

KCYPS- X-SPACE

SPEAKER DISCUSSION HANDOUT

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**REGIONAL VARIATIONS ON YOUTH
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES.**



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INTRODUCTION

THIS TEXT DISCUSSES THE VARIOUS CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACED BY YOUNG PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT REGIONS OF KENYA & EAST AFRICA. IT HIGHLIGHTS HOW THESE VARIATIONS ARE INFLUENCED BY FACTORS LIKE:



Unequal distribution of resources and marginalization: Certain regions, particularly those with a high number of refugees, experience greater marginalization and lack of access to resources compared to others. **Livelihoods and conflict:** Regions dominated by pastoralist communities and those experiencing violent conflict face unique challenges that impact youth opportunities. **Disjointed and discriminatory policies:** Inconsistent definitions of "youth" and discriminatory policies create disparities in access to opportunities across different regions. **Socioeconomic inequalities:** Unequal access to education, healthcare, and other resources based on social class creates further variations in youth challenges and opportunities. The text proposes leveraging the diverse skills, knowledge, and cultural backgrounds of young people from various regions to address these challenges. This can be achieved by: **Creating platforms for collaboration:** Encouraging interaction and knowledge sharing between youths from diverse backgrounds can foster innovation and problem-solving. **Removing systemic barriers:** Dismantling discriminatory practices and policies that hinder equitable development for all youths is crucial. **Promoting self-reliance:** Educational systems and policies should empower young people with skills and knowledge relevant to their contexts, fostering self-reliance and reducing dependence on external solutions. **Developing regional solutions:** Identifying and addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by youth in different regions through locally-driven initiatives is essential. By acknowledging and addressing the existing regional variations and inequities, the text argues for creating a more level playing field for young people across Kenya and the Region, enabling them to contribute effectively to their communities and the nation's development.

IMAGE BY FREEPIK WWW.FREEPIK.COM

THE BIG QUESTION

WHAT CAUSES REGIONAL VARIATIONS ON YOUTH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ?.



To better expound on these regional variations on youth challenges and opportunities this discussion will first focus and look at the Kenya country context and then move on to explore the wider regional East African (EAC) Regional Context as follows:



A GROUP OF SOUTH SUDANESE YOUTHS APPLYING FOR A COMMUNITY SCHOLARSHIP SCHEME IN KAKUMA REFUGEE CAMP IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR & WANGULEI DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

1.0 KENYA COUNTRY REGIONAL DYNAMICS.



KENYA RED CROSS TRANZOIA BRANCH YOUTH MEMBERS AND URBAN REFUGEES IN A PUBLIC AWARENESS MARCH TO SENSITISE ON THE RIGHTS OF REFUGEES AND COMEMORATE THE WORLD REFUGEE DAY 2021 IN KITALE TOWN. IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

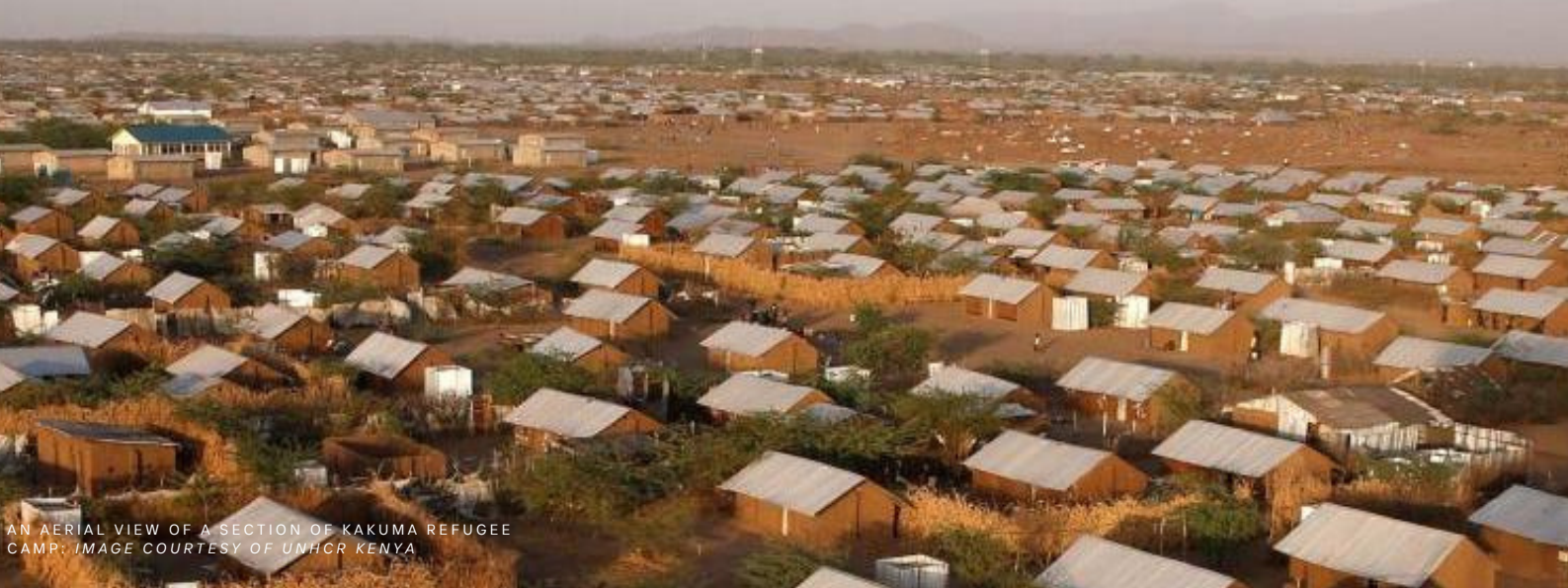
In Kenya, the challenges and opportunities faced by the youth exhibit regional variations, primarily rooted in and aggravated by the persistent extreme levels of inequality and marginalization within Kenyan communities and societies. These regional disparities are exacerbated by imbalances in high-level standards of living and insecurity, both social and economic, as highlighted by the Commission on Revenue Allocation in 2012.

