

# Building Youth Agency?

A study of youth-led formations in East Africa,  
South America and South Asia

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# Content

Introduction .....	3
Methodology .....	3
Forms of youth-led organisations .....	4
Groups founded on self-help principles .....	4
Loose cultural groups .....	5
Out-reach organisations .....	5
Mobilisation networks.....	6
Characteristics of youth-led formations .....	6
Initiation of a youth-led formation .....	6
The drivers of youth-led formations .....	6
Lifelines of youth formations.....	9
Membership and leadership .....	10
Youth agency .....	10
Challenges to youth agency .....	11
Support.....	12
Concluding remarks and recommendations .....	14
Promising practices for promoting youth agency.....	14
Recommendations for supporting youth-led formations .....	15
References.....	17
Annex A: List of organisations and people interviewed .....	18
Annex B: Interview guide .....	23

# Introduction

Although the role of youth in development and social change has been on the international development agenda for the past decade, and the category of youth, especially African youth, has received a lot of research attention<sup>1</sup>, research into youth-led organisations in development countries seem rather limited. Thus, research on youth participation in development in general focuses on youth participation in adult-led projects and initiatives<sup>2</sup>, and research on youth agency<sup>3</sup> has not given much attention to the organisational aspects of youth-led formations<sup>4</sup>.

This report attempts to compile information on contemporary forms of children and youth formations in Africa, South America and Asia with the aim of shedding light on the characteristics and values of such formations and the ways they might add to young people's agency. The notion of formations is used to refer to youth-led structures, whether they are formal organisations, movements, networks or loose groups.

## Methodology

The report is based on information gathered through semi-structured interviews with representatives of child and youth-led formations in two countries in South America (Peru and Bolivia), one country in South Asia (Bangladesh) and three countries in East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania).

The objectives of the study were:

- To generate and document knowledge on contemporary forms of youth organisations with the aim to assess their added value in regard to promoting and supporting children's/young people's agency.
- To assess to which extent the identified examples are examples of promising practise/lessons learned or best practise which can be replicated – and in the case of replication: to identify the support required by INGOs/NGOs.

Formations were selected randomly but based on the following selection criteria:

- The formations chosen should be genuinely child/youth initiated and driven.
- The formations should be autonomous e.g. not a child/youth affiliate of a formal organisation.
- Representation of both rural and urban formations

Only two formations interviewed identify themselves as child organisations (the ones in Bangladesh) while the rest identify as youth organisations. In the rest of this report, we will thus refer to youth rather than children, but this category encompasses the age group from young teenagers (12-15 years of age) to young adults in their 20es and early 30es.

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<sup>1</sup> Burgess 2005

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Wamucii 2007, Cahill & Hart 2007.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. Honwana, & De Boeck 2005, Christiansen et al. 2006

<sup>4</sup> The few researches focusing on youth-led organisations identified include Cordeiro's study of a youth network in Recife, Brazil (2006), and Gore and Pratten's study of youth-led identity-based social movements in Nigeria (2003).

17 interviews were carried out, 8 done in person and 9 over telephone<sup>5</sup>. Respondents included coordinators of organisations (some of them founding members), staff members and ordinary members of the youth formations.

Interviews in South Asia (Bangladesh) were carried out by Lotte Ladegaard in March 2009, interviews in South America (Bolivia and Peru) by Niels Martiny and Linda Mari Tidemann Sandnes in December 2009-January 2010, and interviews in East Africa (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) by Nanna Jordt Jørgensen in December 2009-January 2010. This report has been compiled by Nanna Jordt Jørgensen with inputs from the other consultants.

## Forms of youth-led organisations

While contemporary research has indicated that in general forms of organisation have become more fluid, less stable, more flexible, and more cause and campaign led, only a few organisational formations of this type have been identified among the youth formations in the countries in question. The majority of the formations interviewed are thus founded on or aiming to develop rather traditional, fixed, hierarchical organisational structures. One reason for this could be that smaller fluid formations might be more difficult to identify and contact than formal organisations. There are indications that fluid formations are more common in South Asia and South America than in East Africa. In East Africa, youth formations often choose to formalise as a deliberate strategy to gain recognition and accept by the community, authorities and potential donors. However, fluid organisational forms involving youth still do exist, but they do not always have a clear youth identity.

Below is a suggestion for dividing the organisations interviewed into four different organisational forms. The forms should not be seen as fixed classifications, but rather as analytical categories with somewhat blurred borders, allowing us to see some similarities and differences between formations with different profiles and histories, which have developed in very different social and political contexts, and are continuously developing. Organisations might fit into more than one category or be in the process of moving from one of the suggested forms into another.

### **Groups founded on self-help principles**

Groups founded on self-help principles consist of youth, who have decided to come together to address a common, self-experienced challenge, often related to a position of marginality. The main characteristic of this organisational form is that the founders and drivers have lived the same experiences as the target group. They usually start up as informal groups but might develop into more formal organisations which are reaching out to other youth in similar situations.

*AAUPI, Asociación Indígena de Estudiantes Universitarios de la Amazonia Peruana*, is a Peruvian organisation started by indigenous Indian students at the University in Lima with the aim of assisting each other and other Indian students in adapting economically, socially, culturally and academically to life in the capital. Similarly, another Peruvian organisation, *AIV, Asociación Indígena Inkas Vivientes*, was established by indigenous quechua-speaking students from Cuzco and Apurimac regions wanting to support each other in their studies and in responding to the poverty, racism and discrimination challenging their educational development. Both

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<sup>5</sup> See annex A for list and descriptions of organisations and interviewees and annex B for interview guide.

organisations have since their foundation developed to have a wider outreach than the group initially addressed.

Last, *Child Brigade* in Bangladesh is a child-led organisation established by a group of boys in Dhaka working on the streets, deprived of access to essential facilities like education, health services and protection against the police. In the beginning members of Child Brigade only focused on their own problems, but later they started reaching out to other children in similar situations, and now work in seven areas of Dhaka.

