WE DARED TO DREAM
A Reflection of the Youth Agenda 1996 - 2009

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Acknowledgements

Founded in 1996, young people, youth organizations and groups, friends, development partners and well wishers have continued to champion and support the cause of young people through Youth Agenda (YAA), the longest serving youth organization in Kenya. This publication is a reflection of the journey of YAA, and the impact it has had over the period.

We would first and foremost like to appreciate the founders and outgoing board of directors of the organization to whom this publication is dedicated, for their vision and commitment to venture into an unchartered territory of reorganizing young people—a task that no other group had attempted to do. Without Hon. Cecily Mbarire, Kepta Ombati, Duncan Okello, Danny Irungu, Mercy Nduku, Jackson Mwalulu and Enid Muthoni, the public space the youth enjoy today would still be a dream.

We convey our gratitude to Danny Irungu, Jackson Mwalulu and Kepta Ombati for their in-depth contribution towards the documentation of YAA’s 13-year march that will go a long way in inspiring other youth organizations, young people and for institutional development through learning and sharing best practices. Special thanks also goes to Ms. Jennifer Miano of Uvumbuzi Consult (E.A.), Ms. Kabura Mwangi, her associate in data collection for conducting YAA impact assessment that formed a foundation for this important publication.

We would also like to thank the Youth Agenda Secretariat who worked tirelessly and selflessly to ensure that the report is perfect, specifically Ms Caroline Kogi Programme Officer, Ms Wanja Kahiga—Finance Manager and Eustace Kinyua for the technical and timely support throughout the process. We acknowledge Ms Rita Shako, former Executive Director, who oversaw the impact assessment process. We are also grateful to the Incoming Board for their invaluable contributions towards the finalization of this important report that will inform the next frontier for YAA.

Most of all, we thank all the Youth Agenda beneficiaries who enthusiastically narrated their transformative experiences and made time to participate in the focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Not least, we express our sincere appreciation to our development partners, for believing in the Youth Agenda and for their generous material, moral and financial support over the years of implementing our programmes.

We are indebted to so many people young and old who have travelled with us for the last 13 years and continue to offer support towards YAA interventions in the quest for a just and equitable society for all. The impact assessment and documentation of the Reflection moments would not have been possible without the financial support from The Ford Foundation.
We Dared to Dream is an interesting story and a reflection of seven graduate students from local universities who had an idea of starting a youth initiative with a view to championing young, value-driven leadership in Kenya.

Like most profound acts, the dream began with something simple. Two people kept a paper and a pen near their bed and once in a while shared in bits the simple words and desires. In 1996 the two invited five more to share their desire. They were all prepared to write, draw or jot notes about what they had seen or experienced as soon after they woke up. In some instance they experienced a kind of half-awake, half-asleep state but would state it anyway when they first woke up, so much the better. They took advantage of it! By 2009 they were halfway into that other country, dreamland. In interpreting the dream, they asked themselves questions, and then provided the answer themselves through consultation. In some instances they allowed their imagination to guide, not their intellect. Usually, the first thing that came to their mind was the most valuable. They gave birth to Youth Agenda a national Youth Organization in Kenya.

We Dared to Dream captures in depth successes registered in the dreamland between 1996-2009. Youth Agenda has come a long way, with many tracing its history to the first National Youth Convention held at Limuru Conference Centre on 7th to 11th March 1997. At its inception, many young people faced serious challenges in terms of social, economic and political opportunities. YAA's intervention attempted to reverse this anomaly of a generation confined to being foot soldiers implementing plans that they would not influence, through decision making and policy formulation. It was in this context that YAA provided platforms specifically designed to be spark-plugs to set in motion a process that would catapult the youth of Kenya from the peripheries of political and policy realms to a more influential, dignified and rightful position in the society. The youth had noted that by design and default the sector had been relegated to the background in crucial formulation and decision-making processes with regards to matters that affect them such as the Constitutional Review Process, Education System, Employment, Economic Empowerment and Leadership.

In appreciating that youth are the key stakeholders in the present and future of this country, dissatisfied with being relegated to the fringes, and in the absence of credible alternatives, popular foras and structures to support youth participation in the wider socio-political spaces, young people in institutions of higher learning began to organize themselves.
The aim was not just to create a platform for ventilating issues of common concern, but also seeking and providing viable solutions to existing problems affecting young people.

**We Dared to Dream** provides an overview of Youth Agenda through its modest beginnings as a youth lobby group. The context within which the idea of a youth agenda was spawned in the mid-1990s then proceeds to narrate its early development to date. A youth led movement is one whose time had come and mobilization was less of a challenge than the demand arising from managing the unprecedented success.

The subsequent parts of the report briefly describe the successes of Youth Agenda’s interventions. Further illustrated is the potency of staunch belief in and loyalty to a cause that earns the Youth Agenda a place in the roll of premiership and honour of many organizations and its peers.

Though the transition of the founder members has taken long, this move confirms their commitment to exit after realizing their objectives and allowing the baby to grow and mature. The new frontier for the ‘youth agenda’ is now in the hands of a passionate Incoming Board of Directors who have pledged to move forward into untapped horizons, so that YAA will realize the needs of young people in Kenya and the region.

It gives us great pleasure and joy to share with our stakeholders and partners this dream and the realities this far. Ultimately, this document will have achieved its objective if we Read, Enjoy and Dream a New.

**Susan Kariuki**  
Ag Chief Executive
**Acronyms**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>4Cs</td>
<td>Citizens Coalition for Constitutional Change</td>
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<td>CDF</td>
<td>Constituency Development Fund</td>
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<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<td>CLARION</td>
<td>Centre for Law and Research International</td>
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<td>COTU</td>
<td>Central Organization of Trade Unions</td>
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<td>CREAM</td>
<td>Centre for Rights, Education and Awareness</td>
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<td>CRECO</td>
<td>Constitution and Reform Education Consortium</td>
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<td>DANIDA</td>
<td>Danish International Development Agency</td>
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<td>EAC</td>
<td>East African Community</td>
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<td>ECWD</td>
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<td>FES</td>
<td>Friedrich Ebert Stiftung</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
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<td>Institute for Education in Democracy</td>
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<td>KHRC</td>
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<td>Kenya National Commission on Human Rights</td>
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<td>Kenya Young Parliamentarians Association</td>
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<td>LDP</td>
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<td>MAPACA</td>
<td>Mobilization Agency for Paralegal Communities in Africa</td>
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<td>Maendeleo ya Wanawake</td>
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<td>NCA</td>
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<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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1.0 Looking back: Youth Agenda’s 13-year March

Youth Agenda’s Story of the Formative Years

The 1990s represents one of the most eventful decades in Kenya’s post independence history. It is right at the beginning of this decade in 1992 that Kenya returned to political pluralism after nearly four decades of ruinous one-party authoritarianism, thanks to a combination of local and international pressure. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 saw the collapse of the former communist empire in Eastern Europe and the triumph of global liberalism. Kenyans seized the moment and forced the Kenya African National Union (KANU) regime to yield to multi-partism in 1992 by amending Section 2A of the Constitution of Kenya.

The return to pluralism opened a window of opportunity for many Kenyans to exploit their potential as citizens. Civic initiatives led by youthful members of the academia and the clergy with the objective of nurturing our nascent democracy began to mushroom. Through these initiatives, vibrant debates began to define our political engagement.

