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National Youth Service,  
Employability, Entrepreneurship  
and Sustainable Livelihoods

National Youth Service Programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa:  
Strengthening National Youth Service as a strategy for youth  
employability, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods

## The Case of Kenya

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This country profile was compiled by John Mang'ana under guidance from Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA) and Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP), in partnership with The MasterCard Foundation

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## 1. Executive summary

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African governments are increasingly seeing National Youth Service (NYS) as a strategy for fostering human capital development among young people with the aim of promoting youth employability, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods.

Unfortunately, little is known about whether NYS programme design and implementation in the region is sufficiently aligned with the aims of promoting youth employability and sustainable livelihoods. This is particularly true in the African context where research and information on the nature, forms and impact of voluntary service, including NYS, are generally lacking. The little that is known suggests that the ability for NYS programmes to successfully link young people with employment and livelihood opportunities could be greatly enhanced with greater information on the current status of programmes.

The MasterCard Foundation commissioned Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP), in partnership with Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA), to conduct a study on the extent to which NYS programmes in the region provide young people with a pathway to employment, livelihoods and entrepreneurship opportunities. This case profile on Kenya is one of three case profiles aimed at providing insight into NYS programme design and implementation in Sub-Saharan Africa. This study incorporates a desk review, which commenced in April 2013 and a field study conducted in Nairobi between April 2013 and May 2013.

### **The status of youth in Kenya**

Recent estimates indicate that the country's population is currently around 43.18 million (World Bank 2013). A 2010 report by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) in collaboration with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung indicates that 78.31 per cent of Kenyans are younger than 34 years, while the UNDP (2013) estimates that nearly 80 per cent of the Kenyan population is younger than 35 years.

While Kenya's youth statistics presents great economic potential for the country, it is emerging as a cause for grave concern to the government and society at large, given the enormous social, cultural and economic challenges facing young people. Of the challenges facing youth, unemployment is the most acute. Kenya's unemployment rate has increased to 40 per cent, with young people particularly affected. The latest labour statistics indicate that youth unemployment is at 70 per cent, almost double the national level.

Young people remain on the periphery of the country's affairs and are excluded from the design, planning and implementation of programmes and policies that affect them. The youth are under-represented in politics and in the economy despite their large numbers. This is largely due to

prevailing social and cultural attitudes that view young people in a negative light. Additional barriers experienced by young people include insufficient access to financial capital or alternatives, inadequate organisation amongst youth, and the pervasive poverty affecting a significant proportion of the young population.

Many health-related issues affect young people, including malnutrition, HIV and AIDS and sexually transmitted infections, and poor access to health services. Kenya's education sector has been underfunded for a number of years and this has undermined the quality of public schooling. Many young people also lack the skill or technical knowledge to be able to participate in informal sector. Unfortunately, many of the former mid-level tertiary institutions that provided much of the craft and artisan training have either collapsed due to lack of funding and government support or, like most of the technical colleges, been converted into universities.

Young people also often have to contend with poor housing conditions and have limited access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), which is increasingly a critical tool for sustainable livelihoods in Kenya.

The government has over the years attempted to address the challenges facing youth through various policy initiatives. The National Youth Service Act, which created and regulates the operations of the NYS, is perhaps one of the earliest policy responses and is becoming increasingly relevant within the current context of youth unemployment in Kenya. Some of the other notable policy initiatives implemented over the last two decades aimed at supporting youth include Sessional Paper Number 2 of 1992 on Small Scale and Jua Kali (informal sector) Enterprises, the Development Plan (1997-2001), the Poverty Eradication Plan (1999-2015), Sessional Paper Number 4 of 2005 on youth development, and the Kenya National Youth Policy (KNYP) aimed at ensuring that the youth play their role in the development of the country.

More recently there has been the new Sports Act, envisaged to transform the management of sports in the country to make it a profitable venture for young people and develop sporting talent among youth; Vision 2030, particularly its youth agenda, expected to improve livelihoods through employment and entrepreneurship; and the National Youth Council Act of 2009, aiming to empower the youth economically and socio-culturally.

### **The Kenya National Youth Service Programme**

The National Youth Service (NYS) is a voluntary programme that was established on 1 September 1964 to create a pool of trained, disciplined and organised youth through training and participation in national socio-economic programmes. Its primary roles are nation building through volunteerism and service in the military during a state of war or public emergency.

The programme has undergone significant transformation since its inception. Up to the late 1980s, it was a compulsory pre-university programme targeting graduates of the Kenya Advanced

Certificate of Education (KACE) for a six-month training. The objective of the programme was to inculcate in students the right attitude towards work and instil a culture of tolerance and nationalism. However, this programme was discontinued in 1990, largely due to sustainability issues. Since then NYS training has been voluntary with a market-driven focus. Its fundamental goals are alleviation of youth unemployment and creating national cohesion.

Following the passing of a new law by the Kenya Senate in July 2013, all high school graduates will be required to sign up for a mandatory two-year pre-university national service scheme that is expected to be rolled out in each of the 47 counties across the country from 2014. The programme will seek to give young people vocational training, instill patriotism, and empower them to help safeguard the country.

The current NYS Programme is designed to offer basic paramilitary training, volunteering opportunities, and vocational training to participants. Furthermore, it has considerable reach and spread, with these activities occurring in various satellite stations in different parts of the country.

The NYS, previously a department under the disbanded Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MOYAS), was relocated to the Office of the President (OP). Some respondents feel that this act may reverse the gains made in the struggle for youth recognition in Kenya since 2002, when a dedicated youth ministry was established. Others believe that the NYS is now likely to have more clout as a department under the powerful OP.

Under the current voluntary programme, NYS membership is open to interested applicants from all over the country. The institution conducts recruitment drives once or twice a year depending on funding and the availability of physical space at its various facilities. The current programme enrolls around 5 000 recruits annually. However, this is set to increase in 2014 with the new law requiring compulsory participation by all high school graduates in the NYS Programme.

Applicants must be between the ages of 18 and 22. Men should be taller than 5ft, 6 inches and women should be taller than 5ft, 3 inches. All applicants must be medically and physically fit, unmarried and without dependents. Finally, applicants must have scored a minimum D+ (D Plus) in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Preference is generally given to applicants from orphaned and destitute backgrounds. Of the 5 550 recruits in the 2013 group, 33 per cent were drawn from orphaned and destitute backgrounds. The stringent qualification criteria relate to the unique status of the NYS as a reserve force of the armed forces with the expectation that NYS participants should be ready in defence of the country.

### **Programme governance and resourcing**

The NYS is a disciplined entity that is headed by a director-general (DG) who is supported by a deputy director-general (DDG). There are four senior deputy directors who are in charge of departments that are responsible for service activities spread across the country. These service

activities are co-ordinated through field units that are headed by commanding officers. Principals head the training institutions. There are two distinct lines of operation within the NYS under the DG – the uniformed and the non-uniformed lines. Uniformed officers consider their role as executing institutional command in conformity with the status of the NYS as a disciplined entity – a role that they perform with much pride. The non-uniformed line is mostly limited to administrative functions including managing the vocational training institutions.

The NYS Programme consists of three core components: six months of basic training, depending on availability of space at the various training institutions; one to two years of nation building; and finally, depending on choice of qualification, vocational training that lasts anywhere from six months for a craft or artisan qualification to three years for a diploma qualification.

As a youth transition institution, the NYS has adopted four broad strategies that are expected to result in opportunities that maximise the potential of young people. These include empowering youth to engage in productive activities, providing youth with the necessary financial support and market linkages, moulding youth character through training, and strengthening programmes that advance youth health and well-being.

The NYS is mainly financed through a national budgetary partition, with additional resources coming from the programme's commercial ventures, and to a limited extent, external funding from various development partners.

### **Perceptions of the NYS among respondents**

The respondents expressed varying perceptions of the NYS when asked about their impressions of the programme and its relevance within the current social and economic context, including in relation to the circumstances of youth.

Some private sector respondents suggested that the NYS has great potential but is undermined by its military orientation and rigid style of operation. Another respondent noted that while the NYS is a good programme, government bureaucracy, poor administration and inadequate funding undermine its effectiveness. The view of the NYS as a place that simply 'dishes' out discipline to otherwise unruly youth or is some sort of a military 'bootcamp' is quite pervasive. This negative view of the NYS sometimes overshadows other positive aspects of the NYS.

A number of respondents believe that the NYS enjoys close proximity to the government, which is an accurate assessment, having been relocated to the OP. However, this association is not necessarily considered an advantage for the NYS by many of the respondents, especially among the private sector participants.



Many consider the NYS a link between school/tertiary institutions and the workplace. Its main role in this regard is to develop in young people certain soft skills that are critical to the workplace that may not be taught at schools or tertiary institutions.

### **Programme impact**

The potential impact of the NYS Programme appears to be blunted by a combination of factors inherent to the institution, including an outdated legislative framework, a pervasive culture of bureaucracy and red tape arising from close affiliation to the state, an ineffective organisational structure, and years of poor strategic leadership.

The NYS does not have in place a mechanism to monitor the participation rate of its alumni in the formal and informal economy, so the institution has no knowledge of where its alumni are and the nature of economic activities that they are engaged in. It does not have an alumni association and it does not maintain any links with its alumni once they leave the institution.

Many young people join the NYS hoping to use it as a bridge into formal employment. However, besides those that are recruited by the armed forces and other security organs and youth that are retained in service, the NYS does not assist its members to obtain formal employment.

Most of the NYS alumni in the focus group discussion indicated that while they may not have obtained formal employment as a direct result of their participation in the NYS Programme, they derive value on an ongoing basis from the skills that they acquired. Promotion of entrepreneurship has previously been attempted by the NYS, but it failed, mainly due to lack of funding. However, a new programme planned for 2014 demands that entrepreneurship and computer skills be taught to all students who go through vocational training.

There is no evidence of financial or market linkage support by the NYS to those in service or those who have completed the programme. But the idea of financial support to NYS servicemen and women to start small businesses has been considered previously under the proposed entrepreneurship programme that failed to take-off. A self-employment promotion unit (SEPU) has been suggested to serve as an exit strategy for NYS graduates who opt for informal employment. Under this scheme, a revolving fund is proposed to offer soft loans to service graduates who start small-scale business enterprises.

The NYS has a well-developed reputation in the market for churning out highly disciplined and well-groomed individuals with outstanding work ethic. NYS-trained drivers for instance are much sought after by private individuals and by companies.

The NYS runs a programme that sensitises members and surrounding communities on HIV and AIDS with the intention of promoting behaviour change. This initiative is linked to attempts by the institution to encourage members to participate in various sporting codes. Community service is

a key activity that is promoted as part of holistic development of the individual. This involves participation in activities such as cleaning of the environment and planting of trees.

### **Lessons learned and promising practices**

**Access to resources.** Given its extensive resource base including trainers, training facilities and funding, the NYS is able to handle diverse operational and training issues. This advantage affords the institution great flexibility in addressing a wide range of youth economic challenges. Internal sources of revenue also play a significant role in the institution's financial stability. The NYS generates additional income from various commercial ventures such as agriculture and building of infrastructure including roads, bridges, dykes and irrigation canals. It is evident from the interviews that there is significant scope to up-scale such avenues, even though the strategic leadership to implement this has been lacking. Furthermore, the institution produces its own food from its various farms to feed the volunteers.

**Corporate image.** From the interviews, it is apparent that the general public and other key stakeholders view certain aspects, like the disciplined and well-trained cadres of the NYS, positively. Despite this, the institution is obliged to manage aspects of its corporate image that are misunderstood like the widely held view of the NYS as some sort of a 'bootcamp' to straighten out wayward youth. A positive image makes the institution more appealing to potential employers and to aspiring volunteers.

**Quality and effectiveness of the programme.** According to the respondents, an effective youth empowerment programme should focus its curriculum and training initiatives on addressing market needs. This is the only way of ensuring that the programme remains relevant at all times. Some qualifications from the NYS, such as the driving qualification, remain highly rated. However, some respondents felt that some courses are outdated and not relevant to current market needs.

**Reach of the programme.** The NYS is considered to have the ability to reach a wide network of youth through its diverse geographical units spread across the country. It has 16 training institutions with a capacity to accommodate 10 000 to 15 000 trainees at any given time. The new law on compulsory service for high school graduates requires the government to expand existing NYS facilities in order to accommodate the expected influx of young recruits. This reach is critical for the programme to have the desired effect among the huge population of young people. Another dimension to reach is admission criteria. The NYS for instance takes youth with lower grades compared to a number of available youth programmes that require a minimum form four certificate. This ensures that youth who would in other instances not have anything to do are given an opportunity.