### **Loose cultural groups**

Cultural groups are usually formed on the basis of a common interest in popular or traditional cultural expressions and a wish to share skills and knowledge. Most often income-generation through performances is part of the activities of the group. While cultural groups might work on addressing social problems, cultural activities are the main feature of their work.

The *Breakdance Project* in Uganda is an example of a group of youth mobilised around popular cultural forms; breakdance and hip-hop. Other groups are *Christian Youth Outreach* in Uganda, a group of young people coming together to develop their talents in popular music as well as addressing community problems, and *Ngorongoro Arts Group* in Tanzania which is using traditional music, dance and drama to raise awareness on development issues. All 3 groups are initiated by a small group of founding members starting up some activities based on their own interests and skills, and through these attracting other youth. While the Breakdance Project is a rather unique formation in East Africa, which through informal organising is attracting several hundreds of youth of different backgrounds twice a week Kampala for youth-teaching-youth training sessions as well as reaching out to other youth in the country; small local cultural youth groups such as Ngorongoro Arts Group working with traditional cultural expressions seem to be fairly popular in the region, perhaps especially in Tanzania.

### **Out-reach organisations**

Out-reach organisations are formed by resourceful (often well educated) youth who want to do something for fellow youth or other community members in difficult situations or work with a problem facing young people or the community in general. Out-reach organisations are different from groups founded on self-help principles in that founders and drivers are not motivated by solving a self-experienced (personal) problem but by the wish to do something to improve community or society. Outreach organisations might start as informal organisations, but usually want to formalise in order to facilitate donor funding and other external cooperation.

The outreach organisations interviewed include *Espacio Cultural Creativo* and *Fundación Qhanawara*, both Bolivian organisations run by mostly older youth and implementing education programmes for children and youth; *AMDENA, Amigos de la Naturaleza* in Peru, a small group of youth working on nature protection; *Bhorer Alo* in Bangladesh, a child organisation of older children running a school in the slums for younger children; *Conflict Resolution by Youth, Uganda*, founded by a small group of educated young women and working with peace and conflict resolution among youth in Northern Uganda and Eastern Uganda; *Uganda Pioneers' Association*, a 20 years old youth organisation founded by youth wanting to work with cultural exchange and community support through work camps, and *Kibera Community Development Agenda* in Kenya established by group of youth in Kibera slums working through community media to spread information on social issues.

## **Mobilisation networks**

A last part of the organisations interviewed could be grouped together under the heading "mobilisation networks", although some of them would also fit under the category of outreach organisations. The main focus of these networks or organisations is mobilising youth to ensure their participation and involvement in decision-making.

*CEDA, Centre for Social Development and Governance and Youth Agenda* in Kenya are both formal youth organisations, but their way of working is through mobilising youth in rather independent networks or groups, empowering them to participate in political processes. *Bunge la Mwananchi*, also in Kenya, is an informal network of people mobilising around political questions in their local areas. It is the most fluid, flexible and campaign-led organisation identified, but does not identify as a youth formation, although 75% of the people involved can be categorised as youth.

## **Characteristics of youth-led formations**

### **Initiation of a youth-led formation**

Most formations interviewed have been initiated by one or a few resourceful (not necessarily economically) key persons with initiative and a personal motivation. The nature of this personal motivation might be related to personal hardship experiences coupled with a wish to improve the situation for fellow youth in similar situations; religious/moral motivations of doing good or addressing problems in the community; frustration over lack of possibilities for employment or education coupled with the hope that organising will bring about opportunities; frustration over lack of possibilities for influence for youth in community and society, or a push from outside (a suggestion or an opportunity necessitating starting up a group).

For the founding members, the formation often becomes a close part of their life and identity, and this keeps them motivated for continuing the activities. The founding members bring other people on board in the organisation. Most interviews were carried out with key people in the organisations, but a few included other members or volunteers. Those interviews indicate that for youth involving themselves in youth formations, the driving force is often focused on current or expected personal gains in terms of opportunities, experience and exposure, access to resources, network, or fun and recreation.

### **The drivers of youth-led formations**

Through the interviews, several 'drivers' for the continued running of a youth-led formation have been identified. These include:

- Responding to needs of members or target group

*"Lima is very different in terms of economy, social life and so on. So we talked to the university and private institutions to see if they could help us. But the university told us they would not help each of one of us to make it financially, but that we as a group could apply for help. So we formed AAUPI...in order to stand stronger as students."* (AAUPI)

*"I have a problem of schools fees. I need a promoter, I need someone to assist, and I was hoping that by joining the group I might get access to some assistance."* (Member of Christian Youth Outreach).

*"We started up this organisation because we saw that youth are marginalised and inadequately involved in governance and in managing public affairs." (CEDA)*

Most organisations interviewed brings out as a key point that their work is responding to important needs of young people, which other development actors (state or private) are not addressing. In self-help groups and to some degree in cultural groups, the need is directly linked to the situation of the members in the groups, and a big part of the youth involvement in those groups seem to be motivated by the actual or expected personal gains of the people involved (in terms of e.g. access to training or education, building one's CV or a getting a small income; anything that carries a hope for social mobility). Outreach organisations and mobilisation networks, on the other hand, are addressing needs of young people on a more general level.

- Identity

*"When we started Child Brigade we were having the same problems as our field members have today. Now we are in a very good position, and we want to create space for others to become like us, so that they can also work for others." (Child Brigade)*

*"In the Breakdance Project, we say, our motto is, 'everyone is a student and everyone is a teacher', everyone can teach and learn. Everyone work together, teach each other. New friendships are created. Underprivileged kids realise they have something to contribute." (Breakdance Project)*

Building up a common identity is important 'glue' for keeping a group together. Aspects of the group identity could be the sense of all having lived certain (often negative) experiences or problems and coming together to address the challenges; sharing a common interest in an issue or activity, or having build up a certain way of operating which is perceived to be unique by the group (as in the case of the Breakdance Project). In some formations, notably the mobilisation networks, a social indignation and the wish to take action against injustices and achieve social change are important aspects of the group identity. Coupled with the feeling of being stronger when standing together in a group, this becomes a driver for moving the formation forward.

