



## Youth leading the development agenda in Kenya through inclusive social accountability

### In Kenya...

**Youth make up nearly 35 per cent** of all Kenyans, and they represent **more than half** of the labour force.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these numbers, **Kenyan youth<sup>2</sup> have little say** in the way the government addresses issues concerning them, putting them at risk of marginalisation in socio-economic development.

### Background

Effective citizens' participation remains one of the key missing links in governance in Kenya. In the process of economic and social development, there has been a failure to meaningfully engage, recognize and implement the contributions of the common "wananchi" (citizen) in the implementation of development projects in the communities. This has consequently led to misappropriation of resources, especially at local level in the 47 counties of Kenya.



Siaya County has a youthful population with 45% of the total population under the age of 15 and one in four being an adolescent aged 10-19<sup>3</sup>. This has implications on the County's health and development

agenda as it puts increasing demands on the provision of social services including health and education. With rates three times higher than the national youth HIV prevalence, the region hosts the highest HIV rate among youth and in the general population in the country<sup>4</sup>.

**Youth parliaments** are platforms that empower young people to advocate for their rights and hold public officials accountable for meeting their health and other socio-economic needs. Throughout the world, youth parliaments foster young people's civic participation and help them become politically aware, engaged and responsible citizens.

Through over 60 years of community-based programming to strengthen health systems in Sub-Saharan Africa, Amref Health Africa witnessed how change starts at the community level. Health indicators will only improve when communities, and particularly youth, are informed about their rights and able to demand these rights from policymakers. This process is also referred to as social accountability. By investing in social accountability processes, citizens are engaged to hold politicians and policy makers accountable for the services that they provide.

# The Ugunja Youth Parliament: a model platform for youth advocacy in Kenya

The Ugunja Youth Parliament (UYP) was founded in 2009 in Ugunja Sub-County (Siaya County) in western Kenya, in response to high prevalence rates of sexually transmitted infections and HIV/aids related deaths among the youth and adolescents in the County. In a country where effective citizen participation in governance is generally weak, the UYP successfully pursues a youth-led vision of “creating an accountable society” through 60 volunteer members who are directly linked to local civil society organisations (CSOs).



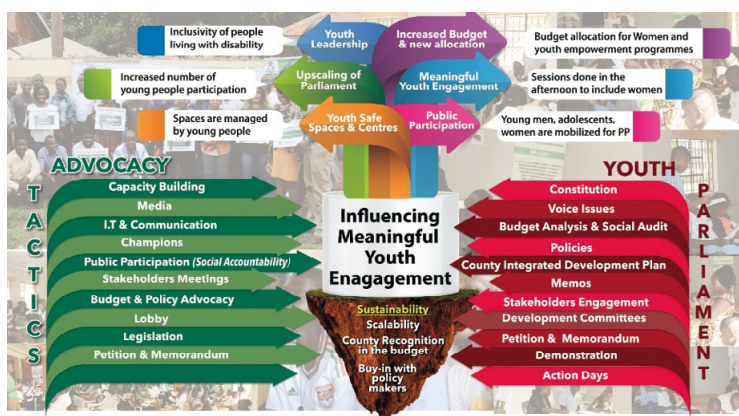
## How the Ugunja Youth Parliament works

The UYP functions like a traditional parliament—including having a Speaker, Ministers, and Members—but it is not a political organisation. As the representatives are all members from different local CSOs, the UYP ensures an inclusive platform for building consensus on the development needs of youth and engaging decision makers in meeting those needs. The UYP acknowledges the heterogeneity of youth by devoting specific attention to unique sub-groups such as the disabled and reaching out to villages that have traditionally been shunned by the government. Topics addressed vary from social development issues to general governance at the County and national levels. Through twice-monthly parliamentary sessions, UYP members: raise and debate County- and national-level governance issues that affect the youth and general community; analyse, critique and appraise development processes and priorities for the community; and establish an advocacy framework for gaining government commitment to meeting the needs of young people.

## Amref's collaboration with the Ugunja Youth Parliament

The UYP functioned inconsistently during its first five years. Since 2017, Amref Health Africa (Amref) has been instrumental in helping the UYP solidify its identity as an advocacy network by providing

training in skills such as parliamentary procedures, budget advocacy, and other social accountability strategies. A key result of this support was UYP's development and implementation of standard operating procedures in 2018. Amref also provides funding and assistance for UYP events like community forums.



*With support from Amref to strengthen its core advocacy tactics and parliamentary functions, the Ugunja Youth Parliament is helping make youth engagement a permanent part of governance in Kenya's Siaya County.*

<sup>1</sup> KNBS, 2018

<sup>2</sup> The Kenya Constitution of 2010 defines youth as those aged between 18 and 34 years old.

<sup>3</sup> KDHS, 2014

<sup>4</sup> National AIDS Control Council, 2018

<sup>5</sup> The County Assembly is in charge of budget making, oversight over the County government, law making for the County and representation of the will of voters of the whole County.