**Sustainable livelihoods.** The majority of the NYS alumni who participated in the focus group discussion, and who also happen to be self-employed, indicated that they are pursuing economic activities that are unrelated to the vocational training that they received at the NYS. Many are



involved in informal trade in the markets within the city. Those in formal employment also indicated that their training at the NYS either has no bearing on their current roles and responsibilities, or is totally unrelated. Even so, they all credit their resilience and resourcefulness to the training received at the NYS. The outcome seems to be more positive for those who acquired hands-on or practical vocational training courses such as masonry, carpentry and driving.

### **Conclusion and potential for change**

There appears to be general consensus among research participants that the NYS Programme has largely failed to live up to its potential as a bridge for Kenyan youth to formal employment or self-employment, including entrepreneurship. The overwhelming verdict is that the NYS Programme has been ineffective as a transition institution for the youth.

Also, there is no evidence that the institution has had any significant impact on other aspects of challenges facing the youth such as health, education etc. Part of the challenge is that the NYS lacks a credible mechanism to monitor, evaluate and report on its activities. Even more concerning is the fact that the NYS neither has an active alumni association nor maintains links with members who leave the service upon completion of their individual programmes.

Respondents indicated that an outdated policy framework underpins the NYS Programme, which, to to an extent, undermines its relevance within the prevailing social and economic context. There is a pervasive sense that the NYS today is no different from what it was at inception in 1964, despite significant shifts in the socio-cultural, political and economic context. Fortunately, the need to review the NYS Act to bring it more in tune with the current times is recognised within the institution itself and externally.

Most respondents agreed that the NYS Programme should be compulsory for all young people. A compulsory NYS Programme is viewed as potentially providing career guidance to the youth, inculcating in young people a culture of citizenship, a means to sustainable livelihood, and a post-school transition programme that would positively socialise the youth. However, to have a successful compulsory NYS Programme respondents suggested eliminating the current military orientation of the programme, de-centralising the programme by establishing more outposts, and focusing more on vocational training and development of technical skills.

Given the infrastructure and capacity challenges at the NYS, the question of funding is critical. The programme is currently almost exclusively funded by the state, with minimal but important contributions coming from internal sources and external donors. Close links between the NYS and government is blamed for what is perceived as a pervasive culture of bureaucracy and red tape within the institution. This by extension is seen as being the key factor behind the institution's lacklustre approach to strategic planning and execution. Delinking the programme from the state should be considered as a strategy for enhancing the programme's strategic approach and implementation going forward.

There are a host of strategic issues that the respondents felt should be reviewed within the NYS Programme. It is clear that the organisational structure needs to be reviewed to ensure that the institution is configured to be able to respond to the changing demands of society and the economy. There is a need to review the curriculum to bring it in line with current market needs. Some respondents suggested that this may require the involvement of the private sector to ensure that the programme offers market-oriented programmes. Despite the obvious potential for meaningful partnerships in several NYS operations, progress has been hampered by the absence of a legal framework to provide clarity or much needed guidelines on the form that such arrangements should take.

Finally, there is also an obligation for the NYS to seriously reconsider its role as a transition institution for young people and adopt a more strategic approach to executing this mandate. This may involve establishing deliberate partnerships with various players, especially the private sector, to provide economic and career development opportunities to successful graduants. The NYS may also utilise its internal resources and capacity to absorb those who are unable to access opportunities outside the service.

## 2. Introduction

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African governments are increasingly seeing National Youth Service (NYS) as a strategy for fostering human capital development among young people with the aim of promoting youth employability, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods. This view of NYS is not misplaced, as many of the available programmes are uniquely designed to reach young people in need of support and opportunities to engage economically in society.

Unfortunately, little is known about whether NYS programme design and implementation in the region is sufficiently aligned with the aims of promoting youth employability and sustainable livelihoods. This is particularly true in the African context where research and information on the nature, forms and impact of voluntary service, including NYS, are generally lacking. The little that is known suggests that the ability for NYS programmes to successfully link young people with employment and livelihood opportunities could be greatly enhanced with greater information on the current status of programmes, documentation of promising practices, closer alignment between private sector's needs and NYS service curriculum, and more opportunities to network, learn and innovate among NYS practitioners and other supporters in the region.

This study thus sought to undertake research on the NYS Programme in Kenya as part of a larger study on NYS programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa. In particular, this study sought to :

- document the current status of the NYS Programme in Kenya
- source promising practice on NYS to demonstrate how youth service can prepare young people to generate livelihoods and to access employment in light of current market forces

- describe the challenges and opportunities in the policy environments with the objective of inspiring programme re-design for greater impact as a strategy for fostering human capital;
- produce new insights and recommendations into policy considerations and programme design for NYS
- begin to document and share insights and recommendations from a limited number of focus groups with private sector representatives on aligning NYS programmes with areas of employment growth, entrepreneurship and livelihoods
- distribute information and key findings from the study widely throughout Sub-Saharan Africa and in other countries around the world that also have NYS programmes and problems youth unemployment.

This study serves as an entry point for establishing the information and network necessary to enhance NYS programmes to more effectively provide young people with a pathway to employment, livelihoods and entrepreneurship opportunities.

### 3. Methodology

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This study incorporates a desk review which commenced in April 2013 and a field study conducted in Nairobi between April 2013 and May 2013.

The desk review traces the circumstances of youth in Kenya and briefly reviews the NYS. The field study considers the NYS as a strategy for employability, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods.

A total of eleven interviews were conducted with respondents drawn from civil society, the private sector, government and the NYS. There were also informal discussions with a number of informants with knowledge of the youth sector in Kenya. The respondents were identified mainly through referrals. Although all the interviews can be described as open-ended, the interview process in all cases was guided by a pre-defined interview schedule.

In addition two focus group discussions were held with current NYS servers and with NYS alumni. The focus group discussions were preceded by a 30-minute session during which participants filled out a questionnaire on general profiling data including their service experience, and in the case of alumni, post-service experience.

The interviews took one to two hours and were all recorded and transcribed.

### 4. The status of youth in Kenya

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The Kenya Constitution defines youth generally as all individuals in the Republic who have attained the age of 18 years but have not attained the age of 35 (Institute of Economic Affairs

2010, Feed the Future u.d.). Deviating from this, the *Kenya Youth Policy*, which to some extent derives its legitimacy from the Constitution, defines youth as persons resident in Kenya in the 15 to 30 years age range.

#### **4.1 Population overview and youth demographics**

According to the 2009 population and housing census, Kenya had a population of 38.7 million, with the female gender comprising 50.29 per cent and male 49.71 per cent of the population (KNBS 2012). More recent estimates indicate that the country's population is currently around 43.18 million (World Bank 2013). Significantly, Kenya's population is said to be increasing by nearly 1 million people annually. Based on these projections, Kenya's population is expected to hit 46 million by 2015, 57 million by 2025, and 85 million by 2050 (Institute of Economic Affairs 2010, Feed the Future u.d.).

A 2010 report by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) in collaboration with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung indicates that 78.31 per cent of Kenyans are younger than 34 years, while the UNDP (2013) estimates that nearly 80 per cent of the Kenyan population is younger than 35 years. The bulk of the population is made up of children aged 0 to 14. However, the number of 15 to 34-year-olds has been increasing and is expected to form the majority of the population in the next 10 to 20 years (UNDP 2013). Government estimates indicate that the number of young people aged between 15 and 30 years (estimated at 14 million in the 2009 census) was expected to rise to 17 million by the end of 2012.

While Kenya's youth statistics presents great economic potential for the country, it is emerging as a cause for grave concern to the government and society at large, given the enormous social, cultural and economic challenges facing young people. Coming in the wake of the Arab Spring, there is a great deal of uncertainty associated with having a large population of young people that feels disenfranchised, hopeless and increasingly impatient.

#### **4.2 Key issues affecting the youth in Kenya**

Amongst the major challenges facing young people in Kenya today is their exclusion from the design, planning and implementation of programmes and policies, particularly those that affect them. The youth generally remain at the periphery of the country's affairs and are hardly represented at levels of authority. As acknowledged by most respondents during the field interviews, the participation of youth in the formal economy is limited. From a health and education perspective, the youth generally have poor outcomes, they face serious social hardships and often have to contend with poor housing conditions, particularly in urban areas. Last but not least, their access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), which is proving to be increasingly critical as a tool for sustainable livelihoods in Kenya, is hampered by prohibitive financial costs.

### **Negative perceptions of youth**

The youth are under-represented in politics and in the economy despite their large numbers in comparison to other age groups. This is largely due to prevailing social and cultural attitudes that view young people in a negative light, lack of financial capital or alternatives, inadequate organisation amongst youth, and the pervasive poverty affecting a significant proportion of the young population.

The statement below by a respondent (disussing a youth programme that is funded by his organisation) highlights some of the views certain sectors of society hold of the youth:

*Government says: How can you trust those youth? ... Youth are untrustworthy and youth are volatile, they don't know anything. ... Bishops and dignitaries ... would get up and criticise them [the youth] for being essentially violent and not so smart. I mean, how can you possibly build trust on that? (Inter-Governmental Representative 1, 2013)*

Still on prevailing attitudes towards youth, another respondent commented:

*I think there is a nonchalance in our older generation who are the bulk of government and so it's a particularly African problem in the sense of - what are those young men doing standing there, give them something to do. We don't think that these people could actually be the engine that drives economic growth that we are looking for. And so they are not integrated in that sense. I will give you a good example. So the government a couple of years ago thought, let's have 'Kazi kwa Vijana'<sup>1</sup> (Jobs for Youth programme) ... the idea behind it was noble ... All of it ended up being menial work and it ended up that the young people do the job, they dig the trenches and the older people who are managing the programme get the money ... There is a problem with this approach though because you are not making use of the young people's skills, you are not giving them something sustainable. (Inter-Governmental Representative 2, 2013)*

Noting the negative perceptions of youth, two private sector respondents commented on how youth are typically not being given a chance, despite their new and innovative ideas:

*I think one of the biggest challenges is youth not being given a chance. Why am I saying this, you know sometimes when you throw your jacket away, you put on your jeans and go out to the market and try to meet people at a very local level and chat with*

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<sup>1</sup> Kazi Kwa Vijana is a World Bank-funded youth empowerment programme that was conceptualised by government and co-ordinated through the Office of the Prime Minister. The programme had three components including the controversial Jobs for Youth Programme that was discontinued, the Kenya Youth Empowerment Programme (KYEP), run by the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA), and an Internship Programme, managed by the disbanded Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MOYAS).

*them, you ask yourself after hearing what they say, wow that is a brilliant idea, why has this not happened! You ask yourself, why is this happening like this! It's like we live in totally different worlds. Several times I have gone out to maybe have a drink with young guys out there in some third-rate restaurant or bar. But when you hear these guys talk, you see a lot of brilliance and sometimes you ask yourself, what happened! One of the things is that they don't have much of an opportunity; they are not given a chance. (Private Sector Respondent 1, 2013)*

*They have new ideas ... they have some new synergies, when you listen to them. But one thing, they really want to be recognised and given a chance to grow and to contribute and that is the chance that is not there... (Private Sector Respondent 2, 2013)*

### **Limited economic participation**

Lack of employment opportunities or underemployment is perhaps the biggest impediment to economic participation amongst youth in Kenya. A recent survey found that 75 per cent of young people under the age of 30 feel that the economy was not favouring them, since most of them lack formal employment (Otieno 2012). The labour market absorbs about 25 per cent of Kenyan youth each year, leaving 75 per cent without any clear options (UNICEF 2009). It is also worth noting that of those that are absorbed in the labour market, many have jobs that do not match their qualifications and personal development goals.

Lack of employment opportunities for youth could partly be blamed on the country's relatively weak economy. Growth over the past few years has not been sufficient to create enough employment opportunities to absorb the increasing labour force of about 500 000 annually.