For most youth formations, being young is an important aspect of the group identity, pointing both to a position of marginalisation in society but also to being more energetic, creative and dynamic than adults. The group identity is strengthened by the social ties and friendships developing between the members.

A number of the organisations interviewed stress the fact that their members are of different background (e.g. different ethnic groups, mixed gender, mixed social backgrounds, and mixed religions) as an important, positive aspect of their group identity. Says the representative from AAUPI, *"We all come from different places, but we work together....This is something that is even difficult for AIDSESP<sup>6</sup>".* Even in Christian Youth Outreach, which developed from a group of youth involved in a Born Again Church, the coordinator highlights the diversity of the membership in terms of religious background, *"Actually we are from different religions – Born Again Christians are the biggest number, but there are also Catholics, Muslims, Adventists, and Jehova's witnesses. We are also people from 5 different tribal groups. [...]In the beginning we were only Christians, that's why we called*

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<sup>6</sup> National indigenous (adult) organisation of Peru.

*ourselves Christian Youth Outreach. But other people started coming, and we don't want to leave anyone behind. They don't care about the name but about the things we are doing."*

- Recognition and appreciation

*"When you carry out activities, you see that you are adding value to the community. And people appreciate what you do." (KCODA)*

*"We want the communities to see the difference we can make as young people. We want them to trust us". (AIV)*

Recognition and appreciation from outside, and the wish for this recognition, seem to be an important driver for the formations and a factor strengthening group identity. The recognition might come from members of the organisation, the community, from other organisations, the authorities or from international organisations. Youth formations strive for recognition in relation to the work and identity of their organisation, but also more generally in relation to the efforts and position of young people. For many organisations, it is an aim to build capacity of youth for participation and leadership, and it is a continuous frustration that the capabilities of young people and their organisations receive little recognition.

- Access to resources and capacity building

*"We formed as a media organisation; we wanted to use radio and TV to give information. So we managed to get training by Shelter Forum and Kenya Community Media Network. This enabled us to start empowering people with information." (KCODA)*

Most groups and organisations need resources to keep their activities going, and the possibilities of accessing resources is thus usually determining the survival of a youth formation. Resources might stem from donor funds, member contributions, community contributions or an income generating activity. Related to the issue of access to resources, capacity building and training of key people in the formation is mentioned by many as a key driver for keeping an organisation going and ensuring its development. Capacity building is usually given by other organisations or accessed through networking, or in some cases done by resourceful people already in the organisation<sup>7</sup> or available in the community. KYDA in Uganda explains that volunteers of the organisation had their capacity built through participation in international work camps organised by Uganda Pioneers' Association (UPA) and through international volunteers placed in the organisation by UPA. AIV in Peru receives technical support from a teacher and development specialist who has assisted the organisation in getting in touch with relevant NGOs. Youth Agenda in Kenya involve smaller youth organisations and groups in their projects and activities, in this way building the capacity of those organisations for implementing activities. The Breakdance Project in Uganda has a contact to MS Uganda and had some of its members trained at MS leadership courses. The director explains that the project try to work through exchanging services with other organisations. *"They teach us something and we teach them something. It is balanced,"* he says.

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<sup>7</sup> In some cases, formations choose to set up advisory boards of older and more experienced people to advice them.

## **Lifelines of youth formations**

In one of the few studies on youth-led organisations identified, a case study of the youth-led *Network of Solidary Resistance* in Recife, Brazil, Cordeiro provides a description of the lifeline of the network, which might be comparable to the one of other youth-led formations<sup>8</sup>. The first step of organising happened when young restless or indignant individuals in Recife joined together in youth-led groups led by friendship and/or identity ties. Little by little groups developed into more formalised youth-led organisations. In order to strengthen their voice, the organisations joined in a youth-led network.

Among the organisations interviewed, most self-help groups and cultural groups have been started up by a small group of youth facing some common challenges and trying to address them together. In the process of the work, the members develop their own capacity, and in some case the groups evolve into more formal organisations addressing the problem on a more general level, assisting other children/youth in similar situations.

Out-reach organisations and mobilisation networks usually start up by a small group of youth with social indignation wanting to make a difference in the society. They commence with limited activities, but their vision is usually from the beginning to grow bigger, to formalise and get donor funds for large-scale activities.

In East Africa, many organisations have an interest in formalising in order to get recognition/accept by state, possibilities to grow, and opportunities for donor support and cooperation. Explains the coordinator of KCODA in Kenya, *"If you are not formal, you have a lot of disadvantages. You don't get support, you cannot go into partnerships. If you are formal, you are able to get support from the government, the community and donors."* In the East African countries, organisations can choose to register as CBOs (with a limited area of operation) at district level, and this is usually a reasonably easy process, while registering as a national NGO is a longer and more bureaucratic process.

Out of the 3 formations categorised as mobilisation networks identified in Kenya, two of them are formally registered as NGOs, while the last one, Bunge la Mwananchi, has deliberately chosen not to register. The informal spokesperson of the movement explains, *"If you register, you have to set up a hierarchical structure, and in that way you make owners of the organisation. This weakens people's involvement. There is a stronger ownership of an informal organisation, and you allow new leadership to spring up."*

In South America, specifically in Peru and Bolivia, registration of an organisation is often a difficult and bureaucratic process. In Peru, indigenous organisations (perhaps especially if working on advocacy issues) face a lot of suspicion from central authorities and thus might have difficulties in getting a formal registration, while foundations and outreach-organisations face less suspicion but might still struggle with the bureaucracy. Bigger organisations still attempt to register, but more loosely organised groups often choose not to, as the gains are rather small.

