Development Perspectives:

The Lost Voices of Kenyan Youth

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Introduction:

I walked across the dusty uneven grounds of Sumba Primary towards a group of teachers seeking shelter from the unbearable late afternoon sun beneath a large tree. Having just completed a tour of the school's sanitation and hygiene infrastructure, it was time for me to pay my respects to the school's leaders. The teachers greeted me warmly while a student was sent to fetch a bench from a nearby classroom for me to sit. Having completed the formalities of Kenyan introductions I asked the mzee (old respected man) to my right what he felt his school needed in order to improve its sanitation and hygiene infrastructure and improve the health of the student body. Several moments passed as he looked at me and I began to fear that the meaning of my question had not been conveyed. Eventually he chuckled and replied, "you tell me." Shocked, I reworded the question and insured him I was interested in his thoughts. This time his reply was even more difficult for me to internalize. He informed me that as an expert from the United States only I could answer that question. Although he had worked for years in Kenya's education system, he felt he was not an expert on how to improve the conditions of his school. Fear boiled up inside me at the significance of this mans reply. He truly felt he did not have the agency to examine the issue I had presented him.

While individuals throughout Kenya wait for the experts to bring solutions to their ever mounting list of challenges, academics throughout the West debate the plight of the world's poor. With the rise of criticisms directed at the structural adjustment programs administered after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Development Debate gained prominence due to the claims of renowned economists William Easterly and Jeffery Sachs. These two individuals are known most notably for their differing perspectives on

poverty alleviation and development potentials. On the one hand Jeffery Sachs criticizes the West for only contributing 1 percent of its resources to combat poverty. He asserts that if we hope to see improvements in living conditions throughout the Global South this percentage must be increased dramatically. Despite Sachs' fervently supported claims, William Easterly presents a much different picture of the situation. He suggests that today's aid climate is deficient and we must realize that throwing money at problems does not translate to realizable solutions. Both sides stand by their arguments sighting numerous studies and supporting experts. However many important claims have been lost in the debates controversy.

Having spent extensive periods of time visiting and researching African communities, Sachs and Easterly come to similar conclusions regarding how to best determine realistic solutions to development challenges. In this vein, Sachs writes in reference to the global poor, "Though struggling to survive at present, they are not dispirited but determined to improve their situation. They know well how they could get back on the ground."[1] Similarly Easterly writes, "The biggest payoff comes from local Searchers who solve their own problems."[2] Both identify the key role that the poor can and should have in solving their challenges. Further, they note that when the poor take the initiative to own the solutions to their challenges high degrees of improvement can be measured.

George Ayittey, a Ghanaian economist also captures these sediments. He writes,

> African problems must be solved by Africans… externalist orthodoxy,
> which held sway for more than forty years after independence, portrays

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[1] Jeffrey Sachs, The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities For Our Time (New York: Penguin, 2005), 227-228.

[2] William Easter, The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good (New York: Penguin, 2006), 383.

> Africa as a "victim" and suggests that the solutions to Africa's problems must come from external sources… Africa must be developed by Africans, using their own "African model," not on copied form the United States, Russia, Asia, or Jupiter.[3]

While supporting some of the major tenants of Easterly and Sachs claims, Ayittey also suggests that Africans must initiate their own development to prove to themselves and the world the strength of their agency and resolve.

Despite the important claims of Ayittey, Easterly and Sachs, the significance of their messages have been lost and both the academy and activists alike have sought merely to bring in the suffering of those in the global south through anecdotal references in order to strengthen their arguments and seek funding for projects. Despite Easterly and Sachs' important discoveries, both are complicit in this act. Both tell accounts of individuals they have met deep within the African continent. However, neither seeks to explore how these individuals would approach development. What projects would they introduce? How would they utilize resources to improve their lives and the lives of those in their communities? Should outside organizations play a role in seeking and promoting solutions to the challenges imposed by poverty?

The answers to these questions must be sought out from the communities and individuals who seek to benefit from development programs. It is within the experiences and histories of farmers, schoolteachers, students, shop owners, mothers, the unemployed, and the many others who make up the worlds poor communities that true ingenuity can be found. Not only is it important to rely on these individuals for the answers to their challenges given their truly complete understanding of the issues, but to assure them that they hold the key to a brighter future. It is time to prove to the elderly

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[3] George Ayittey, Africa Unchained: The Blueprint for Africa's Future (Palgrave Macmillan 2006), 26-27.

teacher at Sumba and the many others like him that answers do not lie with "experts" from the United States or anywhere but rather in the knowledge held by locally grounded community members.

