

Level of Income Inequality and Youth Engagement in Conflict Activities in Machakos County, Kenya

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Abstract: Globally, youth is facing a myriad of challenge among which include limited education and this has made it difficult to cope with day today demands of life. The purpose of the study was to examine the link between the level of education and youth engagement in conflicts in Machakos county, Kenya. The target population consisted of the youth incarcerated in both Machakos male and female prisons. The study employed descriptive survey research design. Simple random sampling was used to select the units of analysis. With ethical considerations observed for anonymity, the data was collected using structured questionnaires and interview guide. Data analysis used both inferential and descriptive statistics. From the study, inferential statistics established a statistically significant relationship between income inequality and conflicts among youths as illustrated by ($P>0.05$), thus high level of conflicts among the youth in Machakos County. The study concludes that majority of the youth engaged in conflicts as a result of desperation for failing to sustain their livelihoods as a result of unemployment as provision of employment is a critical factor in life sustenance. The study concludes that most of the youths in Machakos County are vulnerable to conflicts due to high level of unemployment and that has resulted to high poverty levels, hence high rates of conflicts.

Keywords: Youth, inequality, Unemployment, Conflicts

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, investment in education as a fundamental human right has highly been applauded. Research indicates that limitation of skills and employment opportunities detaches the youth from their employed peers and this makes them susceptible to engage in conflict and crime (Centre for Conflict Resolution, 1998). The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number eight (8) aims at provision of decent work and economic growth with expectation that the citizens get remunerated employment for the sustenance of their families. However, it has been established that over 60% of the youth in developing world are in dire need of employment as more than 500 Million earn less than two dollars a day. A recent report from United Nations of Youth Foundation (2009) shows that the growth of job opportunities has not kept pace with population growth. The United Nations of Youth Foundation report (2009) although the global youth population is more than three billion, more than half of them live slightly above poverty line. Inadequate basic literacy and numeracy pose grievous obstacles to youth entry into labour market (United Nations Development Programme ([UNDP], 2006). The UNDP (2006) report points out that the youth devoid of employment opportunities provide fertile recruiting environments for conflicts and crime.

Concept of Youth and Conflicts

There is hardly any universal consensus on what constitutes the conceptualization of youth terminology. The United Nations (2011) defines youth as person's within 15 to 24 age bracket, while the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) defines youth as anyone the age of 18 years (Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR), 2005; United Nations Economic Commission for

Africa (UNECA), 2009). For some groups of people, the concept of youth is closely linked to a particular gender, while other cultures loosely use the concept to depict transition to adulthood and independence (UNESCO, 2018). For instance, Nigeria and Swaziland define youth as those between 12 and 30 years and Botswana and Mauritius, it includes as the individuals between 14 and 25 years (Gyimah-Brempong & Kaimenyi, 2013). According to the Kenya 2010 Constitution, youth is a person aged between 18 and 34 years (Republic of Kenya [RoK], 2012)

According to UNESO (2018), at the youth stage, the different perceptions regarding circumstances, rights and responsibilities dominate the thinking of the young person as well as cultural and social situatedness. The youth are normally vulnerable to the adverse effects of social injustice and economic privation, and find themselves socially occupying limited access to resources and decision-making power. Youth engagement in conflict activities has been regarded as a global phenomenon (Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery, 2005). According to Freeman (1996), the collapse of the job market has highly contributed to the youth participation in conflicts and criminal activities. Research shows that youth engagement in conflicts jeopardises the opportunity for peace building in society.

2. Literature Review

Inequality and Youth engagement in conflicts

Inequality is a broader concept than poverty in that it is defined over the entire population, not just for the portion of the population below a certain poverty line. The EFA Global Monitoring Report (2011) acknowledges conflicts as one of the major barriers to economic development. According to Lewis (cited in Muste, 2000), conflict is a struggle over values, status, power, and resources. Worldwide, the

unemployment rate for young people between the ages 15 to 24 is up to three times higher than for adults (UNDP, 2006). Youth engagement in conflicts has been associated with economic factors such as the inability to satisfy basic needs, where young people spend days without food, water and other basic needs.

Research has showed that pervasive poverty makes societies more vulnerable to violent conflict, while conflict itself creates more poverty. Furthermore, the grievances caused by social inequalities trigger conflicts under three major conditions, namely; evidence of well-defined separate groups of people in society; the groups compare themselves regarding economic status and finally, the groups must share the information about their situation and hence, frame the situation as unfair and blame, politicising the inequality (Sirimal, 2004; Bahgat, Barrett, Dupuy, Gates, Hillesund & Nygård, 2017). It is well known that conflict and insecurity undermine the stability required for sustainable long-term development (The World Bank, 2006). Worldwide, the unemployment rate for young people between the ages 15 to 24 is up to three times higher than for adults (UNDP, 2006).