In Bangladesh, it is impossible to register an organisation and open a bank account if you are below 18 years of age. As it is illegal to receive funds from donors without a bank account, child organisations in need of donor funds are forced to cooperate with an adult partner organisation, unless they are able to manage completely without donor funds.

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<sup>8</sup> Cordeiro 2006

## Membership and leadership

A few organisations in South America draw their membership from on one ethnic (indigenous) group, which is marginalised in the society, but all other formations interviewed have mixed membership in terms of ethnicity, religion and gender. The definition of membership varies quite a bit from organisation to organisation. In some cases, members are simply the people involved in the activities of the organisation, in others members have to register and pay a membership fee. One organisation, Youth Agenda in Kenya has chosen to work with a rather broad membership definition, *"We have individual members, but there is no membership fee. If you are between 15-35 years you are automatically a member."* He continues, *"To some donors this is a challenge, they ask how we account back to the members."* The quotation indicates that formal membership is more often a donor expectation/demand and a question of formal legitimacy than a real felt need for the formations.

Formal, registered organisations usually have elected leadership and formal organisational structures. In informal organisations, often the founding members are the drivers and catalysers for activities. Some of those (at times rather charismatic) leaders succeed in giving out responsibilities; in other cases leadership is centred on a few persons.

The Breakdance Project in Uganda, Bunge la Mwananchi in Kenya, and Child Brigade in Bangladesh are the only formations identified which are deliberately working with more fluid organisational and leadership structures. In the Breakdance project, the members agree on making certain people responsible for different tasks, but election processes are not formalised, and there are no titles. In Bunge la Mwananchi each local platforms elect their leaders according to their own rules, and there is no formal election of national coordinators. *"As a leader, you have to deliver, if you don't deliver, people move on. It gives accountability,"* explains the informal spokesperson. Child Brigade has developed its own organisational structure. 90 children who are involved in carrying out tasks in the organisations are regarded as the decision makers and named General Members. A Core Group consisting of 10 members is implementing day to day tasks. In order to raise a new generation of Core Group members, Child Brigade has established a Shadow Group of six younger children, who have progressed from being General Members, and who are now learning how to run the organisation and carry out the activities. When a child turns 18, he or she becomes an Advisor to Child Brigade.

## Youth agency

Clearly, most youth involved in youth-led organisations feel that this type of participation offers them possibilities for influence which they would not otherwise have had.

In relation to other civil society organisations, many of them highlight that it is difficult for young people to get a say in 'adult' organisations, some pointing to the fact that those organisations are bigger and more professionalised with less openings for new people, others to a culturally based lack of confidence in young people's competences. For instance, AAUPI in Peru points out that it is difficult for youth to get their voices heard in the 'adult' indigenous organisations, and the relations between the youth and adult organisations are marked by mistrust: *"We think they are corrupt and they think we want to steal their jobs"*. Youth-led organisations, even when formalised, often work in a more flexible and open way

than adult organisations, and thus offer youth more possibilities for influence and for developing activities at their own speed.

In relation to getting a say in community and society, several interviewees emphasise that while in the age-hierarchical societies they are part of, the opinions of individual youth are often ignored by adults and decision-makers, youth organised in groups or organisations usually have a greater chance to get listened to. Some organisations work directly with advocacy for youth participation, trying to open up more space for the voice of the youth in e.g. government structures and committees. Most organisations acknowledge the importance of running advocacy-minded activities, but several don't have the resources for this type of work. In some cases, organisations address national advocacy issues through joining larger networks of youth organisations.

In most of the countries covered by this study, opportunities for youth agency in community and society have increased in recent years<sup>9</sup>. While youth-led advocacy might have played a role in this, the increasing donor interest in child and youth participation is probably a strong driver of this.

On a more individual level, the youth point out that being part of a youth-led group brings about a feeling of belonging and identity which is building young people's self-esteem and make them feel empowered. Further, through activities of the youth led formations, youth gain exposure, experiences, skills and capacity, enabling them to take up leadership in other settings and to take responsibility in relation to their own lives. According to a staff member of Youth Agenda in Kenya, *"One of our success stories is to get young people in leadership. Many people who passed through Youth Agenda are now in high positions, e.g. as politicians or local leaders."*

### **Challenges to youth agency**

Challenges to building up young people's agency in youth-led organisations include socio-cultural barriers to young people's involvement and participation in organisations (the individual level), as well as challenges related to the running of a youth organisation (the organisational level).

- **Barriers to youth participation**

Several respondents mention young people's mobility as a barrier to youth participation in organisational structures. Youth involve themselves in organisational work if they are at the right place at the right time, but if other, more promising opportunities turn up (usually in terms of work or other income generating strategies), they move on. Say staff members and volunteers from Uganda Pioneers' Association, *"Our membership keeps changing. We train people, and then they leave. We cannot sustain them."* Organisations further complain that some youth have too high expectations to the gains of involving in an organisation and quickly get disappointed and disappear if their demands in relation to the benefits of participation or their expectations in terms of immediate change of either their life situation or developments in the community are not met.

Other challenges to youth participation stem from different socio-cultural barriers to participation. In Uganda, several interviewees point out that traditionally authoritative, patriarchal and hierarchical values in especially the rural areas hinder

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<sup>9</sup> For instance, in Bangladesh children and youth are now involved in alternative CRC-reporting to the UN, and in Kenya, youth organisations have been heard in relation to the public hearing on the new draft constitution.

youth in getting a voice in decision making, even if they are organised. Staff members from CRY Uganda, say, *"In some regions, a young person cannot stand up and talk. If you stand up at a community meeting, they don't listen to you as a young person. You get embarrassed. They kill the participation. The attitude is stronger in rural areas than in the urban areas. Culture shapes people's attitudes a lot."* Young women's participation is in particular hampered by such cultural or religious conceptions to women's roles; and coupled with low education levels and heavy domestic workloads this constitute a serious challenge to young women's participation, especially in rural areas. In Uganda, a representative of a network of women's organisations<sup>10</sup> points out that young women are only considered to be youth until marriage or pregnancy, which often happens at a rather early age, and after that they move into the category of married women and are thus seldom targeted by youth organisations. On the other hand, women groups and organisations are usually dominated by elder women. This situation leaves little space for young women's involvement in civil society organisations. Similarly, in Bangladesh child marriages comprise a barrier to the involvement of girls in organisational activities.

