partnerships and collaboration appears most workable.

There exist many more functions of local authorities that can be adapted to demonstrate how government structures can foster and enable young people to be protected and supported. The three mentioned are examples that have relevance to this research project. At the national level, many countries have broadly based policies aimed at improving the lives of youth. Things such as increased access to health clinics, improved school enrolment, and legislation for protection from exploitative labour are three such examples of policy reform. Local authority initiatives often work in tandem with these, equipping schools in poor urban communities, staffing health centers, and providing vocational training schemes.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this background profile has been to give context to what is unfolding by youth and to discuss what has been increasing international acknowledgement of the distinct issues that are facing young people today. With a broad profile of what these issues entail and suggestions regarding the agencies best positioned to assist, this overview narrows on one project before highlighting some specific protective factors that have been offered as mechanisms to strengthen young peoples resilience in the face of overwhelming challenges.

The following section expands on literature associated with what it means to actively contribute, to be engaged and ‘meaningfully’ involved. This reflection is helpful to consider where young people exist in this situation, particularly their positions in instituting change and/or action. As the focus of this research, The Global Partnership Initiative is intended to prepare young people and facilitate increased participation be it through employment, training, or increased cultural and physical activities. The case study of the One-Stop requires reflection to consider how theories and models of participatory planning relate to practice.
In society today, we are presented with a plethora of words and expressions describing the state of being an active contributor, and these words are often the same used when referring to youth. There is a recurring and growing recognition that youth need to be ‘meaningfully’ involved - not just for their own health but for the health of their communities - a point that pervades initiatives which exist for young people. The question that results from this is one of measurement. That is, how can we judge what is meaningful involvement, and what is mere token involvement? This paper situates the role of young people within literature on participatory planning and conceptualizes the role that youth can play.

It is relevant to draw from the vast body of academic work that specifically surrounds youth engagement, involvement and participation. Generally speaking, literature on public participation rarely articulates the role of youth in transformative learning and action. However, this is not always the case. Gurstein, Lovato and Ross (2003) give an excellent illustration of how youth can play a critical role, specifically showing different organizational contexts in which youth and their adult supporters successfully implement youth participation in practice.
DESCRIPTIVE MODELS

It is useful to reflect on the various models that exist in relation to participation. A number of authors have developed models of youth participation that portray the degree or type of participation, the institutional arrangements, and the purpose of participation. This project illustrates five main ones that exist in this field. In researching this area it is important to note that many other hybrid variations exist.

(i) The earliest general model of participation appears to be Sherry Arnstein’s ladder of participation (1969). She described the level of real citizen involvement in the public planning process in the United States. Her model relates to adults’ participation. At that time, citizen involvement became a practical demonstration of developing communities using principles of democracy and rights. Over time, changing views on children and youth have led writers to adapt Arnstein’s model to one where children and young people can be supported to participate in decision making.

(ii) Roger Hart was the first to adapt Arnstein’s model to work with children and young people and identify degrees of children’s participation by recognizing their developing capacity to participate. Hart uses a ladder consisting of eight rungs as a framework for his model of participation. Rungs one through three represent non-participation by children and young people and the remaining rungs represent degrees of participation. It is interesting to note that the usefulness of this model has been criticized because it assumes participation at lower levels is less valuable than those described on the higher rungs. Some researchers point out that non-participation can be a form of participation as long as the child or young person has had the opportunity of making the choice about whether they wish to participate or not (Thomas, Philipson, et al. 1998).

(iii) Barry Checkoway (1998) identifies five types of involvement: citizen action, which empowers citizens in general for social change; youth action, which empowers youth for social change; youth development, which promotes positive development of youth; neighbourhood development, which promotes housing, economic and physical development of local areas; and neighbourhood-based youth initiatives, which promote youth and neighbourhood development simultaneously. This implies a progression from general civic engagement to specific participation that is positive and youth specific, personally and also for the broader community.

(iv) Clare Lardner provides another useful model worth referencing. This is one which uses a grid, rather than a ladder, to represent how participation occurs (Lardner, 2001). According to Lardner, the ladder model assumes that it is better to aim for the highest level of participation possible. However, she argues that different levels of participation may be more appropriate to different situations. She makes the link between the concepts of empowerment and participation and developed a grid model to better represent these complexities.

Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation

Roger Hart’s Ladder of Participation, Children’s Participation: From Tokenism of Citizenship, UNICEF

Barry Checkoway’s Five Types of Participation

Clare Lardner’s Grid Model
(v) Shiers model is based on five levels of participation, along with three stages of commitment at each level of participation, called ‘Openings’, ‘Opportunities’ and ‘Obligations’ (Sheir, 2001). An opening occurs as soon as an individual/worker is ready to operate at that level and they make a personal commitment to work in a certain way. It is only an opening, because at this stage, the opportunity may not be available. Opportunity occurs when the needs are met that will enable the individual/worker or organization to operate at this level in practice, such as having the appropriate resources, skills and knowledge. Obligation is established when it becomes the agreed policy of the organization that staff should operate at this level.

### Levels of Participation

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<tr>
<th>Levels of Participation</th>
<th>Openings</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Children share power/decisions for decision-making</td>
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<td>2. Children are involved in making processes</td>
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<td>3. Children are autonomous (take own view)</td>
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<td>4. Children are given power to make decisions</td>
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<td>5. Children take responsibility for decisions</td>
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<td>Are children represented in the decision-making processes?</td>
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<td>Can children participate in decision-making?</td>
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<td>Do you work in a way that enables children to take a role?</td>
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<td>Are you ready to share power and responsibility?</td>
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<td>Are you ready to share some of your adult power?</td>
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<td>Are you ready to listen to children?</td>
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<td>Does your decision-making process take children’s views into account?</td>
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<td>Is there a requirement that children must be involved in decision-making?</td>
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<td>Are you ready to share power and responsibility for decision-making?</td>
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<td>Is it a policy of the organization to ensure that there are ways to involve children and young people so that they can voice their concerns in decisions that affect their lives?</td>
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### Opportunity

As well as having information, the conditions must exist for participation. The opportunity is there and genuine. To ensure that there are ways to involve children and young people so that they can voice their concerns in decisions that affect their lives. There are many ways that organizations can guarantee that opportunities exist for the participation of young people. For it to be effective, this needs to be part of the organization’s culture. Essentially, a ‘business as usual’ component is required, one that reflects the true value that the organization places on youth and their commitment to the decisions that affect their own lives.

### Support

The support of an adult or older youth can provide the motivation, and be a catalyst for participation. This is applicable to all young people, but it’s of particular relevance in situations where a sense of powerlessness prevails.

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**YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS**

The merits of youth-adult partnerships are given praise by many authors as a positive strategy for building intergenerational relationships to strengthen community development initiatives (Jones & Perkins 2003, Camino, 2000; Wunrow & Einspruch, 2001, Zeldin & Olson, 2000). In many ways the relationship is somewhat of a mentorship role, where a trusting relationship between an adult or older youth creates a relationship that offers guidance, support and encouragement. The relationship can create a foundation from which youth can be active agents in their own development, the development of others and the benefit of the community and civil society. In addition it can create a situation where new social activities, increased learning of essential life skills, positive personal development and community contribution can occur (Kirshner, O’Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2002; Zeldin, 2004).

