



Reclaiming Urban Youth Identity through Language in Kenya: The Case of Koch FM Radio

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Abstract

Kenya's urban youths in Nairobi's informal and low income settlements have had to contend with an identity crisis, economic deprivation, marginalization in leadership and governance and general stigmatization. Moreover, they have borne a heavy burden both as victims and perpetrators of crime, wanton sex trade and drug abuse. This has led to the emergence of a special language variety in the form of an urban slang (*Sheng*) that the youth initially used to exclude their parents and the authorities from their perceived criminal acts. However, since the enactment of a new constitution that has expanded the democratic space and created broader awareness of individual rights and liberties, Kenya's urban youth in Nairobi have given new roles to *Sheng* by making it a symbol of youth's autonomy and creativity. This article uses the case of the youth-initiated Koch FM which is a model urban community radio station that primarily uses urban slang in its presentations. Through this station, the socio-economically disadvantaged youths create and maintain social networks in the form of support groups, theatre and income generating clubs with the objective of creating wealth, thereby boosting identity through assertive self-expression. The youth can then articulate and influence policy on social, political and economic affairs by sharing information on health, HIV/AIDS, political representation and governance roles. This case study demonstrates that a common language can be an effective unifier since it transcends social, economic, religious, ethnic, political and gender barriers.

Résumé

La jeunesse urbaine kenyane des quartiers défavorisés de Nairobi est confrontée à une crise d'identité, à la privation économique, à la marginalisation dans les postes de direction et de gouvernance et à la stigmatisation générale. En

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outre, ces jeunes ont eu à assumer le lourd fardeau en tant que victimes et auteurs de crimes, du commerce sexuel et de la toxicomanie. Cela a conduit à l'émergence d'une variété linguistique spéciale sous la forme d'un argot urbain (*Sheng*) que les jeunes utilisaient initialement pour commettre leurs actes criminels à l'insu de leurs parents et des autorités. Cependant, depuis la promulgation d'une nouvelle constitution qui a élargi l'espace démocratique et créé une plus grande prise de conscience des droits et libertés individuels, la jeunesse urbaine kenyane à Nairobi a donné de nouveaux rôles au *Sheng* en en faisant le symbole de l'autonomie et de la créativité des jeunes. Cet article se fonde sur le cas de Koch FM initiée par les jeunes, qui est une station de radio communautaire urbaine modèle utilisant principalement l'argot urbain dans ses émissions. Grâce à cette station, les jeunes socio-économiquement défavorisés créent et entretiennent des réseaux sociaux sous la forme de groupes de soutien, de clubs de théâtre et de génération de revenus visant à créer de la richesse, stimulant ainsi l'identité grâce à une auto-expression affirmée. De ce fait, les jeunes peuvent articuler et influencer la politique sur les affaires sociales, politiques et économiques en partageant les informations concernant la santé, le VIH/sida, la représentation politique ainsi que les rôles en matière de gouvernance. Cette étude de cas démontre que le langage commun peut être un unificateur efficace puisqu'il dépasse les obstacles sociaux, économiques, religieux, ethniques, politiques et sexistes.

Introduction

The population of youth residing in Kenya's urban slums is on the rise. However, this group faces high rates of unemployment, urban crime, deprivation and general stagnation in life (Waswalla 2013). This has led to stigmatization, missed opportunities and a sense of despondency. Due to prevalent social, economic and psychological pressures, Kenya's urban youth have launched initiatives through social networks to enable them reclaim their individual and collective dignity, to redefine their role and relevance in both local, national, regional and global realms and to use the available resources to innovate and sustain income-generating projects (Kenya Youth Action Platform 2014). Koch FM represents one such youth-driven initiative whose objective is to change people's mindsets while empowering the youth. In this paper, youth empowerment is considered as an essential component of national development. Indeed, youth initiatives contribute a significant part of GDP and youths dominate Kenya's informal employment sector known as *jua-kali* ('hot sun') which is reported to have created some 625,000 jobs in 2013–14 (Waiguru 2014).

In Kenya, youth organizations and initiatives are recognized by the government if they are formally registered by the Ministry of Youth, Sports,

Culture and the Arts. The Kenya government underscores the important role of its youth in national development and promotes self-reliance among youth as a means of creating self-employment opportunities. It has therefore initiated clear policies to support such youth activities. The empowerment takes the form of financial credit schemes, namely the Youth Fund, Uwezo Fund and Youth Enterprise Development Fund.

The Kenyan government coordinates and controls legally recognized youth networks by registering youth groups through the District Social Development Officers. These are normally groups with a distinct administrative structure such as duly elected officials, a bank account, a consistent membership with paid-up members, a constitution detailing the articles of association and a physical project office or physical address.

