Contributions of Youth Centers to the Development of Young People in Ethiopia

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Abstract

There has been a global paradigm shift in conceptualizing how best young persons can be assisted from a conventional deficit-based approach of targeting youth to a more enabling approach of promoting their strengths and competencies. Establishment of youth centers was one such global initiative meant to catalyze positive youth development through supervised and youth-friendly services. In recognition of this, several youth centers have been established in Ethiopia in the last few decades. This research was thus conducted to examine contributions of these centers to the development of young people. Data were collected through questionnaire from a sample of 2,165 participants (service providers and service users) and observation of 94 youth centers drawn from all regions of the country. Findings indicated that the contributions of youth centers were generally minimal in terms of promoting overall positive youth development. Some evidence even showed that youth centers could serve as a platform for acquiring undesirable behaviors among the youth mainly because supervisory and follow up services were not evident. While expanding establishment of youth centers is indeed commendable to ensure access to the greater majority of youth, the need to improve service quality, however, is a priority concern for the relevant actors.

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Introduction

Young people aged 10–24 years constitute 28% of the world's population (UNFPA, 2014). In Ethiopia, the proportion of those aged 15 to 29 accounts for about a quarter of the total population of the country (Donnenfeld, et al, 2017; USAID/Ethiopia, 2018) and the number of people in this age group is projected to rise significantly in the near future. Ethiopia is demographically a country of young people and it needs to do justice mainstreaming its developmental agenda along the needs of its young citizens

Youth constitute the period in the life span characterized in terms of transition from childhood to adulthood (Arnett, 2005; Steinberg, 2014). They are, on the one hand, replete with potentials such as vigor, optimism, and optimal physical functioning for high level productivity, community agency for development and positive socialization of the self (Azeez & Augustine, 2013). On the other hand, however, youth is a period of challenges, instabilities and quests for sense of direction and purpose that conspire against healthy transitioning to adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Naughton, 2003). Hence, youth services, opportunities, and support (SOS) (Whitlock, 2004) need to be put in place to buffer the vice against them and orchestrate effective and healthy transitioning to adulthood (Pittman et al., 2003; Whitlock, 2004).

According to Whitlock (2004), "services" are developmentally oriented activities provided by health systems, school settings and recreational projects/facilities/ or actions done to or for youth with the intention of enhancing health, safety, performance, and other forms of essential youth wellbeing and psychosocial functioning. "Opportunities" (to learn, explore, play, interact, tryout, serve, work) represent the extent to which youth are provided with meaningful and real experiences to practice and expand on what they know and learn either through work, service, or non-formal learning in a more sustained manner (Whitlock, 2004; Zeldin, et al., 2001). Such experiential and sustained experiences, from among a diverse array of opportunities young people could ideally encounter, enhance meaningful decision-making roles that ultimately foster the greatest number of personal competencies (Zeldin, et al., 2001). "Supports" are activities that are done with youth to facilitate access to interpersonal relationships and resources in any one or all of its forms: emotional, motivational, and strategic (Pittman et al., 2003; Whitlock, 2004). While emotional support nurtures a sense of safety, security and trust in oneself and others, motivational support generates positive expectations and sets developmental boundaries. On the other hand, strategic support facilitates access to needed resources and information (Pittman et al., 2003). Studies (e.g. Benson, 2003; Benson, Scales, & Syversten, 2011; Lerner

& Benson, 2003) indicated that young people are more likely to refrain from problem behaviors and demonstrate healthy growth when they are nurtured with essential developmental nutrients of services, opportunities and support.

Youth centers are developmental settings in which services, opportunities, and supports are provided to young persons in an integrated and sustained manner (International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF), 2006). According to IPPF (2006), youth centers are "adolescent friendly contexts where young people can access information and services which address their needs and wants, including sexual and reproductive health needs as well as other needs, such as life skills and recreational activities." They have been a popular approach for engaging youth, particularly in urban contexts. They are considered as useful settings for enhancing young people's participation and empowerment (UNICEF 2009), and offering training in vocational and life skills. Youth centers have also been promoted as a means of bringing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services to youth and providing safe places for youth to interact.

The design and types of services to be provided would depend on the specific realties of communities as well as the specific needs of the young people. However, most youth centers focus on sexual and reproductive health services and some other non-SRH needs such as library service, training on life skills, in-door and out-door games, and small snack shops (IPPF, 2008). Despite differences in the design and type of services rendered, there are certain guiding principles, requirements, and characteristic features for youth centers to have to effectively promote the development of young people.