Kenyan Youth Speak Up:

In an effort to seek out the informed and innovative solutions to Kenya's challenges and empower Kenyans to value their own brilliant intellect this study turned to secondary school students. In doing so 138 interviews were carried out in four secondary schools in western Kenya. The schools are located within a 50 kilometer radius and found in Kenya's Nyanza province. The sample includes two regional mixed schools, one provincial girls' boarding school, and one provincial boys' boarding school.[4] By interviewing a ten percent sample of each schools' form three (high school juniors) and form four (high school seniors) students, researchers have sought to grasp the rising generation's ideas surrounding what challenges they are experiencing, what projects and actions should be adopted to address these issues, and what level of involvement outside organizations should play in providing solutions.

Participant Background:

In order to gain a better understanding of the research sample, the scripted interview included a number of personal background questions. These questions provide a degree of context to the student's responses to further questions. Given that the research focused on students entering their final two years of secondary school, the vast majority

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[4] Kenya's secondary school system is broken into regional, provincial and national schools. Admission to these schools are based on primary school test scores and families' ability to pay (regional schools tending to be the cheapest and national schools the most expensive). This often translates to a low quality of education at regional schools, a good quality of education at provincial schools and an excellent quality of education at national schools. Further, regional schools tend to draw many local students while provincial and national schools tend to draw students from around the country.

of the participants were between the ages of 16 and 19. Although the researchers took the liberty of skewing the two regional school's samples during the randomized selection process to increase the number of female participants, the number of males selected remained higher than that of females. This occurence supports the common perception throughout East Africa that male education is more important than female education. The majority of participants had between four and seven siblings. While most students noted that both their parents played a role in caring for them, a noticeable 15.9 percent identified one or both of their parents as being deceased or no longer being part of their lives. While provincial school students demonstrated a 43 percent incidence of having one or more parents with a university or college degree, regional school students demonstrated a 13.4 percent incidence of having one or more parents with a university or college degree. In all cases, fathers have a far greater likelihood of having received a post secondary school education than mothers.

When at home, the majority of students note that they spend their time gardening, caring for livestock, helping with domestic chores and in family businesses. Given the large size of families and high levels of reliance on farming as sources of income, nearly all students find themselves concerned about their school fees. While the burden of school fees most often falls on the parents, many relatives (often uncles and brothers) take the responsibility of education costs. Despite students' backgrounds, all hope to be given the chance to attend university or college. However, given the issues of school fees, poor performance in school, and negative influence from peers, the majority of students worry that they will be prevented from reaching higher education. Although students are clearly anxious about how to reach their goals, many have lofty and

respectable dreams. Most commonly students voice the desire to become doctors, engineers, lawyers, nurses, journalists and accountants. The two most common dreams held by both boys and girls are to become doctors and lawyers. The responses to these questions indicate that students from Kenya's Nyanza province are industrious in their lives at home when asked to contribute to daily tasks. However, they also hold great ambitions for themselves despite the abandonment of caregivers and the extreme financial burden that education costs pose.

Challenges Facing Youth in Nyanza Province:

In order to better capture the challenges facing youth in their last two years of secondary school, the scripted interview posed several questions that asked participants to describe the challenges that they, as individuals, face; the challenges that their peers face; and what prevents youth from pursuing post secondary education. As evident in *Table 7.1,* 49 percent of youth feel that the lack of financial resources is the biggest challenge in their lives. The majority of the respondents who make this claim discuss the difficulties they have in securing school fees. They often cite the prioritization of a sibling's education or meager financial returns from their parent's crop yields as factors that inhibit their abilities to attend school.