Equally important, young people find it difficult to start small businesses due to **lack of financial capital and the high cost of finance**. Many lending institutions charge high interest rates and often have onerous pre-qualification conditions including collateral or guarantee by a high net-worth individual. Many young people, particularly those from poor backgrounds, are unable to meet these stringent conditions. As a respondent explained:

*One of the challenges the youth are facing in Kenya is lack of opportunities to engage in entrepreneurship because they are not able to access finance. If you go to the bank, you are told to come up with collateral or a guarantor, sometimes you don't even have a title deed. (NYS Alumni, 2013)*

Another respondent attempted to illustrate the frustration associated with seeking financing from mainstream lenders by sharing a personal experience relating to a business expansion loan application from one of the bigger commercial banks:



*...Obtaining loans is not easy, especially from the banks; they need so many things from you and some banks still turn you down even if you provide all that they require. This can be quite discouraging, because sometimes this is a bank that you have been saving with. For me, the first time I tried getting a loan from Cooperative Bank, I had saved for about six months and I had a guarantor. I think my savings was okay, but they never gave me the loan ... my business was already doing well, but I still didn't get the loan from the bank. So the only people who offer loans are microfinance institutions. But with microfinance, you have to be a group, maybe of ten. (NYS Alumni, 2013)*

It also turns out that microfinance institutions (MFIs) have some of the most costly loans.

*And do you know that agency fee in some places will go as high as 40 per cent, meaning transaction costs are so high that there might be little benefit that the programme would gain. So their fear was the microfinance institutions ... is... they levy very high interest rates and they come with other conditions, collateral and so forth, which young people do not have. You ask me for a piece of land, which maybe I do not have. I have not inherited any from my father. You want property; I do not have even a car. You look at those things, when it comes to collateral, interest, agency fee, the bureaucracy within the agencies, the delays on the disbursements, the conditionalities – are not what young people are looking for. Young people are looking for straightforward projects and simple conditions that they can meet. (Civil Society Respondent 2, 2013)*

Many young people also **lack the skill or technical knowledge** to be able to participate in the 'juakali' (informal) sector.

Unfortunately, many of the former mid-level tertiary institutions that provided much of the craft and artisan training have either collapsed due to lack of funding and support from government or like most of the technical colleges, been converted into universities. As one respondent noted:

*What I witnessed with Kibaki's Government, you saw a lot of the tertiary institutions becoming universities and I think there is still a need for these technical institutions, which will not absorb people with A's and B's at high school, but absorb people with potential and who would do the manual, the hands-on work. I think we need to reinforce that ... (Private Sector Respondent 3, 2013)*

As many social commentators note, Kenya is increasingly becoming a society that thrives on patronage that cuts across many facets of life, and the comments below by some of the respondents attests to this.

*You may have a certificate or diploma or whatever, but you must still have somebody to support you. Regardless of your qualification, if you do not know someone influential, you will hardly move. (NYS Alumni, 2013)*

*I think employment is the biggest challenge and having a 'Godfather'... If you don't know somebody, it is very difficult to get a job; you can struggle with your certificate and not get a job. (NYS Alumni, 2013)*

*Even when you are employed, for you to get a better working environment, you have to know somebody in that particular company. If you are 'a nobody', you will get frustrated.*

*Then there is a lot of tribalism, you find people of the same tribe as the boss, dominating the positions in an organisation. You find young people with no experience leading big departments. For example, I have seen a clerk leading a transport department instead of an administrator. The administrator is denied that chance. Also clerks and support personnel are employed by ministries, these people come in through their connections. You are supposed to work with them and supervise them, but they do not respect you because they have 'Godfathers'. These people will always manoeuvre and get extra income while your income remains stagnant. They disrespect you and do not take your orders. (NYS Alumni, 2013)*

*If the organisations (potential employers) are to come, remember we have been talking about bureaucracy, when the organisations come there is too much bureaucracy because the big people want their people to be absorbed. So they should have an agreement, where they decide we are going to pick the best 5, best 10 or best 20 to be absorbed. (NYS Alumni, 2013)*

Against this reality, the inability of many young people to enjoy the benefits of an **influential social network** undermines their efforts to gain employment, engage in entrepreneurship or pursue other forms of sustainable livelihood.

Kenya's youth unemployment situation is discussed in greater detail in Section 4.3.

### **Health-related challenges**

Although lifestyle and attitude to risk contribute somewhat to poor health outcomes amongst Kenyan youth, there are a myriad of real health-related issues that affect young people, including malnutrition, HIV and AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and poor access to health services.

Available statistics show that young people make up 33 per cent of Kenyans infected with HIV. The AIDS pandemic poses a particularly unique challenge considering its impact on other spheres

of life. For instance, it is not uncommon to find child-headed families and young people assuming roles well beyond their ages, such as fending for their families or nursing ailing parents. To this extent, HIV and AIDS has changed the family landscape and the resulting re-organisation of roles and responsibilities has greatly disrupted the lives of many young people (KNYP 2007). The AIDS pandemic has also increased the vulnerability of young people and put them at risk of exploitation.

From a gender angle, female genital mutilation (FGM) and teenage pregnancy are examples of challenges that are unique to the female youth in Kenya. Consequences of these often include dropping out of school during circumcision seasons and in the case of unwanted pregnancies, risks to life through unsafe abortions.

Young people in Kenya unfortunately do not consider health a key priority. According to the Institute of Economic Affairs (2010) and Feed the Future (u.d.), a recent study on expectations and priorities amongst 15 to 20-year-olds found that 45 per cent of young people ranked job opportunities as their top priority compared to only 4 per cent who said the same of health.

### **Challenges related to education**

Kenya's education sector has been underfunded for a number of years (Jubilee 2013). This has mostly affected public schooling, where the quality of education continues to suffer due to insufficient investment in teacher development, lack of equipment for science subjects, and most importantly, a shortage of teachers in relation to need. According to the Institute of Economic Affairs (2010) and Feed the Future (u.d.), about four classes stay without a teacher in every school at any one time. A significant outcome of this state of affairs is the low throughput rates reported across various levels of schooling (Jubilee 2013). Also, the Institute of Economic Affairs (2010) and Feed the Future (u.d.) report that five per cent of children completing class eight cannot read a class two story while 25 per cent of pupils in class five cannot read a story of class two level. With an ever-increasing demand on the public purse and a bulging youth population, this situation could deteriorate even further.

Also worth noting is that while the introduction of free primary education (FPE) boosted enrolment in primary schools (Itunga 2011), the programme is barely coping following the withdrawal of substantial international donor funding.<sup>2</sup> It is generally known that there are not enough textbooks for students, classrooms are overcrowded, and the infrastructure in many schools is inadequate for the high numbers of pupils attending. Also, many schools lack sanitation facilities.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2009 a number of international donors withdrew funding for the FPE Programme in Kenya amidst claims of massive corruption and misappropriation of donor funds.

Within this context, Omollo's (2012) assertion that education policies have tended to focus on numbers within the system rather than the nature of learning that takes place in schools, does not seem misplaced. The school system appears to operate in isolation, ignoring both societal and market dynamics and as a result is accused of failing to provide youth with the required knowledge and skills set to prepare them for life and work.

A number of respondents from the study made similar observations about the shortcomings of Kenya's education system:

*One is our education system, it is wrong ... the curriculum does not develop the youth at an early age ... (Private Sector Respondent 2, 2013)*

*...What is happening right now, we see a lot of graduates without any weight, who graduate by 22 or 23 ... They have all this knowledge that is not practical and yet they do not have basic skills, they are not disciplined... We are actually churning out graduates that are sub-standard ...The system is more focused on drilling to pass exams, not to learn life skills ... I think if we were to teach life skills, how to persevere, how to work hard, going through the ropes – if we had an education that empowered you with all these, perhaps they wouldn't succumb to the pressure as much, they wouldn't feel so hopeless. (Private Sector Respondent 3, 2013)*

A civil society respondent claimed that Kenya's education system is limited because it does not prioritise business education, entrepreneurship training, and inculcating a culture of job creation as opposed to job seeking from an early age. Instead, the white-collar job mentality generally prevails. The respondent had the following views about the challenges facing the youth in Kenya:

*They are quite many ... one has to do with our education system ... much of it has been preparing people for white-collar jobs in that most of the young people even as they go through the education system, think of being employed and not the reverse – becoming employers. So for me I think that is one of the challenges. Other than that also would do with the kind of the curriculum that we are taken through in schools. They are not pumping a sense of ownership in the students ... (Civil Society Respondent 3, 2013)*

Another respondent viewed this prevailing preference for formal employment, and not necessarily the lack of jobs as commonly believed, as possibly the biggest impediment to economic opportunities for young people.

*No, it's the mind-set that we need to change amongst youth ... You don't go to school to be employed ... When you go to class one, do you sign a contract that you will be employed? No, whom do you sign this contract with? But then, where do you start – high school, even if primary school ... Why can't we have a business course, make it*

*mandatory ... then you become well informed ... because my main worry is, the people who need the NYS, the people who need vocational training – those people who drop out at class eight, you know that is the most dangerous group because they have nothing. At least at the university and form four level, you can get somewhere. What about the class eight drop outs, which is about 200 000 every year. Where do you take these people? (Civil Society Respondent 4, 2013)*

There is a need to make education responsive to market demands and relevant to the requirements of young people as learners and future workers, parents, and citizens.

Certain cultural practices like initiation ceremonies and early marriage also interrupt learning for many children of schoolgoing age. According to the Institute of Economic Affairs (2010) and Feed the Future (u.d.), on average, 15 per cent of pupils are absent from school on any given day. Finally, the absence of a re-admission policy for teenage mothers in many schools is also a common barrier.

### **Social challenges**

The Institute of Economic Affairs (2010) and Feed the Future (u.d.) report a strong association between crime and youth in Kenya. Young people aged between 16 and 25 years commit 53 per cent of the crime. The youth generally become restless due to idleness, especially after formal education, during the one-year period when university qualification exams are marked, processed and admissions to public universities determined. Unfortunately, some may get involved in crime and drug abuse. During this period many young people are also exposed to all kinds of abuse and exploitation (Institute of Economic Affairs 2010, Feed the Future u.d.). A respondent observed:

*... Like when you go to Murang'a or Central Kenya many who are not able to move on to university end up in drugs, people who cannot do anything. I was recently upcountry and what you notice is an age gap – there are the older men, who now have to help with the grave digging, then you see the older women and then you see young kids. Then as we are driving out you see the young men at the centres in bicycle taxis. But a lot are also just drunk by the roadside. There is a major challenge for youth at that age and probably because they feel – I am not going to get absorbed...we have always looked at the formal [sector] in Kenya as the only acceptable form of employment. They know they are not going to get absorbed, they know they probably don't have the proper qualification and skills. So there there is a lack of hope I would say ... (Private Sector Respondent 3, 2013)*

This state of hopelessness amongst the youth is heightened by a lack of guidance or counselling, and limited opportunities for meaningful engagement in sports, internships and volunteerism.

### **Poor housing conditions**

Many young people, especially those in the urban areas, are deprived of proper housing in healthy living environments. Amidst a booming property market that is largely driven by speculation, the ignored lower-end of the market continues to face a serious shortage of units and municipal services. This is true for all the major cities such as Nairobi, Mombasa, Kisumu, Nakuru and Eldoret. Many young people are drawn to these cities from the rural areas in search of employment and sustainable livelihoods.

The one positive consequence of the growth in Kenya's property sector for the youth has been an increase in employment opportunities in the construction industry.

### **Limited access to ICTs**

The dawn of the information age has seen major shifts in modes of communication. As communication increasingly takes on a digital format, many young Kenyans, especially in rural areas (where the majority of young people reside), are left behind, unable to exploit career, business and education opportunities because they lack access to ICTs. This is due to the prohibitive costs of hardware and operation.

## **4.3 Focus on youth unemployment**

Amongst the challenges facing Kenyan youth, unemployment is perhaps the most acute. Kenya's unemployment rate has increased to 40 per cent, with the rapid economic growth of the last decade barely having an impact on the unemployment picture. As recent labour statistics indicate, the youth are the most heavily affected. At about 70 per cent, which is almost double the national level, youth unemployment rates remains unacceptably high. According to the UNDP (2013), the unemployment problem in Kenya is to a large degree a youth problem.

Youth unemployment is highest among 15 to 19-year-olds, an age category that is still largely at school and unlikely to be looking for jobs. This category is followed by the 20 to 24-year-olds (24 per cent) and the 25 to 29-year-olds (16 per cent). However, the most pressing challenge is providing opportunities for young people aged between 18 and 25 years.

