Creating Programs for Africa's Urban Youth: The Challenge of Marginalization

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Abstract

Urban youth constitute the vanguard of Africa's twinned demographic transformations. Sub-Saharan Africa's youth population growth rate is the highest of any world region (North Africa's rate is also high). In addition, Africa's urban growth rate is the world's highest. Taken together, the need to provide adequate, effective support for urban youth is critical to fostering Africa's development – and its political, social and economic stability. This article is designed to help address this need in two ways. First, it focuses attention on those comprising the overwhelming majority of this population, urban youth who are poor and marginalized. Second, drawing largely on the author's extensive professional experience with African urban youth, the article reviews the major challenges this population faces; considers the programming context for Africa's urban youth; reviews six principles for developing programs for them; provides field-based insights on improving the assessment, monitoring and evaluation of urban youth programming; and suggest ways to enhance the inclusion of female youth in programs. The article concludes with a consideration of the particular challenge of marginalization in meeting the needs of Africa's huge urban youth population, and a call to respond to this challenge with youth-centered policy reforms and investments.

We are living in the age of youth. There are more young people in today's world than ever before in human history. This is the case in terms of the proportion of the overall population (Barker 2005, p.11) as well as sheer numbers, which are staggering. One and a half billion of the world's population are ages 12-24, 1.3 billion of which reside in developing countries. (World Bank 2006, p.4) Almost half of the world's population is under age twenty-five. (Barker 2005, p.11)

While North Africa's youth population growth rate is significant, Sub-Saharan Africa's rate is the highest of any world region (the youth population there has quadrupled since 1950) (World Bank 2006, p.33). Africa's urban growth rate is also the world's highest (United Nations 2004, p.7), and both of these rates are estimated to remain ahead of all other world regions into the foreseeable future. (World Bank 2006; United Nations 2004)

Urban youth constitute the vanguard of Africa's twinned transformations because youth are the unquestioned vanguard of Africa's gathering urbanization that features the migration of male youth (Hope 1998, p.352) but includes increasing numbers of female youth. (Gugler

1996)

Conflicts further intensify the youth surge towards cities. While accurate population statistics are hard to come by, examples of the dramatic expansion of urban areas during and following wars stretch across the continent. In fact, it would be difficult to find any war-affected country where this is not the case. (See, for example, Peters et al. 2003; Sommers 2003). The phenomenon also applies to refugee-receiving countries, as there is evidence that increasing numbers of refugees are leaving camps, usually illegally, to reside in urban areas. (see, for example, Human Rights Watch 2002; Sommers 2001)

African governments and international agencies have generally been slow to address Africa's transformation into an increasingly youthful, urban continent. Efforts to address the concerns of youth in cities and harness their potential generally remain infrequent and insufficient. Fortunately, this is beginning to change. There has been a dramatic expansion in publications and investments in recent years, signified by the World Bank's World Development Report for 2007 (World Bank 2006), which features development for youth, and recent efforts, led by the African Union and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), to increase employment opportunities for West African youth.

This article is designed to help expand efforts to provide programming support for Africa's urban youth. It focuses attention on those comprising the majority of this population, the poor and marginalized. It draws instead on the author's past eighteen years of professional experience, much of which has involved working, or carrying out research, with African youth, or in developing or evaluating youth projects and programs. Much of this work has directly involved urban youth.

After a brief description of the challenges this population faces, the article reviews the programming context for this population. It then turns to six key principles for developing programs for them, followed by a consideration of how to assess, monitor and evaluate urban youth programming, and how to work to include female youth in programs.

Marginalized Urban Youth

Most Africans are young and either live in urban areas or, it certainly appears, want to move there. For example, the United Nations estimates that by 2025 almost half of all East Africans and nearly three-quarters of Southern Africans will be living in cities. (Hope 1998, p.347) The overwhelming majority of urban youth in Africa are marginalized, poorly educated and poor. Their needs are overlooked even as they overwhelm the cities they are flocking to in unprecedented numbers. A profile of this population is instructive, as it is simultaneously enlarging in size and detachment from the rest of society.

One simple irony delineates the essence of their condition. Marginalized urban youth "are a demographic majority that sees itself as an outcast minority". (Sommers 2003, p.1) Large numbers of young people consider themselves alienated, social outcasts. This condition is significant and potentially dangerous. In most African cities, this irony is an undeniable, self-evident fact. Few civil society representatives actually represent them. Significantly,

female youth tend to be seriously underrepresented in both youth and women's groups.

