

# YOUTH AND THEIR NEEDS WITHIN PUBLIC SPACE



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### **YOUTH AND THEIR NEEDS WITHIN PUBLIC SPACE**

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United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

P. O. Box 30030, 00100 Nairobi GPO KENYA

Tel: 254-020-7623120 (Central Office)

[www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)

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Author: **Tone Vesterhus**

Editors: **Daniela Feenstra, Douglas Ragan**

Contributors: **Isaac Mutisya Mukasa, Nathaniel Canuel, The Mlango Kubwa Community**

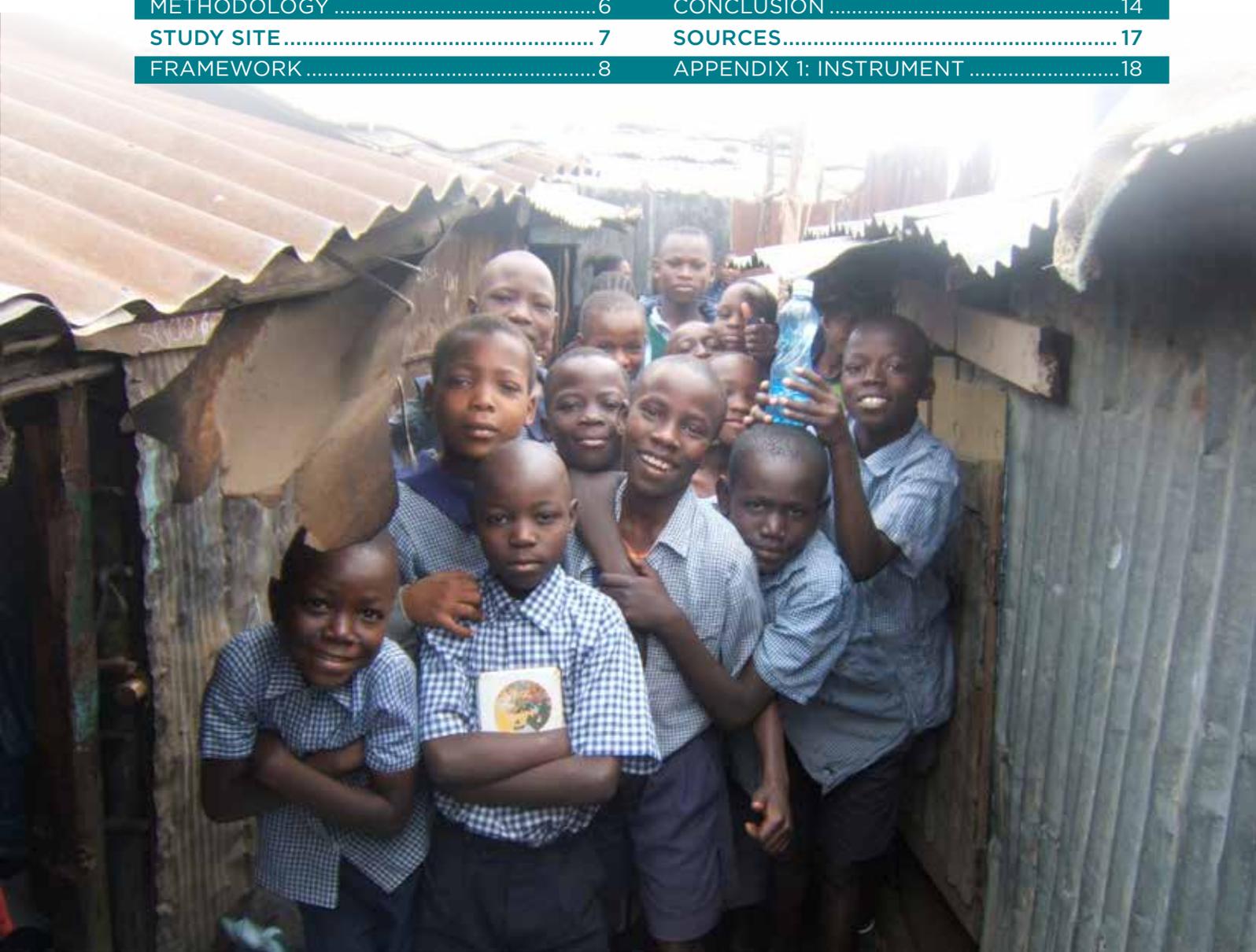
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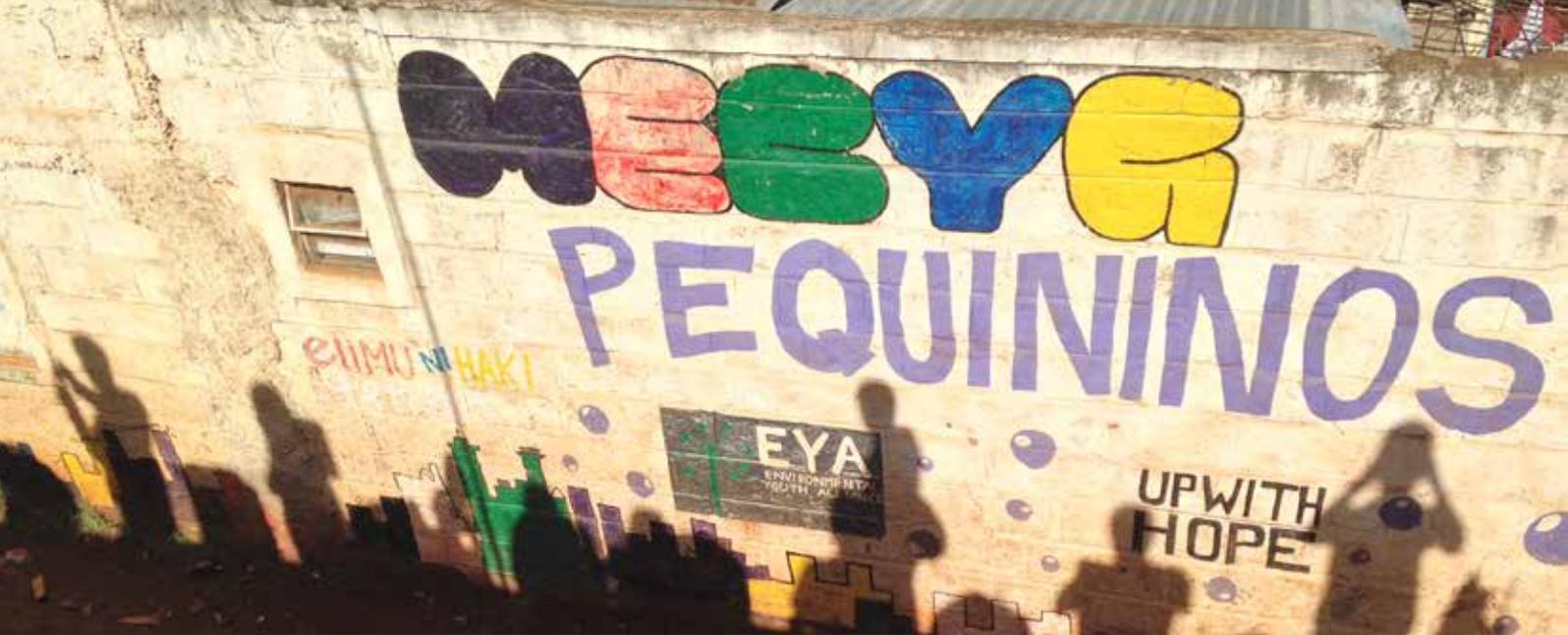
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## INTRODUCTION