Youth engagement in conflicts has been associated with economic factors such as the inability to satisfy basic needs, where young people spend days without food, water and other basic needs. A United Nations (2002) report points out that where job opportunities exist, the youth face discrimination in terms of pay for similar work requiring same skills, although they are the people exposed to hazardous environmental conditions at workplace, hence, deficiencies in job opportunities lead to lack of economic empowerment. Studies indicate that unaddressed political grievances easily lead to conflict in society and that is highly aggravated by presence of poverty and inequality.

According to Ross (2004), resource distribution and state governance plays a vital role in a nation's economic and structural vulnerability to conflict. Similarly, Blattman and Miguel (2010) points out that due to recession, economic shocks normally lead to inflation and that leads to unrest resulting to interpersonal conflicts escalation and vulnerability. It has been established that resource based or economic conflict is triggered by competition over scarce resources such as land, water, oil and diamonds or intangible resources such as power and knowledge (Schilling, 2012). Limited supply of resources leads to competition among the communities with feeling that some gain while others loses, perception of unfairness arises, hence conflicts.

In Sri-Lanka, a study by Sirimal (2004) found a close relationship between economic deprivation and outbreak of conflicts among the youth in Sri Lanka. Since 1980s, violence Brazil has experienced continuous upsurge of conflicts mainly in urban centres. The conflict in Brazil was associated with high poverty levels, drug trafficking, migration and deportation of illegal immigrants from United States which resulted to high number of deaths among the youth.

The issue of conflict and violence has dominated the world's agenda for generations for decades. Research shows that globally, Millions of people have become experienced

conflicts for a variety of reasons such as politics and ethnic clashes (Muste, 2000). Evidence from conflict prone countries such as Burundi indicates that those households who experience recurrent violence at local level are prone to prolonged poverty and deprivation (World Bank, 2011). Other factors that influence conflict occurrence include inadequacy of resources and unfair resource distribution, exclusion from decision making process, perceived differences values and aspirations (Dirks & Parks, 2003). While investigating factors affecting juvenile delinquency, Nourollah, Fatemeh and Farhad (2015) found a strong relationship between socio-economic factors and increased crime rates. For instance, in East Timor-Indonesian, conflicts linked to socio-economic and political identities was reported.

Hicks and Hicks study of 2014 (cited in Senga, Wachira & Kiilu, 2020) argues that inequality goes beyond simple income inequality but also consumption. The study found a direct correlation between conspicuous consumption and violent crime hence contradicts the traditional economic theory that supports the notion that income disparity positively correlates with high conflict prevalence. Durante (2012) while using United States state-wide panel data for the years 1981 to 1999 examined the relationship between income disparity and conflicts. After controlling for demographics and the rates of poverty and unemployment, the researcher found that there is a strong negative relationship between income inequality and the violent and property crime rates.

In most sub-Saharan Africa such as Kenya, Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo, unequal distribution of resources and deterioration of socio-economic conditions leading to high levels of poverty and unemployment. Furthermore, protests against election outcomes have been associated with tendencies of engagement in conflicts among the youth (Human Development Report, 2002). The strain theory views income inequality as determinant factor that may lead to escalation of violent crime. This may occur once low income earners reside next to high income individuals, those with low returns may retaliate in form of conflicts. Similarly in Tanzania, a report by Africa Commission (2010) found a close link between deterioration in access to better livelihoods and youth engagement in conflicts and violence. In Kenya, the problem of youth deprivation is compounded by corruption and tribalism which have locked out the youth deserving employment from getting job opportunities. Furthermore, the violent ethnic conflicts that occurred in 1992, 1997 and 2007 were also associated with market dominance of some ethnic groups, thereby marginalising others. Since little has been done in Kenya, this study sets out to fill the existing knowledge gap regarding influence of income disparity on youth engagement in conflicts in Machakos County.

In Kenya, the problem of youth deprivation is compounded by inequality in resource distribution. For instance, the violent ethnic conflicts that occurred in 1992, 1997 and 2007 were also associated with market dominance of some ethnic groups, thereby marginalising others. Since little has been done in the area of resource distribution and conflict among the youth Kenya, this study sets out to fill the existing

knowledge gap regarding influence of income disparity on youth engagement in conflicts in Machakos County.

Security maintenance and peaceful social environments are pre-requisite for the achievement of sustainable development. From USAID (2005) report, countries which have a high percentage of youth are more likely to engage in violent conflicts. The Government of Kenya is determined to improve security in order create attractive investment environment and enable secure living. The overall ambition for the security sector under Kenya Vision 2030 is "a society free from danger and fear" (Republic of Kenya [RoK], 2007. p. 9). From the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (2012) however, out of the 89,770 crimes reported within 2013-2017, more than 48,710 (54 %) by young people between 18-35 years.