In a report titled *Time to act on Kenya's youth unemployment is now*, it is estimated that there are about 10 million unemployed youth. This number grows by hundreds of thousands every year. The comment below by one of the respondents from the field study sums up the challenge of youth unemployment in Kenya:

*... If you think about 800 000 young people who have joined the job market, how many of these people do you think the private sector is able to employ? Fifty thousand. How*



*many of these people can the Government employ? Say hundred thousand. So out of these 800 000 you have only knocked out about 200 000 of them. So there are about 600 000 young people every year who are coming into the job market and nothing to do. Where do they go – for me, that statistic scares me ... as this number continues to increase, the levels of crime continues to increase. They are very concurrent because you have a whole bunch of people who really truly have nothing to do and unless someone thinks about a way to engage them, the number will continue to increase and they will continue to have nothing to do. That is pressure that you don't want on a young country like this one. (Inter-Governmental Representative 2, 2013)*

Kenya's youth unemployment situation has been described as a time bomb (Etale 2013) and is a "dormant volcano waiting to erupt", according to a high-profile private sector respondent from the field study. According to Etale (2013), when three to four young people meet and sit together, they don't discuss how to get jobs, but rather, how frustrated they are for 'hustling' without success. Etale concludes that the end result will be a revolt. A respondent observed:

*... We talk about young people who are very vulnerable in the sense that even if you get employed even after graduating from this, you are only given a small contract, so you are taking this debate from just about jobs to decent [work]. We have young people who cannot even be brought to the mainstream labour market because they are already very discouraged. These are young people who we should target with life skills, trying to develop their self-esteem... they have graduated from all these training institutions and looked for jobs for years and now they have resigned to fate. These are the very dangerous young people who are just waiting for the day they will die and these are the ones now who are involved in crime because they have tried. (Private Sector Youth Empowerment Respondent, 2013)*

A number of social commentators in Kenya are of the view that unemployment among the youth may have had a role in igniting social tensions that led to the 2008 post-election violence. More worrying, the report cited above (*Time to act on Kenya's youth unemployment is now*) claims that Kenya is headed for a major social catastrophe in the next decade if nothing is done about youth unemployment. The report claims that the situation in Central Kenya where many young people are now lost to dissipation and crime as a result of mass unemployment and the resultant frustration, will be replicated across the country in communities where the largest section of the 'youth bulge' may still be years away from completing its education and entering the workforce.

### **Factors driving unemployment in Kenya**

There are several factors driving unemployment in Kenya including poor access to credit, a widespread mismatch between skills development and demand, lack of information or inadequate flow of information, and the inability of young Kenyans to access influential social networks.

Kenya's unemployment situation is also partly attributed to the cumulative slow growth over the years and the weak labour absorptive capacity of the economy. According to Omolo (2012), the rate at which the net jobs are created is not the same as the rate of labour force growth. While there has been continuous growth in mainly urban formal job creation, it has not kept up with the increasing number of Kenyans of working age. Thus, the proportion of workers with a formal job decreased from about 13 per cent in the early 1970s to 9 per cent in 2010 (UNDP 2013).

There is also a widespread mismatch in skills development and demand:

*There is a huge mismatch between the skills that are coming out of our training institutions, our academic institutions and what the private sector actually needs ... the skills may not necessarily be hard skills. It could be what is considered to be soft, but in our case they are actually turning out to be hard because these seem to be what the employers are looking for more. They are looking for young people who are confident, who understand business the company is in, who are able to adapt to new changes without hesitation, so they are looking for flexible people who can seize opportunities, who are innovative who can imagine beyond their boundaries, their horizons and bring in new business lines, bring in new client base and all that. When you look at all these issues that seem to be coming out as a result of engaging the private sector, we are misunderstanding the needs of the private sector but it is coming out clearly that there is a misalignment. (Private Sector Youth Empowerment Respondent, 2013)*

There appears to be a link between relatively lower skills levels and the informal sector. The widespread mismatch between skills development and demand partly explains the strong emergence of informal activities that seem to fill the gap in labour markets (UNDP 2013). Unfortunately, successive governments have not paid adequate attention to the informal sector – there has been little effort to organise and support the informal sector and this has compromised its effectiveness and as a means to a sustainable livelihood for many Kenyans.

Lack of information or the imperfect flow of information and the inability of young Kenyans to access influential social networks are also widely viewed as contributing to the youth unemployment situation.

*Now the other biggest challenge that we see and probably the NYS should offer is the opportunity to create network information and labour market information, particularly for young people graduating from this system. Labour market information is very scarce, particularly for young people and you can see that the private sector employs nine out of every ten young people in this country, and this is a global benchmark, really the private sector has a lot of market information. But we have not invested enough to gather this labour market information and make it available to*

*such institutions as the NYS, so that they can use it to develop their programmes so that they are more responsive to the needs of the private sector but also to try and address where the opportunities are. (Private Sector Youth Empowerment Respondent, 2013)*

To a smaller extent, inherent rigidities within the labour market like the minimum wage that is now enforced more robustly, and other aspects of the Employment Act, may also have a limiting effect on hiring by industry.

### **The rural versus urban dimension**

There is a clear rural-urban dimension to Kenya's youth unemployment. Youth unemployment is especially high in the cities, ranging between 35 and 60 per cent for youth aged 15 to 25 years and between 20 and 25 per cent in the rural areas for the same age category (UNDP 2013). The main reason for this is that relatively fewer people take on informal activities in urban areas and formal employment is not enough to compensate for the difference. According to the UNDP (2013), rural labour markets are characterised by the early engagement of the youth in informal employment activities which include farming. Also, young people in rural areas engage earlier in home-making activities compared to their urban counterparts.

### **The gender dimension to youth unemployment**

Female unemployment is significantly higher among youth. The UNDP (2013) estimates the female rate of unemployment to be more than 10 percentage points higher than the male rate for young people aged 15 to 25 years. The gap is larger at younger ages than at older age ranges. At its highest point, the female unemployment rate is almost 50 per cent, compared to a male rate slightly above 30 per cent. In contrast, at around 34 years of age, the female unemployment rate is above 15 per cent, while the male rate is above 5 per cent.

Unemployment is high among females because there are fewer employment opportunities for them. However, gender discrimination can also not be discounted as a factor in contributing to the high unemployment among females. Many of the respondents indicated that sexual harassment during employment interviews and at the work place remained a major concern in most industries in Kenya. In one instance, a private sector respondent indicated that women are not able to undertake the work that is generally available at his heavy-duty mechanical maintenance outfit where individuals are expected to dismantle and move around heavy engine parts. The respondent said that he keeps a close eye on his bottom-line and would grudgingly consider providing lifting equipment to facilitate work opportunities for women.

Female youth unemployment is high even though young females, more than males, tend to engage in home-making activities and other miscellaneous tasks related to sustaining families, which to an extent reduces the pressure that females exert on labour markets. With shifting social

dynamics, Kenya is already witnessing a greater interest among females to participate in labour markets. This is likely to increase pressure on labour markets.

### **Youth challenges – policy responses and parallel initiatives**

The Kenya government has over the years attempted to address the challenges facing youth through various policy initiatives. The National Youth Service Act, which created and regulates the operations of the NYS, is perhaps one of the earliest policy responses and is becoming increasingly relevant within the current context of youth unemployment in Kenya.

Some of the other notable policy initiatives implemented over the last two decades aimed at supporting youth include:

- Sessional Paper Number 2 of 1992 on Small Scale and Jua Kali (informal sector) Enterprises
- Development Plan (1997-2001)
- the Poverty Eradication Plan (1999-2015)
- Sessional Paper Number 4 of 2005 on youth development
- the Kenya National Youth Policy (KNYP) aimed at ensuring that the youth play their role, alongside adults, in the development of the country.

More recently there has been the new Sports Act, envisaged to transform the management of sports in the country to make it a profitable venture for young people and develop sporting talent among youth; Vision 2030, particularly its youth agenda, expected to improve livelihoods through employment and entrepreneurship; and the National Youth Council Act of 2009, aiming to empower the youth economically and socio-culturally.

However, monitoring reports on the status of youth produced by various government departments and non-governmental organisations seem to suggest that the impact of these policies on some of the major challenges facing youth, such as unemployment and accessing opportunities for sustainable livelihoods, has been limited.

The reality is that the problem is getting bigger, with a growing population of young people that is becoming increasingly restless, as the lack of leadership and co-ordination on youth issues becomes more apparent:

*... To a large extent, you know government is like the main umbrella body ... its structures to a degree have not been that ... effective in supporting the youth efforts. Today there are 18 ministries and within that there is no youth ministry ... so to a large extent, the ball was nearer but you have now thrown it a further distance. That is the issue, the direct impression is that we are being taken back to the old days where youth issues were not a priority. (Civil Society Respondent 3, 2013)*

*We are not moving forward because of two things – one, there is no way we can move forward unless and until the government is determined that we want to find a solution. They don't want to find a solution – as long as they are there, forget about it ... So the issue is that there is no intention by the people concerned to do something about it. It is not a priority to them – they are not responsible enough to tell the people that elected them what they will do for them. (Private Sector Respondent 4, 2013)*

With over 100 days in office, the new government, despite several pronouncements on youth, is yet to give a clear direction on youth affairs during the next five years.<sup>3</sup> It remains to be seen whether the government will demonstrate political will and power to act decisively on the challenges facing the youth, more so given the competition for resources in what seems to be a crowded five-year development agenda.

Lack of adequate attention to youth issues by government has given rise to a number of parallel youth empowerment initiatives, both legitimate and illegitimate, with some seeking to exploit for financial gain the very youth that they seek to support. Some of the bigger and better endowed programmes such as the USAID-linked Yes Youth Can Project, the World Bank-sponsored Kenya Youth Empowerment Program (KYEP), and the civil society-driven Mathare Youth Sports Association, appear to be bearing fruit, though limited in reach.

The next section explores the NYS as a contextually relevant policy response to the challenges facing young people in Kenya. The focus is on the potential of the NYS as a strategy for youth employability, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods. The case profile draws comparisons, explains contrasts and most importantly, provide lessons from some of the programmes mentioned above.

It is worth noting that most of the existing youth empowerment programmes emphasise employability, entrepreneurship and sustainable livelihoods, while the focus of the NYS has largely been on volunteerism and skills development.

## 5. The Kenya NYS Programme

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### 5.1 Background

The NYS is a voluntary programme that was established on 1 September 1964 as a disciplined service programme that operates on a clear chain of command, similar to the armed forces and the police. The NYS envisions itself as a world-class institution in empowering the youth with knowledge, skills and the right attitude. Its mission is to develop disciplined and organised youth

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<sup>3</sup> The Government of Kenya is ordinarily elected to office for a five-year term. The current regime started its term in March 2013.

through training and participation in national socio-economic programmes. The programme's core values are integrity, discipline, patriotism, reliability, team spirit, selflessness and responsiveness, while its core mandate remains the training of youth to serve the nation.

Up to the late 1980s, the NYS was a compulsory pre-university programme. This programme targeted successful graduates of the Kenya Advanced Certificate of Education (KACE) for a six-month pre-university training. The objective of the programme was to inculcate in university students the right attitude towards work and instil a culture of tolerance and nationalism. This programme was discontinued in 1990 largely due to issues of sustainability (UNDP 2013). Since then NYS training has been voluntary with a market-driven focus.

In July 2013, the Kenya Senate<sup>4</sup> passed a law bringing back NYS conscription for high school graduates. Under the new law, all high school graduates will be required to enrol for a two-year mandatory pre-university national service. In 2012, 436 379 students (up from 411 783 students in 2011) graduated from high school, having written the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) exams (Government of Kenya 2013). All high school graduates will sign up for the programme, which will seek to give young people vocational training, instill patriotism, and empower them to help safeguard the country. The Senate Implementation Committee has been tasked with implementing the law that is expected to be in force in 2014.

Under the existing NYS Act, the NYS Programme offers young people training in technical, vocational and professional programmes at diploma, certificate, artisan and craft levels. The programme also serves as a conduit to the Kenya Police, Kenya Wildlife Services (KWS), and as a reserve force for the Kenya Armed Forces. These specific elements of the NYS are drawn from the NYS Act and appear to have been upheld in some form under the new law.