Slums<sup>1</sup> are areas where land is in high demand. This fact creates intense pressure on public spaces. Land in slums is a highly contested issue; commercial land developers contribute towards the increased privatization of public space.

Youth are frequent users of public space in spite the fact that they rarely have a substantial influence on the planning and development of these spaces (UN-Habitat, 2013a). Regardless, public spaces such as community centres, playgrounds, and sport spaces can have a great influence on the safety, wellbeing, and prosperity of young urban slum dwellers.

Youth repeatedly face obstacles in accessing public spaces for their development. This can be attributed to a number of issues, but is frequently related to questions of security imposed by a combination of high crime rates and unfit public spaces, derived from insufficient lighting and access (UN-Habitat, 2013b).

<sup>1</sup> The United Nations definition of a slum includes the following characteristics; inadequate access to safe water, inadequate access to sanitation and infrastructure, poor structural quality of housing, overcrowding and insecure residential status (UN-Habitat)

Young women face the same challenges as young men, but are in addition victims of societal and cultural norms, which limit their access to social and political arenas and decision-making processes. Young women are also especially vulnerable to harassment and discrimination; hence their need for good public spaces becomes vital in the sense that the lack of sufficiently safe spaces can limit their access to education, health services, employment, and leisure activities (UN-Habitat, 2013b). This study will explore this intersectionality between being both young and female, and how these variables relate to needs in terms of public spaces.

“.....

**Youth repeatedly face obstacles in accessing public spaces for their development.**

.....

This study will hence have the aim of answering the following research questions: a) How does the public spaces of Mlango Kubwa cover the needs of youth members of the community? b) What are the differences between young women and young men in terms of what needs are being met with the public spaces available in Mlango Kubwa?, and c) What types of spaces can be introduced to better meet the needs of young women?

Urban planning and development remains in large part a male-dominated discipline, and re-searchers argue that this, in effect, can leave the planning processes insensitive to gender-specific issues (Hebert, 2001).

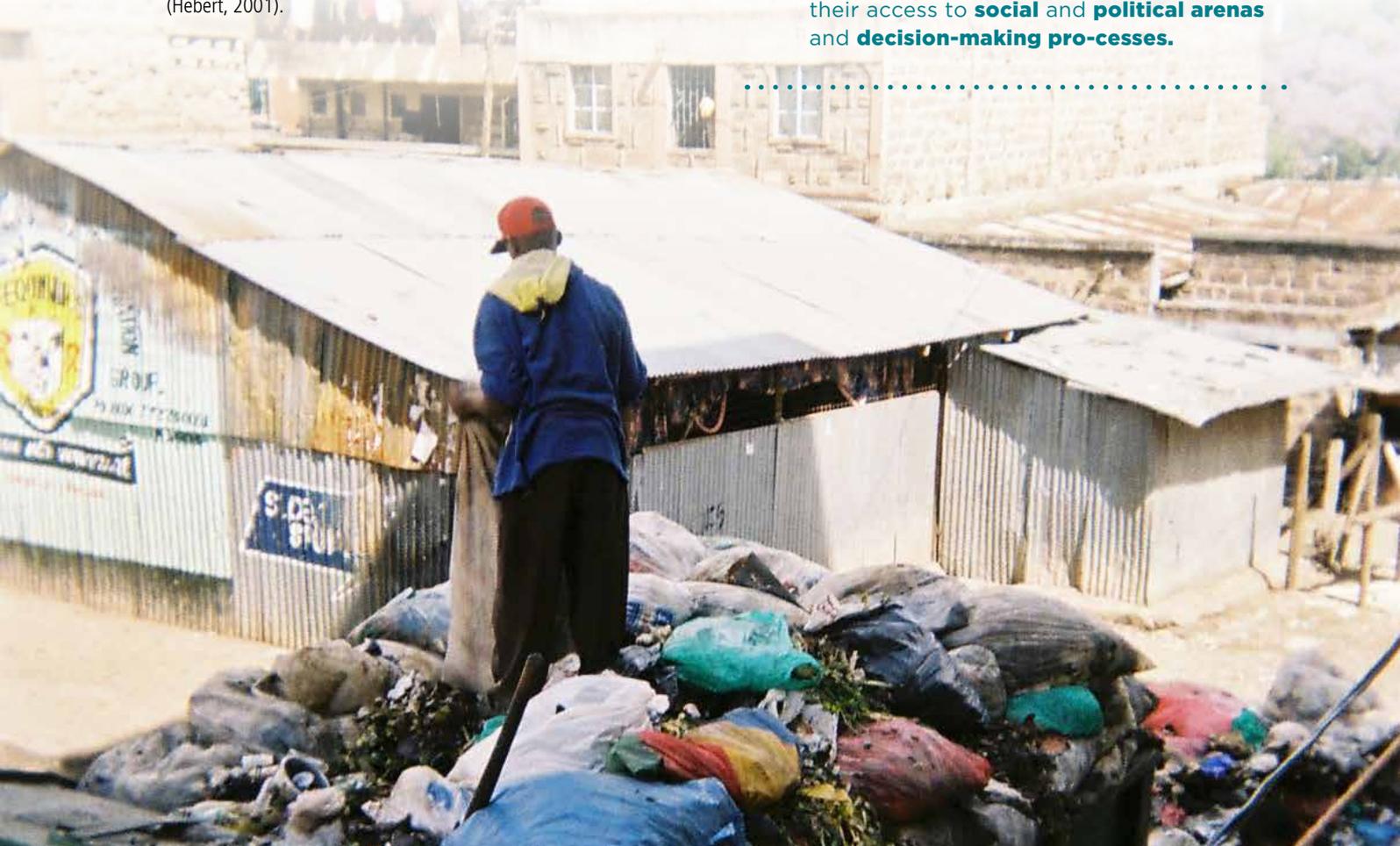
This study will provide insight into what qualities need to be present in order for public space to meet the needs of young women in slums. The outcome will be useful knowledge for planning authorities and policy-makers, as well as organizations and authorities working with slum upgrading and development of public spaces in slums.