After conducting several interviews one afternoon, I allowed my two assistants to take over so that I could attend to several participants who had been waiting to speak with me about our work. After posing for pictures and diplomatically trying to explain several times how my work has the potential to affect Kenyan youth, Omondi, a 23 year old form four student began to explain to me why he was still in secondary school. He recounted having to drop out while in form one (freshman year in high school) in order to allow his

parents to pay for his older brother. Luckily, he was able to rejoin school the next year due to the generosity of a friend. Shortly after returning to school, he discovered that the school had not been receiving payment. Once again he returned home, hoping that when his brother finished university he would be able to finish secondary school. Although his brother was able to find a job the next year, neither his parents nor his brother would agree to contribute to his education. Fortunately, he found another "well wisher" that agreed to aid his cause. While he was clearly elated to be finishing secondary school he was concerned about his ability to find the finances needed for him to pursue post secondary education. Based on the cost of attending university or college in Kenya and the meager salaries held by the majority of those living in Nyanza province, the challenge of obtaining school fees is clearly a serious challenge for youth.

In addition to financial challenges, 15.4 percent of participants' answers focused on negative peer influences, 16.1 of their answers on relationships and sex, and 3.5 percent of their answers on bad school performance. Given the context of Kenya's education system and the lack of services available, the presence of these challenges in the lives of youth can be expected. Although not surprising, these responses are an interesting addition to external sources' perspectives and understanding of the challenges facing youth.

Table 7.1

Individual's Greatest Challenge	Percentage of All Answers
Negative Peer Influence	15.4%
Financial Resources	49%
Bad School Performance	3.5%

Relationships and Sex	16.1%
Other	16%

While the majority of participants noted the lack of financial resources as their largest challenge, they provide a different explanation of the challenges facing their peers. As noted in *Table 9.1* a large number of students pointed to negative peer influence as youths' most serious challenge.   Many participants discussed the overwhelming impact that peers can have on one another.   In this regard many participants, both boys and girls, recounted stories of friends pressured into engaging in sexual acts, drugs and crime. Others merely described the way that peer influence can create distractions from academics. While drugs and crime, relationships and sex, and bad school performance are given their own category, it is important to note that many participants highlighted these areas as being a product of negative peer influence. However, others spoke of them as more separate issues. For this reason, they remain in their own categories. It is unclear why participants' responses regarding negative peer influence shifted from a concentration of 15.1 percent of answers, when asked about personal challenges, to 36.1 percent of answers when asked about their peers. However, I would propose that this observation might be attributed to youths' discomfort in discussing their own personal challenges in regards to relationships, drugs, sex, and grades. Regardless of the reason for the difference, the high incidence of their concern for the power of negative influence on youths' lives, is one of the most intriguing discoveries of this research. Based on this finding, it is clear that Kenyan youth

understand and acknowledge that they struggle to find exemplary peers and a clear path to success.

As I was conducting an interview late one evening, a girl named Atieno shared with me in confidence that she had been forced to drop out of school for a full year because she had become pregnant. Luckily her parents had allowed her to return to school after the baby had been born. Many girls have not been as fortunate as Atieno and are unable to return to their education after having a child. Students' lack of guidance and understanding regarding relationships, sex and drugs, as well as professional development, is clearly taking a toll on Kenyan youths' ability to succeed.

Table 9.1

Youth's Greatest Challenge	Percentage of All Answers
Negative Peer Influence	36.1%
Financial Resources	19.6%
Bad School Performance	13.3%
Drugs and Crime	10.8%
Relationships and Sex	10.1%
Other	9.8%

Many of the same of the same challenges participants cited as large issues for themselves and their peers again popped up when they were asked what prevents youth from receiving a post secondary education. As indicated in *Table 10.1,* 31.4 percent of responses focused on a lack of financial resources. Likewise, 17 percent of answers focused on negative peer influence, 19.7 percent on bad school performance, 7.4 percent

on drugs and crime, and 10.6 percent on relationships and sex. The high concentration of responses in the areas of financial resources and bad school performance make a great deal of sense given the structure of the education system. Youth can gain admission to university through two avenues. They must either demonstrate the ability to fund their own education or score very well on national exams. If a student scores well on his or her exams the government will provide education loans to the individual. Given participants' responses, it is evident that they have a clear understanding of the system and its inability to meet youths' demands for higher education.