By mid 1990s, however, disillusionment began setting in. A disjointed opposition had failed to unseat KANU from power during the December 1992 general elections despite garnering two thirds of the votes cast. The wide spread high hopes across the country that the dictatorial and corrupt regime would be swept aside by the strong tide of change were shot down by a combination of the opposition fragmentation and Moi-KANU’s deployment of state resources to hang on to power inspite of the overwhelming support.

It was the concern about the apparent inability of the political elite to sustain the pressure for change that pushed the civil society to step forth, seize the opportunity and provide new leadership to the reform movement in the second half of that decade.

Initiatives such as the Citizens Coalition for Constitutional Change (4Cs), Institute for Education in Democracy (IED) and the Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION) and ultimately the National Convention Assembly/National Convention Executive Council (NCA/NCEC) became the rallying point for pro-democracy middle class agitators around Nairobi. Their influence spread to the other parts of the country soon thereafter. Student Unions were equally pivotal, as restive young intellectuals sought to assert themselves in the new dispensation.
New Kid on the block

It is under these heady circumstances that the Youth Agenda (YAA) was born in 1996. Its seven founders were fresh graduates from local universities. They were: Mercy Nduku, Kepta Ombati, and Danny Irunu (all from Kenyatta University); Cecily Mbarire (Egerton University), and Duncan Okello, Enid Muthoni and Jackson Mwalulu (The University of Nairobi).

The idea of Youth Agenda was first discussed by Kepta and Okello. The two had interacted quite a lot during their days as student leaders. After graduation, they met as interns at the Green Belt Movement. Mwalulu was then at CLARION, while Cecily, Enid and Mercy were at the Education Centre for Women in Democracy (ECWD) under the same capacity. Irunu, a college friend of Kepta was struggling for a foothold in the corporate sector.

The internships provided an opportunity for them to meet in workshops and seminars where they got to know each other more.

Sometimes in mid 1996 during a CLARION/DARAJA workshop at Silver Springs Hotel, Nairobi, Kepta and Okello approached Mwalulu with the idea of starting a youth initiative with a view to championing young, value-driven leadership in Kenya. The concern was that the youth, who constitute the greatest percentage of the Kenyan population, were getting a raw deal in the leadership sphere. Besides, the country’s leadership was not offering hope to the young generation because of rampant corruption and dictatorship. As such, the youth were growing impatient and this threatened national stability. After discussing at length, the three young men agreed that there was absolute need for such an initiative.

Professor Kivutha Kibwana, who was then the Executive Director of CLARION, was asked for advice on the idea, and he enthusiastically welcomed it with the promise to give it all the support he could muster. Dr. Willy Mutunga, then the Co-Chair of 4Cs similarly welcomed the initiative and pledged his support.
Indeed, with time and because of the proactive role they played in YAA’s formation and growth, the two came to serve as the informal YAA advisory council. They were later joined by Karin Steffenson whose support was amazing.

From Silver Springs, it was considered that the new initiative needed a critical mass of like-minded young men and women. Though most of those young leaders approached were skeptical of the idea at the time, the idea gathered momentum when a few others accepted the challenge and joined. The names of Mercy, Enid, Cecily and Irungu were floated and endorsed on the spot.

“Nomadic” life
The first substantive meeting by the founders was held one afternoon in mid 1996 at the lawns of ECWD offices at Lavington. In attendance were Kepta, Mwalulu, Mercy, Okello and Enid. The meeting decided that there was need to move with speed to concretize the initiative and join the struggle for change.

For the rest of that year, subsequent meetings to grow the idea further took place mostly in restaurants, the University of Nairobi and other open spaces in Nairobi. This is because as unemployed youth, the founders could not afford an office space. The Casino Restaurant on the ground floor of Posta Sacco Plaza and the Mara Restaurant at the City Hall were particularly critical meeting points at this time. In the restaurants they would be harassed by management because they could not afford to book even a single table for a meeting. Many are the times when they had to end meetings prematurely under pressure from management of various restaurants due to inability to pay for the space or making any purchases during these meetings.

They would then simply relocate to a different restaurant and continue with business. If the management of the new establishment kicked them out, they would move elsewhere and this continued till the day’s agenda was done, often late in the evening. At the end of the day, tasks for each member for the following day would be allocated and a date for the next meeting and venue set. In this way the founders were able to quickly consolidate the fledgling organization and establish themselves as a serious youth organization. Indeed within six months, the organization had not only taken shape but became the reference point on youth, governance and development. This also attracted vital support.

YAA’s first financial grant was Kshs 25,000. In 1996, after Prof. Kibwana saw the resolve and commitment with which the group had conducted its business, he offered the first grant that YAA ever received, for start-up and this provided a critical turning point. There was no looking back after this.
The critical question was what to do to reach out to the other youth across the country and to galvanize them into action. What could seven struggling young men and women freshly out of college do to capture the imagination of the country’s youth and to rally them behind a nationwide movement for youth consciousness and action.

**National Youth Convention (NYC 1): A Bold Step**

For months, the founders agonized over the question on what would be the right first activity to rally Kenya’s youth around a common platform of action.

It is out of one of several meetings that the founders saw what needed to be done – a national meeting to bring together young leaders from every region and from every sector across the nation. Nothing like that had been done before. The youth were highly fragmented and had no independent platform to shape their vision from their objective needs. This is what fired the idea of holding a National Youth Convention as the first attempt at creating an independent space for the country’s youth to meet, get to know each other better and forge a common vision for the generation.

Armed with conviction and enthusiasm to match, the seven set out to make this national project a reality from the corridors of other organizations and hostile restaurants. The first shock however awaited the group. This verve and enthusiasm was not shared by everyone. The donors especially were unimpressed! Despite weeks of meticulous preparations, production and endless review of proposals; rigorous marketing of the proposals to donors and countless follow up calls and visits, all the 20 proposals sent out were rejected. There was no good reason given. They were later to learn that none of these donors wanted the risk of supporting such unknown quantum. Even fewer believed that the group was capable of pulling off the ambitious project. Later they were also to learn that some of the donors were impressed with the ideas and had tried to pass them on to other established organizations for implementation.

These donors declined to fund YAA or the NYC ridiculously arguing that youth was a transitional stage in ones life! The other reason offered was the legal status of YAA since it had not yet been registered by the NGO Registration Bureau. The fact that YAA did not have an office also led to donor scepticism towards the novel idea of a structured youth movement in Kenya.
The founder members had long resolved to hold NYC I with or without donor support. Thus despite the setback and other teething problems, the team soldiered on. It was agreed that the National Youth Convention would be held without donor support. The session would be run under a tree and all delegates would pay for their transport and accommodation. Those from Nairobi would have to host those who travelled and could not afford to pay for their accommodation. The team had made tremendous progress by August 1996, so much so that the Convention was slated to take place before the end of the year.

The team, therefore, pressed on with preparing for the Convention on a daily basis in order to actualize their dream. They met the operational costs from their pocket money and whatever little allowances they were able to get from supporters and well wishers.

**Turning NYCI Dream into Reality**

However, more surprises were to come later on. In September 1996, help came from the most unlikely of all places - the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

With its well known strict rules, support from the Agency was least expected among the young nomadic organization founders. However, non registration of YAA proved a hurdle, as it could not be funded under the US laws and USAID funding regulations. No one knew when or ever its application to the NGO Co-ordination Bureau would go through. For unknown reasons, YAA had not been registered as an independent initiative by the NGO Co-ordination Bureau despite making an application that met all the legal requirements. It was finally registered in the year 2000.