There are many cadres of youth movements and networks in Kenya depending on their objectives, activities, membership, motivation, the social contexts in which they are founded and the unifying factors. For instance, there are numerous church-based youth networks brought together by their common religious activities and obligations. Moreover, student associations and sports clubs also thrive in Kenya and have networks beyond Kenyan borders. In terms of formal education networks, there are a large number of Kenyan students in Ugandan educational institutions; there were 40,000 in March 2014 (*Daily Monitor* 2014). This has led to a rapid cross-border transfer of culture and merger of social and economic interests among the youth across the East African region. The dynamics of youth interaction in East Africa are also bound to change with the advent of the common market that entails free movement of goods and labour.

Since information-sharing is a critical component of setting up, networking and sustaining youth projects, development activities and other initiatives, the role of the mass media becomes pertinent to the process of change and development. In recognition of this fact, the Kenya government freed the airwaves and eventually registered up to 116 FM stations between the years 1998 and 2014 (Communications Commission of Kenya 2014). This period coincided with the emergence of many new political parties that championed revolutionary ideas and offered alternative leadership that reawakened the youth to form alliances and get a stable footing in society to advocate for their rights more effectively. The FM radio stations therefore provided a forum for youth outreach, and youth groups and initiatives gained greater popularity as they became more visible in and through the media. Media practitioners and other stakeholders welcomed this revolution on Kenya's media scene and envisaged that it would ultimately create awareness and attract development partners.

The subsequent phase of the media revolution in Kenya saw the emergence of community radio stations whose agenda was to address the immediate needs and interests of groups concentrated in smaller areas. The Communications Commission of Kenya, which is responsible for registering the stations and media regulation, restricts the geographical reach of these stations to within a 25-kilometre radius. This means that the target community would form the focal audience, hence closer networks can result. This guarantees a faster flow of information and feedback and can be a catalyst of local development and for networking with other external groups.

The Objectives and *Modus Operandi* of Koch FM Radio

Koch FM was the first community radio station to be registered and licensed in 2006. The station is based in Korogocho slums with 200,000 residents. This is Kenya's third largest slum after Kibera and Mathare. Koch is slang derived from the name Korogocho as a clipped word. The station is housed in hollow and echo-prone containers that were improvised in a very innovative way.¹ The planning took two years and was as a result of 'people's collective power and the fact that, in as much as Korogocho was viewed as a bad place, there were people who attached value to what the resident youths did'.² The station's initiators were convinced that good things flourished in Korogocho but these were either unreported or misrepresented to the general public. They therefore considered themselves as victims of long-term negative publicity.

Koch FM was run by a group of forty-two volunteers by 2008. However, a high turnover of staff was reported because when these volunteers found better jobs, they would abandon the station. This was a positive development because they shared the experience and challenges faced by youths elsewhere hence they became ambassadors of Koch FM. Those who moved up the social and economic ladder, having used Koch FM as a springboard, could be relied upon to bridge the divide between the upper and lower classes of Kenyan society.

Koch FM has given impetus to other community radio stations, for which it acts as a model, namely Ghetto FM and Kibera FM which are based in Mathare and Kibera slums respectively. Regardless of the levels of poverty coupled with disease, alcoholism and poor sanitation in these three largest slums in Nairobi, most community radio firms are essentially supported by donations from the communities that they serve and a few external well wishers. Lack of funds has therefore been a major threat to sustaining their operations. The community radio therefore has a limited listenership and is perceived as poor radio for poor people. This means that most presenters work as volunteers most of the time. According to Kenyan broadcast regulations,

the Communications Commission allows community broadcasting licensees to advertise, on their stations, adverts that are relevant and specific to that community within the broadcast area. As expected, such local advertisements cannot yield substantial revenues.

The Role of Language in Defining Youth Identity through Koch FM Radio

The ethnic diversity of Korogocho requires strong cultural and social assimilation practices through youth networks in order to break down the tribal barriers that are often a hindrance to peace and development. In Korogocho, there is a divergent composition of heterogeneous ethnic groups namely the Luo, Kikuyu, Somali, Kamba and Luhya communities. Since language is the unifying element that transcends tribal boundaries, Kenya's urban youth have, over the years, developed an urban slang named *Sheng* which is essentially a mixture of Kiswahili which is the national language, English which is the official language of bureaucracy, and vocabulary items from several indigenous Kenyan languages. This language has been used as a mark of urbanization and youth group identity especially in highly cosmopolitan areas such as Nairobi City. This social variety of language has become so popular that even mainstream advertising applies it to appeal to youthful audiences. This includes the leading mobile telephone operator Safaricom as well as banks and churches.

Through *Sheng* urban youth, such as those targeted by Koch FM, consider themselves as Nairobians or Kenyans and keep their ethnic identities concealed. According to one urban hip-hop musician who originated from the slum, such a neutral language makes today's urban youth 'tribe-all' and not tribal. This positive attitude is witnessed in the kind of neutral stage-names adopted by hip-hop musicians that go beyond ethnic, local and national boundaries. For instance, *bongo* music appeals to Kenyan youths as much as it does to Tanzanians, while Nigerian movies are popular among Kenyan youths. They derive inspiration and motivation from them and this enriches cultural standards, vocabulary, world views and entrepreneurial endeavours.