Table 10.1

What Prevents Youth from Receiving Post Secondary Education:	Percentage of All Answers
Negative Peer Influence	17%
Financial Resources	31.4%
Bad School Performance	19.7%
Drugs and Crime	7.4%
Relationships and Sex	10.6%
Other	13.9%

In order to gain more information about the lives of youth, the scripted interview asked; "How do your peers spend their free time?" Many of the respondents discussed youth participation in sports, studying for school and watching TV or listening to the radio. However a number of respondents also discussed cases of drinking, dancing, "storying" (talking with friends), sexual relationships and strolling around the village. All of these responses were discussed in a negative light and seen as the result of negative

peer influences. The acknowledgment of these activities paint a clearer image of the challenges youth perceive themselves facing.

This section of the study revealed several interesting points. First and foremost youth acknowledged that they struggle with a lack of financial resources on a personal level. However, youth also mentioned the incredible impact of peer influences in their lives. This point is perhaps even more intriguing given youth's perception of this issue as a broader youth problem, though not an issue notable enough to mention in connection with personal challenges. Finally, youth noted that the lack of financial resources and poor school performance play the biggest roles in preventing individuals from reaching post secondary education. Through the exploration of the challenges facing this portion of Kenya's population, not only can a high degree of understanding be afforded youth, but also an informed process of problem solving can begin.

Youth Identified Solutions:

In order to introduce solutions to the challenges facing Kenyan youth in Nyanza province the study's scripted interview sought to find out whom youth identify as their allies. Participants were asked; "Do you feel that adults, professionals and politicians consider and understand your challenges?" When responding to this question, 73.8 percent of participants indicated that adults understand and consider their challenges. When asked to elaborate, participants discussed instances when adults had provided advice, given them encouragement or corrected bad behavior. Similarly, 76.2 percent of participants indicated that professionals understand and consider the challenges facing youth. Participants went on to explain that professionals not only provide a source of advice, but also pay some student's school fees, start youth groups and donate supplies to

schools. However, 54.6 percent of participants feel that politicians understand and consider the challenges facing youth. While students note that politicians provide money to help with tuition, provide supplies for schools and seek to increase the number of girls in schools, many also pointed out that politicians make empty promises, only show interest when they are seeking election and only provide services to their supporters. Based on this information, it is clear that youth feel that adults and professionals understand them and are better equipped to help them succeed than politicians. Given Kenya's political history this is not a surprising discovery.

In an effort to uncover what services youth wish government officials would extend to them, the scripted interview asked; "If you could talk to your leaders, what would you tell them?" Participants were asked to address this question as it pertains to their regional, provincial and country leaders. *Table 13.1* provides the most common responses. As indicated, the provision of school fees, improvements in education, the provision of guidance and counseling, and the creation of jobs were the most common areas of interest for youth thinking about addressing their leaders. The desire to talk about these four areas clearly supports not only the information provided in participants' background information but also the common challenges represented in *Table 7.1* and *Table 9.1*. Given the financial background of families and extreme rates of unemployment in Kenya, participants' focus on these areas could be expected.

As indicated in *Table 13.1,* the provision of guidance and counseling for youth is consistently the area with the highest concentration of answers regardless of what type of leader is in question. When discussing the need for guidance and counseling among youth, participants indicate this as a tool to combat the challenges posed by negative peer

influence. The high prevalence of this response helps support my argument that youth downplay this challenge when discussing their personal challenges but feel freer to discuss it as an issue for their peers.

In addition, *Table 13.1* appears to suggest that youth expect a relationship with local leaders that provides more personal services. This can be observed by the high incidence of answers focusing on guidance and counseling. Likewise, youth expect more macro issues to be dealt with by country leaders. This is indicated by the concentration of responses regarding job creation.

Table 13.1

Areas Youth wish to Discuss with Leaders:	Provincial Leaders	Regional Leaders	Country Leaders
Provide School Fees	17.2%	17.5%	11.3%
Improve Education	12.4%	19%	14.2%
Provide Guidance and Counseling	26.9%	19%	19.1%
Create Jobs	11.7%	9.5%	18.4%
Other	31.8%	35%	37%