- Organisational challenges

Several challenges are hindering the organisations interviewed in getting the influence in society which they would wish for. One mentioned by almost all interviewees is related to lack of resources, making it difficult to adequately reach out and follow up, and to sustain the key people working in the organisations. Says the coordinator of CEDA in Kenya, *"At the programme level, the biggest challenge is funding, which we need to be able to reach out to the constituencies, develop our activities and follow up on the work already done. Lack of funding is threatening the continuity of the network and the ability to hold on to people with expertise."* Another challenge relates to organisational conflicts, either internal ones deriving most often from power struggles related to leadership, or external ones with other youth organisations or adult organisations. Conflicts with adult organisations are often seen to be linked with the lack of recognition of young people's role in development. *"It is difficult to be recognised as a youth organisation. People think that it is just a stage, you will move out of it and become an adult,"* says a staff member of Youth Agenda in Kenya. Another organisation in Kenya, Bunge la Mwananchi, is driven mostly by youth, but avoids to be labelled a youth organisation. According to the spokesperson, *"Many politicians in their rhetoric's go against young people and youth mobilisation, which might be associated with anarchy etc. We are a youth-driven initiative, but we are insisting on synthesising the issues of the entire community in our agenda. Youth cannot achieve their agenda on their own, so it is important not to be seen as a threat."*

## Support

Support to youth organisations might come from government authorities, from international donor organisations or from other civil society organisations in the country.

In South America relationships with national institutions and authorities are generally weak. AIV is the most successful organisation in terms of government relations, cooperating with the local municipality and the national tourism agency.

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<sup>10</sup> The director of NAWOU, National Association for Women Organisations in Uganda, interviewed in connection with a study of youth organisations in Uganda carried out for the Danish Youth Council, DUF.

Several of the organisations interviewed receive financial support from international donors, including Ibis and Axis.

In East Africa, the bigger formal organisations in general have good cooperation with authorities, and the smaller ones to a lesser degree. The bigger organisations receive donor funds from international donors, while a number of the smaller ones have received funds for implementation of activities channelled through bigger organisations. Most organisations network with other ones either through youth organisation networks or through more informal connections. Only one organisation, Bunge la Mwananchi in Kenya, mentions explicit bad relationships with authorities/power holders, caused by the political nature of the work of the organisation.

In Bangladesh, the two child organisations interviewed both had support through Save the Children Sweden/Denmark, but are wary of being too dependent on outside support. *"It's MY organisation – it does not belong to some adult,"* says a member of Child Brigade. While the children in both organisations appreciate the funding from Save the Children, too much adult influence is seen as a serious threat. Bhorer Alo experienced being let down by adults when their parent organisation lost its funding, and in general most of the children involved in the organisations have tried to be let down by adults, including adult organisations.

A number of other organisations interviewed have critical reflections on receiving donor funds. While most of the organisations are interested in accessing funds, several complain that donor conditions are too inflexible and not fitting the modus operandi of smaller youth organisation. A staff member from CRY Uganda explains, *"Donors have unrealistic demands for the local situation. Working in northern Uganda with young volunteers, it is difficult for us to get in-voices and receipts on all small expenses or to get tenders"*. Child Brigade in Bangladesh often has to bribe the police if their friends are not to spend months in jail or detention centres, but are not allowed to use the financial support from Save the Children Sweden-Denmark for this purpose<sup>11</sup>.

Apart from the problems of living up to donor conditions, others point to the danger of being directed too much by the priorities of donors. A staff member from Youth Agenda in Kenya says, *"In relation to donors, it is a challenge that you have to follow their priorities, you might not be able to go according to your own strategic plan."* Only very few organisations however decide to say no to donor funds, but it seems that both the Breakdance Project in Uganda and Bunge la Mwananchi would go rather far to avoid donor dependency. The director of the Breakdance Project explains, *"We don't get real funding from anyone. First it wasn't by choice, but now I see it is important. Many youth-led organisations collapse because of funds, personal interest. We show that money is not the important thing. People are proud of what we have done here. We are different from other organisations"*. The informal spokesperson of Bunge la Mwananchi adds, *"We don't want to have a lot of funding. In Kenya, a challenge to our sense of development is that if people know an organisation has money, they attend meetings because of this."*

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<sup>11</sup> However, through income generating activities the organisation have access to other resources which might be used in such incidences.

## Concluding remarks and recommendations

### **Promising practices for promoting youth agency.**

Although this study does not constitute a thorough analysis of the youth-led formations identified, enough information has been collected to give strong indications that youth-led formations add value in regard to promoting and supporting young people's agency. As described in the chapter on youth agency, youth-led formations offer space for youth involvement in organisational structures; they strengthen the voice of youth in society and community, and build young people's confidence and capacity for taking action. While the data gathered does not provide enough evidence to offer comprehensive conclusions, they do present relevant indications of promising practices for promoting youth agency, which could be a relevant starting point for further research.

- Promising practices for creating space for broad involvement of youth in organisational structures and decision making processes

While all youth formations offer more possibilities for youth involvement in organisational structures and organisational decision making than adult civil society organisations, the information gathered indicate that youth formations with open organisational structures (such as the Breakdance Project, Bunge la Mwananchi and Child Brigade) which explicitly value young people's own resources and capabilities, in particular have potential for creating broad involvement of youth in organisational decision making.