This article investigates the processes and initiatives through which the youth-run Koch FM has gradually launched and sustained its significant initiatives and the potential impact and future prospects of this model community radio. The objective is to evaluate the impact of community radio on youth social networks as a precursor for development and youth advancement in the context of the fast-changing dynamic local, regional, global, social, cultural and economic environment.

Literature Review

The spectrum of youth has been variously defined as ranging from ten to eleven year-olds to as high as age thirty-five in sub-Saharan Africa including Kenya. Curtain (2000) observes that young people aged fifteen to twenty-four account for just a quarter of the world's population. Africa had the largest segment of young people standing at 36.4 per cent of the population aged fifteen to sixty-four by the year 2000 (*ibid.*). Kenya has 70 per cent of the population below twenty-five at 70 per cent of the total population, the same as Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Zambia. It was estimated that by 2017, there would be 24 million youths aged eighteen to thirty-five. In Kenya, a youth is taken to belong in the age range fifteen to thirty-five with the voting age being eighteen (Mkandawire 1996). For purposes of this article therefore, youth is considered as representing the age bracket fifteen to thirty-five. This is also the most productive segment of the population.

The socio-economic challenges facing youth in sub-Saharan Africa have been the subject of many studies, enquiries and government policy papers. In his analysis, *The Socio-economic Situation of Youth in Africa*, Chigunta (2002) outlines the major problems facing youth in sub-Saharan Africa, prospects of future action and options available to them, while Mayor and Binde (2001) and Bennell (2000) raise concerns about the socio-economic situation of young people in much of sub-Saharan Africa and the strategies of creating additional livelihood opportunities for them. It has also been noted that in sub-Saharan Africa, large sections of young people have become marginalized or are excluded from education, healthcare, salaried jobs and even access to the status of adulthood. This is compounded by chronic unemployment (Bennell 2000; Mkandawire 1996).

Kenya's ballooning youth population captures this situation aptly. According to the Poverty Free Kenya (2014) movement, gross economic disparities have impacted highly on youth in Kenya. Consequently, a majority of them have abandoned dreams of building positive futures. Due to these depressing conditions, there has been a tangential increase in social ills, crime and drug abuse among the youth. The general lack of opportunities for the youth in Kenya leads to a loss in potential talent and a failure to harness human resources.

To change this trend, there is therefore an urgent need to empower Kenyan youth. This requires simultaneous efforts on various fronts. One way of empowering the youth would entail giving them a full academic education as well as enhancing their life skills, civic participation, appreciation of diversity and preparation for livelihoods. Secondly, empowering youths also

means creating opportunity (Wincla 2014). This may be done by expanding apprenticeships and attachments, supporting youth mentorship programmes, offering financial, legal marketing and other advice and establishing a level playing field in terms of access to jobs, markets and capital.

Thirdly, there is also the need to consciously foster, develop and support youth initiatives and for a strong representational youth voice in services and decision-making in local, national and global arenas. There is a further need to engage youth as resources by supporting them to upscale their innovations and business ventures on grassroots, national and international bases (Kenya National Youth Forum 2013). It has also been reported that in order to develop and take advantage of synergies, youth should be encouraged to work together across social, ethnic and political lines to advance their common interests and participate fully in the political and economic life of the country.

Research has shown that community radios across the world have helped many countries especially European countries like Sweden, and the USA, to achieve industrialization (Flavia 2012). This has improved the status of poor communities by linking rural and poor people with development and supporting sustainable development through innovative approaches, updated information and news.

Studies have demonstrated the potential of community radios in facilitating youth empowerment endeavours. For instance, Radio Lake Victoria based in Kisumu, Kenya is a community radio that serves up to 1.5 million listeners across the Western region. Its impact is summed up by a local fishmonger who observed that it is the voice of the voiceless and a beacon of their hope. It has brought a profound new opportunity and systematic strategies of more inclusive sustainable development especially among the hitherto voiceless youth populations.

Community radio therefore comes as a timely intervention because the situation of African youth is changing as a result of the changing culture and its inherent continuities and contradictions in a context of economic stagnation. The objective of youth mentoring through the stations is a form of social adjustment that is occurring in contemporary Africa in a context of economic decline and restructuring. Moreover, there is evidence to support the contention that traditional African social support structures such as the notion of African socialism and the extended family are disintegrating especially in urban areas (Bennell 2000). Among the contributing factors to this phenomenon are social change, urbanization, education, mass media, economic decline and economic restructuring (Mlema 1999). This means that there is a high degree of individualism, hence youth need avenues to nurture

their own strategies of group sustenance through new forms of social networks; the borderless nature of media can effectively facilitate such moves.