Youth development: Meaning, principles and practices

Youth development is an approach that takes a positive orientation on young people's capacities, strengths and developmental needs rather than on their problems, risks, or health compromising behaviors (Benson, Scales, Hamilton, & Sesma, 2006; Damon, 2004; Hamilton, Hamilton & Pittman, 2004; Larson, 2000; Lerner, Phelps, Forman, & Bowers, 2009). It recognizes the need to widen the scope of adolescent support beyond crisis management and problem reduction to strategies that increase youth's opportunities for positive growth. Contemporary understanding of youth development emphasizes on cultivating long-term qualities and traits desirable in young people through the creation of environments that support their developmental needs and systematically engaging communities across all sectors, i.e., schools, youth serving agencies, faith-based organizations, community governance, business, juvenile justice system and more (Judd, 2006; Shek, Dou, Zhu, & Chai, 2019; Whitlock, 2004).

Although human development is a process rather than a goal (Hamilton, Hamilton & Pittman, 2002), it needs to be operationalized in terms of outcomes so that youth programs, organizations, or initiatives would align services along with specific directions. Based on an extensive evaluative study of positive youth development programs in the U.S., Catalano et al., (2002) identified a comprehensive list of the purpose of a youth development program. According to them, a successful youth development program is one that intends to promote bonding, resilience, social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and moral competence, self-determination, spirituality, self-efficacy, clear and positive identity, belief in the future, and recognition for positive behavior and opportunities for prosocial involvement. Furthermore, based on their empirical investigation of a diverse sample of youth, parents, and community youth development programs in the U.S., Lerner, et al., (2005) and Phelps et al., (2009) indicated that effective youth development programs lead to the development of the "Five/Six Cs": competence, confidence, connection, character, caring/compassion, and connection.

In the course of human development, developmental goals are increasingly evolving with no upper limit to reach suggesting that young people would never be perfectly competent but moving towards it. This movement towards developmental maturity follows certain basic principles of youth development (Mack, 2006; Whitlock, 2004) such as: (1) "Universality and Building Strengths" (signifying that all youth are thriving because all are benefiting from services, opportunities, and supports), (2) "Youth Participation" (the need to engage young people as participants, not merely as recipients of services), (3) "Long-Term Involvement" (the need for activities and supportive relationships to be sustained than short-lived to be effective), (4) "Partnership and Collaboration" (the need for youth services to deploy inter-agency and cross-system collaboration of agencies from various sectors), and (5) "Holistic Approach" (promoting diversity, addressing multiple needs, and putting a referral system in place to ensure that all youth get proper referrals when needed).

Some scholars more persuasively clarify that effective youth development endeavors are possible to the extent that the following requirements are met while translating the principles into practice (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Mack, 2006). One of these requirements is that youth development centers need to promote accessibility and quality of services and opportunities for all young people regardless of demographics or abilities, and building knowledge and skills of youth in a variety of ways. Second, a safe, supportive, nonthreatening, youth-friendly environment for the provision of particularly SRH services (Pathfinder

International 1998; UNFPA, 2003) that are both attractive to young people and acceptable to the community (Moyo, Bond, & Williams 2000). Third, an organizational structure with mission and vision that promote youth development, staff and board members with a clear understanding of these mission and vision so as to direct their planning, advocacy efforts and services around them, and staff and volunteers providing youth services are knowledgeable and use youth development principles in their training, program delivery, and evaluation. Fourth, supportive relationships in place in the youth centers so that young persons can have someone to talk to, track one's progress, help set goals and connect with resources when necessary. Fifth, activities, services, and programs in the youth centers that are engaging by fostering curiosity and creativity, promoting holistic development, building important life skills on such topics as money management, employment readiness, time management and other important life skills that are developmentally and age-appropriate for the target group. Finally, young people need to develop a sense of ownership over the center and be involved at all levels of decision-making. If young people feel a sense of ownership of the youth centers, and that these centers become friendly places through which young people can access services, they will act as key agents for change within the community. Youth centers should meet expressed wants and needs as young people often have few other options for recreation and affordable services (IPPF, 2008).

Youth development in Ethiopia

According to the Ethiopian Youth Policy (MoYS, 2008), youth refers to individuals aged between 15 and 29. Some evidence showed that many young persons in Ethiopia are exposed to a host of deprivations, limited services and social exclusions. For instance, Belay and Yekoyealem (2015) have indicated that young people in Ethiopia are conceptualized from a deficit perspective in which discourses about youth focuses mostly on their vulnerabilities, problems, and concerns rather than strengths and competencies. Yekoyealem (2020) has further indicated that Ethiopian youth had vulnerable developmental assets profile mainly lacking external and contextual assets of support, empowerment, and opportunities for constructive use of time.