The NYS is touted as one of the foremost policy responses to the challenges of youth in Kenya. However, with a mandate derived from a 1960s policy framework, the contextual relevance of the NYS has been under the spotlight, especially in recent times, as the social and economic circumstances of the youth deteriorate even further. It is against this backdrop that any change in the policy framework is welcome. However, the NYS is a decades-old institution that is entrenched in its ways. It is also experiencing significant resource constraints including a shortage of personnel, limited physical resources and inadequate funding. This reality suggests that the full implementation of the new law could lead to hundreds of thousands of young people being released into an administrative and infrastructural setup that is struggling to manage a 5 000-member programme.

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<sup>4</sup> The Kenya Senate is one of the two houses of parliament in the Republic. The Senate represents the counties and serves to protect the interests of the counties and the county governments, makes laws concerning counties, and determines allocation of national revenue among counties, among others.



## 5.2 Legal and institutional framework

The NYS as currently constituted was established through an Act of Parliament. Under the NYS Act, Chapter 208 of the Laws of Kenya, the NYS is charged with the function of “training of young citizens to serve the nation and the employment of its members in tasks of national importance and otherwise in the service of the Nation.”

The policy priorities of the NYS as outlined in the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan include:

- preparing NYS members to work with the Kenya Armed Forces
- empowering youth to participate in projects of national importance for skills training and community service
- improving infrastructure for teaching and accommodation in the service to cope with pertinent an expanded intake and the service workforce
- educating and training youth with an emphasis on recruiting vulnerable youth
- farming for food security and sufficiency, raising appropriation in aid and technology transfer in agriculture
- training the youth in ICT
- improving youth health and behaviour change to reduce the infection rate of HIV and AIDS
- enabling responsiveness to emergency or disaster situations
- responding to youth crime and drugs
- improving the role of youth in the environment
- providing leisure, recreation and community service.

With regards to the mandatory NYS Programme expected to be in force by January 2014, the NYS is expected to provide vocational training to young people and instill in the youth a sense of patriotism and empower them to help safeguard the country. Legislation to support the new NYS Programme includes Section 13 of the NYS Act, with Cap 208 vesting power in the minister responsible for the service to divide the service into branches, units and sub-units from time to time. It is still unclear which ministry is directly responsible for the proposed mandatory NYS Programme, but it is likely to be the Ministry of Devolution and Planning. The Kenya Senate took advantage of this section of the legislation in passing the new law and significantly, directed that the National Government work with the devolved units known as counties<sup>5</sup> to roll out the programme. The Senate Implementation Committee was tasked with the responsibility of implementing the law.

Given the existing institutional limitations bedevilling the NYS, it is important that the senate recognises the critical role of the counties in the successful implementation of the proposed

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<sup>5</sup> The Constitution of Kenya provides for a form of decentralisation, known as devolution, in which the country has been divided into 47 semi-autonomous administrative and governing units known as counties and headed by elected governors.

programme. Incidentally, this is the position held by many respondents who are supportive of the idea of NYS conscription for all youth, as reflected in the following comments:

*I don't know if there are NYS outposts in every county, but I think there are a number. So if we can start by saying ... by telling the governors, this is one way the government wants to help you in terms of dealing with your youth problem. We are going to help you set up this NYS centre, it's a National Government-led process but you develop the strategy to make sure it works for the youth in your county. (Inter-Governmental Representative 2, 2013)*

*We need to draw its structures and implement them and diversify across the country. (Private Sector Respondent 2, 2013)*

*... Each county should have a NYS institution. The schools in a particular area will channel the students through the NYS in that area. And given that the government has also established polytechnics and these other institutions, they would sort of become subsidiaries of the NYS, so that at the end of the day, as the students come out, the background is common in that there is uniformity in terms of value system. (Civil Society Respondent 3, 2013)*

### **5.3 Institutional anchoring**

When the new government came into office following the March 2013 general elections, one of the first tasks undertaken by the president and his coalition deputy was to reorganise the government, a process that is still unfolding in certain aspects.

A key outcome of this initiative was the reduction in number of ministries from 44 under the previous regime to 18. A number of ministries were disbanded in the process and several others had their functions consolidated under new ministries that oversaw several distinct government departments. The NYS, for instance, previously a department under the disbanded Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MOYAS), was relocated to the Office of the President (OP) as a department.

The disbanding of the MOYAS by the president, in particular, elicited mixed views from Kenyans in general, the youth and civil society. There are those who argued that the president, by this act, dealt the youth agenda a deathblow and betrayed the single solid constituency that drove his coalition team into office. Many respondents held this view, notwithstanding the president's explanation that youth issues will be mainstreamed in all areas of government, in addition to a raft of affirmative action measures targeting the youth. Those who argue to the contrary claim that the NYS is likely to have more clout as an ordinary department under the powerful OP than as a large department under the powerless and inadequately funded MOYAS.

## 5.4 Programme aims and objectives

The primary role of the current NYS is nation building through volunteerism. Its secondary role is service in the military during a state of war or public emergency and the defence of the nation.

The two main goals of the NYS Programme include:

- the training of young citizens to serve the nation
- the employment of its members in tasks of national importance and otherwise in the service of the nation.

Its fundamental goals are to:

- create a pool of trained, disciplined and organised youth to undertake work on important national development projects of real economic value
- relieve youth of unemployment
- create national cohesion
- support the military during a state of war and public emergency.

The aim and objectives of the current NYS Programme do not appear to have changed significantly under the proposed mandatory NYS Programme expected to be in force in 2014.

## 5.5 Target group and recruitment process

Under the current voluntary membership programme, NYS membership is open to interested applicants from all over the country. However, the applicants have to meet certain basic conditions as discussed below. Preference is generally given to applicants from orphaned and destitute backgrounds. Under the current NYS Programme, the institution conducts recruitment drives once or twice a year, depending on factors such as availability of funds and physical space at its various facilities. However, there was no recruitment in 2011 as the institution attempted to manage a backlog occasioned by a double intake in 2009.

The service currently enrolls around 5 000 recruits annually. The intake was increased from 2 500 annually in 2009 as a response to the problem of youth unemployment. Under the mandatory programme to be rolled out in 2014, all high school graduates will be expected to sign up for the NYS Programme.

Government, in consultation with the NYS management, takes the decision on the number of volunteers recruited to the programme. As this respondent explained:

*They have to consult because if they give you a directive to take 5 000 ... if it was a directive from the ministry, like now (given the challenges that we are experiencing),*

*we would be throwing all the blame at them ... our intention is that all recruits undergo paramilitary training and have a qualification by the time they exit. But now if we are taking 5 000, given our capacity ... this is when we learn that our training institution can only take 3 000. So the only way out is to expand by establishing new training institutions. This is in our 2008-2012 Strategic Plan. (NYS Respondent 2, 2013)*

Impending recruitment exercises are advertised through print and electronic media. The parent ministry, in this case the OP, also sends out information to this effect through its administrative network across the country. This ensures that the information reaches the grassroots (villages) through local administrators.

The current Director-General of the NYS has been quoted in the media claiming that the NYS has struggled to recruit youth because it is voluntary:

*During our recruitment exercises across the country, we literally beg the youths to join NYS yet we offer the much-needed vocational training required for the job market. (NYS Respondent 1, 2013)*

However, the claim that the NYS begs youth to join the service is contrary to the views expressed by the two NYS respondents who participated in the study. Several other respondents also mention the fact that there is considerable interest in the NYS (as demonstrated by the high numbers at its recruitment drives), despite the challenges that it faces. It is probably worth mentioning that the DG has only been with the institution for a few months and has yet to preside over a recruitment exercise.

To ensure widespread inclusivity, recruitment exercises are carried out in 285 centres across the country. Even so, a number of respondents who participated in the field study felt that the NYS recruitment process may not be as inclusive as it is made to appear. As one commented:

*At the onset it was very inclusive. At some point again it became very conservative whereby a few people were selected to go there, you don't even know how they were selected to go there. I think it started facing obstacles and challenges in terms of meeting the expectations that people had ... it has remained a preserve of government whereas it would have been an institution that feeds other stakeholders. So it is very much a government department, whereas it should be a linkage that binds the Government, the private sector and corporate bodies. But in terms of imparting direct skills to the students, I think it has done very well. (Civil Society Respondent 3, 2013)*

Another respondent commenting on the lack of inclusivity also brought up the issue of corruption in the recruitment process:

*I don't know whether you are familiar with the recruitment process for NYS here as well? It is not a block, but it is the reality of ... recruitment to the NYS is very similar to recruitment to the army and to the police. It is rife with corruption, with my child has to get in – there are recruitment warlords in pretty much every area. So I would think maybe the more important thing even before you roll it out is to open the gates wider ... you say how do we make sure that as many young people as possible that desire to get into this scheme get in. (Inter-Governmental Representative 2, 2013)*

### **Age limit**

Despite the broad age bands adopted by both the Constitution and the Youth Policy of 18-35 and 15-30 respectively, the voluntary NYS Programme limits its intake to Kenyan youth between the ages of 18 and 22.

One of the NYS respondents acknowledged that the service excludes a significant proportion of the youth. The respondent explained that this position is informed by two key considerations. Firstly, the NYS being a reserve force to the armed forces, the volunteers must be physically fit, in good health and of a certain age. To ensure that the volunteers are physically fit, they undergo a harsh six-month paramilitary training course that requires both considerable physical and psychological stamina.

*There is a reason for that. One is once they get to the NYS; they are taken for paramilitary training. This brings them to become a disciplined force, so that they are able to work as a group, as a team ... they are engaged in serious physical exercises, military drills – actually, they are given a full military training. (NYS Respondent 2, 2013)*

Secondly, part of the reason was contextual in nature. The entire programme from basic training to professional qualification takes several years and could potentially disrupt social order. In particular, it could delay institutions such as marriage for the servers, hence the preference for relatively younger recruits:

*We had seen that if a person joins at the age of 22, if this person takes 6 months at basic training and then a few months of holiday, the person would be 23. Vocational course or a technical course to get a skill takes 3 years. This person would be around 26 years old. A person who is 26 years old may require to get married and start a family... we realised that if we take people beyond that age, like if it's a lady for instance, because of the family life and responsibilities, they may be unable to go through. (NYS Respondent 2, 2013)*

### **Physical characteristics of applicants**

Men should be taller than 5ft, 6 inches and women should be taller than 5ft, 3 inches. Participants should be medically and physically fit, unmarried and without dependents.

As already indicated above, one of the strategic objectives of the NYS is to serve as a reserve force for the Kenya Armed Forces. This informs the requirement for specific physical traits among the recruits. It is also possible that this is a measure that is applied to reduce the number of applications, given the huge interest in the NYS amongst Kenyan youth, especially as a conduit to the security services such as the KWS, the police and the armed forces:

*I wish you could attend one of our recruitment exercises, you go to Kisii, you go to Nyanza, Western – you need only 40 and you have over 1 000 men and women. It is very demanding and now you have this issue of police and armed forces, they need our men here, every now and then they come for our men and women here because they know their training will be easier. (NYS Respondent 3, 2013)*

*The problem is there because if you look at the number of people that we have been recruiting, we used to recruit 2 500 annually, but because of the demand, this was raised to 5,000 ... (NYS Respondent 2, 2013)*

### **Academic qualification of applicants**

Skills development is a core component of the NYS Programme and all servicemen and women are expected to qualify in some form of professional skills training at diploma, craft and artisan levels, for which a basic entry-level qualification is necessary. For this reason, the minimum academic qualification for recruitment to the NYS is set at D+ (D Plus) in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE).

### **Destitute and orphaned youth**

While the conditions discussed above are required for recruitment to the NYS, as already mentioned, preference is generally given to orphans and disadvantaged youth who are also expected to meet these stringent conditions. Of the 5 550 recruits who passed out in 2013, 33 per cent were drawn from orphaned and destitute backgrounds.

In a special dispensation in 2003, 500 street childred were recruited into the NYS for the six-month basic course and thereafter offered training in various crafts. Unfortunately, there was never any follow-up to determine where these young people ended up as they were forcefully picked from the street and most did not have homes or any solid background to return to.

## 6. Programme governance and resourcing

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### 6.1 Structure and implementation

The NYS is a disciplined entity that is headed by a director-general (DG) who is supported by a deputy director-general (DDG). There are four senior deputy directors who are in charge of departments that are responsible for service activities spread across the country. These service activities are co-ordinated through field units that are headed by commanding officers. Principals head the training institutions. The NYS organisation and management structure is illustrated below in Figure 1.