Strong relationships emanate from reciprocity in leading and learning between youth and adults, especially when the two parties are engaged as partners in community building or activism (Zeldin, Larson, Camino & O’Connor 2003, Kirshner, 2007). In recognising the merits of this approach, further research has been called for in respect to diverse cultural models of youth-adult relationships. In countries where the youth population is so large it is often the case that increased role responsibilities are a matter of survival from a
**YOUTH LED DEVELOPMENT**

Youth led development is the development of youth capacity to undertake social, environmental and economic initiatives for the benefit of their community. Youth led development goes beyond the traditional teacher-student model in that youth learn the skills, attitudes and discipline to be self-reliant, self-motivated and self-organized. It involves projects or programs which engage youth in shared decision making and youth led and initiated actions characterised by peer to peer learning and adult youth mentorship and collaboration. Whether it is youth peer to peer relationships or youth/adult mentorship, the creating of trust between the partners is vital to the success of youth led development. These partnerships make up the core team from which a program, project and youth led agency is built.

In operation, the youth-led agency develops ideas and drives decision making with their own skills and motivation with little to no support from adults. The Global Partnership Initiative and many of the activities at the One Stop in Nairobi are an example whereby youth-led agencies use space to coordinate and mobilize their own programs or projects that responded to their own identified need for community. In many instances the youth take the lead in seeing that their projects are carried out from inception to completion.

**DEFINING “MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION”**

Governments, international organizations, non-government organizations and community based groups have rallied behind the idea that all people have a right to be part of decisions that affect their lives. It is important to consider that the pursuit of inclusive planning processes is not solely about building the experience base for young people. It is also about shifting organizational and governmental attitudes and policies to an approach decision-making with youth as routine practice. Researcher Sheridan Bartlett describes the objective as a deeper and broader change in local attitudes towards children and youth that begins to work like yeast throughout a city, raising awareness so that it becomes mainstream and common to think in terms of the rights of younger citizens (Bartlett, 2005).

**CIVIL SOCIETY AND Citizenship**

This brings about an important observation of what it is that underpines this goal of ‘meaningful participation’ in terms of planning theory. For instance, Friedmann defines civil society as “those social organizations, associations and institutions that exist beyond the sphere of direct supervision and control by the state” (Friedmann 1998). He asserts that “Civil society is a re-emerging force in the construction of a new citizenship, creating a path of urban and regional development that reterritorialises public value away from the materialism of consumer society towards the quality of human relationships”. Friedmann contends that civil society groups are becoming a dynamic force in the political arena as they elaborate a “politics of identity” reclaiming their members’ social rights as citizens. The work of the planner in supporting this movement is to be “passionately engaged in a transformative politics for inclusions, opportunity for self-development and social justice”. This transformative politics speaks to the work of all planners and other community leaders who, allied with young people and their causes, understand citizenship as representing the story of a lifetime. Starting at a very young age, all people need to be provided with outlets for realizing skills and knowledge that can serve in the work of community building such as creating opportunities for self-development (Gurstein, Lovato, Ross, 2003).

A complementary analysis to Friedmann’s commentary on civil society and citizenship is the work of Hart et al (1997). Hart asserts that youth organizations who are best able to engage and sustain the participation of people share a few important characteristics. Namely that young people understand that they are needed and have valuable resources to offer. There is also an opportunity to assume a variety of roles. As a result of this environment, the organization that results is a space which allows for a rich and complex participation of young people in multiple cultures and identities, defined on their own terms. Gurstein, Lovato and Ross make an important link observing that when this engagement allows for the expression of unique cultures to emerge from the social fabric, youth are free to develop their own ‘politics of identity’ and be recognized as agents in the evolution of civil society.

Theoretically, this reinforces the claim that participation prepares young people for engagement in a democratic society. At a time when social scientists find that many people have “disengaged from democracy,” there is need for new strategies which will awaken them to community problems and motivate them to take action (Putnam 2000, 2001). In this way, participation is the stimulus that provides information for competent citizenship.

**SUMMARY**

One of the main assertions of this paper is that young people are already actively engaged in community work and that their activities and achievements are yet to be truly celebrated, valued and legitimized by broader society. This section has presented a number of models that have been used by authors to illustrate the many ways that participation takes place and what is particularly important to ensure that this is successful. Adult partnerships are one such factor.

The following section will provide practical illustration of applied concepts such as youth-adult partnerships, youth-led development, and the common elements of what models of participation stipulate as the basic conditions for effective engagement. What is particularly encouraging about these observations is how this can redefine the possibilities of local government response and citizen participation; as youth engage proactively in issues of importance to them their development and social justice. The Nairobi One Stop example has much relevance to the field of community development, planning practice and citizen engagement.
Case Study Overview

The following case study advocates for a deconstructed stereotype of youth, asserting the view of “youth as resources” and maintaining that young people are positive assets and competent citizens with a right to participate and a responsibility to serve their communities. This view contrasts with the frequent news media portrayal of youth as “victims of poverty” and “problems in society”. The following section of this research project provides a contrast to many social science studies of youth as “alienated from community” and “withdrawn from participation”, digressing from a professional focus on the deficiencies and service needs of youth. When perceptions remain stuck in a view of young people as troubled and troubling, and youth accept adult conceptions of themselves, this weakens rather than strengthens the roles of young people in a democratic society (Finn and Checkoway 1998, Kurth-Schai, 1988).

In the year before my internship with UN-Habitat, I was working in Vancouver at a youth non-government organisation which frequently connected with a large group of well spoken, smart and inspirational young people based in Nairobi. Each time we connected with this group via email or on a crackly phone line, they told me about a partnership they shared with the local government whereby, the Nairobi City Council provided formal use of a building. As I came to know more of the young women and men from that city who were part of this, I came to suspect that it was a place where motivated change agents were going to get things organised and find out about positive initiatives taking place across the city. In September of 2006 I moved to Kenya and lived for a number of months in Nairobi working from the Partners and Youth Division of UN-Habitat. As part of my time allocation I decided to undertake research to further investigate what the provision of space was achieving in a city where young people dominate the urban demographic.

Informed by the struggles and achievements of years leading up to this, the work provides a summary of both formal and informal components of the initiative. Since the One Stop is now much smaller, the relevance of this work lies in an evaluation and profile of the merits associated with this provision of space. An optimistic narrative is reflected concurrently with the evaluation.

Centres for Change: Part C - 23
Before setting forth to collect information and report on the One Stop initiative as a case study, endorsement and review of my work was sanctioned by UN-Habitat, and the CUYD. Advice and review of the proposed methods was reviewed internally. To comply with the ethics review standards of both host agencies it was required that once in Nairobi at the One Stop, a research committee be formed on site. Regular meetings were held for all committee members to comment on the purpose of study, proposed methodology and data collection techniques. The research committee incorporated representatives from UN-Habitat, the Nairobi City Council, Youth leaders and representatives from One Stop, external consultants, One Stop staff and service providers. The committee was instrumental in ensuring the accountability of this research and the necessary internal support. Before setting forth to participate in the everyday activities and carry out approved methods for data collection at the centre, I was assigned two internal mentors to oversee and review my research information for accuracy; also to ensure that those who participated had consented to be involved. One, a senior internal staff member - Sabine Mungai and the other - a young woman with her own youth organization and a very involved One Stop participant called Dorothie.

Over the four months that I regularly frequented the One Stop to conduct research, both Sabine and Dorothie would join me, often insisting to help collect information, providing their experience and knowledge and also sitting with me on a weekly basis to carefully review the reporting that I had prepared for accuracy. For purposes of anonymity, the names of all youth have been removed or disguised in this final report.