Most urban youth live in squalid ghettos or, increasingly, in the mushrooming peri-urban areas that surround cities. Few have any chance of accessing any youth development programming that may exist. Budgets for ministries of youth tend to be small, while education ministries primarily invest in formal education. Most African youth lack secondary education; only a third of boys and just over a quarter of girls in Sub-Saharan Africa ever enroll much less complete secondary school. (Population Reference Bureau 2006, p.18) Among poor urban youth, an even smaller proportion has received secondary education, while a great many have never completed primary school.

What urban youth seek–access to capital and targeted nonformal education– is often not what government, non-government and international investors are prepared to provide. Indeed, a disjuncture has surfaced between the central foci of national and international development activities and youth at the forefront of Africa's gathering urbanization. Even though Africa's youth are flocking to cities, most development efforts are simply not targeting them sufficiently or effectively.

The tragedy that engulfs marginalized urban youth is that while their energy, creativity, and resilience are not adequately recognized by government, civil society, and international actors, their many assets may be well recognized by those who seek to manipulate them. Drug and gang operators and others seeking to exploit urban youth labor all appreciate at least some of what youth potential can readily provide. All too often, they work on urban youth with few competitors. Social, economic, and perhaps even political alienation, together with the dangers of HIV/AIDS, prostitution and trafficking, form an explosive cocktail for youth living on the margins of African cites.

Program Context

Much needs to be done to appropriately assist marginalized urban youth. Before considering how to support them, however, there are several facts to bear in mind.

First, most youth who migrate to cities never leave. There is little to suggest that significant numbers of Africa's urban youth ever return to rural areas. (Ogbu & Ikiara 1995, p.54) Acceptance of this fact is the essential starting point for engaging with urban youth. In fact, some believe that programs that aim to build the capacity of rural youth might even promote urban migration. To such youth, cities might appear to be just the place to test out the new skills that they have learned. It is therefore a miscalculation to develop programs in rural areas to attract urban youth back to the country.

Secondly, youth is less an age range than a life phase marking the movement from childhood into adulthood. This conception is common in Africa and other parts of the world. The common tendency for agencies to define youth as an age range creates at least two significant problems: First, there is no agreement on the age range. While one common parameter is between 15 to 24, many African societies extend the range to include older people as youth. The accepted definition of youth in Rwanda and South Africa, for example,

extends to age 35. Second, marriage may significantly narrow the youth category. In some parts of Africa, a young person who marries may no longer be considered a youth. This appears to be much more common for female than male youth. In this way, however, a teenage mother may lose any realistic chance of access to programming, excluded from opportunities for youth and lacking seniority among women. [1]

Many urban youth may seek access to capital. Many are entrepreneurial to some degree and have carried out market analyses to identify an economic niche to exploit. Although it might seem unusual to consider petty traders and other small economic actors in informal economies as entrepreneurs, they are.

Most youth do not participate in civil society. The existence of enormous numbers of at-risk, out-of-school youth who are not participating in mainstream civil society activities calls into question just who civil society represents. The relatively few youth who participate tend to be relatively well-educated, elite male youth. Since elite and marginalized views and needs can be dramatically different, it should be seriously questioned whether elite youth leaders are able to effectively and accurately represent and advocate for the needs of the marginalized youth majority.

Providing programming for marginalized urban youth is a crime prevention and conflict mitigation strategy. Many of those engaged in urban crime are young and at least formally unemployed. They are easy targets for exploitation by criminal organizations and military groups. As a result, investing in appropriate programming for poor, marginalized youth in cities simultaneously promises to reduce urban crime levels and significantly enhance security.

Unfortunately, most youth programs in Africa are poorly evaluated, and some are not evaluated at all.[2] It is thus not often clear whether or how particular programs succeed or fail. At the same time, however, salient programming principles have surfaced that can used to inform program development. With testing and evaluation, the following principles promise to help youth in useful and productive ways.