The issue of marginalization in Kenya is deeply ingrained in the distorted process of resource distribution, leading to social exclusion from the dominant socio-economic, cultural, and political structures of the nation. As my discussion will heavily emphasize marginalized communities in Kenya, particularly focusing on refugee communities, I will delve into the first of the four main definitions of marginalized communities in the 2010 Constitution of Kenya. According to the constitution, a marginalized community is characterized as one that, due to its relatively small population or any other reason, has been unable to fully participate in the integrated social and economic life of Kenya as a whole.

Examining the socio-economic struggles of counties and regions in Kenya through the lens of Human Development Indexes (HDI), Marsabit, Turkana, Wajir, Mandera, Garissa, Tana River, Samburu, Narok, West Pokot, Isiolo, Lamu, Kajiado, Kitui, Kilifi, Kwale, Laikipia, Baringo, Taita Taveta, and Elgeyo Marakwet have been identified as disadvantaged regions. Remarkably, these regions, which encompass a substantially high number of refugee communities, contribute to the further marginalization and deepening of existing disparities in challenges and opportunities faced by refugee youth compared to their counterparts in mainstream host communities.



A GROUP OF ARMED PASTORALISTS FROM MARSABIT: IMAGE COURTESY OF THE REGIONAL CENTRE ON SMALL ARMS (RECSA) KENYA CHAPTER



AN AERIAL VIEW OF A SECTION OF KAKUMA REFUGEE CAMP; IMAGE COURTESY OF UNHCR KENYA

KENYAN URBAN REFUGEES YOUTHS AS VICTIMS OF KENYA'S HISTORICAL REFUGEES POLICY UNSPOKEN DIRTY LITTLE SECRETS:

When viewing the previously discussed Impacts of the distorted process of resource distribution and the resulting bureaucratic and politically charged elements of the Kenyan socioeconomic system and its resultant impacts on Kenya refugee laws. Then the refugee groups that disproportionately become victims of this politically charged Xenophobia are the ones rarely spoken of by many refugee protection agencies, and these are the misunderstood and usually unwanted or unspoken of urban refugees.

Successive Kenyan governments have taken steps that made it increasingly difficult for refugees to reside outside camps and obtain official documentation, with its formalization into law occurring in March 2014, at which point residing outside designated refuge camps without official permission became a criminal offense. (NRC 2017).

These extra layers of bureaucratic as well as legal restrictions on refugee youths have further pushed them into a more marginalized sector of the Kenyan Communities.

Refugee youth communities in Kenya thus experience unimaginable distortion of not only their basic human rights but limited or close-to-nothing prospects of meaningfully participating in mainstream Kenyan Societies as full community members.

This bleak social existence with limited socioeconomic opportunities has thus placed the Kenyan Refugee youth populations into what many term a frozen social existence, with their lives being practically frozen & artificially pushed into a cycle of reliance on aid for the benefit of local NGOs & host communities.