The founders approached two organizations – the Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and the Centre for Law and Research International (CLARION) for hosting. Both accepted to host the young organization and eventually CLARION, whose offices were, then at Kileleshwa, hosted YAA.

The USAID grant totaling Kshs 4 million ($57,142) came through CLARION and was immediately injected into the preparatory work for the Convention. Dates were shifted to March 1997 and preparations towards the convention hit top gear.
NYC1 took place between 7 - 11th March 1997 at the Limuru Conference Centre. Its theme was, The Challenge of National Rebirth; Our Responsibility, Our Place. Much of YAA’s secretarial work at this stage was done at Mrs. Nazi Kibwana’s office, Reflections Centre, on Riverside Drive. None of the members had a car then thus they mostly relied on CLARION and Reflections Centre staff for transport, taking matatus and sometimes walking to Riverside from the city centre.

Perhaps the toughest challenge was to mobilize youth from across the country. This is because the target was specifically young opinion leaders across gender and social backgrounds as then very little was known of youth organizations and young leaders. There was neither a directory nor a database anywhere to provide the required information. To overcome the challenge, field researchers were engaged and it took long weeks before they could accomplish the work.

The team was committed and dedicated to their course so they did not relent. NYC 1 attracted not only the invited youth but also young intellectuals and members of diplomatic corps. Special mention should be accorded to the then US ambassador, H.E. Prudence Bushnell and USAID Head of Mission, Dr. George Jones, who supported the process. Leading lights in the civil society with some now in government such as Feroze Nowrojee, Willy Mutunga, Musambayi Katumanga, David Ndii, Dr. Khama Rogo Lawrence Mute, Charity Ngilu (Minister of Water and Irrigation, Hon James Ongogo (now a Minister of Lands, Alfred Mutua (now Government Spokesman, Kabando wa Kabando (now Assistant Minister of Sports and Kivutha Kibwana (immediate former Member of Parliament Makueni) were also there.

At the end of the forum, the youth came up with 50 resolutions regarding where they wanted to take their country. The resolutions are published as a booklet titled “The Challenge of National Rebirth: Our Responsibility, Our Place.” The overarching intention in the summary of the resolutions was to mainstream the youth in leadership in all the spheres. This the youth resolved to do by “storming” leadership institutions such as Parliament, Local Authorities, the Labour Movement, the Women Movement, the Corporate Sector and the Civil Society. The popular creed then was that the youth must get into leadership not by invitation but by invasion!
It is important to point out that by many standards, the objective of mainstreaming the youth in the leadership and development processes in this country has been attained thanks to NYC1 and subsequent work by YAA and its networks. Over the years since NYC1, YAA has produced among others, Members of Parliament, hundreds of councilors, civil society luminaries, corporate chiefs, labour movement leaders and entrepreneurs.

The National Youth Movement

A month after NYC1, civil society under the auspices of 4Cs was planning a National Convention Assembly (NCA) to discuss reforms in general and constitutional change in particular. NCA brought together among others, the civil society, Kenya’s opposition political parties, the religious sector, the labour and women movement, farmers and the youth. YAA was involved in this venture through Kepta, who was then working at the National Convention Planning Committee (NCPC) which was charged with helping organize the NCA.

NCA’s secretariat was at Victoria building at the Luthuli-Tom Mboya Streets, and YAA members would also occasionally meet there in the evenings for consultations. There was an even stronger link between YAA and NCA. An important outcome of NYC 1 was the formation of the National Young Movement (NYM). This movement was aimed at mainstreaming the youth in the reform movement.

During the NCA convention, NYM and YAA were key to both the organization of NCA and its outcome. The youth basically drove the NCA agenda. No wonder mass action to force the Moi regime to give in to demands for a new constitution became the emblem for the National Convention Executive Committee (NCEC), which was born at Limuru as the executive arm of NCA. NYM and YAA delegates constituted the radical wing of the NCA which confronted the conservative wing then consisting of elderly leaders including Mwai Kibaki, David Mwiraria, Ngengi Muigai, Martin Shikuku among others.

Institutionalising YAA

Following the highly successful NYC 1, donor attitude towards YAA changed for the better. For the first time, for instance, YAA secured an office space. Courtesy of USAID, who were by then the sole sponsors, YAA was physically hosted by the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK) at their premises at the Nyayo Stadium. Although the office was just a single small room with a few makeshift furniture which was either borrowed or bought off cheap second hand shops, the team was greatly motivated because for the first time, there was an office from where it could run its affairs conveniently. After several months, members decided it was time to grow to the next level.

1 NCPC is what became NCEC during the Frist Plenary Session of the NCA which took place at the Limuru Conference Centre on April 3 – 7, 1997.
In pursuit of independence, they decided to move to their own rented office. After a long search, the team settled for a single room at Kenyatta Market. Owing to meager resources, YAA’s office was situated one floor above a bar and butchery in one of the old buildings at the Kenyatta Market. To access the office, one had to go through the bar.

Things, however, changed for the better a few months later when YAA got funding from the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) to facilitate the second National Youth Convention and the Young Leadership Development Programme which was a strategic resolution of NYC 98. This enabled YAA to move to a more spacious office at Ngumo Estate and it is now based at Kirichwa Lane off Ngong Road. The support of donors like WFD, USAID, Ford Foundation, MS Kenya, FES, RNE, CIDA, OSIEA, UNDP and UNIFEM, are among those who funded and continue to support the work of Youth Agenda.

Internships

In 1999, YAA started an internship programme to mentor young leaders. The policy decision to encourage internships was necessitated by the need to boost YAA’s institutional capacity in the face of rapidly growing potential. Importantly, there was general consensus that it was about time for transition. After all, YAA constitution stipulated that the youth age limit is 35, and most of founders were getting to the edge. Through the internship program many young leaders have had their skills horned. These include Joseph Mutua who joined YAA as an office assistant. Today he is an assistant programmes officer in charge of logistics one of the most prolific contributors to various national newspapers on issues of governance and development in Kenya. Grace Ireri came in as an administrative assistant. Today she is the Programmes Coordinator with Peacenet. Maurice Odhiambo was an intern, now he is the Executive Director at CLARION. Susan Kariuki joined as an administrative assistant. Today she is YAA’s Programmes Coordinator and Acting Chief Executive.

On the Move

After NYC1 and NCA, YAA embarked on a nation-wide mass civic education campaign to sensitize the youth on the need for comprehensive constitutional change. YAA also carried out voter and civic education. At the same time, YAA and NYM were actively involved in the NCEC’s peaceful mass action campaign to force change. Although the country is yet to get a new constitution almost 15 years later, YAA can take pride in the fact that it was one of the pressure groups which forced the Moi regime to concede to minimum reforms under the Interparties Parliamentary Group (IPPG) as well as the
processes aimed at a comprehensive reform of our constitutional order into a more democratic dispensation. The minimum reforms brought some important changes. They limited a presidential term to two-five year periods. They also introduced the requirement that for one to win the presidency, one had to get at least 25 percent of the votes cast in at least 5 out of Kenya’s eight Provinces.

Since NYCI, YAA has held NYCII in 1998, NYCIII in 2007, and NYCIV in 2008. The National Youth Convention (NYC) in Kenya was conceived to raise the visibility of young people and to create an independent platform for articulation of their objective interests and vision for the nation. The Youth Agenda has hosted three more conventions that have seen remarkable results between 1998 and 2007.