My research used a mixed method approach in the hope that the chosen techniques would give a very visual depiction of the One Stop space and activities. The different research methods incorporated were:

i) Interviews with various people and organisations associated with the One Stop
ii) Photo study of both the space within the building and the activities
iii) Site visits and regular observational analysis of various components
iv) Architectural study of space within the building
v) Six month review of formal daily records

The research undertaken as part of this case study will speak to each of these objectives by reviewing activities and initiatives that have occurred on a daily basis in Nairobi. In an action plan developed in 2004, a set of long term activities for the centre was also outlined with targets to achieve (ITDG, 2004). These are a good basis for comparative analysis. They address the central areas of intervention at the Centre. Furthermore, the research committee incorporated the following summary of research conducted at One Stop as part of the Global Partnership Initiative of UN-Habitat as a case study.

A UN-Habitat programme officer involved with the GPI reinforced in an interview for this project that:

"the main enabling factor of the Nairobi One Stop is the commitment and support of various partners to provide space and mobilize services that provide for, are supported by, and in many instances led by young people. The networking, presence and commitment from both private and public sectors has been testimony to the driving force which sustained the initiative, addressed challenges and worked toward self-sufficiency" (ITDG, 2004)

The following summaries of research conducted at One Stop exemplify this.

GLOBAL PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE BACKGROUND

The One Stop in Nairobi is part of the Global Partnership Initiative of UN-Habitat. It is a private - public partnership consisting of formal space with services and staff that is open Monday through Friday from 9 am to 5 pm. The following summaries of research conducted at One Stop exemplify this.

Unpublished documentation from within UN-Habitat reference five objectives that are central to the project:

i) encourage partnerships with relevant stakeholders in the delivery of youth development;
ii) increase knowledge, skills and attitude change of young people;
iii) respond to educational, socio-economic, recreational, emotional and psychological needs of young people in an integrated way;
iv) encourage youth to have greater ownership of development;
v) offer leadership and mentorship to young people.

The research undertaken as part of this case study will speak to each of these objectives by reviewing activities and initiatives that have occurred on a daily basis in Nairobi. In an action plan developed in 2004, a set of long term activities for the centre was also outlined with targets to achieve (ITDG, 2004). These are a good basis for comparative analysis. They address the central areas of intervention at the Centre.

Broadly, these are as follows:

- Employment and Entrepreneurship: to build capacity of youth to participate effectively in urban poverty reduction through training and by offering employment opportunities in self-employment, formal and informal sectors.
- Governance and Advocacy: to enhance youth contribution towards better governance by promoting increased youth participation in local government matters, particularly those concerning youth development.
- Health: To provide services aimed at preventing and solving reproductive health problems amongst youth by provision of information, skills training, education on reproductive health, counselling and referral services.
- Communications and Information: To establish mechanisms to effectively communicate and disseminate information to youth, youth organisations and other partners involved in both work.
- Environment and Resource Management: To strengthen youth engagement in the protection and improvement of the environment by promoting their participation in environmental justice and governance initiatives.
DIAGRAM 1: DISTRIBUTION OF SPACE

Essentially social interaction and communication takes place in context; space is the primary context for all types of communication. Major contemporary social theorists have pointed out significant relationships between space and communications (see Carey, 1981; Castells, 1989; Harvey, 1989; Lefebvre, 1991). This research project takes an approach that examines spatially differentiated elements where social interaction takes place.

At the One Stop, physical space is divided into different uses. The following floor plan provides a base study of how the Nairobi One Stop was organized in the Kenya Railways building. Initially it highlights what functions and services are provided. An additional floor plan is included in the observations and recommendations section to elaborate on the distinguishing elements associated with the use of this space. This first graphic is provided for spatial reference to the areas being discussed.
FORMAL PARTNERSHIPS AND SERVICE PROVISION

At the time of this research there were five formal partners who have services and operations in the One Stop. The formal service provisioning is based around communication and information technology training, health services, governance and employment. These partnerships are the elements most prevalent in literature about the One Stop model.

1. Companionship of Works Association

Spaces Used: COWA Office

As partners since the centre started, the Companionship of Works Association (COWA) has physically occupied a small satellite office in the One Stop since late 2004. An adult employee comes Monday to Friday for appointments with youth. The organization provides employment related services with their main activities being to provide career guidance. This office from COWA uses an office next to the reception for private meetings (the second counselling room). The organization also focuses on empowerment of young people, advocating that this occurs when working together to market their skills and abilities and make themselves job ready. The COWA group was initially for Catholic youth but now welcomes all. The services are more of a labor exchange than an employment bureau or agency. A review of the register of youth who use the service finds that on average five consultations are held each day. There are over 5000 youth who have registered with the organisation across the City of Nairobi. Of these statistics the COWA representative states that approximately 200 young people have found employment after registering and 35 have started their own entrepreneurship.

2. Hope World Wide Kenya - Counsellors and Volunteers

Spaces Used: VCT Testing Room/VCT Waiting Area

A free voluntary counselling and testing (VCT) service is also provided at the One Stop. This service operates daily and is supported by volunteers who register clients and provide assistance and information. The Counselling room sees between five to ten people a day, however demand is generally much higher. A visit takes approximately 45 minutes in duration.

Two interviews are held with Hope World Wide counsellors. This is the organisation that supplies staff each week; it is a rotational roster of counsellors. The One Stop VCT is only one of many initiatives that this organization provides. The employees I interview tell me that a session begins by having a discussion about prevention techniques to avoid the contraction of HIV and then demonstrations about condom use. Then the counsellor will contextualize the discussion around the client to get an understanding of their concerns and risk factors. The counsellor will also explain what is involved with the HIV test and they discuss what the client will do if the results are positive or negative. Referral services and support groups for HIV are discussed, as are some of the stigmatization factors about HIV. Treatment and drug therapy are also discussed before the HIV test takes place. If the client has concerns about other sexually transmitted infections referral services are provided. Clients will find out straight away if they are positive.

The room where the testing takes place is private; however there is no running water or a proper examination table.

3. One Stop Staff

Spaces Used: Reception, Career Counselling Room #2, Career Counselling Room #1, Office of the Coordinator, Storage Space

There are a number of staff who work at the One Stop full time, all of whom have been involved since the initiative started and the space was provided by the City Council of Nairobi. The staff can be considered formal service providers but also play roles that extend beyond this. The seven formal positions are as follows: Coordinator, Senior Training Officer (newer position for one year), Three Information Officers, One Security Staff, Computer Maintenance and Networking- Contract.

In 2004, Staff from One Stop did intensive field research to ground test a database of active youth organizations in Nairobi. Over two weeks the information officers described how staff visited 100 to 150 different youth organizations that had expressed interest in affiliation with One Stop. This database of affiliate youth organizations was shown to me. To join One Stop as an organization the group must bring a profile of their organization and a valid registration certificate. If the group fits the thematic areas that One Stop addresses, they can then become an affiliate. The validity of the database is questioned as it is many years since many organizations joined and some may now have disbanded.

4. Information Computer Technology - Training Initiatives

Spaces Used: Information Communications and Technology Training Room

Fourteen computers were donated to the One Stop by Computer Aid. Only one is not in working order. Two trainers have worked with One Stop to provide six month courses for youth - specifically focusing on basic computer training. It is an excellent example of peer to peer education. The two training staff are volunteers. One young man is an additional staff from other organizations such as the Mathare Youth Sports Association also support the One Stop Staff by assisting at the reception area during busy periods.

One Stop Staff provide mentorship to individuals and groups (e.g. Junior Council, youth artists, Members and Organizations like those profiled in the Informal Partnerships section of this report). This mentorship extends far beyond the daily 8 to 5 pm duties and extends to weekend support. Staff demonstrate their confidence in youth by attending their events, by sharing food, their computers, their knowledge and contacts within the City of Nairobi and other youth led and youth serving organisations.