A SIGN POST WELCOMING VISITORS TO KAKUMA NEAR THE KAKUMA REFUGEES CAMP; IMAGE COURTESY OF UNHCR KENYA



A GROUP OF SOUTH SUDANESE URBAN YOUTHS MEMBERS OF A REFUGEE COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION AT A COMMUNITY EVENT IN ELDORET KENYA
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AUTHOR

1.1 EAST AFRICAN (EC) YOUTHS REGIONAL DYNAMICS.

REGIONAL VARIATIONS ON YOUTH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES.

In the Horn of Africa and East Africa, studies indicate that pastoralists stand out as the most marginalized groups politically, socially, and economically. A brief examination of refugee statistics in Kenya underscores this reality, with a significant portion of the country's refugees, such as those from South Sudan and Somalia, originating from exclusively pastoralist communities like the Dinka, Nuer, and Somali pastoralist backgrounds.

This significance is underscored by the observation that variations in youth challenges and opportunities across countries and regions are deeply tied to communal traditions and ways of life. Additionally, violent conflicts in the region play a crucial role in shaping these variations. Consequently, the region can be broadly categorized into two main zones of youth social existence:

A) Youth in Violent Conflict Dominated Zones, including predominantly pastoralist communities in Kenya (e.g., parts of Northern Kenya, Coast, Turkana), parts of Uganda, Congo, Burundi, Ethiopia, and Somalia.

These regions exhibit characteristics such as violent conflict and displaced youths, long-standing governance failures, unresponsive institutions, lack of political will to include youth communities, poor land rights, inadequate provision of services and infrastructure, and climate change impacts leading to dependence on aid. These factors contribute to a vicious cycle of intergenerational collective trauma.

The major contributor to regional variations in youth challenges and opportunities is the disjointed societal and policy definitions of youths, deviating significantly from international norms. For example, while the UN defines youths as individuals aged 15 to 24, Africa stretches this range to 18–35, and South Sudan has operated on a range of 18-45. This age confusion results in distorted policy responses, where official policies, including government and social opportunities, are formulated based on these varying definitions. This regional disparity creates an imbalanced dynamic not only in international but also in regional variations on youth challenges and opportunities. To address this, there is a pressing need for a paradigm shift and a restructuring of all socioeconomic structures in the region, including education systems, work and life expectancies, milestones, and opportunities like work and political leadership, to ensure global competitiveness.



B).Youths in non-violent Conflict zones, but socially Unequal, marginalized oppressive & layered zones (Parts of Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda)

Studies reveal that these regional zones exhibit socio-economic class distinctions among youths, perpetuating prevalent intergenerational cycles of privilege and disenfranchisement based on their origin in socioeconomic exclusion zones.

Within these relatively stable zones, inter-generational class divisions and ceilings of privilege exist, where opportunities and prospects are unevenly distributed.

The enduring impacts of colonization and neo-colonization have led to significant class disparities, primarily revolving around historical social traditions, practices, and predispositions.

In these circumstances, the potentials of youths are often defined by socio-economic backgrounds, and a considerable number of youths struggle to break through these defined ceilings, hindering the disruption of systematically established regional variations in youth challenges and opportunities. Consequently, clear systemic discriminations persist, fostering further rifts in socioeconomic status and contributing to variations in youth challenges and opportunities.

A notable example in these regional zones pertains to the characteristics and types of youths occupying key positions in education, politics, administration, or enterprises. Observations indicate that a majority of youths benefitting from youth leadership spaces come from middle-class, highly educated, and high-class privileged backgrounds. Examining the chairpersons of important regional youth bodies such as AU and EAC, it becomes evident that these positions are often determined by the social disparities mentioned above. In instances like Kenya, politically well-connected youths from prominent families have historically dominated AU and EAC-appointed youth political party positions, perpetuating political family dynasties and marginalizing non-politically positioned youths.

Another example highlighting regional variations in youth challenges and opportunities is the Regional Youth Body YouLead, supported by the AU and EAC. Since its inception, this organization has favored well-connected and privileged youths at the expense of socially deprived individuals, contributing to existing disparities in youth realities in these zones.

In critical economic spaces, youths likely to establish agencies, enterprises, or organizations benefiting from formal financial support systems are often privileged, educated, and well-connected. This creates a two-tier system where policymakers, influenced by donors' language and buzzwords, design exclusive "Youth Empowerment" policies and opportunities. The privileged few partake in exclusive seminars, workshops, luncheons, and hacker-thons, while the majority of underprivileged youths are left preoccupied with basic survival. These social realities significantly contribute to regional variations in youth challenges and opportunities.



2: WHAT CAN BE POSITIVELY LEVERAGED TO ALLEVIATE THE NEGATIVE REGIONAL VARIATIONS ON YOUTH CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES?