Six Programming Principles

First, it is essential to gain the trust of the youth targeted for programming. Since young urbanites are so often viewed as social outcasts and threats to mainstream society, sincere and consistent efforts must be invested in overcoming their sense of alienation and social distance. "Trust" here refers to the significance of building relationships with members of your target group and those who work with them. This is done through positive engagement: establishing both a focused interest in the lives of youth and determined efforts to make programming participatory, and then following through. Developing programming for alienated people requires an understanding of their social situation. In mostly unspoken

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[1] The youth definition challenge is more extensively discussed in Sommers (2006) and World Bank (2006).
[2] This tendency is reflected in a recent review of youth programs in conflict areas (including many African contexts). (Sommers 2006)

ways, members of the urban elite, which includes international officialdom, often impart the message that poor young people should stay away from them. The closest a poor youth may ever get to the elite is if they hawk wares at traffic intersections and pass by the cars of elites.

Contrast this palpable and pronounced separation between rich and destitute, connected and outcast, to others who move about poor neighborhoods with comparative ease. Religious leaders are a prominent example. They may radiate a high level of comfort with poor young people, and a sincere interest in their lives – indeed, religious groups may be the only organizations that are targeting marginalized urban youth for positive development (as opposed to exploitation). Being calm, and having time to listen to and interact with young people, is essential to establishing bonds of trust with youth.

Networking with and learning from those who have already made in-roads to reaching alienated urban youth is essential. In addition, however, it is important to listen to and learn from youth directly, as this can lay the groundwork for developing working relationships built on trust. This may sound trite, but it isn't. Many poor youth have had little or no interactions with international agency officials. Regular, trust-building interactions can begin a process of each side gaining familiarity and an understanding of the perspectives and concerns of the other.

But that is only the first step. Participatory programming that addresses the stated needs of youth should follow, in ways that communicate responsiveness, commitment, reliability, and respect – all of which will help program officials develop credible and trusting relationships with urban youth.

One program option to consider is capitalizing on a common urban youth interest, as petty entrepreneurs, in gaining access to capital. Micro credit not only provides access to capital for young entrepreneurs but also represents an extension of trust (that is, that the lender trusts that the loan will be repaid).

Second, the challenge of including female youth in programs should always be anticipated (discussed in more detail below). In many contexts, many if not most adolescent girls and young women are considered young women and not youth, particularly if they are married and have children. In all contexts, significant obligations on the time of female youth will limit their ability to participate in programs. Existing obligations – such as from work, household duties, and child caring – often combine with cultural restrictions to create significant challenges to female youth involvement in programming.

As a result, youth program officials must aggressively explore how to reach and include female youth. Research must be carried out to learn about the workdays, protection needs, and cultural constraints that female youth face. It is also vital to learn what female youth are seeking in a program and when they might be able to attend. The times that female youth are able to attend a program activity may be different, and far more restricted, than for their male youth counterparts.

Third, the central challenge of working with young people who feel excluded is to demonstrate inclusion while identifying which youth can participate in a program. This is hard to do: quite obviously, no government or donor agency has the resources to address the

multitude of needs of the tens or hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of youth who live in a city.

Targeting programming is often elected instead. However, if this is not carefully done, youth programs may further alienate youth already living on society's margins. Perhaps the most prominent example of this tendency involves programming aimed at reintegrating former combatants. A program that only allows access to ex-combatants runs the unintended risk of communicating to other youth that those who fought will be rewarded while those who survived their onslaughts will be ignored. Similarly, ex-combatant programs that do not equally include female youth fighters (in addition to domestics, concubines, spies, and all the other roles that girls and young women play for military groups) communicate, and exacerbate, gender bias.[3]

As a result, programs that are directed at particular at-risk youth, such as ex-combatants, may be interpreted as favoritism by youth who cannot participate. This consequence may exacerbate existing feelings of youth as outsiders who lack support or recognition. Such a result could very conceivably contribute to personal and community instability and violence, as excluded youth seek opportunities in ways that are perilous and destructive.

One approach that can serve to reduce such inadvertent but dangerous outcomes is to concentrate programs less on specific at-risk youth sub-groups than on particular urban communities where at-risk youth reside. Such geographically delineated neighborhoods can be identified through surveys and investigation with those knowledgeable about marginalized urban youth.

Throughout this process, it is important to remain flexible and open to issues of geographic boundaries, and, ultimately, to which youth might be included in any programming effort. Discussions with community, youth, and women leaders on the local definition of youth and the issue of inclusion should help clarify the flexibility needed for boundaries of program eligibility.

It is important to promote youth participant ownership of the program. Ownership is not an empty catchphrase but a key to program success. Youth participants who are allowed to "own" a program will have a greater chance of reaping lasting benefits from it, particularly those who have so often felt excluded or alienated from mainstream society, a dynamic that is prevalent in many African cities.