Youth Agenda in Kenya has a more traditional organisational structure, but is using new technology (internet and mobile phones) for communication and mobilisation of youth out of Nairobi. SMSes have been used extensively in Kenya for mobilisation purposes (for instance in relation to reporting on incidences of post-election violence in 2008) and seem to have a potential for creating new types of fluid networks between youth in different locations.

- Promising practices for strengthening voice of children and youth in community  
Information from the interviews indicate that youth formations succeed in strengthening the voice of children and youth in the local community when they run projects which are recognised, respected and seen as adding value to the community by adults. One example is AIV in Peru, which has started a project on sustainable tourism, creating interest in the local community and jobs for young people. Through the project, the group has earned respect from adults and this has helped strengthening the voice of the young quechua-Indians who face double discrimination based on their ethnic origins and their age.

Another successful way of strengthening the voice of youth in the community is creating local platforms or structures where youth can voice their opinions. For instance, in the local platforms of Bunge la Mwananchi youth find a place and possibility for involving themselves in public debates, and in CEDA's constituency networks, youth establish structures which enable them to voice their opinions in community discussions. Last, some organisations have been successful in building the capacity of youth for making use of already existing formal structures for youth participation (which often only exist on paper). In this way, CEDA has ensured that youth are participating in Community Development Fund Committees (distributing funds for local level projects), and in Uganda youth organisations try to empower and make use of youth representatives in local government structures.

- Promising practices for strengthening the voice of children and youth in society  
Networking seems to be one of most effective way of strengthening the voice of youth in society on a more general level. When youth formations join together to

ensure that they represent the voices of a diverse group of young people (i.e. both rural and urban youth of diverse backgrounds in terms of education, religion, ethnicity and gender), they are sometimes successful in influencing policies and political decisions. Examples are Youth Agenda in Kenya, youth organisation networks in Uganda which draw their membership from some of the formations interviewed, and networks of children and youth in Bangladesh involved in producing their own alternative CRC report to the UN.

Another way of strengthening the voice of youth in society mentioned by several interviewees is building up the capacity of individual youth for leadership through leadership training, resulting in more young leaders in society, as older trained youth move on to new challenges outside of the organisations.

- Promising practices for building young people's confidence and capacity  
Building young people's confidence and capacity is a necessary background for strengthening their agency. In general, simply being involved in a youth organisation is usually building capacity, but it seems that open organisations such as the Breakdance Project, which offer possibilities for direct involvement in both activities and governance and divide responsibilities between many people, are in particular successful in this task.

Further, accessing new skills is mentioned by several interviewees as an important way of building capacity and confidence. Those could be technical skills as in the case of KCODA's community journalists or KYDA's vocational training of young mothers, or it could be leadership and participation skills.

### **Recommendations for supporting youth-led formations**

Supporting youth-led formations means supporting young people's own initiatives, and the starting point should thus be respecting and understanding the specific situation, resources, needs and priorities of the formation and the context of the work situation, before deciding on the type of support. This study points to three overall forms of support which could be considered.

- Supporting youth formations with capacity building and organisational development

Most youth-led formations, except the oldest and most professional ones, mention the need for support to developing their organisations and building the capacity of key people. As young people they often have limited experience with organisational work and lack the tools for running and developing organisation and programmes.

To avoid feelings of disempowerment, capacity building support should as much as possible build on and respect the existing knowledge and strengths of youth organisations. Methods to consider could be capacity building through organisational exchange and youth-training-youth workshops in which youth from different organisations train each other (with external inputs brought in where necessary). Further, assistance to networking and information sharing offering exposure and inspiration might kick off other types of youth-driven capacity building processes.

While capacity building activities should of course address the organisational needs of the formation, it is important to acknowledge that capacity building is also a motivation for the individual youth involved in the formation, and that the experience of personal gains in terms of capacity building is a driver for the development of the activities of the formation.

Support to organisational development should be open to alternative forms of organisational set-ups and encourage/support flexible and inclusive decision making

structures, while bureaucratic set-ups and stiff structures should be avoided. New technology could be instrumental in building up new ways of organising and making decisions. When working with organisational development it should be considered how structures can support and strengthen the inclusive identity, which seems to be prevalent in most youth formations.

- Supporting youth formations financially

Although several formations point to the dangers of donor support, at the same time it is clear that without financial resources, only very few formations are able to sustain their activities.

The need for financial resources could be addressed in different ways according to the structure, capacity and objectives of the organisation. In some cases project funding might work well, but in smaller organisations minor activity grants would probably be a better solution. If the capacity for handling funds is too low, financial support could go through network organisations. Other options are building the capacity of youth formations to mobilise resources locally or to design projects and write proposals.

As much as possible, it should be avoided to push youth formations in certain directions by funding conditions. If interests and expectations of donor and youth formation are too different, rather than asking the youth formation to change priorities or organisational structures, the formation should be assisted in looking for other donor options or offered other types of support than financial support.

- Supporting youth in building up their position in community and society

The low socio-cultural status of young people and lack of recognition of youth initiatives has been pointed out by interviewees in this study to be a factor severely holding back young people's agency. Addressing this issue calls both for support and capacity building of youth formations, but also for effective advocacy initiatives at local and national level.

Local level advocacy could include assisting youth formations in setting up or filling in structures for youth participation in local level decision making (or, alternatively, inclusive platforms for broad community participation); supporting youth formations in implementing concrete (service oriented) activities which help ensure their recognition in the local community, and assisting youth formations in cooperating with or creating their own local media in order to attract attention to and thereby recognition of their activities.

National level advocacy calls for effective and inclusive networks and alliances between youth organisations (involving e.g. both rural and urban youth formations). Youth formations should thus be supported in networking, and in carrying out relevant advocacy activities through their networks, be it campaigns, awareness activities or participation in policy formulation processes.