As evident from the preceding discussion on the existing regional variations in youth challenges and opportunities, many of these variations stem from deep-rooted governmental shortcomings and discriminatory historical elements, where social dynamics such as traditions and skewed socio-economic policies play a significant role.

To truly empower regional youths and foster international competitiveness, it is essential to question the current socio-political landscape, education system, and policies.

This involves determining whether existing frameworks align with the region's developmental goals and addressing systemic disparities through thoughtful and region-specific interventions.

Addressing these challenges requires a positive leveraging of various socio-economic factors, as expounded on the next page:

THE SOLUTIONS

Diverse Traditions & Practices:

Regional youths hail from diverse sociocultural backgrounds with rich and varied traditions. Harnessing these differences can involve creating avenues for the exchange of ideas, where the disparities in traditions and practices contribute to a hybrid of genuinely youth-led initiatives and social changes. For instance, refugee youths can serve as real-life examples, highlighting the consequences of displacement and missed opportunities, fostering empathy and a safer environment for collective thriving.

Diverse Perspectives, Experiences, Skills, and Knowledge:

Recognizing that regional youths possess diverse skills and knowledge acquired from their communities, addressing systemic barriers to equitable development and growth is crucial. This involves allowing authentic and unfiltered expressions of diverse youth voices. Avoiding token appointments based on political considerations, donor appeasement, or political maneuvering is essential. Discouraging manipulations related to marginalized communities, donor influence, gender, disability, and youth tokenism prevents the creation of privileged mini-systems within marginalized social setups.

Diverse Cultures:

Leveraging the rich cultural diversity of the region involves intentionally creating regional realities and rejecting artificially imposed socio-political cultures. This shift aims to eliminate disproportionate socio-economic disparities caused by external socio-political narratives. It necessitates identifying and discouraging donor-driven impact changes that benefit a small elitist sector of privileged youths at the expense of the entire youth population. Formulating youth empowerment initiatives guided by the genuine needs and plans of the youth population is vital. This includes critically assessing the alignment of the education system with regional needs, questioning the effectiveness of existing socio-political policies, and exploring radical changes to create opportunities and resources for youth development.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, by strategically harnessing the aforementioned four key opportunities and mitigating socio-economic disparities among the youth, we stand to cultivate a more equitable playing field. This, in turn, would enable the full utilization of the diverse potential inherent in the youth demographic, fostering a collective community rebuilding effort. Through the adept design and implementation of policies, there is a prospect of comprehending and dismantling deeply ingrained biases present in our existing socio-economic frameworks.

A tangible example, both in the short and long term, involves the adoption of an education system aligned with the actual realities of our youth. Such a system would prioritize the development of self-reliance and youth competencies over the mere imparting of knowledge or skills that may prove less practical. Simultaneously, the creation of supportive systems and policies becomes imperative, ensuring the provision of necessary resources and conducive environments. This strategic approach is poised to empower youths and learners, allowing them to exploit their competencies for the sake of equitable development.

SAMUEL BIOR GARANG
SESSION SPEAKER



A portrait of Bior Samuel Nathaniel Garang, a man with short dark hair and glasses, wearing a light-colored, vertically striped button-down shirt. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a solid light orange color.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Bior Samuel Nathaniel Garang is a protracted South Sudanese Urban refugee in Kenya. Since entering Kenya in 1993, he has resided in Nairobi and Eldoret. His whole childhood & youth have been spent in this situation of protracted refugeehood. Bior experienced his first proper encampment in 2005 when right after high school he went to Kakuma to volunteer as a refugee teacher, he taught at Wau Primary School under the employment of the Lutheran World Federation/Department for World Services that was in charge of education provision in Kakuma refugee camp. Bior Garang juggles two roles as a South Sudanese microbiologist and a refugee community rebuild peace advocate. He is the Co-Founder of several Organizations & Chief amongst these is Leprosy and Neglected Diseases Organization South Sudan, an organization that advocates and finds dignity and self-reliant solutions for tropical and Neglected diseases afflicted persons and communities in South Sudan, and Sixty Four Voices For Peace Organization, a refugees Youth Formed and lead community Organization in Kenya. He is also currently a board member for the Fields Of Peace Organization, a small non-profit based on the coast of Oregon USA that has a mission of ending the killing of children in conflicts and conflict zones, In fields of Peace Bior had in the past also double-up as the South Sudan Country peace Ignite circles program coordinator, where he teaches peace-building through the Fields of peace Innovative peace-building techniques of the Promise to our children philosophy.



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