



# Participative Governance



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## Youth Assemblies

In the era of globalization, the question of youth bulge and socio-political participation remain largely unresolved. The United Nations Security Council adopted unanimously in 2015 a ground-breaking resolution on Youth, Peace and Security, recognizing that “young people play an important and positive role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security”.

UNSCR 2250 (2015) urges Member States to give youth a greater voice in decision-making at the local, national, regional and international levels, and to set up mechanisms that enable meaningful youth participation in peace processes and development. In Kenya, this has been largely peripheral. Youth marginalization, unemployment, and tokenistic inclusion in policy and decision-making processes have overtime exposed youth to exploitation by criminal, violent and radical groups. Due to the challenges youth face in democratic and economic participation, and the considerable contribution they make to the Kenyan population (80% according to the 2019 National Council

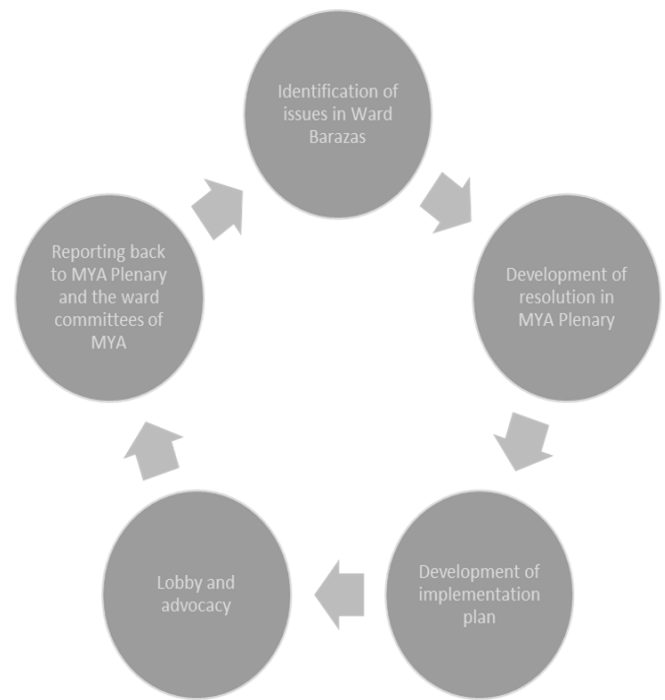
## Method

The Oslo Center works with established Youth Assemblies to strengthen their role in their community and local government by:

- Holding Grassroot Public Forums (otherwise known as Barazas)
- Support Assemblies’ internal structures: House Business Committee, Standing Committee (Chaired and coordinated by the Office of the Speaker and Clerk) and Cabinet (Chaired by the President).
- Provide technical support to Parliamentary (Plenary) sessions

for Population and Development Report), The Oslo Center has worked with local counties and barazas to increase youth participation in subnational policy implementation and governance structures.

In the last four years, The Oslo Center has trained over 1308 youth within the assembly structure and integrating around 9000 voices through dialogue forums that advocate for integrity, transparency and accountability in public services delivery in the coast region of Kenya. These activities have advocated for the most disenfranchised citizenry in over 30 wards and helped improved services in infrastructure, rule of law, education, health care and social services for the elderly and vulnerable populations.



Youth Assembly Process

### Subnational Participation

Youth Assemblies have a critical role in Kenya’s democratisation process. They have increased youth participation in public affairs and established a considerable following that provides solutions to public policy problems in the community. Youth Assemblies can harness their role by building political bridges between local leaders and citizens at the grassroots level to address community concerns and challenges. They fill a representational ‘gap’ and enhance youth participation in subnational governance, leadership and political life.

In Kenya, youth assemblies have cultivated significant trust and built local confidence to address alleged violation of human rights, victimization, stigmatization and extrajudicial killings of the youth. This has for example resulted in enhanced community policing initiatives and increased evidence-based security operations in Mombasa. This close collaboration between local police forces and youth has improved security and mitigated radicalization of youth profiling by including assembly members in local policing committees.

The work conducted by The Oslo Center has also increased local accountability by increasing local access to information, justification and answerability. In 2018, the Youth Assembly and Member of the County Assembly recognized youth participation in the county’s Agri-business and education bills, resulting in an Ad-hoc Committee that included citizen needs and concerns in the county budget planning.