NYCII 1998 The NYC II brought together young people from across tribe, class, religion, and political divide to start a conversation around transforming the country. They were driven by a sense of frustration with the status quo and needed a forum to articulate issues. YAA and the various committees put together an elaborate program to discuss options with different people who included Prudence Bushnell, former US Ambassador to Kenya, Civil Society Leaders Academicians, Politicians, and the Diplomatic Community. Pursuant to the resolutions made at the conference, YAA embarked on a long journey to galvanize the youth energy through Civic Education across the country, Leadership Training, Regional Linkages, among others.

NYCIII 2007 Once again YAA organized the third NYC but expanded the organizing and planning to activities to 15 youth serving organizations. NYCIII brought together over 700 youth leaders from all the eight provinces of Kenya. The convention sought to review the status of implementation of NYCII resolutions and evaluate the gains made by young people since 1997; share experiences and lessons on how youth have addressed the challenge of leadership; and to chart a common course on national economic, political and social priorities to be lobbied for by the youth. This convention contributed greatly to the highest ever recorded active participation of young people in elections both as aspirants and voters.

NYCIV 2008 The fourth Nationa Youth Convention brought together 1,300 Young Kenyan Leaders from all of the eight provinces of the Republic of Kenya and from different backgrounds. The convention was designed to offer a national platform for young leaders to build consensus on the priorities and expectations of young people across the country, their role and duties in the post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction process, building of a nationwide network of volunteer peace-makers.
and reconstruction workers and unifying a platform for mobilizing young people across the country for the task ahead. The active NYC google network was conceived after NYCIV through the leadership of Emmanuel Dennis who was contracted by YAA as the Coordinator.

From Mobilising to Organising: Strategic Thinking

The resolutions of the last four NYCs have greatly informed the programmes that Youth Agenda has successfully implemented to increase youth consciousness, sense of pride and increased visibility of young people influencing decisions and occupying leadership position.

YAA became a national youth initiative with the overall mission to redefine the role and contribution of the Kenyan youth in governance and development processes in the country. The above mission has been pursued through the following programmes with remarkable results: Young Leadership Development Programme, Political Leadership Development Programme, Youth Outreach and Civic Education Programme, Advocacy for Policy and Legal Reforms, Youth and Constitutional Reforms Programme, Research and Documentation Programme, Student Leadership and Empowerment Programme, Voter Education Programme, Election Monitoring and Support Programme, Internship and Mentorship Programme, Celebrating our Diversity Programme, Human Rights and Social Justice Programme, Gender and Development Programme and Youth Sector and Capacity Building Programme. These programmes have been undertaken between 2000-2009. By the end of YLDP, a national network of young leaders known as Young Leaders Network was formed to actualize the agenda of young leadership in Kenya. To date, 1032 young people are alumni of YAA leadership programmes and are in key leadership positions and influencing change.

Concurrently, YAA was also involved in fostering the East African cooperation through the East African Youth Council (EAYCO) programme. Aside from speeding up the cooperation, the idea was also to push for a youth-friendly East African Community. This initiative brought together youth representatives from the three East African countries: Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Between 2000 and 2001, several meetings to promote this agenda were held in the three countries. At one point, members were hosted at the Arusha EAC headquarters by then Tanzanian foreign affairs minister, who is now the country’s President.
In 2002 one of the landmark projects was the highly influential and prophetic publication, “Recreating Our Republic: The Ambitions of a Generation”. Youth Agenda conducted rigorous discussion within the young populace and between the young and other generations to work out a shared vision for the new republic and consolidated a critical mass of young people into a transformative force for positive change in Kenya. This intervention was aimed at establishing new leadership values which would redefine leadership on the basis of the philosophy of leadership for service and to further create a foundation for the rebirth of our nation. One of the most striking aspects of the booklet is that it calls for a truth justice and reconciliation commission to address past and present injustices against individual Kenyans and groups, ICT reforms, constitutional reforms, electoral reforms, dealing with the challenge of identity, education reforms, employment and improvement of livelihoods.

Time to Move on

As the end of the 2000s decade neared, the seven YAA founder members, who acted as board members and as programmes managers for the organization started to think about transition. As pointed out earlier, this was necessitated by the constitution, which capped the youth age at a maximum of 35 years. But more importantly, they were committed to nurturing a healthy culture in leadership transitions, a rare feature in Africa’s public leadership and the bane of many country’s stymied democracies and development. Leaders in Africa have bad manners. They never know when it is time to leave. They more often than not overstay their welcome. Planning their own leadership succession and seeing to it that it was adhered to was therefore the founders’ own small way of contributing to shaping a new culture.

In 1999, for instance, Okello flew to London for further studies, Mercy went into the corporate sector, and Mwalulu was in active journalism. Kepta was running the NCEC secretariat, while Enid was practicing law.

That left Irungu and Cecily as the only members actively running the YAA secretariat. The rest of the members, contributed through the then Management Board, making policy decisions and providing strategic leadership but also and actively participated in YAA activities.

In late 2001, Mwalulu successfully vied for the Taveta Parliamentary seat during that year’s by-election. YAA actively played part in this campaign, and this is one of its success stories. During the 2002 general elections, three members: Mwalulu, Cecily and Kepta vied for Parliamentary seats in Taveta, Runyenjes and Bobasi, respectively. Resources were however a challenge and all could not make it. Still, Cecily got nominated to Parliament through NARC party. In 2007 she got elected and she is now an Assistant Minister.
With six of the members out of active engagement with YAA, Irungu was left to run the secretariat as the first Chief Executive Officer between 2002 and 2005.

In 2005, Kepta, who by then was heading the NCEC secretariat, came over to YAA as the CEO on contractual basis. Irungu moved on to the International Republican Institute (IRI), an American International NGO, as a Programme Officer for East Africa Programme.

In 2009, Kepta called it a day at YAA. A new CEO, Ms. Rita Shako, came in. That brought to an end an excruciating search for a new CEO at Youth Agenda. It was also a gigantic step towards full transition from the founder members to a new team. At the end of 2009, Rita left the organization and was replaced in an acting capacity by Ms. Susan Kariuki, the Programmes Coordinator.

As YAA founding Board pass on the baton after 13 years at the organization, they look back at the journey they have traveled with the organization from scratch with pride. With the official inauguration of the new members of the YAA Board, transition in YAA is finally completed. The outgoing members had absolute faith in the new team to see YAA through its original dream. More critically, the outgoing team trusts that the new members will go the extra mile to explore new horizons for the Youth Agenda.
2.0 From an Idea to Action

Beginnings:

Upon formation in 1996, Youth Agenda (YAA) kicked off its programmes with a focus of creating a unifying purpose among the ordinary youth wherever they were in the republic. The message especially resonated very well with youth of all cadres, from students in universities, colleges to young professionals and those in the informal sector and even the many unemployed youth in both urban and rural areas. The project was driven by passion and enthusiasm more than by graphic or academic designs.

At the start of its activities, YAA operated in a social background where the term ‘youth’ was an anathema. The Kenya youth occupied the dubious position of being riotous, unreasonable, half-brained, and only interested in causing mayhem. Youth Agenda therefore had an onerous task of first and foremost, sanitizing the term “youth” for the very youth to begin to believe in themselves again. A way had to be found to cultivate pride and positivism in being young and energetic. At the same time, the Youth Agenda had to disabuse the youth of the notion that the society owed them anything. Creative ways had to be found to impart the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes to be able to meaningfully engage in and create space for themselves without waiting for all this to be given to them on a silver platter. This why the rallying call was “power by invasion, not invitation”. This meant rejecting the platitude “the youth are leaders of tomorrow…” because this had been used to keep the youth in the sidelines waiting for a tomorrow that would never come. Things had to change, and change they did!