Similar patterns emerged when participants were asked about the types of projects that would help them overcome their challenges and what projects would aid their peers in overcoming challenges. *Table 14.1* and *14.2* outline the areas that received the highest concentration of responses. Both tables clearly indicate participant's perceived need for guidance and counseling. When asked to elaborate on this issue, participants cited numerous areas of life that they feel uninformed about. One of the highest areas of concern is relationships and sex. While some schools provide minimal education on the

issue, others avoid the subject all together. At home, parents also struggle to address this issue due to cultural norms and practices, which make the subject taboo. While conducting interviews, I had the opportunity to observe a local clinic attempt to fill this gap by providing seminars to youth. The presenters later reported to me that they were unable to follow their lesson plans due to the overwhelming level of unawareness and vast number of questions. Youth also fervently indicate that they do not understand how to succeed given the structure of their society. Many youth indicated the desire to have youth groups where they can discuss their challenges and collectively seek out advice from individuals who have succeeded. The possibilities for projects like this are seemingly endless and should need greater exploration.

Table 14.1
Projects for the Individual:

Guidance and Counseling	Job Creation	Pay School for School Fees	Other
31%	26.5%	8.4%	34.1%

Table 14.2

Projects for Youth:	Regional Projects	Provincial Projects	Country Projects
Guidance and Counseling	33.3%	32.5%	22.9%
Job Creation	31.1%	36.5%	28.9%
Improve Education	10.6%	11.9%	16.9%
Other	25%	19.1%	31.2%

Another clear area of concern for youth is jobs. Both *Table 14.1* and *Table 14.2* indicate this point. According to the Central Intelligence Agency, Kenya's

unemployment rate lay at 40 percent in 2008.[5] Given that this staggering statistic has not changed a great deal since, youth are naturally concerned about where they will find jobs.

The understanding youth hold of how to address the challenges that face them are sculpted by the programs and projects they witness being carried out in their communities, districts and country. 80% of participants acknowledged that they had seen or heard of projects similar to the ones they outlined as solutions to their challenges. They noted that most often schools, churches and clinics sponsored such projects. However, at times, projects conducted by these groups collapse or merely do not equitably distribute resources and information. Despite the possibility of issues arising, projects that focus on the areas indicated in *Table 14.1* and *14.2* are seen by Kenyan youth as the key to increasing opportunities and the quality of life for themselves and their peers.

This section of the study clearly outlines the areas of priority youth hold when problem solving their challenges. In this light, youth noted that focus should be placed on projects dealing with job creation as well as guidance and counseling. Youth noted the great need for focus on these areas to address individual's personal challenges as well as the challenges faced by youth at large. In addition, participants indicated that their expectations of local leaders are grounded in personal matters of daily life. For these students, the issue of guidance is an area that local leaders should participate in addressing. While many youth noted the importance of country leaders in the process of providing guidance, also, an overwhelming number indicated a desire for country leaders to address more macro issues such as job creation. By examining *youth identified*

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[5] "Africa: Kenya", Central Intelligence Agency: The World Fact Book, accessed August 23, 2011, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ke.html.

solutions governments and NGOs can better tailor their projects to the needs of individuals while harnessing the voices and resolve of the populous in the process.

Implementation and the Role of NGOs:

In order to better grasp participants understanding of NGOs, they were asked to explain what they know about them. Their replies indicated that 58.3 percent had a concrete understanding of the tasks and roles of NGOs in Kenya, 23.6 percent had a vague understanding, and 18.1 percent had little or no understanding. Although 68.3 percent of participants claimed to have never come in contact with an NGO, the fact that most youth clearly have some understanding of the work of NGOs allowed for further exploration to be made into the perceived effectiveness of the work being done by NGOs. While no clear patterns emerged within the structure of the open-ended interview, a number of interesting anecdotal replies were shared.

By and large, all participants described the exceptional task that NGOs engage themselves with filling the need for lacking social services. Participants indicated NGOs' abilities to sponsor student's education, provide health services, provide guidance for youth, promote environmentalism, provide disaster relief and many other honorable endeavors. However, participants also pointed out that NGOs succumb to a number of downfalls. Participants point out that NGOs often are caught up in corruption, too involved in matters of politics, lack good facilities, fail to utilize local resources, do not provide services equitably, or are not efficient at tackling issues. What can be observed from these points, is that youth understand that NGOs often play a critical role in their society and have the intention of creating a positive difference. However, at times,

NGOs become too caught up in their goals and political bureaucracies to make a truly sustainable, efficient and locally grounded difference in their communities.