The programme generally consists of three core components: basic training, nation building, which encompasses the volunteering aspect of the service, and professional qualification or vocational training at diploma, certificate, craft and artisan levels. These three components are discussed in greater detail under programme implementation.

#### **Programme structure**

The NYS appears to be in a state of transition that is largely informed by proposals that are contained in its 2008-2012 strategic plan. Some of the key changes proposed in the plan include re-organisation of the management and administrative structures for enhanced operational efficiency and effectiveness of the programme, and overall quality service delivery.

While the pace of transformation has been relatively slow, it emerged from the field interviews that some of the proposed changes in the strategic plan have been effected. For instance the head of the institution is now referred to as director-general as opposed to director.

#### ***Distinction between the uniformed and non-uniformed lines***

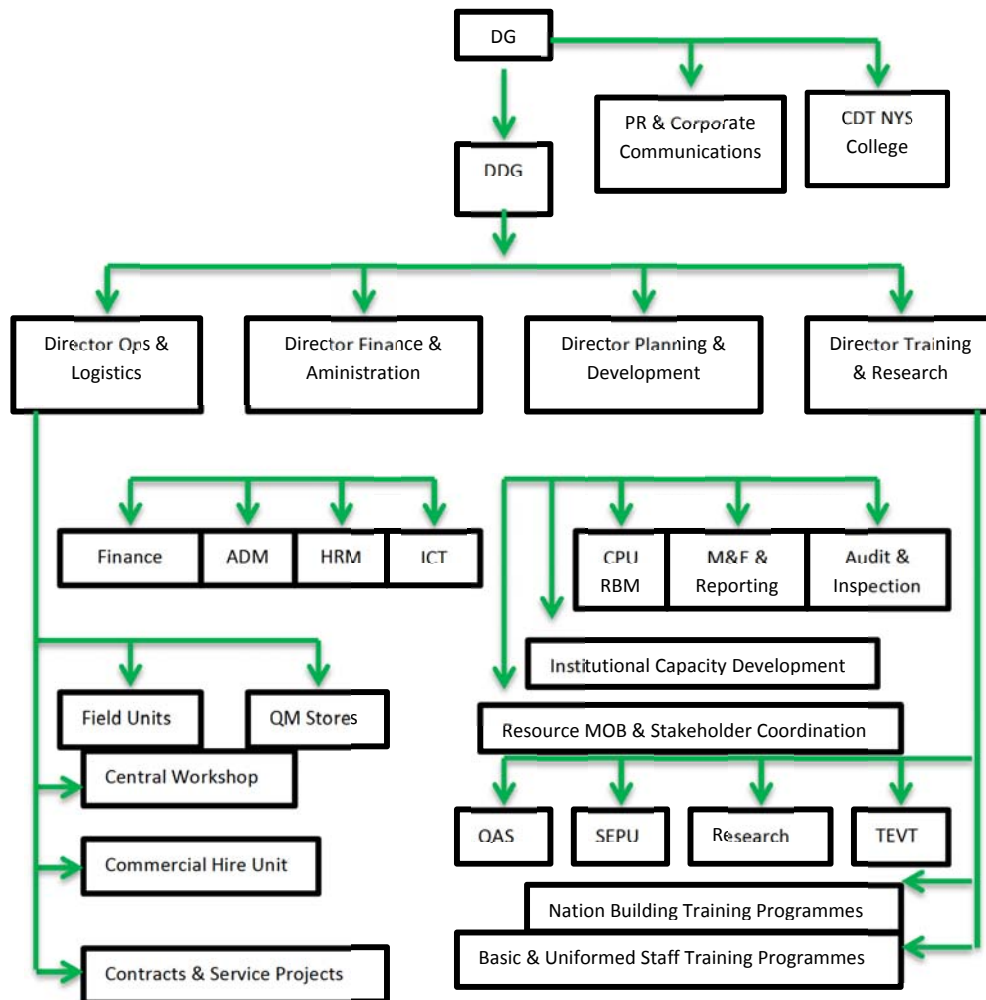
According to the NYS respondents, there are two distinct lines of operation within the NYS under the DG – the uniformed and the non-uniformed lines. Uniformed officers consider their role as executing institutional command in conformity with the status of the NYS as a disciplined entity – a role that they perform with much pride. They consider themselves to be the ‘soul’ of the institution, as reflected in their unofficial use of the term ‘insider’ to refer to themselves. The non-uniformed line is mostly limited to administrative functions including managing the vocational training institutions.

Many of the current senior managers from the level of director upwards (as per the structure below) are uniformed officers. The fact that they are uniformed suggests that they ideally would have risen through the ranks over time. The reality however is that some were absorbed from other security forces such as the military. The current DDG, previously a commandant and the commandant of the NYS headquarters are good examples of ‘insiders’ who rose steadily through



the ranks to their current positions. The current NYS headquarters commandant joined the institution in 1976 as a volunteer.

Figure 1: NYS organisation structure



**Key:** CDT = Commandant, PR = Public Relations, Ops = Operations, ADM = Administration, HRM = Human Resource Management, ICT = Information and Communication Technology, CPU RBM = Central Planning Unit, M&E = Monitoring and Evaluation, QM = Quarter Master, QAS = Quality Assurance and Standards, SEPU = Self Employment Promotion Unit, TEVT = Technical Education and Vocational Training Programmes

Uniformed officers known as commanding officers head field units, which are the basic operating stations for the NYS Programme, while principals, who are not necessarily uniformed, head the training institutions. Based on the descriptions provided of the power and recognition as well as roles and responsibilities of uniformed and non-uniformed officers, it is not inconceivable that the

privileged status accorded to uniformed officers could create conflict within the administrative structure and undermine effective implementation of the programme.

### **Programme implementation**

The NYS Programme consists of three core components: six months of basic training, depending on availability of space at the various training institutions; one to two years of nation building; and finally, depending on choice of qualification, vocational training that lasts anywhere from six months for a craft or artisan qualification to three years for a diploma qualification.

The mandatory NYS Programme to start in 2014 is expected to utilise a two-year layover period between writing of KCSE by high school students and determination of public university admissions by the Joint Admissions Board (JAB). As explained in the previous section, this two-year layover tends to be a challenging period for a number of young people, especially those from poor backgrounds, because the youth are idle and disengaged, they sometimes involve themselves in acts of criminality and drug abuse, and are in some cases exposed to exploitation. According to the political leaders behind the new law, the legislation comes at a time when the country is seeing an uptick in criminal activity. It is also expected to supplement the national education system, which is mainly academic, with vocational training. With respect to the three core components mentioned above, it is unclear at this stage what form the new programme will take.

#### ***Basic training***

Individuals selected at the annual recruitment exercises proceed to Gilgil NYS Institute for a compulsory 6-month basic training course. This is a basic paramilitary training course that is expected to instil in the recruits a sense of patriotism and discipline. The recruits graduate from this training as servicemen and women. As the NYS respondent explained:

*Once they get to the NYS, they are taken for paramilitary training. This brings them to become a disciplined force, so that they are able to work as a group, as a team. They are brought in from whatever villages they have come from. Once they join the NYS, they are all taken to our training college in Gilgil and they are trained now to live as a group, how to be able to operate as a group, how to take commands and they are engaged in serious physical exercises, military drills – actually, they are given a full military training, basic training and in the process they are also given lectures on diverse topics. It takes six months. (NYS Respondent 2, 2013)*

#### ***Nation building***

Recruits graduate from the basic training course as servicemen and women and are thereafter posted to various NYS field units spread all over Kenya to take part in the national service. This takes between a year and two years, depending on the availability of space at the various training institutions.

During national service, the servicemen and women give service to the nation by undertaking various forms of assigned duties and responsibilities, including working at NYS farms, participating in construction of infrastructure such as roads, building of dams and dykes, or taking part in crowd control duties during major national engagements such as national celebrations. Some of the recruits are involved in security duties at government buildings during this time. The recruits are also called upon during national disasters like the rockslide that killed several people in Nairobi in 2012. During a catastrophic slum fire in Nairobi in 2011, the NYS Fire Fighting Unit was the first emergency unit to arrive on the scene and many of the servicemen and women were integral to the rescue operation thereafter. The recruits also participate in environmental protection and rehabilitation exercises like tree planting and cleaning. Recruits recently participated in environmental rehabilitation work by cleaning the Nairobi River.

### ***Vocational training***

The commandant at the NYS headquarters explained that after nation building, volunteers have the option of technical training or the line of command. The former prepares the servicemen and women for both formal employment and self-employment, while those who take the line of command find their way back into the NYS system as uniformed officers. For instance, the current commandant joined the NYS in 1976 and chose the line of command.

Upon completion of voluntary national service, those who opt for the training line join one of the 16 training institutions across the country for vocational training. The NYS offers technical and vocational skills training at various levels, including, diploma, certificate, artisan and craft. However, admission to the certificate and diploma courses requires relatively higher academic grades at high school. The technical training is aimed at developing technical competency for meaningful participation in the economy. All diploma courses take three years, craft and artisan courses take around two years, apart from the driving course, which takes six months.

The following technical courses are offered at the various NYS training institutions:

**Table 1: Technical courses offered by the NYS**

<b>School</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Course</b>
NYS Engineering Institute	Diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automotive Engineering</li> <li>• Mechanical Engineering</li> <li>• Electrical Engineering – Telecomm</li> <li>• Electrical Engineering – Power</li> <li>• Computer Science</li> <li>• Construction plant - TEP</li> <li>• Material and Metallurgy - TEP</li> </ul>
NYS Institute of Business Studies	Diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Secretarial</li> <li>• ICT</li> </ul>

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School	Qualification	Course
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Certified Public Accountancy (CPA)</li> <li>• Supplies Chain Management</li> <li>• Sales and Marketing</li> <li>• Human Resource Management</li> <li>• Business Management</li> </ul>
NYS Institute of Business Studies	Diploma	• Supplies Chain Management
		• Sales and Marketing
		• Human Resource Management
		• Business Management
NECTS (Nairobi Engineering Craft Training School)	Craft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automotive</li> <li>• Electrical Installation</li> <li>• Mechanical Production</li> <li>• ICTT Kasneb</li> </ul>
NYSTC (National Youth Service Technical College), Mombasa	Craft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automotive</li> <li>• Electrical Installation</li> <li>• Mechanical Production</li> <li>• Plumbing</li> <li>• Carpentry and Joinery</li> <li>• Welding and Fabrication</li> <li>• Masonry</li> <li>• Refrigeration and Airconditioning</li> <li>• ICTT Kasneb</li> </ul>
RCTC (Rural Craft Training Centre)	Craft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Automotive</li> <li>• Electrical Installation</li> <li>• Mechanical Production</li> </ul>
	Certificate	• Metal Processing Technology
Gilgil	Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Technology</li> <li>• Electrical and Electronics</li> </ul>
	Artisan	• Upholstery
Voi Training Institute	Certificate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motor Vehicle Technology</li> <li>• Electrical and Electronics</li> <li>• Metal Processing Technology</li> </ul>
POMS (Plant Operators and Mechanics School)	Artisan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plant Operator</li> <li>• Plant Mechanic</li> <li>• Welding and Fabrication</li> <li>• Motor Vehicle Mechanics</li> </ul>
	Artisan	• Plant Operator

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School	Qualification	Course
OJT (on the Job Training School), Tana		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plant Mechanic</li> <li>• Welding and Fabrication</li> <li>• Motor Vehicle Mechanics</li> </ul>
OJT (on the Job Training School), MTB	Artisan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Panelbeating and Spraypainting</li> <li>• Motor Vehicle Mechanics</li> </ul>
Driving School, Naivasha	Artisan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driving</li> </ul>

### 6.2 Programme resourcing

The NYS is mainly financed through a national budgetary partition, with additional resources coming from internal sources and, to a limited extent, external funding from various development partners.

Below is a breakdown of the NYS financial requirements, funding and resource gap for operating years 2011/12 and 2012/13

Table 2: Gross resource requirements

Resource requirement	2011/12	2012/13
Expenses	US\$ 8 153 845	US\$ 8 213 023
Operations, maintenance and development	US\$ 71 574 023	US\$ 71 372 844
<b>Total</b>	<b>US\$ 79 727 868</b>	<b>US\$ 79 585 867</b>

Source: NYS Strategic Plan 2008-2012

1 US\$ = KES 84.5

Table 3: Source of funds

Source of funds	2011/12	2012/13
Government grants*	US\$ 46 153 846	US\$ 48 520 710
Partners	US\$ 11 834 319	US\$ 11 834 319
Internally generated and others	US\$ 5 313 609	US\$ 5 573 964
<b>Total</b>	<b>US\$ 63 301 774</b>	<b>US\$ 65 928 993</b>

Source: NYS Strategic Plan 2008-2012

1 US\$ = KES 84.5

\* The current source of revenue for recurrent and development expenditure for the NYS is mainly through a grant from the Exchequer.