3. Methodology

According to Bamberger (2012), there is no single method that can capture all the complexities of research. Hence, the study used mixed method approaches where qualitative and quantitative designs were employed concurrently. The study targeted all the 566 youth between the ages of 18-35 years incarcerated in the three prisons in Machakos County. The target population consisted of the total of the 566 incarcerated youth obtained from both the male and female prisons in Machakos County.

The study made use of Krejcie and Morgan (1990) standardized tables to obtain a sample of 234 respondents from population of 566. The Krejcie and Morgan standardized tables was preferred because it ensures a good decision model as it shows the sample sizes for different population at 95% confidence level, a sampling error of 5% is acceptable (Kiilu & Mugambi, 2019; Krejcie & Morgan, 1990). Purposive sampling techniques to get two probation officers was used. The Probation officer were chosen because they provided specific information about the youth engagement in violent conflicts in Machakos County.

Questionnaires were used to obtain data from the 234 incarcerated youth while interview guide was used to get information from the two probation officers. The use of interview schedule provides in-depth detailed qualitative information (Cohen et. al., 2007; Creswell, 2012). Data was analysed through quantitative and qualitative techniques. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Computer software was used to aid in the analysis of quantitative data. The analysed quantitative data results were presented in frequencies, percentages, charts and tables that were suitable for variable under the study. Qualitative data was categorised into themes and patterns and analysed qualitatively in form of narrative formats. Ethical considerations regarding confidentiality were ensured through anonymity of questionnaires as guided by researchers such as Creswell (2013) and Mugenda and Mugenda (2003).

4. Results and Presentations

The questionnaire return rate for the incarcerated youth was 171 and that was 73%. According to Mugenda and Mugenda

(2003), a questionnaire return rate of 70% is considered statistically appropriate, hence return rate for the study was acceptable

The study was interested in obtaining responses of the respondents' source of income. This was achieved by administering questionnaires to respondents and the collected data was computed and presented in Figure 4.1

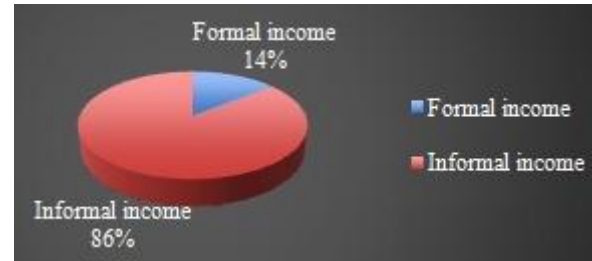


Figure 4.1: Distribution of Respondents by Source of Income

The results in Figure 4.1 demonstrate that the majority of the youths have informal source of income as marked by 86%. The study findings further indicated that only 14% have formal income. These results revealed higher number of youths whose source of income is informal which correlate to the higher number of youths committed crimes as reported by KNBS, 2011. The findings concurs with the United Nations (2008) report that, lack of employment opportunities among the youths make self-sustenance impossible and hence, leads to youth engagement in illegal activities.

The research sought to establish the relationship between income inequalities and conflict occurrence among the youth in Machakos county. The collected data was analysed and presented as in figure 4.2

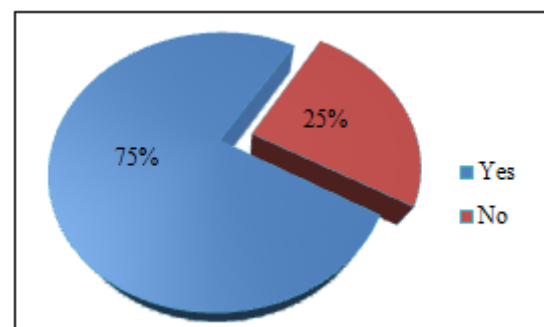


Figure 4.2: Income Inequality and youth engagement in conflicts and Crime

Figure 4.2 present answers given by the respondents on the influence of income inequality on crime rates among youths in Machakos County Kenya. The 75% of the respondents agreed that inequality in income distribution influence conflict among the youth. On the other hand, only 25% of them reported that inequality in income distribution disagreed that conflict could emanate from income inequality.

The reasons given by the respondents to explain how inequality in income distribution influence crime rate among

youths in Machakos County were presented in the Figure 4.3.