Historically, communities in Africa have provided the underlying framework for social development. Through various kin and non-kin arrangements, networks of formal and informal relationships were developed which ensured reciprocity and exchange in the form of service and support. As a consequence, patron–client relationships, involving fosterage and adoption, volunteerism and collective endeavours have been quite widespread in Africa. This is, however, not true of contemporary Africa especially in the complex urban context. In recent years, rapid urbanization which has brought people from different, sometimes hostile, ethnic groups together, and widespread economic and restructuring processes have conspired to undermine traditional kinship structures (Bennell 2000). It is in this urban context of social dislocation and the undermining of institutions traditionally offering support that many young people in much of Africa currently find themselves.

Chigunta (2002) identifies the concepts of fragmented youth urban identities, street sub-cultures and social marginalization in contemporary Africa and attributes them to the absence of social control or properly functioning social support institutions, as a result of which young people in contemporary Africa tend to be alienated from mainstream society and largely end up on the streets where they create their own social worlds. These social worlds constitute what is generally referred to as youth sub-cultures. In a sense, Kenya's urban slang *Sheng* and hip-hop music through which the youth have found creative and motivational self-expression can be viewed as constituting a youth sub-culture. The fact that youth have been supplanted from their rural environment, and the gradual loss of contact, means that they have two identities, although they mask their rural roots in order to come to terms with the complex demands of the urban environment.

This background has led to what Abdullah (1998) has described as the negative stereotyping of young people. Abdullah (1998) observes that the deepening crises in Africa have compelled many young actors on the street to redefine themselves in social terms that reflect their marginal status in society. The informal socialization of young people in the streets and urban slums also occurs in a global context there by allowing local youth to tap into a global youth culture. This process is facilitated by the Internet through social platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. In that sense, globalization continues to shape and define urban youth identity.

Due to the current trends of youth redefinition, some aspects of youth culture in Africa have emerged. As a result, popular mass culture in the West has become, to a large extent, part of the repertoire of African youth

culture. This is witnessed through revolutionary styles in music, art and dress culture. Chigunta (2002) recommends that youth empowerment should be promoted through youth enterprise and self-development, improving the policy environment, improving the access of youth to credit, providing business development services to youth, and promoting institutional and enterprise networking.

Githethwa (2008) reports that Koch FM was the first slum-based community radio in Kenya whose example was followed by others, notably Ghetto FM in Pumwani and Pamoja FM in Kibera slums. A case study similar to Koch FM is the initiative by Maji Mazuri Foundation that launched the first community radio in Mathare Valley to give people in the ghetto information, education, strategies to promote peace, gain access to jobs, funding and other economic and social empowerment opportunities. This created unity in the community that is made up of the eleven ghetto villages. The target listeners of Mathare FM were to include the most vulnerable youth in the ghetto who survive by engaging in crime, prostitution and brewing illicit alcohol, who lack hope for a better future and who have no networks and did not belong to youth groups, CBOs and NGOs operating in the area to help them access jobs and other opportunities.

The Mathare community radio station provides much needed civic and non-formal education. It has initiated sharing of information, interaction and cooperation, and encourages unification in socio-economic and empowerment activities in order to curtail fragmentation into regional, class- or ethnic-based and gender age groups. One documented achievement is that Mathare FM actively undertook peace promotion in the run-up to the 2013 General Elections because idle slum youth had been mobilized into political violence. As a mother commented, Mathare FM had stopped many bullets for their children: the bullets of crime and violence, the bullets of drugs, of alcohol abuse and the bullets of poverty.

The Mathare FM initiative was therefore meant to create awareness about past and current conflicts and the dangers of ethnicization that have fuelled violence in the past. In the slum set-up where the majority of people are semi-literate and do not speak fluently, radio was found to be more accessible than the Internet and newspapers. The preferred languages on the station's programmes are *Sheng* and Kiswahili. Through this, Mathare FM, with its slogan 'STOP THE BULLET', aims to encourage community cohesion and to assist the community to develop tools to quell simmering tensions as they arise.

It is envisaged that greater knowledge about local initiatives will also engender a more optimistic image of the slum and that this will positively impact on both society's and the community's image of the slum. Older teens

receive counselling and business training through the radio station. Networking at a macro-level is seen in the direct influence that Koch FM has made by partnering with Mathare FM. This is a synergistic arrangement given the fact that the environmental and socio-economic challenges faced in both slums are largely similar. Through the two sister initiatives, entire families have been lifted out of poverty through business training and micro-finance facilitation.

An audience survey of Koch FM listeners by Nyambala (2011) found that there was average involvement of the community in identifying problems for the community radio station through focus group discussions (FGDs), telephone calls, committee memberships, and telephone text messaging. Community participation was exhibited through the involvement of the music artistes, and church-based organizations in broadcasting. There was therefore a positive correlation between perceived attainment of improvements which showed that the station had realized increased awareness of community problems. It also emerged that greater knowledge patterns from radio were likely to lead to more dedicated participation patterns in community radio.

According to Poverty Free Kenya (2014), empowering Kenyan youth requires simultaneous efforts on multiple fronts. Youth should be encouraged to work together and this can be facilitated by strong networks in their movements mediated by radio and such channels as the Kenya Youth for Change Facebook fan page.

