

# MENTORSHIP AND RESILIENCE IN THE INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS OF KENYA – A CASE OF UWEZA FOUNDATION IN KIBERA

## INTRODUCTION

Mentorship as practiced in Kenya has often been associated with the approach used for counselling, guiding, and coaching of children and youth. Guiding, life skills education services, and counselling are defined in different levels of the education sector in Kenya. According to the Ministry of Education in Kenya, Life skills education involves the acquisition of skills for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Facilitation of such skills is therefore intended at equipping the school going children with psychosocial abilities that would help them solve age appropriate problems, think innovatively and creatively, make informed decisions, communicate effectively with peers and adults, build relationships, identify with those in need and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner (Ministry of Education-Kenya [MOE-K], 2012).

Some of the organisations in the Kenya have been running mentorship programs, particularly in the informal settlements. These include: Ungano Tena (U-Tena); African Population and Health Research Centre (APHRC) and Macheo.

U-Tena is a grass-roots community based organization created by youth from the Viwandani and Mukuru slums in Nairobi (Ungano Tena is a Kiswahili word meaning - ‘coming back together’). U-Tena provides mentorship, life skills training to communities about HIV, STI, sexual and reproductive health, and other related topics. Since 2012, U-Tena has been working with Globemed at Brown University in Rhode Island to implement the KUZA project (KUZA is a Kiswahili word meaning ‘to nurture’). KUZA targets girls aged 13-17 years in Mukuru slums. The long term aim of KUZA is to empower its members to

take control of their own livelihood and destiny. U-Tena works towards achieving their long term goal by training female mentors to support KUZA members in life skills, development, sexual and reproductive health and financial management, (U-Tena, 2007).

APHRC rolled out maiden girls' mentorship program in 2015 in collaboration with two community-based organizations: Miss Koch in Korogocho and U-tena in Viwandani. In order to ensure program's success, the CBOs and mentors continuously interact with the girls. Through this, a trust between the mentors and the girls has developed and continues through steady interaction. As an outcome of the maiden girls' mentorship program, the girls in Viwandani are able to discuss subjects that were previously taboo, mothers also discuss with their daughters about body changes, and why they need to put extra efforts in their studies. Parents now appreciate the need for supporting their girls to be what they aspire to be, even in the midst of challenges including poverty. The program has empowered the parents to be able to talk to their daughters. Even those parents who did not know how to, or what to share with their daughters, now feel that they are able to sit down and talk to their girls. It has given hope to some of the girls who did not know that they would ever step in to secondary schools, ((Abuya, Ngware, Hungi, Mutisya, Mahuro, Nyariro, Gichuhi and Mambe, (2015).

Macheo Mentorship Project founded by Strathmore University started operating in Kibera informal settlements in February 2012. Macheo provides the opportunity for adolescents to leave the sphere of Kibera and introduce them to the idea and reality of university life, an academic community, and social responsibility. Its aim is not only to broaden the students' academic horizons, but also to show them the possibilities of life beyond the Kibera slum. Some of the structure activities run by Macheo mentorship include:

- 1) Tutoring in mathematics, English, and science;
- 2) Direct one-to-one mentorship on goal-

setting with each student; and 3) Sports and excursions in and around Nairobi in order to foster the whole person's mind, body and spirit development.

U-Tena, APHRC, and Macheo present a picture of how organisations in the informal settlements of Kenya use mentorship interventions to promote the wellbeing of children and youth living in informal settlements. This paper is about Mentorship and resilience, a study carried out in Uweza Foundation.

Uweza is a Kiswahili word for ability and power. Uweza Foundation is an organization located in Kibera informal settlements. It is registered both in the State of Illinois and by Non-Government organizations (NGO) board in Kenya. The organization was founded by Jen Sapiro in 2008. It was instituted as a result of a long-term observation made by the founder on Kenyans working to better their communities without any international assistance. The founder was therefore compelled to start a foundation that would develop talents, build life skills, and improve emotional and mental well-being of the recipient rather than provide handouts which may not be a long-term sustenance to the community (Uweza Foundation, 2015).

The main objective of Uweza Foundation is to fight the cycle of poverty that persists in Kenya's Kibera slum. The foundation nurtures and builds upon the already existing capabilities and resourcefulness of Kenyans, through community-based empowerment programs. All projects in Uweza Foundation have been developed and/or run by Kibera residents who are dedicated to the betterment of their community. This means that all adult workers, referred in this study as mentors, are Kibera residents. Uweza Foundation runs different programs, majority of which involve children and youth of ages 5 to 21 years. Enrollment into the programs is free and open to all Kibera residents. The only requirement is observation of consistency and accountability. Currently, three hundred children and youth of different age groups, and from Kibera community, are enrolled in Uweza Foundation.