In order to better understand what youth would focus on if given the chance to take charge of projects, they were asked what project they would conduct for youth if they had a budget of 40,000 KES. This question was then repeated with a budget of 50,000,000 KES. Given the answers to the previous section of the interview, *Youth Founded Solutions*, the responses to these questions were not surprising. As indicated in *Table 19.1,* if given 40,000 KES, 39.5 percent of participants' responses focused on increasing jobs for youth. As described before, the need for jobs in Kenya is a serious issue that must be addressed in order to meet the rising demand for jobs posed by the large and growing youth population. Youth recognize that the lack of opportunity for youth to earn money also means that many youth have a great deal of idle time in which they are not being productive and even worse are getting into trouble. In order to combat these issues many youth would utilize the 40,000 KES to invest in the informal sector. Some would open small shops while others would raise chickens, start fish farms, invest in agriculture, buy cows for milking or get a boda boda (motorcycle taxi).

Similarly, when participants were asked how they would spend 50,000,000 KES to help combat the challenges of youth, 39.1 percent of responses suggested that youth would allocate a portion of these funds towards increasing job opportunities for youth. As expected, the cost of the projects increased with the increased budget.   With 50,000,000 KES many youth would buy property to rent, buy a fleet of cars to start a taxi company, perform large-scale farming, invest in large industries that would create many jobs, open a supermarket or start a carpentry business. These replies clearly capture not

only the base of Kenya's economy, but also the areas in which many people invest when they have extra resources. Thus, these responses capture an informed understanding of Kenya's economic system and opportunities in a way that many outsiders are unable to acknowledge or comprehend.

Many youth also indicated that they would use resources to provide guidance and counseling to youth. When participants were asked how they would spend 40,000 KES, 17 percent of participants' responses focused on guidance and counseling. This percentage shrank to 10.3 percent when asked how participants would utilize 50,000,000 KES. This drop in percentage is clearly captured by an increase in participants' allocation of funds towards school fees. Participants indicated several ways in which they would provide guidance. Many individuals remarked that they would start youth groups that would discuss challenges together and work together to seek solutions. Others indicated the need to provide information on relationships and sex, how to succeed in Kenyan society, and how to avoid the temptations posed by peer groups. In order to provide this information, some of the participants suggested bringing in experts from the community and local individuals who have succeeded professionally to give lectures, answer questions and stand as role models. This approach to development is unique and clearly proposes simple and practical solutions for many of the challenges presented by youths' lack of understanding about critical life issues.

Table 19.1 also indicates that many youth would allocate resources towards improving education. If given 40,000 KES, 8.2 percent of the responses indicated a focus on education improvements. Similarly, if given 50,000,000 KES, 10.3 percent of responses indicated a focus on education improvements. In order to obtain

improvements, youth suggest that school supplies be donated to schools, rural schools started, better teachers hired and schools, colleges and universities constructed. As would be expected the cost of projects increased when participants were asked how they would allocate 50,000,000 KES. With this amount of money most participants would focus funds on constructing educational institutions.

The last area where participants' responses are clearly concentrated is the provision of school fees. As indicated before, a jump in the number of responses focused on this area can be observed when the amount of available funds increases from 40,000 KES to 50,000,000 KES. Given this scenario the number of responses jumped from 10.9 percent to 19.6 percent. This increase can likely be explained by the large financial commitment it takes to pay for education combined with participants' noted distaste for inequitably allocated resources.

Table 19.1

Utilizing Resources:	With 40,000 KES (500 USD)	With 50,000,000 KES (625,000 USD)
Job Creation	39.5%	39.1%
Guidance and Counseling	17%	10.3%
Education Improvements	8.2%	9.8%
Provide School Fees	10.9%	19.6%
Other	24.4%	21.2%

In addition to asking youth about their ideal area to focus funding if they were in charge of an NGO, the scripted survey gave participants the opportunity to indicate what areas of youths' lives NGOs should not be involved in. As indicated in *Table 20.1,* 14.7

percent of responses focused on family life. These responses often referenced a desire to respect traditional family power structures and forms of decision-making. 23.3 percent of responses focused on relationships and sex, particularly marriage. However, 20.9 percent of responses indicated that NGO should feel free to be involved in all areas of youth's lives. When questioned further, these individuals indicated that NGOs should feel free to share advice on relationships and family dynamics. Given that 79.1 percent of participants feel that there are areas of youths' lives that NGOs should not be involved in, it is important to exercise a degree of respect for culture and tradition when working with youth.