A survey that covered the adjacent low-income Dandora, Mathare and Kayole estates revealed that Koch FM had a daily listenership of about 600,000 people. It is instructive that the residences of these listeners exhibit environmental and socio-economic experiences that are very much similar to that of Korogocho, hence they would easily identify with the content and ideas propagated by Koch FM in line with the common urban youth agenda (Githethwa 2008). The role of the Kenya Community Media Network (2013) recognizes the fact that community radio plays a crucial role in democracy and development by enabling marginalized communities to debate issues of concern at the local level and feed these concerns to the national level. There was therefore a need to support independent, participatory media in Kenya such as Koch FM. Such media should ideally be owned, controlled and produced by, for and about the community in order for them to be sustainable.

Methodology

Koch FM was purposively sampled for this case study firstly because it was the first community radio station to be licensed in Kenya in 2006. Secondly, it is consistently run by youth management and youth presenters and the major

target group consists of the youth in the under-privileged urban slum of Korogocho. Moreover, Koch FM has been used as a model and reference point by subsequent community radio stations in Nairobi. Moreover, the impact of Koch FM in terms of establishing and sustaining strong youth networks has been recorded. Finally, the author lived physically with his relatives in Korogocho slums during his college days and still visits them frequently hence has first-hand experience of the youth networks and activities found there.

This article adopted a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis. The data reported here was obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with two station managers, one male and one female, and two FGDs with the station listeners, while the secondary data was obtained through a literature review of published materials in the library and on the Internet. The data was analysed through content analysis guided by the themes of social movement, social networks and youth empowerment with various variables such as peace, development, health awareness, education, water and sanitation, self-employment, leadership and politics, security, gender issues, human rights, job creation and innovation, campaigns against drug abuse and alcoholism, career building, music and the arts and youth mobilization. These were used to organize the data into themes and categories. Their roles in reinforcing youth networks locally, regionally and globally were examined using the above indicators. The results and discussions are presented in the form of analytical prose, illustrated by items of the youth slang *Sheng* to contextualize the youth urban slum mindset.

Strategies for Reclaiming Urban Youth Identity through Koch FM radio

The broadly stated mandate of Koch FM was to find ways of informing people about what was going on in the neighbourhood, what political decisions are made on behalf of the people and how they affect their lives in the slums of Eastern Africa. Koch FM was situated in the slum in order to provide a voice for the voiceless and also to provide a platform for the community to address their issues through information and education. This article set out to evaluate the strategies that Koch FM uses to give the urban slum youth a distinct identity, especially through special language use and how this facilitates the formation and sustenance of active youth networks.

Through an in-depth interview with the station manager, it emerged that in pursuing its main goal, Koch FM programming is guided by five major principles, namely education, entertainment, empowerment, talent nurturing and leadership, and the target audience is mainly the youth. At Koch FM,

audience feedback is monitored through phone calls, questionnaires, short message service and social media. In terms of language preference and choices by the station staff, we observe that English is rarely spoken, Kiswahili is spoken sometimes, while *Sheng* was the most frequently used, hence was the norm, because it apparently appealed to more listeners than English and Kiswahili, Kenya's official and national languages respectively. The following emerged as the strategies and core areas of concern in Koch FM's programming and communication strategies.

Promoting Peace Programmes and Counselling Initiatives

Koch FM produces and broadcasts programmes that promote dialogue and encourage social cohesion among its diverse listeners. In addition, the station conducts talk shows on peace building and runs commentaries on peace messages. This has yielded positive results by preempting and dissuading youth who are inclined to violence to adopt productive activities. For instance, the *zuia noma* ('prevent violence') campaign is recognized as having minimized the chances of electoral violence in the 2013 General Elections that were largely peaceful. The station also conducts interviews to help the community understand the importance of various groups such as youths and women in peace building, transformation from conflict, and building a culture of sustainable peace. The objective is to run a daily programme on peace that combines education with entertainment, hence the elision 'edutainment'. This entails a daily radio drama on peace, acted in the local *Sheng* slang and captures the experiences of youth from the community. These dramas are based on original stories of and by the community, all aimed at promoting peace.

Secondly, the radio station organizes an extensive trauma counselling programme for community members by providing education, notifying people about counselling opportunities and airing personal narratives with respect to trauma counselling. This mitigates the negative consequences of socio-psychological pressures occasioned by domestic violence, gang attacks and recovery from drug abuse and alcoholism. Support groups are also established to identify and facilitate the sharing of experiences through the narratives of personal narratives aired on Koch FM.

Youth and other community members will offer creative and effective tools, developed by themselves with guidance from experts, to deal with trauma and to vent their frustrations. To this end, civic education is provided in local languages and *Sheng* in relation to local political and social contexts while adult education is offered to the elderly to enable them conceptualize the messages in simplified terms.