Current projects that involve children directly include: Soccer Academy, Art Club, Educational Sponsorship, and Life Skills Training.

## METHOD

A correlational survey design was employed in a sample of 90 adolescents. Data was collected using structured questionnaire, interview guide and focused discussion group guide tailored from Child and Youth Resilience Measure (CYRM-12). Questionnaires to measure mentorship relationship and resilience were administered to 90 adolescents. Interviews were conducted with 3 Uweza adult workers and a focused group discussion group held with 12 adolescents representing four mentorship programs in Uweza Foundation. Out of the 90 adolescents, 43 were male and 47 female. Uweza Foundation runs four mentorship programs: Art Club, Soccer Academy, Education Sponsorship and Life Skill training. Out of 90 adolescents sampled, 59% of adolescents attend life skill training, 38% Soccer academy, 23% education sponsorship and 13% Art Club.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### **Mentorship relationship**

Most adolescents reported that there was an adult in Uweza who: cared for them ( $M=4.49$ ,  $SD=0.99$ ); affirmed and encouraged them for a job well done ( $M=4.31$ ,  $SD=1.15$ ); who believed adolescents will be successful ( $M=4.64$ ,  $SD=0.59$ ); who listened to them ( $M=4.58$ ,  $SD=0.82$ ); who advised them ( $M=4.50$ ,  $SD=0.88$ ) and who would look for them if they were missing ( $M=4.21$ ,  $SD=1.19$ ). In response to role modelling, a soccer coach in Uweza reported that one of the gifts he brings to Uweza is his own life experience. He revealed that he grew up in Kibera and working hard despite circumstances around him. He uses his life experiences to inspire adolescents to look beyond the challenges in the informal settlements and aspire to be agents of change in Kibera. Art instructor mentioned in the interview that her

passion to help adolescents is ascribed to a desire to see them become successful adults. She revealed that apart from training adolescents in artistic work, she engages them about life questions, listens to their views and goes an extra mile to correct negative thinking. She further reported: *“I have to model what I want to see in these youth. To build relationship with them, I ask about their friends, family and school work. I learn what they are going through and advice to them”*.

Social supports can buffer the effects of negative life events including, health problems and violence (Hurdle, 2001). For younger children in poverty, the presence of alternative caregivers and supportive persons, such as grandparents, older siblings or school teachers, is an important resiliency mechanism. According to Lincoln (2000), adolescents who feel close to parents, teachers, or classmates had better emotional health and were less likely to engage in risky behaviors such as substance use, violence, and early sexual activity.

### **Resilience amongst Adolescents in Uweza Foundation**

Resilience was determined by measuring the following attributes: Self-esteem, Empathy, Help seeking behaviour, and Orientation towards the future. The highest score among adolescents was 100%, lowest score was 69%. The average score was 89%.

Most adolescents in Uweza have positive attitude towards life, 98% believe they will be successful in future. According to researchers, internal characteristics such as orientation towards promising future, hopefulness, locus of control, self-worth, and positive coping are associated with better health. Further research suggests that resilient adolescents may be in a better position to avoid risky behaviours, such as violence, substance use, and adolescent pregnancy, than are other adolescents (Resnick, 2000). The findings of this study has demonstrated how adolescents in Uweza Foundation invest their energy and time in building talents, skills and forming meaningful relationship with their peers, carer and significant

adults, such sense of responsibility and social competency form characteristics of resilient individual (Masten, 2001; Luthar & Cicchetti; Werner, 2000).

The average score for self-esteem is 87%, most adolescents reported that they can do many things well. The reason for confidence in ability to do many things is credited to availability of training in Uweza such as personal safety, first aid training, communication skills training, creative writing, poetry, soccer coaching, painting and drawing skills. Adolescents in Uweza consider themselves capable of speaking up for themselves and acquire new skills necessary for their wellbeing.

### **Mentorship promoting resilience**

To measure the role of mentorship in promoting resilience a Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed between Mentorship Relationship and Resilience. A hypothesis were tested, and Alpha level of significance set at 0.05 (H<sub>0</sub>1-Mentorship relationship do not significantly enhance resilience amongst adolescents in Uweza Foundation). Table 1.0 displays the correlation findings.

**Table 1.0: Relationship between Mentorship and Resilience amongst Adolescents in Uweza Foundation.**

		Mentor Relationship	Resilience
Mentor Relationship	Pearson Correlation	1	.450**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0
Resilience	Pearson Correlation	.450**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	

N=90

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Considering the Alpha level of significance for the hypothesis set at 0.05,  $H_{a1}$  was accepted and  $H_{01}$  rejected. There is a significant relationship between mentorship relationship and resilience ( $r = .450^{**}$ ,  $N=90$ ,  $p = 0$ ).