Table 4: Resource gap

	2011/12	2012/13
<b>Resource gap</b>	<b>US\$ 16 426 094</b>	<b>US\$ 13 656 874</b>

### **Government financing**

The current source of revenue for recurrent and development expenditure for the NYS is mainly through a grant from the Exchequer. Kenyan government funding is channelled through the parent ministry, the OP. Although in recent years there has been a small increase in its budget, mainly in the development budget, in general, funding for the NYS is limited.

Government recently financed a comprehensive modernisation programme for the NYS development and training equipment at a cost of over Kshs 4 billion to enable the service to discharge its mandate more effectively.

### **Internal resources**

The NYS generates additional income internally from various commercial ventures such as agriculture and building of infrastructure including roads, bridges, dykes and irrigation canals. Among the projects currently being undertaken by the NYS are putting up a perimeter fence at Lamu Port, construction of constituency-based road projects funded through constituency development fund (CDF), construction of airstrips, as well as sinking of boreholes.

### **Partnerships**

The NYS also receives financial support from various external donors such as the governments of Japan, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and China. For example, the Government of China provided funds to update the machinery and technology used during projects and educational courses. With these funds the NYS was able to induct 4.3 billion shillings worth of equipment in February 2010, including road construction and earth moving machinery, agricultural machinery, fire fighting engines, generators and more.

## **6.3 Youth transition considerations**

The fundamental goals of the NYS include the development of trained, disciplined and organised workers and relieving the youth of unemployment, which makes it amongst the foremost transition institutions for youth in Kenya today.

As a youth transition institution, the NYS has adopted four broad strategies that are expected to result in opportunities that maximise the potential of young people. These include:

- empowering youth to engage in productive activities
- providing youth with the necessary financial support and market linkages
- moulding youth character through training
- strengthening programmes that advance youth health and well-being.

As apparent from the discussion above, the cumulative package of basic training, national service and technical training is designed to help further these strategies.

Unfortunately, the NYS 2008-2012 Strategic Plan is silent on provision of financial support and market linkages to members. The interviews with NYS personnel and focus groups with both current members and alumni confirm this.

The NYS priorities (as per the 2008-2012 Strategic Plan) to mould youth character include initiatives to improve teaching, responding to social challenges such as youth crime and drugs, providing opportunities for leisure, recreation and community service, and inculcating in youth a sense of citizenship.

Finally, there are specific initiatives to strengthen programmes that advance youth health and well-being. HIV and AIDS is an area that has received particular attention.

## 7. Perceptions of the NYS among respondents

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The respondents generally expressed varying perceptions of the NYS when asked about their impressions of the programme and its relevance within the current social and economic context, in particular, the circumstances of youth.

**Great potential but an archaic setup:** Some private sector respondents suggested that the NYS has great potential but is undermined by its military orientation and rigid style of operation. The implication being that there might be a need to bring the programme in tune with the 'current world' to make it more relevant to the needs and market opportunities of modern times.

**Positioning:** According to one respondent, the NYS is inclusive and has good programmes. However, government bureaucracy, poor administration and inadequate funding undermine its effectiveness. Also, the prevailing public impression of the NYS is generally negative.

*It is inclusive, they have proper programmes, but they are short of funding, government bureaucracy, poor administration and then it comes out as a disciplinary ... you know a probatory place for people who need discipline ... So you need to manage that image. That could be a transitional place to develop skills to empower people and build their skill levels to allow them to compete in the market place. (Private Sector Respondent 2, 2013)*

**Volunteerism:** The NYS is generally considered a volunteer programme. In fact, the recruits are referred to as volunteers during a stage in their programme. However, one of the respondents argued that this should not be the case:



*Every time we have a volunteering meeting with the government we say is the NYS a volunteering scheme and we have hours of discussion around it and the conclusion usually is no, its not, for some reason ... It is considered a volunteer scheme ... because the government uses it on such a large scale as volunteers in very many different situations ... However my personal opinion is that NYS is not a volunteer scheme. The reason why I think so is because of the way it is structured and because of the way it actually works. People don't go into the NYS thinking, I want to volunteer for my country. (Inter-Governmental Representative 2, 2013)*

**Proximity to the state:** A number of respondents believe that the NYS enjoys close proximity to the government, which is an accurate assessment, considering that it is a department within the OP, having moved from the disbanded MOYAS. However, speaking to the various respondents, it seems that this association is not necessarily considered an advantage for the NYS, especially by the private sector, whose input it seems, would be greatly valued by the NYS.

**A place where people go to be disciplined or orientated:** The view of the NYS as a place that simply 'dishes' out discipline to otherwise unruly youth or some sort of a military 'bootcamp' is quite pervasive. As a matter of fact, within the public eye, this view of the NYS sometimes overshadows other positive aspects of the NYS. As some of the respondents commented:

*I used to see that as a military place where people would be disciplined and nothing good would come out of it apart from toughened guys, but that is in the past, although it is the way I still think today ... (Private Sector Respondent 1, 2013)*

*The institution I think was set up at independence but at the time, the objective was ... it wasn't skills transfer perse, it was to orient those young people, kind of discipline and it was a pre-condition, you go through NYS before you go to the university ... (Civil Society Respondent 2, 2013)*

*Because I will tell you, as an institution, it is a semi-military outfit, so the discipline levels are quite good ... (Private Sector Respondent 2, 2013)*

**Bridge to formal employment:** Many consider the NYS a link between school/tertiary institutions and the workplace. Its main role in this regard is to develop in young people certain soft skills that are critical to the workplace that may not be taught at schools or tertiary institutions.

*NYS when it came was supposed to bridge between the universities and some people in the medium levels of learning. But more so, it was supposed to empower you to do your own stuff. So a lot of people go there and we absorb them – this is the first lot of 10, we have taken and we have absorbed them in our tractor division. We will distribute them some at the division here and the other guys within our branch network and subsidiary in Uganda and Tanzania and we want to develop them for a*

*long period, in line with the factory – New Hollard. (Private Sector Respondent 2, 2013)*

## 8. Programme impact

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Two of the most timely and contextually relevant fundamental objectives of the NYS include the development of trained, disciplined and organised workers and relieving the youth of unemployment. To be able to implement its strategic intent, the NYS has in place a relatively extensive resource base and infrastructural capacity, considerable geographical reach, and close proximity to the state. Bearing this in mind, the NYS is perhaps well placed to serve as an effective transition institution for the youth in Kenya. Unfortunately the majority of the respondents noted that this has not been the experience for many young people.

The potential impact of the NYS Programme appears to be blunted by a combination of factors inherent to the institution, including an outdated legislative framework, a pervasive culture of bureaucracy and red tape arising from close affiliation to the state, an ineffective organisational structure, and years of poor strategic leadership.

Below follows a detailed assessment of the impact of the programme with a specific focus on the priority areas identified under youth transition considerations (see Section 4). The assessment also covers other dimensions of the youth challenge as captured in Section 2 of this report. It is important to note that the evidence of impact provided is anecdotal and captured as it emerged from the interviews and focus groups.

### 8.1 Monitoring and evaluation systems and tools

The NYS does not have in place a mechanism to monitor the participation rate of its alumni in the formal and informal economy, so the institution has no knowledge of where its alumni are and the nature of economic activities that they are engaged in. It does not have an alumni association and it does not maintain any links whatsoever with its alumni once they leave the institution.

### 8.2 Anecdotal evidence of impact

#### **Empowering youth to engage in productive activities**

There are three main dimensions to empowering youth to engage in productive activities. These include formal employment, self-employment and entrepreneurship.

Many young people join the NYS hoping to use it as a bridge into formal employment. However, besides those that are recruited by the armed forces and other security organs and youth that are

retained in service, the NYS does not assist its members to obtain formal employment. This is evident from some of the views expressed by the NYS alumni focus group participants:

*My expectation was that I would get a job immediately [after] I complete my training, but I didn't get a job. So my expectation was not fulfilled. (NYS Alumni, 2013)*

*In my case I thought that I would go for the basic training, go to class then get employed. It did not happen that way ... after completion we had nowhere to go. You leave the place not knowing what you will do. (NYS Alumni, 2013)*

*While there, we had many organisations coming to recruit like the Forces and other security companies. That is when it occurred to me that people were at the NYS to find employment. But I can't say that I am employed because of the NYS ... its because of the passion that I have for work that no matter what happens, I must be able to obtain a source of income. (NYS Alumni, 2013)*

Most of the NYS alumni in the focus group discussion indicated that while they may not have obtained formal employment as a direct result of their participation in the NYS Programme, they derive value on an ongoing basis from the skills that they acquired.

*I think I benefitted from the NYS because were it not for the NYS I would not even earn a living. I am using my masonry skills picked from the NYS. I am in the line of maintenance so I am practicing what I learnt. (NYS Alumni, 2013)*

Promotion of entrepreneurship has previously been attempted by the NYS, but it failed, mainly due to lack of funding. However, a new programme to be rolled out from 2014, demands that entrepreneurship and computer skills be taught to all students who go through vocational training.

### **Providing financial support and market linkages**

There is no evidence of financial or market linkage support by the NYS to those in service or those who have completed the programme and left the service. But the idea of financial support to NYS servicemen and women to start off small businesses has been considered previously under the proposed entrepreneurship programme that failed to take-off. A self-employment promotion unit (SEPU) has been suggested to serve as an exit strategy for NYS graduates who opt for informal employment. Under this scheme, a revolving fund is proposed to offer soft loans to service graduates who start small-scale business enterprises.

### **Moulding youth character through training**

The NYS has a well-developed reputation in the market for churning out highly disciplined and well-groomed individuals with outstanding work ethic. NYS-trained drivers for instance are much sought after by private individuals and by companies.

*In terms of imparting direct skills to the students, I think it has done very well. It is very intensive ... they impart good skills and discipline of the highest order. (Civil Society Respondent 3, 2013)*

### **Strengthening programmes that advance youth health and well-being**

The NYS runs a programme that sensitises members and surrounding communities on HIV and AIDS with the intention of promoting behaviour change. This initiative is linked to attempts by the institution to encourage members to participate in various sporting codes. Community service is a key activity that is promoted as part of holistic development of the individual. This involves participation in activities such as cleaning of the environment and planting of trees, among others.

## **8.3 Engagement with alumni**

The NYS neither has an active alumni association nor maintains formal links with members who have completed their programme and left the service. There was no signal from the NYS respondents of any likelihood by the institution to remedy this situation in the near future. Unfortunately, the institution's corporate relations team was not available for an interview to explore this matter further.

## **9. Lessons learned and promising practices**

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### **9.1 Access to resources**

Given its extensive resource base including trainers, training facilities and funding, the NYS is able to handle diverse operational and training issues. This advantage affords the institution great flexibility in addressing a wide range of youth economic challenges.

Also, the fact that the NYS draws its funding from the Exchequer gives it a clear advantage over other competing youth empowerment programmes. Government funding goes a long way towards ensuring sustainability of the programme. The significance of adequate funding for the programme is highlighted in the comment below:

*We have been doing recruitments twice a year, but right now, because of lack of funds, we are doing it once a year, which is very unfortunate to the young boys and girls, because those who come here go to the AP, Police, KWS. (NYS Respondent 3, 2013)*

Internal sources of revenue also play a significant role in the institution's financial stability. The NYS generates additional income from various commercial ventures such as agriculture and building of infrastructure including roads, bridges, dykes and irrigation canals. It is evident from the interviews that there is significant scope to up-scale such avenues, even though the strategic leadership to implement this has been lacking. Furthermore, the institution produces its own food from its various farms to feed the volunteers.

## **9.2 Corporate image**

From the interviews, it is apparent that the general public and other key stakeholders view certain aspects, like the disciplined and well-trained cadres of the NYS, positively. But it should not stop at this. The institution is obliged to manage aspects of its corporate image that are misunderstood like the widely held view of the NYS as some sort of a 'bootcamp' to straighten out wayward youth. A positive image makes the institution more appealing to potential employers and to aspiring volunteers.