The clamour for multiparty democracy that began after the amendment of Section 2A of the Constitution in 1991 progressively paved avenues for the creation of nods of pressure for both political and social transformation by various constituencies. Majority of the crusaders for democratic change were men between their 30s to late 50s allied to political groupings. While agitation for enhanced democratic space and the need to level the playing field for all actors resonated with a wide cross section of citizens, lamentably the youth and women featured on the periphery of what was coalescing into a mass movement for positive national change.

Yet, these were the segments of population, who possessed the numerical strength to drive change, bore the brunt of an ailing economy, political repression resulting in gross human rights violations and general social malaise. Viewed critically, these conditions were and still are a by-product of inept leadership by the elite political class.
Dissatisfied with being relegated to the fringes, and in the absence of credible alternative popular forums and structures to support youth participation in wider socio-political spaces, young people in institutions of higher learning began to organize. The aim of which was to create a platform for ventilating issues of common concern and seeking viable solutions to existing problems affecting young people. Against this backdrop, a group of young university students conceived the idea of a youth forum in 1996 that later became known as the Youth Agenda. The initial aim of the Youth Agenda was to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas on broad governance concerns affecting the youth and also press for increased academic freedom.

The informal development of a youth forum was premised on the notion that youth issues such as education, health, employment, identity, and political participation are of primary concern and the formulation of interventions to address them could not be left to generations of times past. Recognizing this reality, the youth needed to seize the moment by taking centre stage in democratic decision making processes and enhance participation in institutions that influence their socialization.

Armed with energy and the risk taking nature of youth as the only impetus for the cause to build a youth movement, the team of seven young students who established YAA travelled across the country creating awareness among young people. In the process, youth networks that would be responsible for continued galvanizing and conscientisation of young people across constituencies were established. Over time, the initiative burgeoned into a mass movement that politicians began to take a keen interest in especially as the country prepared for its first multiparty elections in 1997.

Realizing the benefit of political participation, the Youth Agenda established a political unit called the National Youth Movement known more by its acronym NYM. While intended to engage constructively in political activism, it became apparent that the NYM was infiltrated by diverse interests, some of which were not capable of nurturing within the Youth Agenda. Consequently, the NYM went into limbo and the challenge of managing the overwhelming demands by Youth Agenda’s growing constituents while still informally constituted lingered.

That did not blur the aim of Youth Agenda of becoming a forum where youth from different social, political, economic, and cultural backgrounds would come together to build a critical mass that would transform the country. Lamentably, few donors at the beginning had faith in what was considered a transient youth initiative. Donors considered giving grants to Youth Agenda a risky venture. However, YAA did succeed in securing modest grants from DANIDA, USAID, WFD, and RNE to commence its pioneering work in shaping a distinctly youth agenda. It obtained its first grant from USAID in mid-1997. Subsequently, Youth Agenda was registered in the year 2002 as a Non-Governmental Organization and efforts have continued in earnest to attract sustainable funding.
For the better part, funding for Youth Agenda programmes has been short-term on occasions tied to donor designed initiatives which have in part constrained programme development as well as their sustainability. Nonetheless, the steady stream of funding for Youth Agenda projects has ensured that it continues to serve and respond to the needs of its constituents who constitute over half of the national population – a youthful nation indeed.

Despite the challenges, the YAA has in the last thirteen years evolved into a premier youth organization, registering phenomenal growth in stature through fostering positive change by mobilizing youth consciousness and nurturing young ethical leadership across the Republic.

Today, the Youth Agenda has to its credit an increased youth consciousness through participation in critical governance processes, enhanced visibility of young people occupying leadership positions in various sectors and the proliferation of youth led organizations aimed at making a difference. A long and arduous journey such as the one Youth Agenda set out on requires reflection and inquiry into milestones achieved, impediments encountered, and lessons learnt along the way, to determine how it should further develop.

What Successes Were Registered?

Changing times, Changing mindsets:

The National Youth Convention (NYC) I and II held in 1997 and 1998 respectively were the first projects to be rolled out by YAA. They largely brought together youth from current and former students leadership, civil society activists, activists from universities and national polytechnics, from the self-help and cultural groups from the far-flung parts of the country. It really was a mosaic of what the youth in Kenya really were. The focus of the conventions was to set the agenda for change in the country and roles for the young people in subsequent national change processes, especially in the run-up to the 1997 general elections and beyond.

“...it was the best experience ever...an idea that you believe in and see it grow.”

Danny Irungu
YAA correctly noted that student leaders and activists were systematically being reduced from national leaders to domestic managers of institutional subsistence issues. This was happening when the Berlin Wall had dramatically been brought down and the country was just turning into its first decade of multi-party politics—which required new and young leaders as the Young Turks had proven in the lead up to the first multiparty politics.

The said NYCs had the impact of bringing into focus the purposefulness of the youth of Kenya. For the first time, a total audit of all facets of life – social, economic and political, was done by the young, how they viewed it, how it affected them and how they wanted it to be. These were carefully documented as NYC I and NYC II resolutions, another first for the youth. NYC I and NYC II recommended to see the following accomplished for Kenya; A Ministry of Youth, A Comprehensive Youth Policy, A National Youth Council, Free Primary Education, Youth Enterprise fund, 150 young members of parliament, young people taking leadership of COTU, KNUT, MYWO, LSK, establishing East Africa Council, forming Anti Corruption Youth Commitee, Advocacy for a new Constitutional Dispensation and more responsive institutions of governance.

**Successes**

- **Sanitized the term ‘youth’** and the term started to be used and applied to mean freshness, energy, creativity, and a break from the past. Youth was reborn as fashionable and this has not changed. It is no wonder that senior politicians were tripping over themselves trying to capture this group that had the promise of bringing political benefits to them. A few unscrupulous students swallowed this hook, line and sinker and went all out to pursue their parochial interests.

- **Create Space for the youth around the table please!** Youth began to attract attention as policy factors and got into focus as centre’s of development and important sectors for development considerations including at constitutional, leadership, legal, policy, political, funding and planning levels.

- **The quasi-political agenda of the youth was sharpened.** Youth concertedly mobilized and focused on participating in political and social engagements with the intention of taking over the leadership and acquiring the requisite power. Many youth presented themselves as candidates in the 1997 elections in the local and parliamentary elections with impressive shows.

- **Independence.** Young people were and have remained galvanized to mobilize and organize variously along their agendas without necessarily being prompted by other competing interests at all levels.
• **Walking the uncharted path.** The successes of the activities and events in that epoch opened the doors for serious consideration for support to youth initiatives among and by the donor community. The Youth Agenda defied all odds and managed to convince major donors that it was worth their while investing in this new, inexperienced group of young Kenyans, and who had not been initiated in the ways of the big-league donors. Again, it was never always easy to send a “concept paper” to donors to request for consideration for funding.

• Contributed significantly in the **push for free and compulsory primary education**. The group of 300 that met in Limuru on April 17th-20th 1998 through resolution 4 on the Education section unequivocally called on the government and development partners to initiate and support free and compulsory education if the youth were to break away from the curse of ignorance, abject poverty, and disease. Young people were convinced that this would have been the greatest gift from the outgoing generation to the young generation – the gift of knowledge. The resolutions of the convention were resounding in their proclamation on the issues of social capital that would develop this nation for generations to come.