While some may consider youth ownership to be a questionable programming element, programs for unskilled youth should aim to provide both essential services and support to help youth surmount their sense of separation from others in society. Understanding this dual objective helps explain the success of youth outreach efforts that religious organizations carry out in poor urban neighborhoods across urban Africa. Developing a way to address the deficits of poor urban youth in terms of skills and education as well as their social status is a central element in this work. The chances of developing a lasting positive impact on the lives of marginalized urban youth are only enhanced when youth are given opportunities to

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[3] See, for example, McKay & Mazurana (2004).

participate in, identify with, and contribute to a program designed for them.

There are a number of methods in which youth can shed their distrust and become vital contributors to a program. Youth can contribute to baseline assessments, community mapping work, and, critically, the elements of the youth program itself. Youth can also help monitor and evaluate programs. Indeed, youth can be keen evaluators who are able to unearth significant and surprising results.[4] Youth participation in each of these activities constitutes potentially significant training opportunities. It also provides them with an opportunity to enhance their stature as valuable contributors to their families and communities. For a young person who views himself as an outsider or outcast, and is often shunned by most of society, this is no small achievement.

Fourth, it is important to start small. The pressure to develop large youth programs quickly may be substantial. However, it is best to resist this pull, as it is better to know what works on a small scale than to plunge into risky, ambitious ventures that may fail. This is particularly vital because the urban youth population is massive and largely alienated, and thus difficult to administer to or coordinate with effectively. It is also critical because, as noted, few urban youth programs in Africa have been well evaluated, and there is little evidence on which to base program design.

The emphasis on identifying quality policies and components by beginning with a small-scale, pilot programming is useful in at least four ways. First, it can help ensure that programs have positive and hopefully lasting impacts on youth lives. In addition, it allows managers to create their programs as participatory, learning-based activities and actively develop working relationships and networks with other agencies and actors (such as religious groups) already working with youth. Starting small also provides an opportunity for learning about who the program's competitors are (those who are exploiting youth in particular) and, if the competitors are negative and exploitative, how to attract youth away from them.

Finally, the start-up phase described here should not begin by working exclusively with the most challenging marginalized urban youth (such as girls working in the sex industry or boys active in gangs). That is asking too much. It is better to start with comparatively stable male and female marginalized urban youth, learn from that experience, and then expand the program.

Fifth, whenever possible, youth programming should be holistic (and multi-sectoral). The idea of holistic programming arises from one of the central challenges of developing programming for at-risk youth: that their needs are diverse. Marginalized urban youth, for instance, may require education in basic skills and literacy and numeric, in addition to economic skills development and vocational training.[5]

During the program development phase, it might be useful to consider presenting youth with a menu of programming options. At the same time, it is recommended that certain components of an urban youth program be considered for inclusion: health education

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[4] See, for example, Lowicki (2002).
[5] See, for example, Sesnan et al. (2004) and Muhumuza (1997).

(especially HIV/AIDS education and prevention) and education about the human rights and responsibilities of youth. Indeed, it should be anticipated that youth needs are almost by definition multi-sectoral, potentially incorporating a combination of the education, health, employment, micro credit, and perhaps other sectors as well. Accordingly, appropriately coordinated approaches need to be applied.

It is also recommended that the economic concerns of youth be featured as well. The specifics can be developed in part through conversations with marginalized male and female urban youth and through an assessment of economic activities and opportunities for marginalized urban youth in target neighborhoods. It is likely that access to capital, perhaps through a micro credit program, will prove relevant and useful for entrepreneurial youth. In addition, applied literacy and numeracy education are likely to be in demand. Youth may be interested in learning the primary language used for business transactions in town, for example, in addition to business skills such as budgeting.

Sixth, it is important to consider the social and political implications of working with marginalized urban youth. Programs for large numbers of poor, alienated, and youthful urbanites may inspire curious or even negative responses from others. Since the repercussions may have a significant impact on program development, it is important to consider the implications of marginalized urban youth programming.

It is necessary to understand the general dimensions of urban youth lives. How do urban youth participate (or resist participation) in the larger urban society? What is the range of their livelihoods? What does one need to know about the beliefs and aspirations among youth before launching a program for them? Which other groups provide services to marginalized urban youth, and do they appear to be successful (In other words, who are your competitors, including religious groups and gangs)? How are youth divided by ethnicity, region, religion, or political affiliation, and how might these divisions impact programming? How would one deal with allegations that criminals are among those involved in your program? How would one deal with the presence of criminals in a program? Does any part of civil society represent the needs and concerns of marginalized urban youth? These are among the questions that youth programmers might wish to consider.