The information officers help to answer enquiries. They also facilitate meetings, provide referrals and assist with the coordination of youth activities such as Habitat Day, Youth Market Place, City Council of Nairobi events. The staff clean the One Stop and coordinate bookings and use of space. They collect and post information and also conduct outreach services. During my visit there were two examples where One Stop Initiatives were discussed with youth at outreach events. For example a presentation about One Stop was given by staff to over 50 youth at a Social Hall in the Embakasi district of Nairobi. Staff also participate in positive community events with youth from the One Stop such as garbage clean up initiatives (e.g. the African Youth Parliament initiative in the Eastleigh South district).
volunteering as an intern with the One Stop from Kenya Polytechnic. The other is a graduate student who completed an Information Technology course with Nairobi Aviation Polytechnic and also has Information Management Systems certification from Computer Pride. The youth from Kenya Polytechnic have been at the One Stop for two months. He enjoys it and says that it is his first time as a teacher. He sees his volunteer work as a bridge to formal employment where he can practically apply the knowledge and academic work that he has completed. He comments that the One Stop is an opportunity to share knowledge with his peers.

The other trainer hosts other lectures outside of the One Stop and is a civic leader of a separate youth organization called Youth Environment Alliance in Rau about twenty kilometres from Nairobi City. He helps students find attachments (work experience) and has been working with information technology advisors to advocate for his students to receive formal certification for the skills that they have acquired. He has negotiated a discounted rate for his students to sit the official examination (100ksh). Unfortunately only four of the twenty students in his class can afford this. The trainer in an interview highlights that 75% of youth who come to his One Stop computer class represent vulnerable and disadvantaged youth. His example to illustrate this describes a programmed visit to a cyber cafe to teach participants how to set up an email account. “When I told everyone that we would visit a cyber, I was surprised to find that the majority of the class had never been to any establishment with computer services.” He went on to explain that “my students didn’t think that they were allowed to enter such premises because of their socio-economic status, and the majority don’t have the money for the cyber cafe visitation fees”.

On one visit to the One Stop, I was invited to sit in on a training session. I ask three students who are taking the course in the morning what they think of the program. All agree that it is very worthwhile and an excellent opportunity to strengthen their skills. One young woman is teaching herself to use Microsoft Access. She tells me that she would love to use the skills she is developing to do freelance journalism. Another participant is interested in studying mechanical engineering. He comments that the One Stop computer training is unique because it is free.

“...it is a good way to connect the youth community to technology so that the training can be used as a precursor to formal testing”. “the One Stop program is a good way to practice before going for a formal testing elsewhere”. Youth Participant

5. Datobel Lecture Series

Spaces Used: Main Hall

The main hall at the One Stop is often used by varying formal service providers and partners of the One Stop to provide training or other opportunities for youth and of relevance to the central areas of intervention as outlined as part of the One Stop official mandate.

During the time of my research, Datobel is the organisation using the main hall to offer refresher courses for youth in Business Management. The sessions are for Certificate I and also Diploma. I am told that the first class will soon be graduating with accreditation recognized by the Kenyan National Examinations Council. Starting in January 2007 there will be additional sessions for advanced Certificate II and advanced Diploma. The classes are beneficial because they provide opportunities for underprivileged youth who haven’t had the opportunity to attend further training and haven’t the capacity to afford training elsewhere. The first sessions have been very popular with nearly thirty youth attending each. In an interview, the director of the program mentions that the Datobel organisation has partnered with lecturers from local universities and colleges, explaining that lecturers regularly come to the One Stop to host seminar guests.

“this is a mechanism that ensures students access to local academic institutions without the barrier of university fees”. Datobel Director

6. Youth in Governance- Nairobi Junior Council

Spaces Used: Career Counselling Room #1, Main Hall

Another partnership that has existed at the One Stop since its first beginnings has been a formal group, encouraging youth participation in governance. Initially part of an international network called ‘Youth for Habitat’ this partnership has been working towards the development of six junior councils in major towns across Kenya including Nairobi. A successful action example of this goal to institutionalize youth forums within local Government structures, operates from within the One Stop space. There are at least two junior councils in each of Nairobi and the Junior Council has a representative for each of these civic areas who is between the ages of 15-24. Every Friday the junior council meets in the main hall at the One Stop. In October and November 2007 these meetings saw 20+ representatives and covered areas such as education, the environment and health. The chairperson of the Nairobi junior council is 22 and has been involved for the last two years. He tells me how the One Stop was initially requested by the City Councillor of Nairobi to prepare a City Wide Youth Policy. Based on examples such as the Malindi junior Council and the Brazilian Youth Charter, young people at the One Stop held a consultative forum across divisions of the city to work with youth in the development of this policy. The junior council worked with welfare officers from the City Council of Nairobi Social Services department to have access to the Cities Social Halls for the purpose of these consultations. Over 100 youth came to the sessions. This relationship has continued with the city welfare officers and youth at the One Stop also use the social halls for outreach purposes. The Youth Policy awaits adoption by the City of Nairobi Councillors.

The Junior Council chair is the elected official for the Mukuru constituency. This year has been very successful for him. He lobbied local government for financial support of youth organizations working towards poverty alleviation. His efforts secured funding for youth in his Mukuru district. He tells me that a business plan competition is underway amongst the organizations in his area to determine where the financial resources will be allocated. Garbage collection, entertainment, awareness, crime prevention, governance and sports are all focus areas that the different groups in Mukuru youth are passionate about. Other Junior Council members were also successful in lobbying council for youth funding. The junior councillor for Kayole also secured some funding assistance.

In May of 2007 the Junior Council decided to promote dialogue with Kenyan ministries. To do this they used the One Stop space to host a ‘youth open day discussion’. At this session ministers were invited to see what youth are doing in relation to the theme of youth and development. Since this session, One Stop youth have become active partners with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and also the Ministry for Sports and Culture - Department of Social Services. The Junior Council chair was appointed to join the National Steering Committee for the Kenyan Youth Day and Harare Youth Work. During these events young people came to showcase their talents and propose strategies for government to move forward in relation to youth affairs. These have been successful ways for youth to interface with government on a national level.

As part of an interview, the Junior Council chair reflected on his enthusiasm around a recent invitation to present and report in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia for the African Development Forum. The African Union launched the African Youth Charter at this event and he referred to the compelling deliberations of youth in its adoption.

“The Junior Council’s participation in these broader forums allows us to lobby very seriously for the African Youth Charter we really contributed. One of the things we were trying to see included was that young people are involved in decision making. That there be opportunities in East Africa like those that exist in West Africa. We would like to see youth equally involved as elected officials”. Junior Council Chairperson
INFORMAL PARTNERSHIPS- YOUTH LED DEVELOPMENT CASE EXAMPLES

In this case study of the One Stop I seek to explore beyond only the formal partnerships and programs that are operating in this physical space. In an effort to give voice to elements of the One Stop that are not as broadly discussed or publicised; and by way of illustration, I have also chosen to profile eight particularly inspiring stories associated with the individuals who are active at the One Stop.

1. Rueben Youth Starship Association

Spaces Used: VCT Waiting Area,

An important component of formal services provided at the One Stop is the associated youth volunteer participation. An excellent example of this is a group of eight young people from a youth organisation who are volunteering with Hope World Wide Kenya in the VCT clinic. These young people are from the Kitisenga area and are part of an active youth organisation called the ‘Rueben Youth Starship Association’. With approximately fifty youth members, the group is chaired by eight founders.