• **Enacting of a National Youth Policy and National Youth Council.** It was our conviction that the youth needed a legitimate and independent government-funded body that would effectively take up their issues at policy and local levels. The very first motion that was developed for establishment of the National Youth Policy and a National Youth Council (NYC) and presented to the Speaker of the National Assembly was developed by the Youth Agenda and presented by the then MP for Taveta, Hon. Jackson Mwalulu. Unfortunately, the motion never saw the light of day as it lapsed because Parliament was prorogued. That, however, remained work-in-progress for the Youth Agenda. The issue was later taken up with the Minister for Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services, and later by the newly formed ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. It is noteworthy here that there was intense lobbying that went on for the Government to establish a specific ministry that would address specifically issues relating to the youth in Kenya. Until 31st December 2009 when H.E President Kibaki assented the National Youth Council Bill, Youth Agenda has consulted young people, presented memorandums, lobbying young Members of Parliament to ensure that the recommendations made by young people is achievable.

• The recommendations of NYC 1998 also proposed creation of a **National Youth Enterprise Fund** to assist deserving youth develop themselves economically through provision of capital and necessary entrepreneurial skills. This was in response to the challenge of inaccessibility of capital for young people because of lack of collateral, guarantors or punitively high interest rates. Today, we are happy to see a functioning Youth Fund, challenges notwithstanding.
Official recognition and factoring in of the youth as an important stakeholder in social, political and economic sectors. The youth began to officially participate in national processes as a distinct stakeholder. This was the key to encouraging young people to register as party members and to actively participate in positive legitimate party activities. Presence of Youth Leagues in a few parties are confirmation of youth leadership and reclaiming their space. In the same context, a number of policies considered youth as a significant sector in the society.

**Mobilizing and organizing for change:**

Having sufficiently raised the consciousness of the country on who the youth are and what they are capable of, YAA then trained its focus on developing the capacity of young people to truly take charge of the affairs of the country. The strategy was to develop programmes that would enhance their skills, knowledge, and attitudes as a way of developing quality cadre of youth who would effectively take up the challenge of leadership at very high levels in society. This was realized through short intensive courses between 2000 and 2007. The flagship programme that was developed by Youth Agenda with the support of DANIDA and the Ford Foundation was appropriately christened Young Leadership Development Programme (YLDP). Special focus was given to trainings for Young Community Leaders, Young Political Leaders, Young Trade Union Leaders, Young Professional Leaders and Young Women Leaders. Later the political sector training grew into a fully-fledged training programme of its own, the Political Leadership Development Programme (PLDP) very ably supported by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.

These trainings equipped the beneficiaries with capacities to acknowledge and understand their environments, leadership skills, managing challenges and consolidating gains.

There were also fora where upcoming political leaders would spur with their counterparts in preparation for the real political platform.

**Successes**

- A premier **technologically connected nationwide network of young leaders** was formed and continues to thrive. The network has mutated and has evolved into a formidable virtual community that shapes political opinion of a significant number of members, both in the country and in the Diaspora.
Effective leadership nursery. Among its graduates are some of the most successful corporate leaders, civil servants, members of parliament, civil society leaders, councillors, political party managers and prominent trade unionists. Many look back with a sense of pride and nostalgia, the days when young people came out in large numbers to support progressive causes even when one was never sure how he would get home in the evening.

Back to the basics: leadership for service. The process registered an exponential increase in the number of young persons seeking and getting leadership positions at various levels. This was a good sign because the concept of leadership was successfully demystified and this is the route to reaffirming our belief in leadership for service. However, we remain alive to the challenges that continue to face the young leaders because of commercialization of politics. Running for a political seat has become a very expensive affair and this is why the rich and corrupt leaders find it easier to outdo the younger leaders whose only weapon is a vision. This must be addressed through concerted effort by all who care for democracy in Kenya by finding creative ways of dealing with the political profiteers who have continued to perpetuate this very despicable trend. There is also the reality that being young alone is not enough. For this reason efforts have been made by YAA to ensure that values and ethics are instilled in young people aspiring to leadership so that they provide leadership with a difference.

Upsurge in development of more specialized leadership training and leadership programmes for youth by YAA, the government, political parties, development partners and other civil society organizations. Many organizations picked the cue and have now developed specialized leadership programmes for young people. We considered this complementary because Youth Agenda could not do as much as it wanted because of limited capacity.
• **Strategic engagement of youth leaders** in key institutions and processes of the Kenyan society. These include: The constitution making process, development and implementation of Vision 2030, and major political parties.

**Informing and Empowering:**

YAA has cut a niche of generating and sharing information that enhances the role of youth in the management and leadership of the country. This has been done continuously from 1997 and include;

• Developing, packaging, publishing and widely disseminating all the resolutions and recommendations of all the National Youth Conventions (NYCs). This formed part of the national reform agenda as the youth were not ready to see their vision forgotten. Successive NYCs have attempted to take stock of the gains and challenges with a view to developing new strategies to address old and new problems.

• Developing, sharing and lobbying for the first draft **National Youth Policy** in the country. It is with pride that those who spent days, evenings and even weekends discussing the development of a National Youth Policy acknowledge that their effort was not in vain. Young people now have a national youth policy that has strategically outlined the challenges of young people and provided solutions to deal with them.

• Providing an account of the guilty; is violence a problem of young people or the society? Youth Agenda sought to expand the information available on election violence that virtually had become a second skin to elections in Kenya. **The “Who is Guilty? Youth Perspectives on the 2007 Pre Polls Electoral Violence in Kenya”** report launched in 2008 provided an account of the recurrent problem of electoral violence in Kenya in 2008 provided an account of the recurrent problem of electoral violence beyond the traditional boundaries of election monitoring and reporting. The book was famously referred to in the Waki Report, and other researchers who wanted to understand the roots of the post election violence have found worth in the Youth Agenda Publication *Who is Guilty?*, which was supported by Pact Kenya.
Leadership in CDF development process. Leading the analysis on law, administration, and implications of the proposed Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and stepping down and disseminating the same. Youth Agenda took up the challenge of engaging the proponents of the CDF and offered inputs towards making the structure, administration, monitoring and evaluation of the fund more effective. The Youth Agenda publication “Constituency Development Fund: for Development or Campaigns?” was widely distributed for public education.

Consolidation of the youth position in the constitution-making process. The journey from Bomas, through Kilifi, to Naivasha and lastly to Delta House has seen young people present their innovative, non selfish, and sometimes radical views to the successive review organs and finally to the Committee of Experts. YAA collected, collated and widely disseminated the views and opinions of the youth on the constitutional review process. The Youth Agenda played the important role of effectively linking the youth with the constitution-making process through channeling of these views to the relevant bodies. Danny Irungu who was then the CEO of YAA represented youth and marginalized groups at Bomas. The Youth Agenda developed position papers which were shared with key institutions including the Ufungamano Group on Constitutional Review (1998); National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) by the civil society groups; The Constitution of Kenya Review Commission and during the Constitutional
• **Conference at Bomas in 2003 - 2004.** The eagerness with which Kenyans greeted the release of the Harmonized Draft Constitution on 17th November 2009 was testament to the desire among the citizens for meaningful and far reaching reforms in the country. Youth Agenda presented memoranda with views from over 10,000 university students who participated in fora organized in 21 Campuses and those from outreach activities. The citizenry is awake to the reality that a good constitution is the bedrock of the much needed reforms. The debates are still intensified because Kenyans want a New Constitution. It is the leadership provided by the YAA that led it to be invited to the National Reference Group on the Constitutional Review Process by the Committee of Experts (CoE) that is drafting the Constitution of Kenya.