## DISCUSSION

Mentors in Uweza Foundation provide support to adolescents that would otherwise be provided by significant adults at home. Most adolescents reported that mentors in Uweza encourage them to be successful by affirming positive progress. Mentors in Uweza are caring and would go an extra mile to look for adolescents who miss attending mentorship programs, thus many adolescents indicated that they trust Uweza adults. According to study conducted by Onyango and Tostense (2015), most youth in Kibera consider their parents poor and failing to guide them. Some felt that their parents do not respect or trust them. Some youth reported that their parents were abusing drugs and alcohol which made them incapable to look after their children. The majority of youth interviewed were living alone, or with their mothers. Thus, single parenting in slum communities is a real challenge to children and youth.

Uweza Foundation runs four mentorship programs: Life Skills training, Art Club, Soccer Academy, and Education Sponsorship. Children enroll in these programs as per their desire. One is however required to obtain consent from parents, commit self to regular attendance and maintain above average grades in school.

Life skills training involves practical discussions, topics exploration, skills challenges such as; public speaking, leadership, personal safety skills among others. Attendees are grouped

according to age ranges (below 12 years, and above 12 years) and gender (male and female groups). The facilitator used this organization to cover age appropriate topics. For example, older adolescents may dialogue about identity and future aspiration, while younger children may role play on how to build friendship in school.

Art club facilitates artistic skills for children. The art center opens daily for practice of drawing, sketching and painting. There are two groups in art center: younger children below 12 years, and older children above 12 years. As children grow older in Art Club, they specialize in making commercial art. Their skills sharpen over time, and they are able to display art in various galleries, exhibitions and online markets. Uweza Foundation uses the proceeds from Art sales to support education of the artists.

Soccer academy involves coaching at a football pitch. The mixed gender academy is divided into three groups: Uweza seniors, who are high school students, Uweza youth club who are past high school education and Uweza juniors who are in primary schools. Apart from building soccer talents, Uweza provides meaningful challenge for the teens, one is expected to score acceptable grades in order to secure continuous training placement with soccer academy. When a teen performs poorly, they are suspended from soccer academy for a period of time so that they can work harder in school to improve their grades. According to Bandy and Moore (2011), having one or more things one can do well, can take pride in, and can share with others seems to be another factor that promotes resilience among adolescents. Such activities can include hobbies, athletics, performing arts, and computer technology.

Education sponsorship includes children whose educational expenses are being covered by Uweza Foundation. Activities in this program include parental engagement, leadership training and school progress monitoring. Uweza guides children enrolled in this program to set education goals, make career choices, and build accountability towards their goals and



objectives. The school grades are actively monitored every term, and intervention measures put in place for children in need of improvement.

Research suggests that the most successful mentors are those who invest time and energy and have regular and prolonged interaction with the children (Mbambo, 2002). Most adolescents reported that mentors in Uweza affirms them, cares for them and believes they will be successful in future. According to Hair et al. (2002), adolescents who have such caring adults in their lives are also more likely to be resilient. Those who have positive relationships with adults outside their families experience mental health benefits: they feel more supported, are more socially expressive, and are less likely to be depressed than are adolescents who lack such relationships.

Further findings of this study indicate that, mentorship relationship in Uweza is significant in promoting resilience amongst adolescents ( $r=.450^{**}$ ,  $N=90$ ,  $p=0$ ). According to Yates, Egeland & Sroufe (2003), Social network, involving interpersonal relationships, can be instrumental in developing resilience competencies. Cultivating resilience is an important way to promote the psychological and social development of adolescents. External protective factors theorists have suggested that people who do not have a functional social support system are more vulnerable to external stresses (Hepworth, Rooney, & Larsen, 2002).

Previous studies indicate that programs which are effective at promoting adolescents' interpersonal skills and their abilities to manage their emotions and behaviors are programs including community-based interventions (National Academy of Sciences, 2009); (SAMHSA, 2007). Uweza Foundation is playing its role best by providing valuable community characteristics to adolescents through services such as promoting acceptable

behaviour and valuing young people thus in itself, plays significant role in fostering and maintaining resilience amongst adolescents in Kibera.

In conclusion, Uweza Foundation is playing an important role by strengthening adolescent's ability to recognize and utilize social support systems in his or her surroundings. As a result, adolescent build internal factors in such as healthy self-esteem, ability to solve age appropriate problems, positive decision making, help seeking behaviour, motivation to build talent and optimism towards life now and in future.

### Recommendation

Since the mentorship intervention provided by Uweza has demonstrated to be significant in promoting resilience, Uweza may expand its presence in Kenya and provide similar intervention to communities around informal settlements. Other organisations and institutions working with children in the informal settlements of Kenya may use these findings to strengthen role modelling between adults and youths.

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