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.....



## METHODOLOGY

This study uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection. The analysis of the qualitative data was done using a case study approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two youth leaders in the Mlango Kubwa community; one male and one female. Surveys were conducted with 26 youths between the ages of 18 to 25 whom reside in Mlango Kubwa.

Data was collected from randomly selected male and female participants between the ages of 18-34, which is in line with the definition of youth in Kenya (GOK, 2010). The gender representation of the population ratio was 50% female and 50% male. The framework for this study is Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which was used to assist in the determination of needs based on growth, development, and success. The study focuses and represents findings in the Mlango Kubwa area, and is not meant for generalization purposes.





## STUDY SITE

Mlango Kubwa is a neighbourhood in the Mathare slums of Nairobi, Kenya. This area is home to approximately 40,000 dwellers and area has experienced a number of positive developments in the recent years; especially related to youth employment and public space. An important force for this development has been the Mathare Environmental Conservation Youth Group (MECYG).

This group started in 1997 as a waste management group that collects garbage from residents for a small fee. MECYG employs many young people who reside in the area, and focus on the common goal of creating and renewing public spaces for the use of young people. The group has managed to create a soccer field as well as a community youth centre, which provide various activities for the younger members of the community.

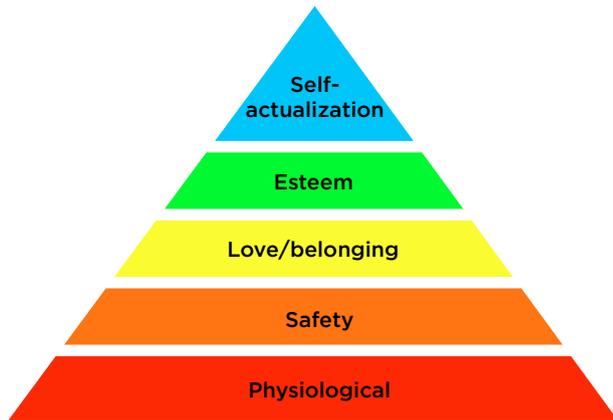
The introduction of the youth centre and the soccer field has had a substantial influence on the community. This study will look at the differences between young women and young men; in terms of what needs are being met by the soccer field and the youth centre.



## FRAMEWORK

This study uses Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a framework for operationalizing needs. The hi-erarchy is based on Maslow's theory on human motivation (A theory of human motivation, 1943), and defines five categories of human needs: physiological, safety, love/belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (as shown in the diagram below). Maslow suggests that in order to achieve self-actualization, the bottom levels of the hierarchy, which represents the most basic needs, must be met. For this study, the focus has been placed on three of the five categories of needs: safety, esteem, and self-actualization.

FIGURE 1: Maslow's hierarchy of needs



*Source: Simplypsychology.org*

Physiological needs, such as water, food, and shelter, are being provided to the participants of this study by the social structure in which they live. Safety was measured through the use of a questionnaire, by asking participants the following questions: 1) on a scale from 1-5, how safe do you feel at slum soccer? and 2) on a scale from 1-5, how safe do you feel at Pequininos Social Hall?