In an interview with a young woman and man who are both founders of the group, it becomes evident that they are at the One Stop to learn and receive mentorship about health services and counselling. Both speak about how Hope World Wide Kenya has helped facilitate travel for different members from their organisation to come to Nairobi to volunteer and learn at the One Stop. The Rueben Youth Starship Association is not the only youth-led group that is associated with the VCT clinic, and I am humbled by their passion and motivation to contribute to the health of their peers and young Kenyans in general. One of the volunteers tells me of another Hope World Wide Kenya project that he has been giving time to. It is a night operation working to provide a safer environment for sex trade workers on a key transportation corridor in Kenya, he is very proud of his involvement in this work.

“It is often a long and difficult trip. We travel 400 kilometers each way to the site where services are provided and when we are there the activities that the youth are doing are risky. There is often no protection from sexual disease and the risk of abuse is high.” Founding member interview.

In addition to the interests of this youth organisation around health, the Rueben Youth Starship Association also works to mobilize around other issues, share their learning and education with their friends through peer training. The group hosts music and drama activities, shoe educational movies and organize games and community building activities.

2. Reformed Youth Association

Spaces Used: Career Counselling Room #1, Career Counselling Room #2, Reception Waiting Area, Main Hall

A number of the junior council members are also active within their own youth led groups. One particular junior councillor is enthusiastic to share his achievements. During my visits to the One Stop I am introduced to three young men from his organisation. The One Stop staff are quick to point out that these young people are inspiring examples of marginalised youth taking action and empowering themselves.

The chair, secretary and spokesperson whom I met were formerly street youth who have now formed a coalition of approximately 300 members. They have been coming to the One Stop since January 2006 and formally registered as an organisation in June of 2006. With the support and mentorship of One Stop staff, the Reformed Youth Association members have worked together to secure a letter of support from the Mayor of the City. They have now used this support to lobby for private funding. “I can remember when one of the One Stop Information officers came to some of the ‘youth bases’ in the City which are places where street youth meet” reflects the secretary. He is referring to spaces in Nairobi like the Mutatitu stations or large carpark areas. “I was one of these youth and was tired of my life on the street”.

A goal of the Reformed Youth Association is to acquire space in their community, within the district of Embakasi. The group has a strong relationship with the social welfare officer in Embakasi. The secretary of Reformed Youth Association tells me that this is something that they have worked on for some time and that there is now a strong relationship with the City of Nairobi and also that the welfare officer in their community runs the Social Hall for youth regularly.

On World Aids Day, December 1st - I was invited to visit the Embakasi social hall to see the outreach activities of the Reformed Youth Association. Initially, no one is in the main hall and I wonder if an event is really taking place. I ask my research mentors who are with me, plus a group of women doing tailoring in the room next to the main hall. I am assured by all that there is, in fact, a very large event taking place. Within twenty minutes over eighty youth under 25 greet me behind a large banner which reads: “Stop AIDS - keep the Promise - men say no to sex without consent” and another small group holds a banner reading: “Youth in Action”. There is poetry, a representative from the Ministry of Health gives an address, youth perform a play, there is a boxing demonstration to represent the fight against AIDS, and a lively question and answer session take place.

We also visit an area in the local Sokoni slum where homeless youth members of the Reformed Youth Association have built a temporary home amongst the garbage and are currently conducting a recycling initiative. The secretary introduces us to the “boys” and we sit and talk about how they hope to lobby the city for acquisition of this land. The Reformed Youth Association acquisition of land would allow the group to pursue development of small business skills such as tailoring, drivers, security guards, waste management and recycling.

The Reformed Youth Association regularly visits the One Stop. The chairperson is currently running for election in the Embakasi district. An information officer from One Stop tells me that reformed youth used to access the social halls where they had access to food, shelter and a place to sleep. This is not consistently provided anymore, presenting a challenge that the youth led group is fighting to redress.

The Reformed Youth Association uses the One Stop every Friday. The chairperson and the secretary were at the One Stop on most of the occasions that I visited.

3 Empowerment of Young Women / Eastsiderz

Spaces Used: Career Counselling Room #2, Reception

For the past two years, “Eastsiderz” have been meeting on Thursdays to conduct waste collection in the Eastleigh estates. Of 10 youth members, my youth mentor is the only female. The group requests 100 Kenyan shillings per week from those who live in the estates where they are managing waste. The fee goes towards the collection of garbage; and organization for a collection agency to come and pick up the waste. The group is registered under the ministry for social workers and the youth are striving to be recognized as useful service providers in their neighbourhood. Members are between 18 to 25 years and all reside in the Eastleigh Civic ward. It is often difficult for the youth because the money that is raised does not leave enough for protective clothing such as gloves or overalls. The group does not have a formal space to meet and there are no formal agencies as partners. To date the clothes that the group uses have been donated in kind.

My youth mentor has been a regular member of the One Stop since early in 2006. She is passionate to see more young women frequenting the Centre. Recently she has founded a women’s empowerment group comprising 12 young women aged between 15 to 20. The group is not yet registered but as a core advocate she has been working with these women to conduct outreach in rural areas to address issues affecting women such as fostering self esteem, addressing cultural
barriers to participation and changing perceptions associated with harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation. As a mentor to me, I am regularly inspired by her ideas and proposals and plans for women’s empowerment that she would like to see advanced through her involvement at One Stop.

“Much of my project for young women is still in the research stage. I have many ideas but it is difficult for young women to be as involved as I would like. There are many other responsibilities and there are so many young men who come here to One Stop that it can sometimes be intimidating. I would like to develop more opportunities for young women to feel welcome” Dorothie, Youth Mentor

In the months leading to my trip to Kenya, my mentor had been the focal person in Nairobi for an international Youth Employment Summit. She also had acted as personal assistant to the Kenyan country coordinator and was based at the One Stop full time as a Youth Employment Summit volunteer representative for youth interested in the Summit.

4. YPARD- Young Professionals Platform for Agricultural Research and Development

Spaces Used: Career Counselling Room #2, Reception, Reception waiting area, Main Hall

This youth led organization has an international membership base, and the young woman I interview is one of two co-founding members from Kenya as well as being the regional focal point in East Africa. Of the 20 current members, some are from Germany, Italy and Uganda. The group works together on issues of food security through sound agricultural practices. As one of the founders she has spent the last ten months since the group’s inception trying to promote the environmental benefits of sustainable agriculture. She is trying to infuse environmental issues as a core area of importance at the One Stop.

A frequent One Stop participant since January 2006, she tells me about another interesting project she has been working on - a Youth Friendly Guide for Nairobi. In partnership with two other Nairobi youth the Guide is currently in first draft.

“I have talked to a lot of young people about what the public comments that it is a challenging position and can often be intimidating. I would like to develop a library with another young woman. Many publications have been donated by the United Nations and the campus of African Technologies and Policies Studies. They are now seeking ways to secure resources for building materials to construct shelving for the collection.

5. Action for Life

Spaces Used: Main Hall, Reception Waiting Area

Another elected representative on the Nairobi Junior Council also coordinates a well known youth organization in Kibera. With some 30 members, all are active youth between the age of 15-35. The group has been together for two years and has regularly used the Habitat field office in Soweto East. Up until the age of 18, the Junior Council representative tells me that he had never left the Kibera slum to visit the city centre. Since being part of the youth lead “Action for Life”, this has changed. At age 22, he travelled to Vancouver to participate in the UN-Habitat World Urban Forum III in June 2006. He mentions that the experiences he gained from this were helpful and that he feels he can use what he learned on the ground in Kibera. “I have never written a report from my trip to Canada” he states, “but if you actually visit me in the Umoja Catholic Church. The junior counsellor explains me about another interesting project she has been working on - a Youth Friendly Guide for Nairobi. In partnership with two other Nairobi youth the Guide is currently in first draft.”