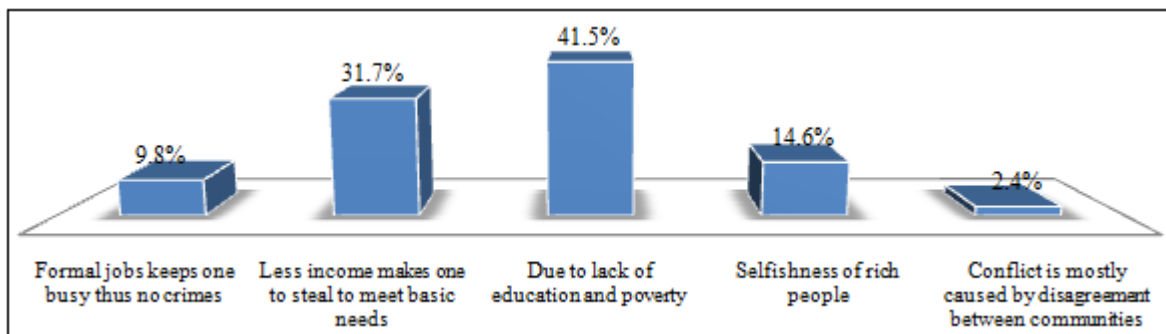


Figure 4.3: Influence of Income Inequality and youth engagement in Conflicts

Findings in Figure 4.8 indicated that 41.5% of the youths postulated that income inequality influences conflict due to lack of education and high poverty rates in Machakos County. Furthermore, youths at 31.7% confirmed that less income make youths to steal to meet their basic needs hence high crimes rates in Machakos. Additionally, 14.6% of youth indicated that rich people are selfish and that they attract youths to revenge on them. The results further demonstrated that 9.4 % of youths in formal employment are busy hence they do not commit crimes compared to youths in informal employments in Machakos County. Minority of youths at 2.4% revealed that conflicts are mostly caused by disagreement between communities. These results are supported by Whitworth (2013) that there is close relationship between income inequality and conflict occurrences.

Table 4.1: Responses on Income Inequality and Crime Rate among the Youths

Statement	SD		D		N		A		SA	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Rich people are not likely to steal from others	13	22.0	10	16.9	7	11.9	15	25.4	14	23.7
Those with low income are more likely to engage in criminal offences compared to those with high incomes	7	12.1	6	10.3	8	13.8	17	29.3	20	34.5
People from poor families results to crimes to earn their daily bread	6	10.5	9	15.8	7	12.3	12	21.1	23	40.4
Valid N	86									

The findings in Table 4.1 indicates that majority of respondents agreed at 49.1% that rich people are not likely to steal from others. However, 38.9% of youths disagreed with the statements. Further, results indicated that 62.8% agreed that those with low income were more likely to engage in criminal offences compared to those with high income levels. Moreover, most of respondents at 61.5% agreed that people from poor families result to crimes to earn their daily bread. These findings concurred with a study done by Neumayer, (2011) who established that any increase in income led to increased violence rate over a range of income groups. The relationship was presented in table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Chi-Square Tests on Relationship between Income Inequality and Crime rates among youths

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.901 ^a	8	.011
Likelihood Ratio	13.653	8	.091
Linear-by-Linear Association	.198	1	.657
N of Valid Cases	38		

The results in Table 4.8 demonstrate that there is a statistically significant relationship between income inequality and crime rates among youths as illustrated by ($P>0.05$). This implied that income inequality influences youths to commits crimes that led to high conflicts rates in Machakos County. This is evidenced by fact that the source of income of the majority of youth are in informal employment. These results contradict Pridemore (2011) who argues that there exists no link between inequality and crime rates and that studies which claim that relationship exists have failed to control for poverty rates, which is the most consistent predictor of crime rates. The results are however supported by scorzafava and Milena (2012) who postulates that there a significant relationship exists between income inequality and conflicts in Brazil.

4.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

From the study findings, it can be concluded that majority of youths earn their livelihoods from informal employment sector as attested by 86% of the respondents. From the study, high poverty levels and unemployment were among the significant factors that led to youth engagement in conflicts in Machakos County. The study further revealed that low income levels among the youth who lived in areas with contrasting income levels were more likely to engage in criminal offences compared to those living in almost similar income environments.

4.3 Recommendations

The study based its recommendation on the findings that there was statistically significant relationship between income inequality and youth engagement in conflicts. The study recommends that government come up with entrepreneurial innovations that target the youth so as to ensure that the youth earn livelihoods to draw them from conflicts. Furthermore, the government and other

stakeholders should need to come up with workshops to train the youth on practical skills to solve the current global problems through psychomotor skills. There is also the need for seminars to change the youth mindset on the elusive white colour employment dream.

The study suggests a further study to establish the youth perception on the current solutions to income inequalities in Machakos county. Furthermore, a replication of the similar study to be carried out in other counties across the country. Thereafter, these study findings can be compared to establish similarity and differences that may be evident. This will assist local and national government to benchmark and plan for their youths in the Country.

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