

Youth as Agents of Community Development
Johannesburg, South Africa

I. Context: Community and Urban Development in Johannesburg

The late Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, believed in the importance of mobilizing the resources of urban communities in order to create opportunities for all South Africans and make a competitive nation within the world economy. In the foreword of the country's Urban Development Strategy, President Mandela said, "The success of this will depend on the initiative taken by urban residents to build their local authorities and promote local economic development."

Recently, the local government of Johannesburg has taken to this message - branding itself in growth and development strategies as "the city of the future." Despite this bold and hopeful narrative, areas of the city continue to face significant social issues such as growing economic inequality, racial segregation and inequality, health inequities, crime, youth unemployment, homelessness amongst children, failed housing projects, lacking and poor infrastructure, and low quality public education. While sustainable community development requires the insight and knowledge of a wide range of residents, youth input tends to be missing in planning and decision-making.

Recently, research has shown that youth play a critical role in the development of their communities through their involvement with local government, civil society organizations (non-governmental organizations and non-profits), schools, student-led organizations, businesses, and grassroots movements. Johannesburg has a large corps of people and voluntary organizations ready to give their time and energy to improving the city. We are especially inspired by those groups and individuals who have reached out to the city's youth and successfully created contexts in which youth can derive strong benefits from engaging in community change initiatives. While government and civil society organizations have begun to introduce initiatives to encourage youth to get involved in community work, there is a need to continue educating and sustaining this culture of engagement.

II. Project Overview: Creating Youth Workers: Involving Youth in the Development Process

Our project seeks to actively engage and partner with high school students and connect them to opportunities to become long-term contributors and leaders in community development efforts. Equipped with the information and skills of community development thinkers, students will have the power to improve their own lives and their communities. With clear direction and support, these youth can build their capacity to address critical issues in their immediate communities and ultimately reach larger post-millennium goals toward a peaceful world society. One of our goals is to make youth, particularly those on their way out of school, aware of their different options after school. This program will provide youth with the opportunity to attain the necessary skills and experience in preparation for their careers. Thus, this kind of youth work can also reduce unemployment, one of the development challenges affecting young people in the country.

III. Project Design

We will assist youth in becoming leaders within their own communities by recruiting and training a group of 30 students in Sir John Adamson High School in Johannesburg South neighborhood in South Africa. The project will take place in nine weeks from June 1st to August 8th.

Over the course of the nine weeks we will conduct a series of after-school community building skills workshops to inform, develop and mentor students as young leaders for a better South Africa. We would also like to bring in local community development practitioners from various organizations in the field to speak to the students about some aspects of their work. We intend to attract a very divergent group of people representing organizations in areas such as housing, community health, and local economic development. The following organizations will be taken as case studies for the students to learn from: The National Institute for Crime Prevention and the Reintegration of Offenders, The Southern African Association of Youth Clubs, Khulisa Social Solutions, Johannesburg Housing Company, Child Friendly Cities Initiative, Mayor's Office of the Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council. Students will form an understanding of the range of issues that are in play and create a vision of comprehensive community development.

During the last week, the workshops and training will culminate in a final project, in which we divide students into small groups and ask them to creatively address a community development issue. By giving students the opportunity to interact with practitioners from local NGOs and the tools to analyze development, we hope to empower them to be leaders within their own community as well as global community development thinkers. Ultimately, community development relies on the potential of local people to mobilize themselves, resources, and tools to address local needs. In the long term, we anticipate that students will apply this framework into whatever field they decide to enter into and have an accessible network of connections with local NGOs that promote youth engagement and employment. This program will be part of a larger grassroots movement to integrate youth in community development planning, and it can be looked to and replicated on a wider scale.

IMPLEMENTATION

The youth training sessions will cover the practice and the theory of community development, with an emphasis on urban populations in low-income areas. What can be done to reduce poverty, generate employment, promote opportunity and solidarity, educate all, and empower youth? Our community development class will meet three times a week after school (MWT from 2:30-4:00PM). The Monday class will cover a lecture on the given topic. The Wednesday class will include an interactive activity followed by student led discussion on local challenges related to the topic. Thursday's class will be a workshop led by a guest practitioner from a local NGO who will speak about their NGO, the work it does related to the week's topic, and their role in the organization.

TIMELINE

Week 1:	Introduction to Development in the Urban Community
Week 2:	Civic Participation and Collective Action
Week 3:	Economic Development
Week 4:	Racial and social inequality
Week 5:	Access to Healthcare
Week 6:	Violence and Crime
Week 7:	Shelter & Housing
Week 8:	Education and Leadership
Week 9:	Final project presentations

Weekly Workshop Agenda (Example: Economic Development):

Monday; 2:30-4:00:

Lecture and discussion on concepts in economic development.

- 1) What is economic development?
 - a. Economic growth vs economic development
 - b. Human Development Index (HDI)
 - c. History: Agriculture and industrial policy
- 2) Examples of economic growth
 - a. The East Asian Miracle & BRIC
 - b. Globalization
- 3) Millennium Development Goals/Foreign Aid
- 4) Alternate models of economic development
- 5) Globalizing/Localizing
- 6)

Wednesday; 2:30-4:00:

Interactive activity followed by student led discussion.

- 1) Warm-up activity- Break up students in two teams

of 15 students for a debate and assign an affirmative and negative side. Ask students to address this prompt: "The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are useful indicators for economic development in Sub-Saharan Africa." Based on Monday's lecture, each team will prepare their positions for their respective stances.

- 2) Discussions questions about the reading in small groups.
- 3) Concluding remarks.

Thursday; 2:30-4:00:

Practitioner from Alternate Information and Development Centre will visit classroom to speak about their NGO mission and role in the organization. He/she will discuss the "One Million Jobs Campaign" and other programmatic efforts to address Joburg's mass unemployment situation, and their current successes and limitations. Students will have the opportunity to pose questions and learn about volunteer opportunities at the organization.

IV. About Us

Mona Elminyawi is a senior at Wellesley College and student of Urban Studies with a minor in Economics. Her individual program of study focuses on urbanization and development as it plays out locally in Boston and globally. She became interested in the study of cities because she wanted to learn about various community processes and the work that goes into creating diverse and inclusive localities. Outside of school, she has worked for nonprofits that serve their local community. She has mentored youth in Cambridge and Roxbury, researched the impact of foreclosure in six distressed neighborhoods of Boston, and interned at the Neighborhood Preservation Coalition of NYS, an affordable housing coalition in upstate New York.

Monica Setaruddin is a senior at Wellesley College pursuing a double major in Psychology and Human Biology; Health & Society. With a deep commitment to global health and international development, she's researched gender-based violence, HIV/AIDS, and reproductive health in Haiti, post-disaster gender-based violence in Southeast Asia, and malaria prevention in East Africa. Her most recent summer experience on malaria elimination with Clinton Health Access Initiative in Namibia sparked a love for Southern Africa and community development issues.

Together, they've taken a spread of development courses at Wellesley: Political Economy of Underdevelopment, Gender and International Development, Politics of Community Development, and Development Economics. Each of these courses has to some degree emphasized the importance of local actors in bringing about positive social change. They hope to encourage bottom up energy from youth and turn them into decision makers within their communities. This peace project will enable youth to critically think about challenges within their communities as well as see themselves as active agents of change.