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## Annex A: List of organisations and people interviewed

### Bangladesh

#### **Child Brigade**

Nargis, Shofique, Salahuddin, Tania og Raju, members of Child Brigade  
Rumi Sk. Rahmat Ullah, contact person in Save the Children Denmark-Sweden

Child Brigade was one of the first child-led organisations to be established in Bangladesh. A group of boys working on the streets in 1994 met in a park and found that they all were deprived of access to essential facilities like education, health services and protection against the police. Assisted by an adult from Save the Children Sweden the boys decided to unite to solve their problems while at the same time generate income.

The activities of Child Brigade include street based education given by older members to younger children, assistance to get access health services, theatre for awareness raising about the working street children's problems towards their communities, parents and friends, and monitoring when a street child is detained by the police. Child Brigade provides its services in seven areas of Dhaka city. Two-three children are overall responsible for each area. 90 General Members are regarded as decision makers who also help carry out tasks.

#### **Bhorer Alo**

Babu, Russel, Rony, Rahan, Ershad og Bijoy, members of Bhorer Alo  
Sabrina Karim Murshed, contact person in Save the Children Sweden-Denmark

Bhorer Alo was initiated in 2003 in Dhaka on the remains of the children's organisation Children's Congress established by Save the Children Denmark's partner organisation Resource Bangladesh. When the partner organisation ran out of funding, Children's Congress also lost its support in terms of capacity building, adult support and funding. However, simply shutting down their organisation was not what a group of the children wanted, and Bhorer Alo saw the light of day. The main activity of Bhorer Alo is running a small tin shed school in a slum area in Dhaka where older children provide basic education for younger children. Bhorer Alo has recently managed to open yet another school in another slum, and some children are involved in theatre. The organisation has an elected Executive Committee of 12 children who are overall responsible for running the organisation for two years at a time. These children have to be at least 12 years of age and maximum 18.

## Bolivia

### **Espacio Cultural Creativo**

Miguelangel Estellano

Espacio Cultural works from the city of La Paz, Bolivia. Their main focus is to strengthen opportunities for children and youth through innovation, creativity and participation. Their target group consists of children and youth aged 3-15 years. Espacio Cultural wishes to reach those children and youth who do not have opportunities to express themselves creatively – such as street children/youth and children from poor families in La Paz' El Alto district. The organisation was established in 1996 and is run mainly by young volunteers.

### **Fundación Qhanawara, [www.qhanawara.org](http://www.qhanawara.org)**

Ulrika Nilsson, coordinator

Qhanawara runs an educational centre in the Los Liros district of El Alto – an impoverished slum city adjacent to the capital of La Paz. Los Liros has very high rates of poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and pollution. The founders of Qhanawara – all of themselves young people from more affluent districts of La Paz – wants to promote education, innovation and leadership among children and young people of Los Liros. Furthermore they wish to work directly with the community through health projects.

## Kenya

### **Bunge la Mwananchi, [www.bungelamwananchi.org](http://www.bungelamwananchi.org)**

George Nyongesa, informal spokesperson

Bunge la Mwananchi started as an informal movement of people in Nairobi coming together to discuss and protest against political issues during the regime of President Daniel Arap Moi. In 2003 when the government in Kenya changed, the gatherings started to attract more people and became known as Bunge la Mwananchi (people's parliament), and the idea started to spread to other localities in Kenya. Bunge la Mwananchi today consists of community platforms in all parts of Kenya with their own independent leadership, who are sharing information with each other through a web-site, informal communication channels and annual meetings. The platforms address socio-economic and political issues in their local area and nationally through campaigns and demonstrations.

### **Centre for Social Development and Governance, CEDA**

Robert Njenga, coordinator

CEDA was started in 2008 by four youth (3 men and 1 woman of different ethnic background) who wanted to address the marginalisation and inadequate involvement of youth in governance issues. The organisation is based in Nakuru and works in 10 constituencies in the Rift Valley Region by setting up networks at ward and constituency level. CEDA carried out a number of activities with funds administered by larger organisations in the aftermath of the post-election violence in 2008, but now lacks funding for its programmes, which focus on building capacity of youth and women for active participation in governance, human rights

monitoring, lobbying and advocacy, information sharing and social audits of public expenditure.

**Kibera Community Development Agenda, KCODA**

Julius Ayoma, Programmes Coordinator

KCODA was formed in 2002 by young people in Kibera (a large slum in Nairobi) of mixed ethnic origin who lacked employment and wanted to do something about the problems in slum. The organisation registered as a CBO and works on community media, peace building, and good governance, and is currently a partner of MS Kenya.

**Youth Agenda, [www.youthagenda.org](http://www.youthagenda.org)**

Eustace Kinyua, head of research department

Youth Agenda was started in 1996 by university students in Nairobi of mixed gender and ethnic backgrounds. During the regime of President Daniel Arap Moi it was difficult to register as a youth organisation and Youth Agenda thus opted to be hosted under another organisation, Clarion. In 2002 with the introduction of multi-partism in Kenya, it became easier to register, and the organisation got its own identity.

Youth Agenda has both individual members and coordinates a network of local youth groups in all parts of the country. It runs four programmes: Democracy and governance, Policy research and publications, Leadership training development and support, and Youth sector support. Most activities are funded by international donors.

## Peru

**Amigos de la Naturaleza (AMDENA), [www.amigosdelanaturaleza.net](http://www.amigosdelanaturaleza.net)**

Juan Carlos Yucra, coordinator

AMDENA focuses mainly on conservation of environment and nature. They wish through their work to focus on sustainable use of resources and nature. AMDENA as a group consists mainly of youth living in the Villa El Salvador district. Villa El Salvador is a huge, but very poor and marginalised district of Lima, Peru. They offer workshops on ecology, environment and resources. As a community group they also offer beach cleanings of the nearby and polluted beaches of southern Lima.

**Asociación Indígena Inkas Vivientes, AIV**

Miluska Mendoza

AIV works for and is formed by indigenous quechua-speaking students from Cuzco and Apurimac regions. The organisation seeks funding and academic advice for students from impoverished rural communities. It was started by a group of high school students wanting to pursue further academic studies in Cuzco, but facing overwhelming challenges in terms of economy, academic level and discrimination towards indigenous peoples. Now, Inkas Vivientes is also trying to be more present in the students' own indigenous communities with a sustainable tourism project. This project is also to be copied to other regions of Peru.