• **Demystifying leadership.** This was largely done through establishing structures on the ground, the Constituency Parliaments, which gave communities an opportunity to interact with their leaders and make known their challenges and triumphs. The parliaments encouraged alternative leadership at the constituency level, and leaders offered real solutions to real problems experienced by real people. This was a real test of leadership and many young people found this to be a very useful forum indeed.

• **Keeping youth current with contemporary socio-political discourses.** Research and dissemination of contemporary issues that include role of young people in pre and post election violence; toolkits for fighting corruption; the legal and constitutional moments; and current political thinking. In 2008, Youth Agenda implemented the Human Rights and Social Justice Programme in High Schools, a programme that faced resistance from the schools’ administration due to the increased school unrest. Today it is a big project promoting national cohesion and tolerance through the support of CIDA.

• **Greater sense of civic responsibility by the youth.** YAA has without fail developed and upgraded guides for – and conducted – voter education at all the general elections since 1997, including the 2005 referendum and in all the provinces in Kenya. This was geared towards encouraging young people to take charge of the electoral process by bringing their numerical strength to bear. Whereas the youth did not significantly change the direction of the vote, many young people were excited to make their vote count in deciding the political destiny of the country. In the 2007 Kenya registered the highest number of youth voters and this

“A good idea must give way to a better idea....”

*Michael Kijana Wamalwa*

*Former V-President of Kenya*
was attributed to great campaigns done countrywide by Youth Agenda through the **Get Involved Campaign**, involvement in Vijana Tugutuke campaign, among others.

- **Strengthening young people’s political participation.** There is one thing that Youth Agenda will forever be remembered for, the interest and commitment to see young people participate in elective leadership positions. A number were however inhibited by the electoral system that promotes a culture where “the winner takes it all”. YAA has supported young political leaders in the formation of youth leagues and institutionalizing them. The recent effort was to expand the support mechanisms at the regional level. To date through Youth Agenda, the Inter-parties Youth Council constituting members from all political parties works to consolidate, validate and strengthen their various initiatives aimed at promoting and supporting the participation of young people in the political parties.

- **Higher civic awareness.** In between elections, YAA has continually been conducting civic education that is wholesome and that encourages the youth to be active actors in matters governance as opposed to being reactive as they have traditionally been. There were more responses from youth on matters that touched on governance, constitutionalism, democracy, social justice and human rights. The discussions focused on Rights, Responsibilities and Obligations of Kenyans though targeting the youth.

- **Coalition Building: Women and Youth Alliance.** Upon implementation of programmes with remarkable achievements such as gender and governance, YAA in partnership with Centre for Rights, Education and Awareness (CREAW) launched the Women and Youth Alliance (WAYA) an innovative strategy to initially even out the electoral ground for women and young candidates. It has now grown into an ideology for organizing youth and women towards reforms and transformation.
Mentorship:
Mentorship is one of the greatest gifts that Youth Agenda has purposed to offer to the youth constituency. The founder members had mentors who did not tire holding their hands and providing guidance even during those moments when their projects did not seem to offer much hope. They, therefore were duty-bound to pass on the good lessons that they received from their mentors who included great men and women from Kenya and elsewhere. They included (in random order): Dr. Willy Mutunga, Prof. Kivutha Kibwana, Davinder Lamba, Prof. Wangari Maathai, Dr. Gibson Kamau Kuria, Karin Steffenson (formerly of the Danish Embassy), Dr. George Jones (former head of USAID), Paddy Onyango among others.

This spirit continues to be a core value of YAA, where the skills, potential and aspirations of young people are nurtured and harnessed in all spheres of life. These values include appreciating the role of youth, good governance, respect for human rights, quest for social justice, and the spirit of selflessness, determination and hard work.

It is through the work of Youth Agenda and availability of support mechanisms that has led to many young people occupying leadership positions and influencing decisions. A number of those who have publicly attributed their success to Youth Agenda’s intervention include Hon. Rachael Shebesh, Hon. Kabando wa Kabando, Geoffrey Mogire– Nyanza KNUT Chairman, Cllr Rachael Kamweru, the Late GPO Paul Oulu, Tabitha Njoroge–Executive Director WILDAF, Cosmas Kanyadudi– Chairman LDP Youth League, Alfred Mutua–Government Spokesperson, Evans Gachie– Director Youth Agenda - Coast for Peace, Ann Njogu – Chairperson CREAW, Suba Churchil– NCSC Coordinator, Benson Maisori– Coordinator Kuria Youth Forum, Hassan Omar–Vice Chair– KNCHR, Mohammed Gabow– Garissa Mayor and Yusuf Jillo– Director Youth Agenda Garissa, Otieno Aluoka among others.

It is quite telling that all the persons who have served in the YAA secretariat either as staff, interns or volunteers have proceeded, without exception, to occupy leadership positions and take up roles of higher responsibility elsewhere. YAA made it its business to develop young talent through inculcating professionalism, initiative, meritocracy, and ambition.
Mentorship includes incubating and supporting youth initiatives and youth organizations e.g. MAPACA, KYP.A, NYC, YLN, P4C, NYM, NYF, National Youth Lobby for Reforms, Ford Kenya Youth League, LDP Youth League, Centre for Community Dialogue (CODE), Young People’s forum (YPF), Youth Agenda Garissa and East Africa Youth Council among others.

Through its interaction with the youth across the borders, the Youth Agenda also inspired the formation of youth organizations that espoused similar values and approach in their work in their countries. They include Youth Agenda Zimbabwe, and Uganda Youth Network (UYONET).

This way, YAA has over its existence continually produced beacons of hope and a path of perpetuation and renewal for society.

**Networking and Regionalization:**

In its work, YAA has always endeavored to walk with others through a deliberate process of collaborating and networking. Youth Agenda found this to be very valuable. Unlike a banana, when an idea is shared, it does not diminish. Instead, it is given a chance to be improved on and become better.

**Relationship with Government** YAA was once an enemy of the government. Today the relationship is beneficial, the two parties consult each other on many things but remain firm on the principle of engagement. YAA monitors government’s performance and provides technical support to the three arms of government through dialogue, researched work, capacity building and provision of linkages.

**East African Integration** YAA facilitated the formation of East Africa Youth Council which provides a basis for greater co-operation in the entire Great Lakes region and a useful voice for young people in the regional integration efforts. These efforts have been pursued through political, social and economic opportunities through mobilizing and organizing young people towards domestication of Africa Youth Charter.

YAA also spread its tentacles nationally and regionally. YAA established beacons of young people across the entire stretch of the country. This sustained the organisation’s reach in different parts of the country.

“If you want to go fast, go alone; If you want to go far, go with others.”

*Luo Proverb*
YAA further joined other progressive civil society networks including:

- Constitution and Reform Education Consortium (CRECO) which brought together civil society organizations in the governance social justice/human rights sector. YAA was a founder member and a chair of the consortium.

- Partnership for Change (P4C), for enhancing accountability and monitoring of executive and legislative performance.

- East Africa Youth Council (EAYCO). For advocating greater youth networking in the region and panafricanism.

- National Civil Society Congress- to streamline the message of Civil Society in monitoring government performance

- Katiba Sasa Campaign, to safeguard the constitutional review process

- National Convention Assembly (NCA), and was also represented in the National Convention Executive Council (NCEC). These brought together political groupings for common political action including advocating for a new constitution for the country.

- Citizen Coalition for Constitutional Change (4Cs); to develop collaborative strategies for constitutional change.