The focus has been placed on three of the five categories of needs: **safety, esteem, and self-actualization.**

The respondents were also asked to state whether or not they have experiences bullying, harassment, crime, sexual harassment, and whether they have ever felt unsafe in the two spaces (the soccer field and the youth centre) both in the dark and at night. Esteem was measured by asking participants the following questions: 1) on a scale from 1-5, how much does going to Slum Soccer help with your self-esteem? and 2) on a scale from 1-5, how much does going to Pequininos Social Hall help with your self-esteem? Self-actualization was operationalized as personal growth, and measured by the open ended questions: 1) how much does going to Slum Soccer help you grow as a person? and 2) how much does going to Pequininos Social Hall help you grow as a person?



## ANALYSIS

### Youth and needs met in public spaces

The first research question: How does the public spaces of Mlango Kubwa cover the needs of youth members of the community? aimed to identify how the needs of young people in Mlango Kubwa are being covered by the two chosen public spaces (the youth centre and the soccer field). The needs of interest in this study, as mentioned above, are: safety, esteem, and self-actualization.

Within the need of safety, the data collected reveals that only two respondents out of the sample of 26 have felt unsafe or very unsafe at both the soccer field and the youth centre. 16 participants felt safe or very safe, and eight participants provided neutral responses.

For the whole sample (n=26), the balance between safe and unsafe was almost identical for the youth centre and the soccer field. 11 respondents answered that they have felt unsafe in the dark at both the soccer field and the youth centre.

Six say they have experienced bullying at the youth centre, and three shared that they have felt unsafe at the Soccer field. Respectively five and six out of the 26 re-spondents said they have been exposed to crime at the soccer field and at the youth centre. Four participants said that they have experienced harassment at the soccer field, and three participants said that they have experienced harassment at the youth centre. Interestingly, four participants said that they have experienced sexual harassment at the soccer field and only one participant said that he/she has experienced sexual harassment at the youth centre.

Four participants have felt unsafe during daylight at the soccer field, and six participants have felt unsafe during the day at the youth centre. Although a significant number of the respondents report to have experienced various factors that can be categorized as threatening to their safety at the two public spaces, the general level of how safe they feel at these spaces, as measured by the respondents was high. The fact that only two respondents, less than 10% of the sample group actively state that they, in general, feel unsafe or very unsafe at the soccer field and the youth centre, indicates that the spaces are seen and considered to be safe spaces for young people.

When measuring safety in these public spaces, it is important to consider the general level of safety in the Mathare slum. The slums are not considered to be very safe places, and therefore, providing completely safe spaces would be challenging: as their context is one of high crime rates and social issues.

When measuring esteem as a need, this study found that 17 respondents stated that going to the soccer field helps with their self-esteem, seven were neutral, and two responded that going to the soccer field does not help with their self-esteem. 17 respondents also



stated that going to the youth centre helps with their self-esteem, six were neutral, and three responded that going there does not help with their self-esteem. The data collected also indicates that both spaces, the soccer field and the youth centre, seem to have an overall positive effect on the esteem for majority of the youth in the community. This study does not account for how frequently the respondents use the youth or the soccer field, which can also be a factor in determining whether or not the respondents re-late the spaces with increased self-esteem. In addition to Pequininos Social Hall, there are two other small youth centres in Mlango Kubwa. Some of the respondents might frequent one or both of other centres, and therefore their responses may not have an overwhelming relation to Pequininos Social Hall.

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**The slums are not considered to be very safe places, and therefore, providing completely safe spaces would be challenging: as their context is one of high crime rates and social issues.**

.....

Self-actualization was operationalized as personal growth. For the soccer field, 17 respondents stated that going to the soccer field helps them grow as a person, three were neutral, and six re-ponded with one or two (on a scale from 1-5), signifying little to no growth. 16 respondents said that going to the youth centre helps them grow as a person, four were neutral and five stated little to no growth.

It is important in this context to also take under consideration the fact that there are two other community centres in the area and therefore, there may be young people in the sample who experience growth

in a youth centre, but not in this specific one. Regardless, it can be con-cluded that the youth centre has a positive impact on individual growth among a majority of the youth who go there.