## Creating a youth movement

The UYP is an **inclusive social accountability** platform that has formalised **relationships with decision makers**, enabling...

...youth to influence **policy development and budget allocation**, and leading to...

...improved **service delivery** for young people.

# From movement to impact: securing budget and support for youth-centred service delivery

With support from Amref, the UYP managed to bridge the gap between missing citizen's participation in mainstream development processes and the voice and needs in their communities. Gaining the recognition from important decision-making bodies has led the UYP to celebrate important successes such as budget allocation for youth-centred health services.

The following sequence of activities and results laid the foundation for its successes.

## Improved relationship with decision makers and communities

When the UYP started in 2009, the initiative met with fierce opposition from the local leaders of Ugenya Constituency. UYP has taken time to acknowledge and document the challenges that they have faced along the way, such as being mistaken for a political organisation rather than a social accountability platform. UYP has held several debates with decision makers, and the County Assembly<sup>5</sup> now sees plenty of opportunities for expanding the space for youth participation in governance. For example, youth have been involved in coordinating community forums to increase participation; improving community awareness and visibility on UYP's exact roles and mandates; and supporting the capacity enhancement of its young citizens.

*"We had no good relations with policymakers. The Youth Parliament has filled that gap."*

Judy Akinyi, UYP Minister for Social Development

## Data-driven debates

The UYP made addressing rising rates of unwanted pregnancies and HIV infections among teens a priority in 2018. The mock Parliament first led community debates to identify the main factors influencing these increasing rates and analysed County budgets to determine the

priority of local sexual and reproductive health programs for young people. Presenting the resulting evidence at a November 2018 stakeholders' forum, the UYP gained community buy-in for activities to combat alcohol and drug abuse, a prevailing threat to youth sexual health and rights.

*"The County government of Siaya and other stakeholders need to capture the real data and real information and the real voices that come from young people so they use that to do youth programming implementation without cascading from up-to-down."*

Daniel Abongo, UYP Minister of Health

## Translating advocacy into action

In response to the evidence-based debates, Siaya County leadership included the UYP in proceedings to develop policies, including the most recent County Integrated Development Plan, County Fiscal Strategy Paper, and County Budget. Notably, a policy memorandum issued by the UYP became the basis for allocations in the Siaya County budget for 2019/2020. Thanks to the policy memorandum, the allocations increased the number of local youth friendly health centres there from 5 to 35, added 25 new medical personnel, and reinforced reproductive health commodity supply management.



## Influencing policies and decision-making

The inclusivity of community members in UYP meetings, and the UYP acting as a link between the community and government, helped in changing the perception towards meaningful youth engagement. Many local development committees in Siaya County are now extending participation to the UYP. These include recent appointments of UYP members to the Ugunja Sub County Gender and Social Services Committee and the Project Management Committee of Ambira Sub-County Hospital's new modern maternity project. The UYP has been involved in the development of health policies such as Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health legislative proposal; the Family Planning Costed Implementation Plan; and the Adolescent, Youth Sexual Reproductive Policy Framework which was launched in September 2019.

## Scaling up inclusive social accountability

Ugunja Youth Parliament continues to attract recognition as an effective platform for youth engagement with various leaders. As of January 2020, it has helped form two more youth parliaments in neighbouring sub-counties, with two more on the way and an additional group starting up in another County.

*"All of these things have been through the effort of ensuring that the young people in this County have a joint voice over their issues."*

Enock Chiteri, UYP Speaker of the Parliament

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# Making sure the inclusive social accountability model remains truly inclusive

The Ugunja Youth Parliament is proof that youth, whose voices have generally been ignored in governance, elevates community participation and fosters an inclusive social accountability mechanism in Siyaja County. This calls for constant engagement and capacity building of the duty bearers to respond to a society that is increasingly becoming sensitive to its health care needs; needs that can only be achieved through wider replication of this initiative in other communities.

## Nothing for Youth Without Youth

Throughout the Health Systems Advocacy Partnership, which runs from 2016 until 2021, Amref supports UYP through small grants and mentorship. Anchoring the UYP into local structures with other CSOs and the County Governments is part of these efforts. At the same time, continued long-term support will be crucial for the Youth Parliament to sustain its work.

To support youth advocacy through mock Parliaments, the following recommendations are formulated for interested parties, local governments and stakeholders:

1. County Governments to include the parliaments' activities in the Annual Costed Work Plans as well as Costed Integrated Development Plan.
2. Training of Trainers to continue the development of the skills of upcoming youth parliaments.
3. Youth-led civil society to build Alliances and work together to broaden the support base.
4. Academic programs that cultivate students who are well-versed in social development and Universal Health Coverage.
5. Documentation and celebration of best practices to inspire the replication of the UYP as model for inclusive social accountability.



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