My interview is cut short for another meeting with the Kibera for Kibera organization to discuss the Assembly for the Poor initiative. As a youth advocate, the junior councillor and Action for Life member is looking to help youth from the three civic wards in Kibera represented in a meaningful way in the World Social Forum in Nairobi in January. Before leaving I am reminded that “youth voice” is a fundamental goal for this group and it is not without challenges.

“I am constantly fighting perceptions. Every time I present myself there are assumptions made because I do not look like a person of poverty from a slum......what people don’t appreciate is that slum dwellers do have pride and will make every effort to show the world that living in a shanty doesn’t rust your brain or condemn you to rag clothing- we are sharp!” Nairobi Junior Councillor, Kibera Ward

6. TENCORA Tena and Inner Core Estates Merged

Spaces Used: Reception, Main Hall

Another youth led organization associated with the Junior Council is based in the Umoja district. With approximately 30 members, the focus area of the group is entrepreneurship, environment and youth empowerment. The group convenes in the Umoja Catholic Church. The junior councillor explains to me that meeting in church is a fundamental way that she is able to relay information she has gathered from the One Stop. Many youth go to church and it is an ideal location to share information, plus there is adequate space. She takes posters, pamphlets and applications to Umoja youth.

At 22 and one of few female youth councillors on the Junior Council, she has been active for two years at the One Stop but comments that it can sometimes be intimidating. Young women are more intimidated than men by a woman. Despite bringing her female friends on many occasions, few retain an interest in attending. The ratio of young males involved at the One Stop is much higher than young women. North-Siad address this gender imbalance addressing the additional role responsibilities and maternal duties that are expected of young women (1998). These roles may restrict the time availability to participate in the same way that young men do.

7. NEYREP - Nairobi Eastlands Youth Rehabilitation Program

Spaces Used: Career Counselling Room #1, Reception, Waiting area, Main Hall

From the Kamukunji constituency, I meet a youth who explains his role as a project consultant with an umbrella youth organization representing 25 youth groups in this area. It was founded in 2004 by the East African Regional Youth Network under the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (program addressing Youth issues). The organization has been given a mandate to survey and provide data from Kamukunji and its environs. NEYREP has been working on a report that spearheads environmental management. Led by youth, they have developed an urban forestation development programme and coined this the ‘adopt-a-tree’ concept. The group works with scouts/girl guides, 35 schools, church clubs, mosques and community clubs to provide education on the Kenyan Environmental policy using the ‘adopt-a-tree’ concept. Youth are given a seedling to look after and nurture until it is large enough to be self-sufficient. Establishment of tree nurseries has been introduced in ten schools as part of a pilot phase. The project is supported by National Environmental Management Authority, Forester, St. Johns Ambulance, and a Community Development Fund.
OTHER ACTIVITIES AND USE OF SPACE

On different occasions the One Stop goes beyond day to day service provision and involvement of existing youth. The large spaces within the building lend themselves to host mobilizations and special events. Large workshops and celebration activities occur monthly. For example - on the occasion of World Habitat Day, the One Stop filled with youth who had come to listen to presentations from UN-Habitat, speeches from service providers at the One Stop, and addresses from their peers about projects and groups where involvement is welcome. The inspirational success of these events cannot be overstated enough. Pictures tell the story and show every available chair taken with still more attendees squeezing into the main hall where most of the program is hosted. At special events the whole One Stop fills with bodies full of discussion and positivity, there is music, dance, and creative theatre and the energy levels overflow.

Analysis of booking sheets over a six month period shows that of all the spaces within the One Stop Centre, the hall and the computer training room have the greatest number of youth using them. In the four months of research, six large celebrations of more than 100 youth take place. These include Market Day, City Council Ceremonies, Habitat Day, International Youth Day - Human Rights Event, a Peace and Conflict Resolution - Training and Capacity Building Day and a large workshop hosted by an international youth agency (Taking It Global - Youth Information and Communication and Technology Open Forums). The main hall space is regularly booked for smaller gatherings and scheduled training workshops.

Research suggests that this use is predominantly service delivery based with most young people attending lectures or training sessions which are being provided by volunteers or One Stop partner agencies. Youth led organizations also book the spaces to host meetings or discuss their organizational activities. The Youth Office is popular for this and has scheduled training workshops.

MEASURING PARTICIPATION

FORMAL DATA COLLECTION

Registration and enquiry forms are collected from youth who visit the One Stop. A review of six months of data from these forms (May to October 2006) indicates that the most common registrants were youth seeking information about the Centre itself, about what trainings take place in the Centre and how to access employment resources such as advice and career counselling. Each month, just over half of the total number of registrations and enquiries are first time visits to the One Stop and approximately 60% are males.

A large component indicate being under the age of twenty five but there are also a large proportion who do not specify age. Another predominant reason that youth cite for visiting the centre is to link and mobilize with other youth groups. Staff at the One Stop mention that many youth who come to the One Stop do so with the purpose of registering and raising awareness to support their own community based organizations.

After reviewing all the data collection sheets from the One Stop it seemed that the register was not adequately capturing the true number of youth coming to the facility each day. To test the accuracy of the formal register a full daily attendance count was undertaken on fourteen occasions during the research timeframe spent in Nairobi. Results showed daily visitation between sixty to two hundred youth. The formal data sheets recorded these numbers as monthly statistics. These finding showed that the true levels of youth participation have not been represented by the formal registration processes.

SUMMARY

There is much that can be said about the One Stop case. The purpose has not been to showcase the One Stop as the only example where services are being provided for youth and young people use space to effect change and address the issues in their community. This example is useful because it provides and demonstrates successful formal partnerships between youth at a local government level. It is a way to show the results of a localised strategy that is giving youth legitimacy through involvement in their city.

The following section will further elaborate on this by suggesting some of the factors for success. Particularly in terms of the space itself and how its use facilitates participation. Observations will be made regarding the objectives and goals of the One Stop and also the main difficulties that exist.
Factors for Success

In the case study profile of the One Stop an attempt is made to illustrate the distinguishing elements associated with use of space. Diagram 2 shows five core elements that can be used to define what takes place. These core elements are essentially the fundamental spatial building blocks for the One Stop initiative:

- Activity space/event hosting
- Spaces for formal partnerships and service provision
- Informal space for youth led activities
- Information promotion/notice boards
- Formal spaces that are also supportive of youth-led activity

On closer review of this, a number of further characteristics exist that support youth engagement and are particularly successful features within this layout. These elements or ‘factors for success’ are also useful when reflecting on the descriptive models of participation outlined in Part B - Participation as they generally relate to the overarching conditions that are important for effective youth participation.

They include:
- Spatial Flexibility
- Personal Freedom
- Spatial Function
- Spatial Partnerships
SPATIAL FLEXIBILITY
The majority of space in the One Stop is available for youth to use for their own activities and for mobilization or activism. The junior councillors for example, use the main hall as a place to host regular formal meetings on issues of local governance. As a flow-on from this, the junior councillors who are associated with other youth led activities can and will also use this space to coordinate their local action projects. A strong example is profiled in the case study is the Reformed Youth Association. The spatial flexibility of the One Stop is a genuine opportunity and condition for engagement and participation.

PERSONAL FREEDOM
The use of 'formal' and 'informal' to distinguish use of space within the One Stop predominantly refers to the degree of adult supervision exercised in each space. The majority of space within the One Stop is supervised. Informal space indicates freedom for activities to take place in these areas which have been organised by and for youth. An important and successful element in this arrangement is trust. One large office is dedicated for youth and adult mentors and staff allow this area to be coordinated by youth. What results is an enhancement of personal freedoms that allows youth to lead their lives that they have reason to value but with the knowledge that support is literally next door.