**Asociación Indígena de Estudiantes Universitarios de la Amazonia Peruana, AAUPI, [www.aaupi.org](http://www.aaupi.org)**

Euclides Espejo Tiwi, chair person

AAUPI was formed by a small group of young indigenous students at Lima's San Marcos and La Cantuta universities. The students all come from indigenous communities of the Peruvian Amazon and present a range of different ethnic backgrounds such as Awajun, Ashaninka, Achuar etc. The group seeks to help indigenous students of the Amazon with the cultural, social, economic and academic challenges related to studying in Lima. The group seeks funding opportunities for poor students and works as a social network for students organising outings and events. AAUPI has a wish to further legalise their organisation in order to advocate for indigenous rights and as such advocate for better conditions for indigenous students from the Amazon.

## Tanzania

Ngorongoro Arts Group

Rama Yange, director

Ngorongoro Arts group was formed in 2007 in Karatu (northern Tanzania) by 15 youth, and now has 45 members. The main activity of the group is creating awareness on development issues through performance of traditional dances, drama and music. The group receives no support from outside, but sometimes members are paid for their performances.

## Uganda

**The Breakdance Project, [www.breakdanceuganda.dk](http://www.breakdanceuganda.dk), [www.youtube.com/amramzt](http://www.youtube.com/amramzt)**

Abrams Tekay, director and other members

The Breakdance Project was started in 2006 as an informal youth-teaching-youth programme in Kampala by a few youth involved in hip-hop, with a young man from a poor background as the driver. Since then the group has grown immensely in terms of numbers. Several hundreds of youth meet every Monday and Wednesday in a youth centre in Kampala, and a branch of the project is working from Gulu youth centre in Northern Uganda. Further, the group has trained youth groups all over the country. The Breakdance Project is not yet a registered organisation but is in the process of developing a constitution through a participatory and discussion based process. When the constitution has been finalised, the group will register as NGO.

**Christian Youth Outreach,**

<http://c-youthoutreach.cfsites.org/custom.php?pageid=13833>

Johnson Ssekate, Alex Kakooza, founding members + other members

Christian Youth Outreach was founded in 2008 by a group of young people in a small village in Wakiso district (close to Kampala) wanting to do something for themselves and their community. The group is not yet registered and does not have

a formal governance structure, but is planning to put this in place in 2009. 50 youth from Wamala village are involved in the activities of the group, which include music and dance performances and construction of a youth community centre (including a music studio). All funds come from local resource mobilisation and contributions by members.

**Conflict Resolution by Youth, CRY, [www.cryuganda.org](http://www.cryuganda.org)**

Staff members

CRY Uganda was founded in 1999 by a small group of young women who reacted to the many violent strikes organised in schools at the time and started up activities on peace and conflict resolution. CRY works in peace building, conflict resolution, gender equality and empowerment of women, youth development and participation in Northern Uganda and Eastern Uganda. The organisation is mobilising and organising youth in peace clubs and in peace camps, trainings, debate forums, and drama groups (forum theatre).

**Kawempe Youth Development Association, KYDA**

McBenard Otal Ssewava, Coordinator

KYDA was formed in 2001 as an informal group by youth from Kawempe (in the outskirts of Kampala) who had finished university and wanted to do something for their community. In 2005 KYDA was registered as CBO, and in 2007 as NGO. The organisation today has around 300 members, and a secretariat of 20 people, most of them volunteers. Focus areas include reproductive health, environment, drugs and substance abuse, vocational skills training, and local advocacy for child rights. Vocational training is carried out at the office, including vocational training targeted young mothers who have dropped out of school. Volunteers are further carrying out out-reach awareness activities in the surrounding community.

**Uganda Pioneers' Association, UPA, [www.upa.sphosting.com](http://www.upa.sphosting.com), [www.upa.typepad.com](http://www.upa.typepad.com)**

Samuel Waddimba, Executive Secretary and other staff members

UPA was founded in 1989 by a group of 8 young people who wanted to work on youth issues. UPA started as work camp organisation, and still coordinates work camps and is member of international work camp network, but it now also offers possibilities for mid-term volunteers and long-term volunteers. The organisation has more than 300 members, most of them youth, but some older people as well. The members are organised in branches (10 branches in 6 districts) which work rather independently on grass-root projects (e.g. on HIV, community development, agro-forestry etc.). The main funding of the organisation comes from fees from international volunteers and work camp participants. UPA was an MS Uganda partner for a number of years.

## Annex B: Interview guide

Organisation, formation, networks – any structure that complies with being child and youth led are eligible for the study. In the following the notion of formation hence covers a range of structures.

### **Characteristics of child and youth formations**

- What are the focus and characteristics (rel. to autonomy) of the child and youth formation in question? (basic data must be included such as age, gender, rural/urban, ethnicity etc.)
- How was the formation established – and which drivers keeps it running?

### **Structure and functions**

- How do the formation work in terms of structure, activities, leadership, finances (incl. external funding), and implementation?
- How does the formation evolve over time? And what is the life span/future?
- What are the two most significant successes and challenges, respectively?

### **Particular values**

- What are the advantages / disadvantages of autonomous child and youth formations? (in comparison with adult led organisations and/or formal youth organisations).

### **External relationship**

- What is the relationship with local, regional or national (according to the level of the formation/organisation) authorities e.g. government, police etc.?

### **Agency**

- Which features and assets does the formation bring about with regard to reinforcing the position of youth and children in the country in question?

### **Support**

- What kind of support does the formation receive from either adults and professionals (guidance, funding and/or training)?
- At which level of the formation (according to the scope of the formation) is support necessary?
- What kind of support (financial, training, education etc.) would facilitate the growth of the formation?