## Differences in needs between young women and young men

The second research question: what are the differences between young women and young men in terms of what needs are being met with the public spaces available in Mlango Kubwa? aimed to uncover differences (if any), in the needs covered by the chosen public spaces between young women and young men. The method for responding to this question was to look at the same sur-vey questions used to answer the first research question, and see if the answers that female par-ticipants gave differed from that of their male counterparts. It is important to mention that the total number of participants in this sample was 26, composed of 13 females and 13 males.

Two respondents, whom stated that they feel unsafe at the soccer field, were female. At the youth centre, one female and one male stated that they generally feel unsafe. The ratio between male and female respondents that stated they have at some point felt unsafe during the day or during nighttime was marginally equal. Three females and one male participant stated that they have been sexually harassed at the soccer field. One female and no males stated that they have been sexually harassed at the youth centre. For the remaining categories of experiences related to safety: bullying, harassment, and exposure to crime, the ratio of responses was close to equal be-tween the females and the males. As shown by the above data, most youth feel safe at the select-ed spaces, and upon closer look, the data shows that this reality applies to both genders. It is; however, worth remarking that only girls feel generally unsafe at the soccer field and that several of the girls who participated in this research, have been exposed to sexual harassment at the soc-cer field. This fact is an indicator that the

females are slightly less likely than their male counter-parts to have their needs for safety covered at the soccer field.

None of the males responded negatively to the question designed to find out if going to slum soccer helps with their self-esteem, whereas two girls stated that going to the slum soccer field does little or nothing for their self-esteem. Five females and three males answered neutral on this question. One male and two females stated that going to the youth centre does not help with their self-esteem. Five females and one male responded neutral to this question. In total, there were 11 positive responses from the males, and only six for the females. The researcher anticipated to see a bigger difference in esteem at the soccer field, based on the observation that the majority of young people that use the soccer field for playing soccer are males. The difference in gained self-esteem for going to the youth centre is significant, indicating that males have a greater opportunity than the females of getting their need for esteem covered at the centre.

Nine of the males and eight of the females stated that going to the soccer field helps them grow as a person. Two males and one female were neutral in this area. Four females and two males responded that going to the soccer field does not help them grow as a person. Seven females and nine males responded that going to the youth centre helps them grow as a person. Three males and one female were neutral in this area. There was one negative response among the males, and four among the females. The overall tendency of lower scores for the females remains in this category as well. Although the disparities are not immense, the data points to the fact that the females, to a lesser extent than the males, experience individual growth by going to these spaces.

## Spaces that can be introduced to meet the needs of young women

The final research question for this study: what types of spaces can be introduced to better meet the needs of young women? had the objective of identifying new spaces that can be introduced to meet the needs of young women in the community. The respondents were asked to answer the open question of what type of space they would create for young women if they had the power, respectively a safe space, a space where they could increase their self-esteem and a space where they could grow as individuals.

As a safe space for young women, a total of 10 different spaces were mentioned. In this area, to qualify as a category, the space had to be mentioned by a minimum of five respondents. Similar responses were gathered into one category. In the findings, it was noted that 10 respondents suggested to build another youth centre as a safe space for girls. Eight suggestions for a new space were within the category of a training facility or school, which was described as a place where girls could enhance their skills and their employability. No other spaces qualified as a category. When breaking down the suggestions by gender, the data shows that the most attractive space, a youth centre, was suggested equally between males and females. Three females and five males suggested some sort of training facility or school.

To gain self-esteem, 14 different spaces were suggested. 10 respondents suggested another youth centre, seven suggested a training facility or school, and six people suggested a church. Here also, the most popular suggestion was equally distributed among the genders. Five females and three males suggested a training facility or school. Four females and two males suggested a church.

For self-actualization, a total of 12 different spaces were suggested. 10 respondents suggested another youth centre, and nine suggested a school or training facility. The distribution between the genders shows that four males and six females wanted a youth centre, and four males and five females wanted a training facility or school.

All together, the participants mentioned a youth centre as well as a training facility or school stands out as the most important new space aimed at covering the needs of young women, and both genders agree on this. It is; however, interesting to look at some of the suggestions that did not qualify as a category, meaning that these suggestions had less than five respondents mentioned this as an answer to the question.