It is also important to gauge the responses and perspectives of others. Elites in general and government and security forces in particular may fear or be hostile towards poor urban youth. In addition, unemployed college graduates may not react favorably to a program aimed at their non-elite brethren. Government institutions, such as the ministry of youth, may have a particular interest in, or may even seek to control, a new youth program. How these sorts of responses might impact programming should be considered in advance, and may need to be negotiated over time.

Assessing, Monitoring and Evaluating Urban Youth Programs

Monitoring and evaluation processes are essential to any program. Identifying and measuring indicators and carrying out midterm and final evaluations are focal parts of this

endeavor.

Working with youth makes the entire "M & E" process especially important. Youth are in the process of tremendous change. Their lives, locations, and aspirations can be in considerable flux. Gauging how a program is meeting the evolving needs of this population is critical. Additionally, there have been few urban youth programs in Africa, especially for members of the marginalized majority, and fewer still that have been evaluated. As a result, urban youth programming must become a learning process from the earliest stages, documenting how the program is developing over time.

Given the unusual nature of programming for marginalized urban youth, some ideas regarding assessments, monitoring and evaluation are offered here.

Assessing the early program development phase, when a program is being piloted, is unusually important. It is during this period that assumptions that were made regarding what urban youth need and how they will respond to the new program can begin to be tested. In addition, ways in which youth can participate in youth programming can be explored and begun during this period. Youth can be engaged to help survey participants on their perspectives of the program, explore why some youth are participating and why some are not, help carry out a community mapping activity, and document the economic activities of marginalized urban youth.

The early assessment should also expand the field of endeavor beyond pilot program activities:

It is important to start to develop profiles of marginalized urban youth lives, and the significant ways that their lives differ (by sex, location, ethnic group, occupation, etc.). It is also valuable to gain some understanding of the economic niche that marginalized urban youth occupy.

It is always useful to develop examination of a "control group" of marginalized urban youth for comparative purposes. These should be youth with profiles that are similar to those participating in the program but who are not participating in the program – and, just perhaps, are not participating in any program. This control group can then be periodically researched over the course of the program.

This is also the time to begin gaining an understanding of whom else is working with youth (such as local NGOs and religious groups) as well as exploiting youth in the communities where the program will take place.

Moreover, it is essential to begin exploring how marginalized urban youth are perceived by others in urban society. This would include a consideration of the political implications of carrying out programming for marginalized urban youth, as discussed earlier.

Since this programming aims to work with marginalized, poor, and alienated young people, an emphasis on indicators that measure program results is a component of the monitoring process. However, considerable caution needs to be maintained here. It may be difficult to reach and retain substantial numbers of the target group – truly marginalized youth – at first. It may continue to be difficult. This challenge may need to be studied carefully, and program revisions may need to be made before the number of target group participants

reaches satisfactory levels.

A somewhat slow process of program development promises to allow the program to mature as it learns how to effectively address marginalized urban youth needs. However, pressure on programmers to deliver impressive indicator statistics may cause programmers to recruit more accessible youth into their programs instead of those who better fit the target group profile. In other words, it is easier to obtain better indictor results if non marginalized youth make up the majority of program participants. Patience, careful assessment and monitoring analysis, and relevant program adaptation and revision are all strongly encouraged, until members of the target group become reliable if not loyal program participants.

Across the process of monitoring and evaluation, it should be noted that youth can become highly useful evaluators of their program. If they are comfortable expressing their thoughts openly and in a relaxed and trusting environment, it is likely that any disconnects between program offerings and what youth seek in a program will surface. This is highly useful information, and can be used to improve an existing program. If this is done, it also promises to enhance a sense of ownership in the program among youth participants, improving the chances of program success.

Finally, there is the issue of measuring program impact. Considerable emphasis should be placed on tracking the lives of program graduates over time, to gauge how the program may have (and have not) influenced their lives. This information can be illuminated through comparison with findings on the lives of control group members. These findings on impact can then be fed back to programmers, so that appropriate revisions can be carried out.