- The National Youth Forum to mobilize and organize young people towards reforms.
3.0 Great Opportunities for Youth Agenda

Like a marketer would apply the principle of growth, an analysis of Youth Agenda environmental fit is imperative. A product’s life cycle (PLC) is divided into several stages characterized by the revenue generated by the product. If a curve is drawn showing product revenue over time, it may take one of many different shapes. The life cycle concept applies to Youth Agenda and its duration did not exist as a fad but as a reputable brand with services demanded by its customers and in this case young Kenyan citizens.

It is clear from the foregoing that there were sales and that Youth Agenda is reputable as a pace setter in advocating for inclusion of young people in their quest to recreate Kenya. As a product progresses through its life cycle, changes in the marketing mix usually is required in order to adjust to the evolving challenges and opportunities. Whereas the organization has managed to wield enormous goodwill among its constituents and curve itself the niche of a vibrant youth leadership nursery over the thirteen year period, the challenge now lies in managing this growth. Innovative and creative ways of doing business will inevitably have to be developed to retain YAA’s appeal among its constituents and the leader in this discourse.

Managing the Leadership crisis

Kenya is currently founded on a slow economic turn around within the country coupled with several significant economic and political paradoxes. For instance though Kenya is the largest economy in the Great Lakes region, it is also the most unequal. Indeed the country has been experiencing unprecedented expansion of inequalities in tandem with significant economic growth suggesting the country’s wealth is increasingly in the hands of fewer and fewer people. The country has increasingly young private sector and civil society leadership ranged against an ageing public and political leadership.

The country has more recently been rocked by instrumentalized ethnicity which has revealed another significant contradiction- that the 43+ Kenyan ethnic communities are perfectly harmonious in their diversity at the social, sports and cultural realms but are at war at the slightest provocation within the political and economic domains.
There is however a continued demand for value driven leadership in public and private offices, which is a great opportunity for Youth Agenda. This is more demanding due to the profile that YAA has had over time in training and developing youth leadership. The challenge however is ensuring that age is not the valuable brand but the alternative leadership, different from the status quo. A real paradigm shift in Kenya’s leadership is calling and it is YAA’s role to nurture and provide the new leadership.

**Life expectancy**

In guiding the next steps, YAA will have to review the state of the Republic. Kenya celebrates 46 years as an independent Nation—this is within the lifespan for many living Kenyans. It also means that there are at least three living generations of Kenyans, born in the post-colonial era.

As Kenya looks to the future, it should do so with confidence, since the labour force is young and growing and as it is, life expectancy is currently at 42 years hence the urgent need to invest in and nurture the youthful generation. The economy is also becoming increasingly open to the global economies and social and political development initiatives that seek to raise Kenyan’s human development and governance to meet international standards. This positive outlook is obscured by the seeming inability to rise above “disorder”. The recent developments point to the fact that in Kenya’s climb in the last 46 years, there remain fundamental weaknesses and cracks to nationhood and nation building that the country continues to face. “The youth must rise to the occasion! Youth Agenda must captain the ship”.

**Developing innovative approaches**

Great opportunities among young people coupled with resistance to change by the old only serve to generate frustration and a sense of hopelessness, killing the potential that is the youth. It is in this regard that regular reflection and analysis of the work of YAA is essential in ensuring the development of an articulate plan that responds appropriately to identified priorities and relevant needs of its constituents. Additionally, the process would contribute to organizational learning and development.

Agenda setting and innovation in strategy development ought to take precedence over implementing short term donor conceived initiatives. YAA has done well in articulating democracy and governance...
issues but the current context instructs that to remain relevant as a youth organization, YAA needs to focus on the issue of youth and unemployment, livelihoods, critically assess government policy legislation with a view to identifying opportunities for youth. The CDF and Roads Fund for example, present opportunities for economic empowerment for the youth in both rural and urban areas. A key informant in the impact assessment felt that YAA should be operating within the superstructure in order to influence national processes.

From the previous experience YAA has had challenges with short term projects due to unavailability of funds. To break the cycle of donor dependency, there is need for YAA to institutionally put in place a strategy for capital and assets acquisition and development. It also needs to set out internal ways of resource mobilization. Additionally, the organization should re-negotiate the funding approach with donors in favour of core funding to ensure YAA remains in charge of its agenda.

The need for Research and Development

In conducting the impact assessment, it was difficult to measure the tangible, qualitative impact attributable to the work of YAA. This was majorly attributed by the lack of baseline surveys and research for comparative analysis. This would help identify new areas of focus, strategies and opportunities that YAA ought to address within programme and organizational development. YAA should ensure that its advocacy strategies are more knowledge based and driven. Increase in cutting edge publishing will also be anticipated once research efforts are stepped up.

Equally important is the carrying out of Baseline surveys or needs assessments to inform the process of designing projects. Application of the 3As: Assessment, Analysis and Action model is recommended for all civil society organizations, Youth Agenda included.

Demand for Knowledge

Closely related to the research and development is the establishment of a Resource Center that carries all information pertaining to youth matters. The growth of YAA over the past thirteen years as the pioneer youth organization places it at a vantage point of evolving into a think tank and resource centre for youth and youth organizations as a way of consolidating gains and ascending to the next level. YAA should envisage becoming a one stop shop for youth polices, legislation, manifestos, reports on various issues affecting the youth around the world among other related resources.
Improving Livelihoods and Broadening Economic Opportunities

The labour market is very depressed with about 800,000 young Kenyans joining the labour market every year. Therein lies a great opportunity for young people specifically but also Kenyans generally to enjoy better living standards through deliberate interventions to improve their livelihoods, enhance their life chances and address concerns of equity.

Youth Agenda must design interventions geared towards creating economic awareness among youth and equipping them not just with the skills to venture into business but also pointing them in the direction of existing business opportunities and how they can take advantage of them to improve their livelihoods.

Increased youth number of youth organization and interest to youth issues

The positive change and perception by development partners of young people is an opportunity for growth and sustainability of YAA as an institution. Tracking the performance of alumni in leadership positions, volunteers and interns while noting and acknowledging exemplary efforts or contribution in their assigned roles would be useful in not only ensuring continued engagement but also as a means of inspiring other young people to subscribe to the Youth Agenda.

There is a critical need to device programmes that support young leaders from every region in the country. These could be in the form of providing opportunities for political internship, relevant scholarship awards, profiling, technical support to YAA membership organisations or actually setting up a fund for young leaders.

Creation of vertical and horizontal linkage to the work of YAA would reinforce the great influence from the grassroots level and its linkage to national interventions.

Illustrious history of existence and success

The exponential growth of Youth Agenda over the last thirteen years is unquestionable. Its position as a leader on issues related to young people and governance casts on it the onerous responsibility of pace setting. Besides, the expansion of YAA, demands by constituents for more products and services, coupled with ongoing internal changes, require prudent management to ensure that YAA continues to provide leadership as it embarks on redefining its role in a fluid political and socio-economic environment. Indeed, YAA occupies a strategic place by virtue of being a pioneering youth organization that possesses credibility. YAA will strive to confront the ever burgeoning number of youth in the 21st century and beyond.
4.0 Making The Youth Factor Count!!!

This report confirms that there was and there is still a dream to be realized. It is a dream for young people locally and in the world over to complete the process of reengineering the state and put Kenya on the path to prosperity, development and good governance.

The Youth Agenda secretariat and the board wishes all readers of this publication a success in their endeavor and welcomes all on board to the unchartered path.
We Dared To Dream

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