Community Development

Koch FM has improved knowledge and awareness of solutions to community development problems. These range from cultural challenges to rural development, hygiene and sanitation, agriculture and local governance. The station has been an active and appropriate medium that acts as an interface between duty bearers and right holders. The reinvestment of funds accruing from efforts by the community is protected by Kenyan law, hence there is a guarantee that stakeholders will benefit from the dividends of their own collective contributions. The law requires the Communications Commission of Kenya to ensure that the funds generated from operations of a community broadcasting station are re-invested into activities benefiting the community (Communications Commission of Kenya 2014).

As part of its corporate social responsibility, Koch FM sponsors youth sporting activities and clean-up campaigns to improve environmental health awareness. It also partners with youth groups to help them publicize their small and micro-enterprise activities. Through this, a network leading to attract more interested youths with similar projects is brought together for capacity building and advised on how to establish a marketing chain. In addition, there is regular information on opportunities provided by government funds and procedures for accessing them by individuals and groups. This is also provided on radio, for instance, information on the government-run Youth Fund and Uwezo Fund. The radio presents existing organizations, groups and initiatives in the slum to the outside world and connects NGOs and the central and county government with the various appropriate counterparts in the slum.

Health Awareness Campaigns

Koch FM plays a vital role in linking health workers and the larger public. Health authorities educate and entrust the media with essential health information which is then relayed to the public. Health awareness campaigns include partnering with the government to publicize immunization programmes and voluntary medical circumcision, family planning and behaviour change, the dangers of smoking and HIV/AIDS awareness. Platforms for debate are created through regular call-in programmes. This is also done by playing music in which the message is encoded in *Sheng*. After playing a thematic song, the studio DJ teases listeners by asking for feedback on what lessons they deduce from the songs and whether they can relate it to their own health experiences. For instance, a song that this researcher witnessed being played on the radio had the following lyrics advising youth on coping strategies in case one contracts HIV:

kula vizuri 'eat well'
piga tizi 'exercise'
meza dawa 'take your ARV drugs'
utaishi vifiti 'you will live healthily'

Another song advises youth to take precautions against wanton sex through the *Sheng* lyrics:

usione amejaza nyuma 'do not see her fat buttocks'
ukadhani ako poa 'do not imagine she is HIV negative'
usione ana pesa 'do not see his money'
ukaanza kumfuata 'do not follow him'
vuta pumz 'breathe in'

In order to emphasise its destructive nature, while appealing to youth emotions, the HIV virus is metaphorically referred to as *mdudu*, 'insect' in the youth slang. This is not euphemistic at all as one would expect the older generation and civil citizens to use it. It is a direct comparison of the disease with an insect that bites, hence a bold move to confront the stigma and apply an immediately alarming tag to create self-responsibility. Another popular message propagated by Koch FM reminds youths to abstain from premarital sex viz.: *ni poa kuchill*, 'it is cool to abstain', and extra-marital affairs: *tia zii ni kuzii*, 'abstain, things are bad'. This style is crucial for the behaviour change and self-determination by the youth consumers of these messages because the slang appeals to their social aspirations and daily experiences.

Education and Career Building

Educational programmes targeting the slum youth also feature prominently on the Koch FM agenda. The programmes facilitate learning by non-regular students who are enrolled in informal schools and work towards improving their academic goals. These programmes also enlighten the public both formally and informally. The radio project provides people in the slum with new frameworks to grasp local tensions and work together towards solutions. Through community dialogue, access to information and education through local radio and educative radio soap operas, the project aims to work on practical conflict resolution using input of the primary stakeholders. This illustrates institutes interventions from below.

Koch FM promotes career guidance tips through talk shows by hosting relevant experts in the field of career development. This means that youth can have role models to learn from the radio platform. These role models are

tapped as resource persons in diverse fields such as music, theatre, technical fields such as small-scale manufacturing and home industries such as liquid soap, juice, ice cream production and merchandising.

Mentoring youths in similar set-ups has also been a focus of Koch FM, with positive results. For instance, in setting up Mathare FM, the sponsors sought the assistance of Koch FM whose staff had vast experience in starting up a community radio station and had used radio to quell unrest in Korogocho in the past on numerous occasions, with positive results. With help from Koch FM, Mathare FM therefore trained fifteen youth and two staff members to run their own station and various programmes through music, local news and radio soap operas on peace and other contemporary themes relevant to youth experiences.

