Map Kibera – a partnership between local youth, non-governmental organizations and several United Nations agencies including UNICEF – is based in Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya. It engages young people, particularly young women and girls, in the participatory digital mapping of risks and vulnerabilities in their community, which is Africa’s largest slum. Through this process, young people gain new awareness about their surroundings, empowering them to amplify their voices on critical issues. The project is helping identify safe and unsafe physical spaces, as well as raising awareness and offering advocacy opportunities around the issues of HIV and AIDS and other vulnerabilities.

Map Kibera involves five steps:

- **Stakeholder meetings**: Implementers consider issues of gender-based violence, HIV and AIDS or related topics to identify the most appropriate map data to collect.
- **Map data collection**: Thirteen young mappers from the community use global positioning system (GPS) devices and open source software to create a map of safe and dangerous areas; then the data is uploaded to OpenStreetMap.
- **Community consultations**: Using printed maps, tracing paper and coloured pens, the mappers conduct discussions with girls and young women about safety and vulnerability, leading to better situational awareness for both girls and planners.
- **Narrative media**: Young people from the community use videos, photos and audio to create short narratives about the issues they face, which are then interwoven into the map narrative.
- **Advocacy**: Quantitative and qualitative data are used for advocacy with local governments, community leaders and other decision-makers to obtain better services and protection for young people.

Results from the mapping process will be used to identify physical and psychological areas of risk or vulnerability and patterns of risk perception. The information will be publicly owned and available, helping keep grass-roots advocates and policy planners more accountable to young people in the community.

Regynnah, one of the mappers, provides below an account of her involvement in the project.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has encouraged governments to put in place legal and policy frameworks and mechanisms to ensure the systematic participation of children and young people at all levels of society. A good example is the recent development of a National Strategy on Child Participation by the Government of Mongolia. Formulation of the strategy involved extensive consultations with adolescents and youth at the local, provincial and national levels.

The positive experience of active youth engagement in this process has given greater impetus to child and youth participation in national and local decision-making forums.

Young people must also be given a voice in deciding how best to allocate resources. This can be done through the formation of youth groups, forums or other channels through which youth can express their opinions. Some countries are even taking steps to include youth as partners in the development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

UNICEF Brazil, for example, has encouraged adolescents to become partners in social budgeting initiatives. Adolescents received training to help them identify areas of public policy relevant to them, undertake research, estimate the benefits of additional expenditures on social spending and become effective advocates.

The ‘youth participation’ looks like. A recent report in the *Journal of Community Psychology* sheds light on this issue, explaining that youth organizing gives a new role to adults. “Rather than leading, adults need to be in the background, monitoring, mentoring, facilitating, but not being in charge. Young people want support from adults in the form of dialogue, coaching, and providing connections to sources of institutional, community, and political power.”

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Many governments have also developed or updated national youth policies to better address the diverse needs of adolescents and youth. The development of the national youth policy in South Africa – in which a participatory approach involving adolescents and young adults as key contributors produced a comprehensive, rights-based national youth framework – is often seen as a model. While most national youth policies have tried to cater to the needs and concerns of youth in an age range extending to 24 years and sometimes beyond, it is also important to focus on adolescents, who require special support, preparation and preparation for their transition to adulthood.

**A supportive environment**

Conventions, legislation, policies and programmes for adolescent rights require a supportive environment to uphold them. Creating an environment that is conducive to positive adolescent development entails addressing the values, attitudes and behaviours of the institutions in the adolescent’s domain – family, peers, schools and services – as well as the broader context of norms established within communities, the media, legislation, policies and budgets.

A national government may build secondary schools and expand compulsory education, but it must also address the underlying factors of poverty and inequity that lead many parents to take their children out of school. Donors who make significant contributions to HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment initiatives need to recognize that the availability of condoms, testing sites and vaccines must be complemented with efforts to remove stigmas and change gender constructs that serve to sustain the spread of the epidemic. Systemic changes are required on all levels to create an environment where children have the greatest chance of thriving.