*I think NYS is not sold well enough. I am a communications person so that hits me smack in the face because the first question I ask anyone about any organisation is how do you perceive this organisation? As an employer, would I employ someone who comes from the NYS solely on the fact that they have come from the NYS? Why is there a hesitation on the part of the employers ... I would hesitate to hire from the NYS because of how I view the programme. I do quite a bit of hiring for UNV. So I think it's a communications problem, maybe not necessarily how the programme is actually running but how it is being perceived. So I think opportunities certainly exist. (Inter-Governmental Representative 2, 2013)*

## **9.3 Quality and effectiveness of the programme**

According to the respondents, an effective youth empowerment programme should focus its curriculum and training initiatives on addressing market needs. This is the only way of ensuring that the programme remains relevant at all times. Some qualifications from the NYS, such as the driving qualification, remain highly rated. However, some respondents felt that some courses are outdated and not relevant to current market needs. The KYEP, a private sector-driven youth empowerment programme, has been able to sustain great interest among youth, because it is perceived to offer quality training and services and is considered effective because it manages to place most of its graduates in various private sector organisations as interns or employees.

## 9.4 Reach of the programme

The NYS is considered to have the ability to reach a wide network of youth through its diverse geographical units spread across the country. It has 16 training institutions with a capacity to accommodate 10 000 to 15 000 trainees at any given time. The new law on compulsory service for high school graduates requires the government to expand existing NYS facilities in order to accommodate the expected influx of young recruits. This reach is critical for the programme to have the desired effect among the huge population of young people.

Another dimension to reach is admission criteria. The NYS for instance takes youth with lower grades compared to a number of available youth programmes that require a minimum form four certificate. This ensures that youth who would in other instances not have anything to do are given an opportunity.

## 9.5 Sustainable livelihoods

When asked how they earn a living and the nature of economic activities that they are currently engaged in, the majority of the NYS alumni who participated in the focus group discussion, and who also happen to be self-employed, indicated that they are pursuing economic activities that are unrelated to the vocational training that they received at the NYS. Many are involved in informal trade in the markets within the city. Those in formal employment also indicated that their training at the NYS either has no bearing on their current roles and responsibilities, or is totally unrelated. Even so, they all credit their resilience and resourcefulness to the training received at the NYS.

The outcome seems to be more positive for those who acquired hands-on or practical vocational training courses such as masonry, carpentry and driving. A focus group participant who acquired trade skills in masonry at the NYS currently works as an independent contractor. He essentially considers himself to be self-employed, even though he often has to rely on more established construction firms for work and occasionally goes without work. Another participant who trained as a driver also works on an ad hoc basis as a driver, but indicates that most of his peers are formally engaged as drivers.

## 10. Conclusion and potential for change

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From the interviews conducted with the private sector, civil society, government, NYS administration, and the focus group discussion with NYS alumni, there appears to be general consensus that the NYS Programme has largely failed to live up to its potential as a bridge for Kenyan youth to formal employment or self-employment, including entrepreneurship. The overwhelming verdict is that the NYS Programme has been ineffective as a transition institution for the youth:

*... As things stand now, I would say we are wasting resources ... at the end of the day, the people who will leave this place and get jobs are those who were brought in by influential people. So the society at large is loosing. We are actually helping people who could have managed without coming to the NYS because even when they go to the job market, the person brought in by an influential person will likely get the job because he or she will be recommended. The other people will go back to the village and continue herding cows and goats. If there has to be real value, we have to make sure that all who come through the NYS are deployed somewhere. If there are no jobs for them out there, we should actually bring them back and utilise the resources we have to generate some income – they should actually be employed by the NYS. (NYS Respondent 2, 2013)*

Responding to a question asking whether the NYS is currently configured to respond to the issue of youth unemployment, a respondent explained:

*I don't think so - that is the honest answer. If this is a strategy evaluation, that is the honest answer. It is not, if it is maybe in the mind of someone but in the mind of the public that is supposed to consume, its not. (Inter-Governmental Representative 2, 2013)*

Also, there is no evidence that the institution has had any significant impact on other aspects of challenges facing the youth such as health, education etc. From the perspective of an external observer, part of the challenge is that the NYS lacks a credible mechanism to monitor, evaluate and report on its activities and the tangible outcomes of these activities with respect to its mandate as a youth empowerment programme.

Even more concerning is the fact that the NYS neither has an active alumni association nor maintains links with members who leave the service upon completion of their individual programmes. This suggests that the NYS does not know where its alumni are at any point in time, whether they are employed or not, and the nature of livelihood activities that they are engaged in. From the focus group discussion, it emerged that many of the NYS alumni remain unemployed or are involved in livelihood activities that are completely unrelated to the trades and qualifications acquired while in service.

The reasons given by the respondents for the situation vary widely, but are discussed below under four broad categories: relevance within the current social and economic context, NYS as a conditional programme, the role of the state, and strategic leadership. These areas also represent key opportunities for meaningful change within the Kenyan NYS with a view to enhancing the programme's impact on the young people it seeks to support.



## 10.1 Relevance of the NYS within the current socio-economic context

Respondents indicated that an outdated policy framework underpins the NYS Programme. This to an extent undermines its relevance within the prevailing social and economic context. There is a pervasive sense that the NYS today is no different from what it was at inception in 1964, despite significant shifts in the socio-cultural, political and economic context.

The NYS has largely derived its mandate from the 1964 NYS Act in its original form. While there have been occasional deviations arising from presidential directives, ministerial memos or orders of the director-general, these have not been far-reaching, leaving the 1960s organisational culture and practice intact. However, this is expected to change somewhat with the new law on compulsory NYS conscription for all high school graduates.

Fortunately, the need to review the NYS Act to bring it more in tune with the current times is recognised within the institution itself and externally, as reflected in the statement below.

*... I think the biggest challenges that there has been is on the NYS to generally look at the contextual issues that are happening to young people ... we have moved now to the knowledge age where we are now seeing that if you are to focus this country, then the next big thing that we have to invest in as a nation is skills towards science, engineering – technological oriented ... these are some of the things that probably the NYS should already start picking and seeing how to modernise the technology offering, the skills offering that they are doing. (Private Sector Youth Empowerment, 2013)*

Commenting on a possible policy gap, a respondent stated:

*... We have always asked what happens to private sector partnerships with NYS. If NYS is a programme for churning out people who are able to do certain things, who are the people in the market who have need of this skill. Why are these skills not ending up with those people? So for me I think there is a policy gap in terms of how these things are negotiated and how it goes, but there is a gap there. (Inter-Governmental Representative 2, 2013)*

Besides the need for a policy review, there also needs to be an integrated approach to the question of youth challenges in Kenya. Some of the respondents felt that this may have been lost following the dissolution of the MOYAS by the current government.

## 10.2 NYS as a compulsory programme

Most respondents agreed that the NYS Programme should be compulsory for all young people at some stage in their lives. They believe that it would serve as a mechanism to help address some

of the challenges facing young people. The Senate adopted this line of argument in passing a new law on compulsory NYS participation for all high school graduates.

A compulsory NYS Programme is viewed as potentially providing career guidance to the youth, inculcating in young people a culture of citizenship, a means to sustainable livelihood, and a post-school transition programme that would positively socialise the youth.

From a career guidance perspective, the NYS is viewed as a process that could assist young people to make the right choices in life, or a career orientation programme that could help young people to understand the various career options available to them as they make their career choices.

Compulsory NYS participation may be necessary for purposes of instilling in youth a sense of service and value for the nation. The NYS also offers an opportunity to impart a sense of responsibility in young people.

An effective compulsory NYS Programme presents an opportunity to re-consider current approaches to developing opportunities for sustainable livelihood for young people.

However, the respondents suggested that there are conditions that need to be fulfilled in order to have a successful compulsory NYS Programme. These include eliminating the current military orientation of the programme, de-centralising the programme by establishing more outposts, and focusing more on vocational training and development of technical skills.

The NYS is considered a reserve force of the armed forces and this is reflected in how the institution is run. Respondents felt that this must change to ensure the success of the compulsory programme. It is also important to open up more NYS centres across the country to enhance access, given the expected influx in numbers of participants. The new law that makes NYS participation compulsory calls for close co-operation between national government and the county governments on programme implementation. Finally, the focus should be on imparting technical skills to improve opportunities for self-employment amongst participants.

### **10.3 The role of the state**

Given the infrastructure and capacity challenges at the NYS, the question of funding is critical. The programme is currently almost exclusively funded by the state, with minimal but important contributions coming from internal sources and external donors. However, indications are that government funding for such programmes may be affected in the medium term, amidst falling revenue collections, dwindling donor funding for government programmes, and a ballooning recurrent expenditure budget. Within this context, the senate directive that national government works with county governments to implement the compulsory conscription programme is timely. But, there are simmering tensions at the moment between national government and some

counties, especially those under the opposition, which raises concerns regarding the potential of this arrangement.

Also, close links between the NYS and government is blamed for what is perceived as a pervasive culture of bureaucracy and red tape within the institution. This by extension is seen as being the key factor behind the institution's lacklustre approach to strategic planning and execution. Delinking the programme from the state should be considered as a strategy for enhancing the programme's strategic approach and implementation going forward.

*Maybe delink it from government; restrict government processes - one of the reasons it has gone down is the approach that government took. The bureaucracies of government ... Government can control, regulate, but when they run it, it does not come out very well. So to develop the NYS, first we have to put proper resource people there, qualified. (Private Sector Respondent 2, 2013)*

*I didn't get the impression that they (NYS) even viewed themselves really as an answer to youth unemployment problems or anything like that ... I got the sense that they were approaching it from we are ... part of the government, we are just trying to make sure that every young person that passes through here comes out straight as a rod and we train them in this and that or the other. So I don't think there was any strategic thinking to it ... (Inter-Governmental Representative 2, 2013)*

#### **10.4 Strategic leadership**

There are a host of strategic issues that the respondents felt should be reviewed within the NYS Programme. These include the organisational structure, curriculum, approach to partnerships and exit strategy for the servers.

From the interviews at the NYS, it is clear that the organisational structure needs to be reviewed to ensure that the institution is configured to be able to respond to the changing demands of society and the economy. The institution itself has recognised the need to reorganise its operational and administrative structure to make it more effective and efficient.

There is a need to review the curriculum to bring it in line with current market needs. Some respondents suggested that this may require the involvement of the private sector to ensure that the programme offers market-oriented programmes.

*... If we are to talk about a vibrant NYS that can deliver ... then a solid partnership needs to be on board, where the private sector is involved not only in the design of the curriculum but also in terms of clearly articulating its needs. (Private Sector Youth Empowerment, 2013)*

Despite the obvious potential for meaningful partnerships in several NYS operations, progress has been hampered by the absence of a legal framework to provide clarity or much needed guidelines on the form that such arrangements should take. However, one of the NYS respondents explained that, as the accounting officer, the DG can initiate direct dealings with external stakeholders without involving the government. It is therefore not clear why there is little activity in terms of relationship building with external stakeholders, especially the private sector.

There is also an obligation for the NYS to seriously reconsider its role as a transition institution for young people and adopt a more strategic approach to executing this mandate. This may involve establishing deliberate partnerships with various players, especially the private sector, to provide economic and career development opportunities to successful graduates. The NYS may also utilise its internal resources and capacity to absorb those who are unable to access opportunities outside the service.

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**Appendix 1: Interview list**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Position</b>
Jacob Kithinji	National Youth Service	Lecturer/Trainer
Karanja Julius	National Youth Service	Assistant Director
Inganga John	Caucus for Women's Leadership	Programme Manager
Ouda Japheth	Global Peace Foundation	Programme Co-ordinator
Steinkamp Roger	USAID (Kenya)	Youth/Education Advisor
Muchiri Carol	International House Limited	Human Resource Manager/PA to the Chairman
Gachugu Ehud	Kenya Private Sector Alliance	Project Director, Kenya Youth Empowerment Programme
Oloo George	United Nations Volunteers	Partnerships and Communications Specialist
Musungu Dennis	CMC Motors Group Ltd	Divisional Manager
Oyier Allan	Samsung East and Central Africa	General Manager
Chandaria Manu	Mabati Rolling Mills Ltd	Chairman, Industrial Companies