Table 20.1
Areas NGOs Should Not Be Involved:

Family Life	Relationships and Sex	None	Other
14.7%	23.3%	20.9%	41.4%

Participants were also given the opportunity to share their ideas about how to best organize and run an NGO focused on youth challenges. While no clear pattern of answers emerged, there are a few areas that did hold a higher concentration of responses. A number of participants indicated a need for collective decision-making surrounding how to best address the challenges of youth. Others indicated the importance of involving youth in this process. Many individuals also indicated the need for transparency within NGOs. Overall, youth voiced their values for sound leadership, division of tasks and a general level of respect and equity within NGOs. These responses not only demonstrate Kenyan youths ability to brainstorm sound value structures for

organizations, but also their understanding of what challenges can inhibit NGOs from reaching their full potential and providing the highest possible degree of benefit.

Through the examination of this section of the study several key points were highlighted about what areas youth based projects should focus on as well as the role that NGOs should play in providing services. Participants noted that if they had the resources to implement projects for youth they would most often focus on creating income-generating activities. Such projects were noted by youth as not only being a source of income but also a way to create a constructive structure to youth's lives. With an increase in jobs, youth suggest that the negative impacts of peer pressure could be reduced as youths time is made productive. In addition, while youth overwhelmingly noted the positive role that NGOs play in society, they also highlighted instances of corruption of cultural disrespect. In response youth indicated a desire to be more integrated into the process of project design and the institutional structure of NGOs in order to created a greater connection and level of understanding between communities and NGOs.

Conclusion:

Through this study youth identified several key challenges that prevent them from succeeding. Primarily, they noted the impacts of insufficient financial resources, negative peer influence, bad school performance and relationships and sex as the most critical issues facing their generation. However, participants were also able to suggest that through job creation, the provision of guidance and counseling, the sponsorship of education and improvements in the education system many of their challenges could be addressed. Many elaborated noting the need for youth groups, good role models, the

construction of schools, improvement in teacher training and development of jobs in the informal sector. Most youth indicated their general appreciation for the work of NGOs in and around their communities. However, many also described apprehension towards the cultural and social implications of these institutions. In an apparent response to this apprehension, students indicated a desire to have a larger role in the organization and decision-making process involved in youth based programs and projects.

Such a tremendous level of feedback indicates the level of intellect and ingenuity possessed by Kenyan youth. Their vast understanding of their situation and the resources available to them allow them to have a highly practical understanding of possible solutions to their present day challenges. Through candid side conversations with many of the studies participants, I discovered a high level of appreciation and interest in my work. It was clear from these discussions that many of the participants had not been asked to think about these issues before. Simply being interested in the ideas of youth caused many to open up and discuss their passion for youth development and ask how they could become involved.

In order to better unpack the topics discussed in this study, further research should be conducted on the issue of negative peer influence. It is clear that this is a point of great concern for Kenyan youth and this areas depth and complexity requires further exploration. This would allow for the many factors incorporated into this broad area to be delineated and the varying degree that such factors effect youth captured. In addition, it would create a better guide for how development can be pursued in this area and what projects and programs are needed most by youth.

It is through the dreams and hard work of youth such as those whose voices have been introduced here that Ayittey's vision can be realized. As he has said, "Africa must be developed by Africans, using their own "African model."[6] Through this study a better grasp of the "African Model" can be obtained. Further, through studies such as this participants can be empowered by the process of creating their ideal development model. After all, it is from their intellect and ideas that home grown development models are born and pride and agency reinstated. Sadly, upon returning to Sumba primary school a year after my interaction with the mzee, I discovered that he had passed away. Nevertheless, I hope that he would have been intrigued by the innovation and critical thought put forward by the 138 young students my assistants and I interviewed. I hope that it would have caused him to think critically about who truly has the answers to Kenya's challenges. But most importantly, I hope that he could have felt a pride boil up inside himself for the intelligence and potential found in his pupils and his fellow citizens. For with pride, agency and resolve the possibilities of a country's greatness lie unfettered.

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[6] Ayittey, Africa Unchained. 27.