This type of engagement helps strengthen Kenyan’s democratisation process by encouraging an accountable political culture that is responsive to citizen needs across the country. Under the 2010 constitutional dispensation, Kenya has established a strong foundation for good governance, integrity leadership, responsible citizenship, institutional reform and accountability. The devolved system of government has opened spaces for active citizen engagement and participation at the local polity system. Youth Assemblies facilitate therefore the implementation and enactment of these national and political priorities.



## Oversight

The government has the responsibility to provide public services to sustain and improve the welfare of the society. To do this, the government requires organisational structures and qualified personnel to provide the best possible services. This is not always possible due to lack of monetary, physical and human resources. Youth and citizen engagement can help fill the gap by providing oversight mechanisms. In Kenya, youth have employed over 50 community sensitization and community education activities that have succeeded in revealing unmet needs, demanding answers from the various county government officials and local elected leaders. In the last quarter of 2019 alone, the Youth Assemblies have provided oversight to 47 services.

Youth Assemblies have been able to build the capacity of peer educators and trainers of trainers to increase oversight. To strengthen this function, The Oslo Center together with the Youth Assemblies, have developed 21 operational documents to guide their engagement. These include code of conduct, standing orders, compliance and enforcement, partnership guidelines and electoral laws.

In its function as non-participant actors, Youth Assemblies have managed to navigate partisan politics, and legal and policy constraints that impede meaningful youth participation in policy, decision making and service delivery processes.

Successful citizen centred accountability and youth participation also helps stimulate voter interests, political priorities and contributes to institutional trust building.

In the last two years, the Youth Assemblies' effective mobilization of grassroots consultations and dialogue forums has led to the improvement of sewage and garbage systems, and installation of streetlights, security lights, marketplaces and public recreational centres. The collaboration with 15 subnational bodies has also resulted in new police posts in areas that face security challenges. Since the end of 2018, the Youth Assemblies have helped improve the living conditions in an area that hosts over 646 000 Kenyan citizens.

This in turn has also enhanced a sense of ownership and accountability in project management within wards and in county processes.

“MYA is a truly **non-partisan institution** – working with everybody- within the county assembly. As an elected representative I am supposed to give feedback to the community, and it is through the MYA platforms and venues, when invited Members of the County Assembly get the community members to ask questions and MCAs responds. The close link to the **electorates** is **beneficial for both sides**. When MYA adopt resolutions, they are issue based [...] But the challenge has been implementation”

- Member of County Assembly-Mombasa County



## Youth Empowerment

Youth Assemblies have also exposed youth to programs, opportunities and benefits that have enhanced their political, socio-economic, cultural, intellectual, moral, spiritual and leadership development. Capacity building programs have strengthened their skills and knowledge on democratic values, such as tolerance, participation, dialogue, inclusion, consensus building and cooperation. These skills have enabled youth to consolidate democratic principles and values, whilst positioning them as credible local actors that contribute to local governance and benefit from public trust.

Leveraging on these capacities, youth from local assemblies have been incorporated into the subnational government's technical-planning, oversight and implementation structures where they have been able to influence policy, decision-making and service delivery processes.

“The youth assembly provided me with an opportunity to **develop my leadership** and management skills when conducting the required research on various issues to be able to offer guidance as the Speaker. It also gave me exposure, networking and collaboration opportunities with government institutions for cross **learning**”

Former and First Female Speaker  
Mombasa Youth Assembly, Mary Maina



For example, the Youth Assembly in Mombasa influenced the National Kenyan Blue Economy Policy Framework by developing resolutions that recommended the incorporation of youth employment in blue and ocean resources. These were adopted by the Permanent Secretary, responsible for Martine and Shipping, and are in process of being implemented.

## Recommendations

- **Reviewing legislative framework:**  
Support quotas for youth representation by formally recognizing youth legal structures and their roles at subnational structures
- **Fostering participatory governance at grassroots:**  
Strengthening youth decision-making structures by supporting local governance systems and cementing meaningful youth consultations, dialogue and participation
- **Strengthening subnational structures to serve youth constituency:**  
Strengthening the linkage of subnational structures and civil society interaction, including youth led initiatives. This is critical to bridge the disparity between national and subnational government projects and local youth and community needs.
- **Promote political, community level civic education and sensitization programs:**  
To serve as reporting and oversight mechanisms to diversify and strengthen checks and balances. These platforms can help young citizens execute their respective constitutional rights and participate in their national political processes.