SPATIAL FUNCTION
The use of space for services that are orientated specifically for youth is another successful factor, be it for employment, governance and advocacy, educational purpose, or the provision of health care, the functions of space speak to community issues and offer access to information about what is taking place and of relevance. It essentially creates an outlet for realising skills and knowledge that can serve in the work of community building. The space function within the One Stop acts as an impetus for participation. As a result of this environment, the organisation that results is one that allows for the expression of personal identity.

SPATIAL PARTNERSHIPS
The flexibility and function of the different spaces within the one stop creates opportunities for youth in other ways. It incubates alliances. This includes but is not limited to networking and communications formed with other youth, adult mentors, authorities from government, academic institutions, private enterprise, researchers and volunteers. These partnerships are a factor for success because they extend access to a supportive network of friends and community. It can be the partnerships that create the building blocks for positive and healthy behaviours, for learning, livelihoods and employment. The majority of youth who access the One Stop have a personal trajectory distinguished by lack of access, injustice, tragedy and poverty. The accessibility and exposure to positive influences may be the protective factor that encourages resiliency.

OBJECTIVES AND AREAS OF INTERVENTION
The Global Partnership Initiative background highlights five objectives that are given for the One Stop Youth resource centre. Using the research of this project a number of observations and comments can be made in relation to measurement of these objectives. Each is taken from an action plan developed in 2004 for the One Stop centre. Targets were also given. These objectives and targets are given in Table 1.

(vi) Encourage partnerships with relevant stakeholders in the delivery of youth development:
At the time of this research there are five core partners that deliver services at the One Stop on a daily basis. In addition, a multitude of other partnerships are also in place (as outlined in ‘Factors for Success’). While these partners are not always an obvious component of the space they include - the immediate support and affiliation with UN-Habitat, government agencies, international and local non-government organizations with expertise in youth development, charitable organizations, local and international academic institutions, consulting firms, and an extensive volunteer base.

(vii) Increase knowledge, skills and attitude change of young people:
The seven narrative profiles of Youth-Led development case examples are testimonies to how the provision of services and space for youth can increase knowledge, skills and attitude change. This research profiles only a small handful of different activities that youth are leading and finding support at the One Stop. A more extensive quantification of associated youth led groups would broaden the demonstration of how this local initiative meets this objective.

The Computer Training Initiative is another good measure of knowledge and skills increase. Of the few students who can afford to take the end of course official examination - 100% pass with high or very high distinctions. This is particularly notable given power that the computers at the One Stop is not always in operation and 75% or youth who attend the One Stop computer class have no previous training.

(viii) Respond to educational, socio-economic, recreational, emotional and psychological needs of young people in an integrated way:
Individual needs assessments are not conducted for each of the youth who visit the One Stop. Some services have incorporated it into their program - such as the employment and career counselling service and the voluntary counselling and testing service but generally the programs do not explicitly address this objective.

This said, the more informal peer to peer interactions of youth at the One Stop does indirectly support this objective; particularly the instances where youth are educating or training other youth. Peer to peer exchange allows connections amongst youth who have similar life experiences. These methods have often been used in drug education, assisting youth involved in the legal system, or youth who are at risk. The United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention defines peer to peer learning as: “The use of same age or same background educators to convey educational messages to a target group” (International Centre for the Prevention of Crime, 2005). Peer educators work by endorsing “healthy norms, beliefs and behaviours within their own peer group or community, and challenging those which are unhealthy.”

(ix) Encourage youth to have greater ownership of development:
The number of action oriented projects that relate to employment and entrepreneurship, governance, health, education, recreation and environment and resource management are testimony to the ways in which youth are encouraged to contribute and lead lives that they have reason to value.

(x) Offer leadership and mentorship to young people:
The youth interviewed as part of this project speak of the intergenerational relationships that they have formed whereby a youth-adult partnership often contributes to their learning and development. A particularly strong example is the youth who work with VCT service providers who are passionate about the health of their peers. Another strong example is the Reformed Youth Association, Overtime and with support from adults these youth demonstrate how they have moved from life on the street to become an advocacy group and supportive network for their peers.
Generally the partners of the One Stop provide leadership and mentorship in some way. This includes, but is not limited to, advice for personal development, contacts or connections to further new social activities, and increased learning for essential life skills. Based on trust, these relationships offer guidance, support and encouragement. The staff and partner support from the One Stop extends beyond the general service hours and often involves accompanying youth to support, give encouragement and advice to the initiatives and action projects they coordinate.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The observations generally show that the One Stop meets its objectives and aims of intervention. To give a more critical perspective there are a number of elements to consider.

(i) Gender Balance

The spaces within the one stop are predominantly used by young men. Young women that were interviewed as part of this research asserted that it is difficult to welcome new women because the space is not as friendly as it could be.

(ii) Operations

Basic utility services are not always available. Provision of electricity is not always guaranteed and money to finance electrical bills is often lacking. At one time the One Stop was without electricity for a number of months. Without electricity services such as computer training are seriously impaired.

(iii) Revenue

There are minimal operating revenues for the space. Generally what exists and takes place within the building is done in kind. The different groups within the One Stop often struggle to host events or provide services because direct funding is absent.

(iv) Information Updates

As an information centre the One Stop does not have print mechanisms to keep information updates current. Many of the information spaces and walls have outdated posters and there is rarely funding to create or print notices about new initiatives. This means that much of the information distribution about upcoming events or initiatives is distributed by word of mouth. Sometimes this is problematic because not everyone has equal access to the information and it is not possible to convey updates to all participants at the center.

OPERATIONALISING PARTICIPATION

Despite the difficulties at the One Stop the participation development initiatives are high. In a compendium of promising strategies and programmes from around the world on urban crime prevention and youth at risk, specific examples are given showing how city governments or local community organizations have been able to successfully establish and sustain good partnership crime prevention structures, and reduce levels of crime and violence through coordinated urban development and participatory approaches (ICPC, 2001). The One Stop initiative broadly facilitates five conventional different forms of positive participation in community planning. The following articulation of these types is recommended for other agencies with an interest in supporting youth to consider.

- Social action groups whereby youth are organizing around issues such as environmental protection, political voice, and neighbourhood revitalization. Exemplifying how youth are joining together for social action and increasing their collective capacity.
- Community planning efforts at the local level that include steps to assess local conditions, formulate action plans and build support for implementation.
- Local services development whereby youth are involved in efforts to develop community-based services that are responsive to needs such as education, employment, health, and environmental management.
- Public advocacy whereby young people advocate with legislators about policy proposals, held agencies accountable for administrative regulations, and build coalitions supporting the interests of youth.
- Community education that strengthens the consciousness, competence, and confidence of youth to ‘transform the world’ instead of sitting in silence and accepting the roles which adults attribute to them, the One Stop is an example where youth are encouraged to question their circumstances and change their community.
- Service delivery whereby youth are involved in efforts to develop community-based services that are responsive to needs such as education, employment, health, and environmental management.

It is important to recognise that the types of activities that youth are involved in at the One Stop are twofold. There are both community service programs where youth perform service related activities, but also activism initiatives whereby, once empowered, or working with other youth and/or adults, participation in more activist orientated groups occurs. These collaborations are positive insofar as the involvement seeks to change enables participants to forge identities as powerful civic actors. One way that they do so is through the actions that they take in the public realm. By participating in civic venues, such as city council meetings, youth position themselves and are positioned by others as competent political actors (Nasir & Kirshner, 2003). In becoming a civic actor, youth are encouraged to question the status quo and envision better alternatives for themselves and their peers. Although these roles are consistent with recent advances in youth development, and social research new paradigms are often resisted by those who have a stake in the status quo (Kuhn 1962).