Including Female Youth

When youth groups gather, male youth usually dominate. When women's groups assemble, the more senior women are generally at the forefront. In both cases, few female youth may be present. There often appears to be little space for female youth to participate or be recognized. This issue is particularly pressing for poor urban youth in Africa. Because of this, particular attention must be paid to the recruitment, inclusion, and retention of female youth in programming.

Two responses to the marginalized female youth challenge in African cities will be briefly mentioned here. The first concerns the need to advocate for female participation in youth programs (and sometimes that female youth are youth as well). It is fairly common for some sort of advocacy to try to get girls or women into school, for example. Still more persuasion may be required to attract female youth into an urban youth program.

One challenge in advocating for female youth participation is that it may not be clear that female youth are members of the youth cohort, with rights to programming equal to those of male youth. In addition, getting female youth, who tend to live more private lives that their male counterparts, into activities alongside male youth, may be a challenge.

Accordingly, it is important to learn about the difficulties and challenges of marginalized female youth in cities, as well as discover what female youth require to be able to attend a

program. The range of problems or obstacles that may be preventing their participation may be substantial, and may include some of the following:

Female youth may not be able to attend program activities in a particular location. Community or youth centers, for example, may be inviting to male youth but uncomfortable for many female youth. As a result, the program may have to consider ways to shift at least sections of a program to places where female youth would consider attending.

Female youth may simply lack the ability to attend at the times that programs normally take place. More flexible timeframes may be required.

Female youth may not be comfortable attending a program that is dominated by male youth participants. This may call for at least some of the programming to take place separately from male youth.

Some female youth may need permission from their families. This may well require that program officials seek permission for female youth to participate in a program directly from husbands or other relatives.

Some female youth may already have children. Childcare services may accordingly be required. One aid official working in West Africa, for example, emphasized the significance of this issue by referring to a youth program in Gambia, where "most of the female youth participants would have been unable to attend if childcare was not provided."

For male as well as female youth, an appreciation of the health concerns of youth is essential. This may include assisting youth with health referrals, including issues concerning reproductive health and HIV/AIDS and other illnesses.

Finally, there is the issue of protection. Female youth and their relatives may have considerable concerns about whether and how female youth can be protected while traveling to and from the program site. They may also feel threatened or made uncomfortable by the behavior of male youth participants, their teachers, or other program personnel.

These and other concerns must be taken seriously, and appropriate, and reasonable, responses to all protection concerns need to be developed. One possible solution is to hire female trainers, teachers, and supervisors work with female youth participants.

To accomplish the often difficult task of attracting and retaining marginalized female youth in urban youth programs, programmers may need considerable creativity to work with female youth (and their relatives) to devise appropriate, reliable, and safe ways that will allow them to participate. The program will need to be adaptable, able to respond to particular target group concerns. Accomplishing this may well require budgetary and programmatic flexibility, in addition to work to generate credibility in the eyes of marginalized female, and male, youth.

The Challenge of Marginalization

Most of Africa's urban youth have little or no chance of entering a program designed to support them. There are far too many African youth, in cities and elsewhere, and their numbers are only increasing. There is also far too little funding, at present, to address their concerns.

Despite these challenges, the most significant is their social marginalization. Having so many young urbanites distanced from the mainstream raises questions about who governments represent, and who they should represent. It is not uncommon to hear calls to 'give youth a voice'. They have a voice, but it is too often unclear just who, beyond other youth, is listening. Even among youth themselves, social distance tends to keep the elite minority and non-elite majority apart. Elite youth are more commonly given opportunities to share their opinions than their far more numerous non-elite agemates. To be sure, elite youth have truly important needs: African nations need to better include all young people in their politics, societies and economies. But it is a mistake to assume that elite youth represent their marginalized brethren.

Programs featuring youth participation are a necessary but clearly insufficient method for supporting Africa's burgeoning youth population. Broad, youth-focused policy reforms, and their active implementation, are urgently needed as well: if most Africans are young and marginalized, then government policies and civil societies should, in all ways, reflect and embrace this new reality. Support for youth in targeted, appropriate ways should lie at the core of government and donor investments. Inclusion is the key. Youth from all backgrounds – but particularly those from the marginalized majority – should be viewed as a resource for providing advice and direct input on how to support them.

Population demographics and urbanization are transforming Africa. The social, political and economic marginalization of African youth, particularly those in cities, begs for new solutions for the continent. What now remains is for government and non-government institutions to catch up and positively engage with those youthful Africans at the forefront of change.

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