When added up, the suggestions for all three categories of needs show eight suggestions to create a soccer field for girls. When the findings are grouped by gender, seven of the suggestions came from males and only one from a female. This finding indicates that the male perception of what young women need in public spaces differs from young women's own perception of what they need. This tendency is in line with the issue pointed at by Hebert, which states that planning, as a male dominated discipline, can be insensitive to gender-specific considerations (Herbert, 2001). When men plan for women, although their intentions may be sincere; they might not hit the target.



## CONCLUSION



This study was designed with the objective of uncovering what needs public spaces cover among youth in the community of Mlango Kubwa in the Mathare slum of Nairobi, Kenya. Subsequently, it had the aim of discovering any disparities in needs between that of young men and young women, and finally to identify potential new spaces to better meet the needs of young women. The framework for the study was Maslow's hierarchy of needs, where safety, esteem and, self-actualisation were the categories of needs in which this study focused.

Overall, a majority of the youth of Mlango Kubwa seems to get their needs for safety, esteem, and self-actualisation covered at the soccer field and the youth centre, which were the two public spaces studying which this study focused. This research shows that young men, to a greater extent than girls, have their needs met at both the soccer field and the youth centre. Although the differences are not remarkably high, it is notable that females consequently responded with a lower number on the scale than the males. Another pattern worth mentioning is that several females have had a negative experience(s)



of sexual harassment as well that of feeling unsafe at the soccer field. This fact when combined with the result that building a soccer field for females was only mentioned by one female participant, points to the interesting conclusion that males and females perceive different things when it comes to identifying what qualities in public spaces will meet the needs of young women.

Cultural and societal norms, which may prevent women from enjoying the same opportunities, as men must also be taken into account when

concluding that young women, to a slightly lesser extent, have the opportunity of getting their needs met at the public spaces in Mlango Kubwa. Overall, the differences are not immense and the general perception is that these spaces positively contribute to meeting the needs of the youth in Mlango Kubwa; for both young women and young men. We can draw from this study, that participation in the designation of public space is a key element when planning, and therefore both genders' perspectives need to be taken into consideration when deciding how to best develop public spaces.



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## APPENDIX 1: INSTRUMENT

### Qualifying questions

Gender:

Age:

Do you live in Mlango Kubwa?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

### Questionnaire questions

1. Which one(s) of these places do you go to?

\_\_\_\_\_ Slum soccer

\_\_\_\_\_ Pequeninos Social Hall

On a scale from 1-5, where 1 is low, 5 is high and 3 is neutral:

2. How safe do you feel at Slum Soccer?

1      2      3      4      5

3. How much does going to Slum Soccer help with your self-esteem?

1      2      3      4      5

4. How much does going to Slum Soccer help with you grow as a person?

1      2      3      4      5

5. How safe do you feel at Pequeninos Social Hall?

1      2      3      4      5

6. How much does going to Pequeninos Social Hall help with your self-esteem?

1      2      3      4      5

7. How much does going to Pequeninos Social Hall help with you grow as a person?

1      2      3      4      5

8. When you are at Slum Soccer, have you ever felt:

\_\_\_\_\_ bullied

\_\_\_\_\_ harassed

\_\_\_\_\_ exposed to crime

\_\_\_\_\_ sexually harassed

\_\_\_\_\_ unsafe during daylight

\_\_\_\_\_ unsafe in the dark

9. When you are at Pequeninos Social Hall, have you ever felt:

- \_\_\_\_\_ bullied
- \_\_\_\_\_ harassed
- \_\_\_\_\_ exposed to crime
- \_\_\_\_\_ sexually harassed
- \_\_\_\_\_ unsafe during daylight
- \_\_\_\_\_ unsafe in the dark

10. If you had the power to create one place in your neighbourhood where girls/young women would feel safe, what would that be?

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11. If you had the power to create one place in your neighbourhood where girls/young women could feel appreciated by other people, feel confidence, and gain self-respect, what would that be?

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12. If you had the power to create one place in your neighbourhood where girls/young women could grow as individuals, what would that be?

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**UN  HABITAT**

United Nations Human Settlements Programme  
P.O.Box 30030, Nairobi 00100, Kenya;  
Tel: +254-20-7623120;  
Fax: +254-20-76234266/7 (central office)  
Infohabitat@unhabitat.org

[www.unhabitat.org](http://www.unhabitat.org)