Promoting Leadership and Political Participation

In Kenya, it has been common to refer to the youth as ‘leaders of tomorrow’. The generational change in leadership has, however, remained a mirage as youth are continuously sidelined. One reason is that youth lack the resources to sustain campaigns for political office. To face this challenge, Koch FM promotes the notion of youth self-reliance and the motivation to seek alternative but legal means of attaining leadership goals. Through the motto *vijana tugutuke* (‘youth let us wake up’) the station educates listeners on good leadership qualities and the type of leaders the audience or citizens should elect. One presidential aspirant in the 2013 elections in Kenya, Peter Kenneth, formulated a slogan *tunawesmake*, ‘we can make it’. Although this was largely seen as a duplication of the US President Obama’s rallying call ‘Yes We Can’, it represented an innovative way of appealing to the youth in a language that they appreciate better. The station also strives to set the political agenda for the elected leaders. Through civic education programmes, leaders are challenged to make themselves more accountable so that they fulfill their campaign promises. The invincibility of the youth as a massive voting bloc was also captured in the song ‘*we are unbogable*’, ‘no one can intimidate us’. The massive following that the NARC party got from the youth that led Mwai Kibaki to power is largely attributed to the influence and experiential appeal of this song which was composed and performed by two college youths from Dandora, an estate that neighbours Korogocho slums, and hence has social networks that form part of the coverage areas of Koch FM.

Koch FM informs community members and engages them in decision-making processes with respect to their community, and at the same time functions as a tool to check leaders and expose any excesses such as abuse of power and poor representation. This is achieved through promoting a network

of open-air peer review sessions locally known as *baraza* where residents evaluate the performance of their own youth leaders and determine whether they should continue in their roles or give way to others. This is further amplified through call-in programmes that emphasise accountability and transparency from leaders at the community level. This system encourages participation of members in democratic processes and enables them to hold leaders and NGOs accountable for their actions, hence preempting exploitation of the community at large.

Defending and Promoting Human Rights and Gender Issues

Koch FM the station develops and airs programmes that promote gender equality and women's empowerment and also those that amplify the voices of women. They also air personal experiences and real life stories of different women and girls to help them cope with situations of early pregnancy, child prostitution, motherhood, orphan-hood and joblessness, but also success stories of female youth who have come out of poverty and marginalization through hard work and revolutionary means of livelihoods. Addressing gender-based violence and insecurity in their areas of coverage demonstrated how communities can initiate and sustain local solutions to national problems affecting them, ensure sustainability of the stations, and work closely with their stations to resolve local issues from a local and global perspective (Nyambala 2011).

The station creates a more global picture of human rights abuses that can inform local strategies of eliminating these, such as child protection and self-defence strategies. This is done by creating images of human rights abuses around the world. Through this, human rights ideas are highlighted, hence awareness levels increase and the likelihood of resolving the abuses rises. There is also a weekly segment on human rights awareness campaigns as well as call-in programmes based on how to access vital information with regard to the constitution and implementation of new laws, especially youth-friendly laws.

Job Creation and Youth Entrepreneurship

The station conducts interviews with individuals who are residents of the slum who have managed to establish successful businesses. Through these success stories and their experiences, other youth audiences are given tips and advice on how to save and nurture their own business ventures for success. Available job vacancies are also advertised for the benefit of unemployed youth. This helps change the youth attitude by which they see themselves as *masufferer* ('hapless suffering victims') to a more progressive self-concept of

being *mahasla* ('jobless hustlers'). Youth are encouraged to continue *kusaka* ('to seek opportunities aggressively').

The station also invites various community groups that deal in small-scale production of handiwork such as beadwork, basketry, woodwork and dressmaking to the studio to share experiences and motivate other upcoming groups to choose and focus on their trades for self-reliance, as well as activities that can engage them sustainably in campaigns against drug abuse and alcoholism. Since drug and alcohol abuse renders youth both psychologically and physically unproductive, the station engages in creating greater awareness of drug abuse issues by educating listeners on the effects of drugs on their health. Youth who already abuse drugs are supported through outreach and peer counselling to seek help from experts who are concerned with issues of drug abuse and movements against alcoholism and towards rehabilitation strategies such as Alcoholics Anonymous. By mentoring the volunteer announcers, Koch FM is poised to create job opportunities for the youth who have the wish and talent to become editors, radio presenters, reporters and DJs, radio technicians, scriptwriters and radio actors.

Promoting Cohesion, Security and Co-existence

Given the ethnic diversity and autonomy of the ghetto villages that comprise the Korogocho slum, residents have had very little knowledge about each other, and each village has its own history, social make-up and culture. In the past, this lack of knowledge about, and lack of relationships with, each other have engendered negative stereotypes and triggered community competition and even violence. Koch FM has therefore encouraged exchanges of information and increased knowledge about the various social groups and cultures, and the social and economic challenges these groups face that are specific to each ghetto village. There are conscious and active strategies to promote inclusivity and solidarity. Given that the Korogocho slum is inhabited by a multi-ethnic area occupied by Luo, Kikuyu, Luhya, Kamba and Somali communities, there is a need to promote amity and acceptance. To this end, Koch FM radio anchors therefore use phrases like *mtu nguyas* ('my person'), *chali yangu* ('my guy') and *mzee wangu* ('my man'). This encourages cross-ethnic acceptance and tolerance, which, in turn, promotes collective action and ownership of community initiatives, which are then viewed as home-grown solutions.