NEW SPACES FOR LEARNING

As a result of such active participation in community development initiatives, many changes can be made. By providing physical space, and allowing youth to lead their own projects as groups within this space, initiatives such as the One Stop create an environment that not only supports youth by providing services, but goes beyond to foster and legitimize creation of new spaces for learning. Krishna contends that youth activism groups serve a function by providing distinctive environments for learning and development that move away from more traditional forms of schooling. He includes their role in providing such things as collective problem solving, exploration of alternative frames for identity, academic and civic institutions (2007). These are of particular relevance to the One Stop example because they are also characteristic of what has developed. To articulate and give evidence to this it is useful to draw on the following examples.

COLLECTIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

To foster opportunities for collective problem solving a shift in focus takes place from individual to group and learning as a team. An excellent example is working together on a social action campaign to accomplish goals that any individual would be hard-pressed to accomplish on their own. Take the example of the Nairobi Citywide Youth Policy. In this instance complex tasks were undertaken by the youth in the Nairobi junior council in collaboration with each of the councillors from the different wards of the city, and an older youth mentor and the staff at the One Stop. In this instance citywide policy to support youth was sought. Junior councillors organised workshops, lobbied the local authorities and collaborated to have a working draft adopted by city officials. Young people’s accomplishments in groups such as this defy predictions about what adolescents are capable of doing according to standard developmental theory (Youniss & Hart, 2005). These experiences may contribute to feelings of collective efficacy (Bandura, 1999).

ALTERNATIVE FRAMES FOR IDENTITY

Being active in groups and projects that strive to create change enables participants to forge identities as powerful civic actors. One way that they do so is through the actions that they take in the public realm. By participating in civic venues, such as city council meetings, youth position themselves and are positioned by others as competent political actors (Nasir & Kirshner, 2003). In becoming a dynamic force in the political arena groups are essentially achieving what Friedmann contends is a politics of identity. The projects and examples of engagement at the One Stop enable youth to see how issues can be reframed as a collective responsibility. Framing social problems as such can be significant in identity development because it contributes to feelings of empowerment and collective self-determination. A paramount example of this is the transformation and
determination of the street youth of the Reformed Youth Association. Their collective struggle to legitimize space for their peers has resulted in a politically active group of young people who have developed their own "politics of identity". This group exemplifies being passionately engaged in the political arena with the goal to reclaim their peers' social rights.

BRIDGES TO ACADEMIC AND CIVIC INSTITUTIONS

Many of the examples of youth activities at the One Stop demonstrate where civic engagement for youth has been facilitated through direct forms of civic action. Youth participate as leaders and decision-makers in projects designed to address pressing social problems through research, advocacy, education, and action. In doing this there are opportunities to marshal academic skills in the service of meaningful public-oriented goals.

In addition, youth seek the training provided at the One Stop by formal service providers and will use what is learnt as a way in which to further study or apply their learning to effect change or contribute meaningfully. Two of the service providers within the One Stop provide excellent examples. The teacher who volunteers time to share knowledge of computer technology sees this academic service as a bridge to formal employment. Interviews with youth who were taking part in this training also suggested that the training was being used as a mechanism to strengthen further study opportunities. The Datobel lecture series is another direct bridge to academic accreditation for those without the financial capacity to attend training elsewhere.

SUMMARY

The commitment of many young people today is to operationalize key elements of deliberative participatory planning (Forester 1999, Friedmann 1998, Sandercock 1998). The value of such a respectful dialogue, advocacy, critical education and cooperative organizing cannot be underestimated.

Initiatives like the One Stop represent new roles for young people in organizations and communities. When young people become active participants in evaluation and research rather than passive recipients of information, this challenges the usual roles ascribed to them, raises questions about age-appropriate methodology, and suggests "a new epistemology" or "way of knowing" about the roles of youth in society (Checkoway, Richards-Schuster, 2004).
The importance of research focused on young people is reinforced by the realities of the current global situation. Statistics support the fact that a significant proportion of the world's population is young. This report introduced this problem with an overview of youth demographics and the characteristics that have come to define young people's existence. Particularly the issues of poverty, legacies of political instability, urban population growth, health, economic and social disparities and the negative impacts of global values which encourage competition and consumption.

In the face of this situation we must ask what can be done to encourage resiliency. Creating an enabling environment involves participation and empowerment, enabling policies and institutions and supportive families and communities. Action-oriented examples of success are useful to consider in light of such overwhelming global disparities.

In cities and communities across the globe, there are many inspiring examples of youth leading positive community action projects. There are also many examples of spaces that have been provided and shared for young people to use and collectively mobilize. The reason why the Nairobi One Stop Youth Resource Centre provided such an interesting case for research has been its exceptional function as a hub for engagement, networking and social action. The support and legitimacy that it receives from the local municipality is important for other cities to consider as an example.

By examining a physical space, this research has presented the layout and the functions of a building that after four years no longer exists as a space for youth. The value in this research has been the opportunity to reflect and examine what were the fundamental spatial building blocks that support and incubate youth participation. Concluding that flexible space, partnerships and personal freedom play a crucial role. What results is essentially a new and distinctive space for learning.

Conclusion
Students like myself have much to learn from our international comrades, particularly those who are taking action in ‘development initiatives’ which demonstrate an enhancement of freedoms that allow them to lead lives that they have reason to value.

In the first days of my arrival to the One Stop I remember how quickly I was forced to re-evaluate my existing perceptions and academic training. Before I knew it, a total deconstruction of self occurred as a result of what I saw and experienced. Not by ‘culture shock’ as the Department of Foreign Affairs Canada had warned in my training; nor by the continued UN broadcasts about how dangerous the environment around me was. On the contrary, it was something positive, life affirming and inspirational. Concurrently, the 2006 Youth Employment Summit was taking place, and youth from the One Stop had negotiated with the Kenyan Minister of Youth Affairs to incorporate a showcase of many of their associate youth groups who use One Stop as a place for mobilization.

On that day I met one outstanding person in particular, four years younger than myself. He was presenting an initiative on show in a tent at the convention centre where the Summit was being convened. I listened while he casually discussed aspects of a business plan that he had developed with peers, going further to tell me about what it was that this initiative worked to achieve. Here was someone barely in their twenties showing me, for example, a cooking stove prototype that he had been constructing in collaboration with other youth in his rural area. It was a simple contraption shaped from the clay soils of a village near Thika. Its beauty was that the design helped maintain heat for cooking and reduce the consumption of coal fuel. This was designed, produced and marketed entirely by youth.

Still excited to tell me about it at 10 pm, despite having set forth for travel to Nairobi at 3 am that morning, other young international interns from the United Nations were with me and we huddled around eager to learn from this born-natural educator. The expertise was captivating and awe inspiring. Energy and drive like nothing I have experienced. To this day I will remain humbled by the knowledge that so many youth across the globe exemplify this kind of activism, leadership and vision. I have been liberated from the tunnel-vision conditioning that suggests youth are always in need, alienated from community, and withdrawn from participation. That kind of scenario is far from the whole picture. The case example of Nairobi is a digression from a focus on only the deficiencies and service needs of youth. It is a case example that reinforces the merits of collective positive action and the multiplier effect that goes with it. Even the young people with whom I socialised in the most abject of conditions, reminded me that “living as a slum dweller doesn’t rust your brain - we are sharp”. I hope that the case example and story that I have attempted to tell as part of this research project is one which reinforces and gives life and colour to this situation.
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