In terms of security, the station invites and hosts national security policy makers, past and present government officials, lawmakers and military personnel who contribute to discussions on the national security situation and assist the public to comprehend security affairs broadly. The community-driven initiative of reporting crime is given impetus by

the campaign christened *mulika mwizi* ('flash lights on the thief'), which advises residents not to protect criminals and their activities but to expose them promptly. This would aid police efforts of curbing crime in the slum and adjacent areas and enhance their own local security efforts through community policing.

Music and the Arts

According to Nyairo and Ogude (2005), popular forms are creative instances arising from the individual's attempts to formulate coping mechanism to come to terms with personal experiences. They are also able to inhabit different locales, to link individuals and generate audiences. This demonstrates their universality and ability to attract a following from a broad spectrum of fans. Music, therefore, has great potential in youth mobilization, the formation of networks, behaviour change communication and entertainment. The station promotes music and the arts by playing various songs by local artists who have become successful in the music industry. They also promote music by upcoming artists. For instance, one musician inspired by the ghetto radio says he changed his name to Ekoddyda to mask his ethnic identity because he was born and brought up in an inter-ethnic, highly-urban slum environment. The musician states that the youth should speak a neutral language and adopt neutral names. For instance, he has named his children 'I am Blessed' and 'Keep-It-Real'. Through such creativity, he hopes to give the new generation a neutral identity (Nyahero 2014). He says that Kenyan youth should be 'tribe-all' rather than tribal.

Music does not exist independently of other social, economic and political institutions. As a result, it may still be able to change the world as well as reflect it. Such popular forms have the capacity to forge, clarify and articulate the bond between cultural affairs and political existence. Through the themes of the songs, we hear of the issues and events that constitute people's experiences, history, current endeavours and future aspirations as well as the capacity of the music to drive and catalyze change. For instance, the popular campaign song adopted by the NARC campaign team was written by two college students from the Dandora slum that neighbours the Korogocho slum. The song became a national hit and acquired political relevance and acceptability across tribal and social barriers, although the title '*unbwogable*' was a combination of Luo and English. Due to its unifying potential, the song was used by campaigners to mobilize millions of youth votes, because they could identify directly with its core message and tone that signified self-rediscovery and determination of future political and governance destiny.

Youth and Stakeholder Mobilization

The Koch FM radio station broadcasts messages that encourage discussions among community-based groups such as women's unions, youth groups and other community initiatives such as church groups to form collaborations through which information on funding opportunities from development partners, voluntary activities and civic education on governance and electoral processes can be undertaken expeditiously by utilizing the synergies built through social networks and propagated through channels such as media and music.

From the focus group discussions, it emerged that there is a network of reporters on the ground who ensure that information gathered on the ground projects an authentic and home-grown image of the lives and daily struggles of Korogocho residents. They, therefore convey verified information about Korogocho to the outside world. The tools of radio, community dialogue and education through radio are then utilized to communicate solutions throughout the entire community and stimulate debates and interaction between antagonist groups. In turn, this ensures peaceful coexistence and creates intra-and inter-group understanding.

Conclusion

Koch FM has adopted a practical approach to issues and sought practical and immediately relevant interventions that address issues of youth identity and enable youth to redefine themselves and steer their own destiny. For instance, through crime watch programmes, whereby instances of mugging and human rights violation are routinely and promptly reported by listeners to the station, community policing and collective community action are realized. Other core programmes, including advertising job opportunities in surrounding industries, combating idleness and unemployment, exposing the effects of drug abuse and promoting anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns, community health messages and human rights advocacy have great potential in redefining youth identity in the selected urban slum in the context of changes in technology and breakdown of traditional socialization patterns.

Despite the great strides made by the Koch FM project in youth empowerment, some logistical, financial and infrastructural challenges remain. These include high staff turnover of station volunteers, a lack of polished presentation skills and capacities and a lack of information on available community radio networks, their location and membership. Many of the presenters are not educated, hence the need for continuous capacity building. Since most community radio stations, including Koch FM, tend to

address the needs of groups at the bottom of the economic pyramid. They can therefore capitalize on spreading social messages at a fee on behalf of various organizations, including NGOs, government agencies and religious groups. Potential areas for further networking and training for youth through radio should target community mobilization, training in fundraising, outreach activities, social marketing, publicity and public relations, sustained efforts to increase listenership and participation, promoting community listenership through frequent road shows and availing free media instruments such as small radio receivers and promotional materials.

Peace promotion is key to the sustainability of Koch FM programmes. The best way to promote peace now, and in the future, i.e. sustainable peace, is to base peace promotion strategies on the youths' experiences and frames of reference and involve them in the implementation of such jobs and other social and economic activities and opportunities that will give them hope. The gap in peace interventions was that the youth were not affiliated with formal organizations. Youth are now provided with information on job opportunities and other social economic opportunities in and outside the slum area. This approach guarantees that the radio content and conflict resolution strategies developed by these youth will speak to the minds and address the needs of many similar youth in the slum and others in similar socioeconomic circumstances.

Notes

1. www.kochfm.org.
2. BBC Monitoring Africa 2006.

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