However, young people in Ethiopia need in fact to be seen beyond risks and vulnerabilities as they have been important political, economic, social, and cultural actors in this nation (e.g. see Bahru, 2014; Hussein, 2006; Legesse, 1979). Youth have been participating in different voluntary services at different historical periods taking meaningful share in shaping and transforming this nation. Recognizing the potentials of young Ethiopians and the optimism and

contributions they have shown over the years, on the one hand, and the realization that such efforts were compounded by a host of internal and external factors, different government and non-government measures have been taken in the past decades to redress the needs of young person's ranging from policy formulation to implementation of the policies.

Formulation of the Ethiopian Youth Policy (MoYS, 2004) was a major leap in working towards addressing the developmental needs of young persons in Ethiopia. The policy takes note of the problem of participation and social exclusion as a major barrier of Ethiopian youth and provides a youth development framework that promotes participation, empowerment and healthy transitioning to adulthood. The then Ministry of Youth and Sports has also drafted implementation manual of the policy (MoYS, 2005), an administrative manual for basic and small range skills trainings for the youth (MoYS, 2006a), separate development packages for urban (MoYS, 2006b) and rural youth (MoYS, 2006c), a national framework of life skills training for young persons (MoYS, 2008), a training manual to accompany the national life skills framework (MoYS, 2011), a standard for youth voluntary services (MoYS, 2009a), and a manual for youth centers organization and management (MoYS, 2009b; MoYS, 2017). In addition, sectoral youth focused programs such as the five year national adolescent and youth health strategy (2016-2020) (MoH, 2016), have been in place to redress youth development concerns in the past some years.

Working also towards implementing the designed policy and strategies, attempts were made to establish youth centers and avail services to promoting the development of young persons. In this regard, over 3,000 youth centers have been established in the country at large; though only about half of them (1,545 centers) were functional and the rest were not operational due to various problems. These centers were established based on a standard set forth for establishing, directing, and coordinating youth centers in which youth personality development centers are viewed in terms of four levels: model, multipurpose, medium, and small youth centers (MoYS, 2009b; MoYS, 2017). Some small scale assessments seem to suggest that even the youth centers that were functional have been trapped with so many problems (MoWCY, nd). They did not provide standardized services, enough opportunities and exposure to youth, not appetizing youth enough and, therefore, not preferred by the youth in the communities and considered as not beneficial (MoWCY, 2019). On the other hand, some small scale individual (e.g. Workitu, 2017) as well as institutional (e.g. Right-to-Play, 2011) assessments have shown evidence not only of problems but also of some strengths, benefits and contributions as well.

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Comprehensive studies that directly examine the effectiveness of youth centers particularly in low and middle income contexts including Ethiopia are lacking (Zuurmond et al., 2012). According to Zuurmond et al., (2012) available studies from such contexts indicated that youth centers generally served a relatively small proportion of young people in their surroundings and the main users being young men attending school or college. In Ethiopia, too, studies that directly pertain to the effectiveness of youth centers are almost absent. Very few studies (e.g., Motuma, et al., 2016; Mulugeta, et al., 2019; Simegn, et al., 2020) have tangentially examined the issue focusing on utilization of youth friendly health services in public health facilities.

In light of these experiences, the present study aimed to investigate the extent to which the youth centers in Ethiopia are serving the intended purpose of promoting the development of young people. Specifically, the study sought to examine the extent to which youth centers contribute to the positive development of youth in terms of promoting general positive impacts, constructive use of time, acquisition of knowledge and experience, changing undesirable behavior, building personality, and development of job creation skills.

Methods
Design
A descriptive survey research design was employed to examine the contribution of youth personality development centers to the development of young people in Ethiopia. This design was adapted for the reason that it was suitable not only to describe what exists (the contribution of youth centers) but also to determine the extent of the contribution (Walker, 2005).

Data sources
This study is part of a larger national assessment on the effectiveness of youth personality development centers in Ethiopia. Hence, sample was drawn from all the nine regions and the two city administrations so that drawing inferences would be possible. Initially out of the total 3000 youth personality development centers in the country, 1,545 functional youth centers were taken as the sampling frame. Out of the 1,545 functional youth centers (see Table 1), 94 of them were drawn as a sample based on proportional stratified random sampling technique. Sampling of the centers was made in such a way that the different types/levels of youth centers in each region can be represented in the sample. The youth centers are classified into four levels/types based on the revised standard of youth personality development centers (MoWCY, 2017):

Model youth center: a youth center which is capable of providing 16 different types of services.

Multipurpose youth center: The one which provides 12 of the 16 services that are listed in the youth centers service provision standard guideline.

Medium level youth center: a youth center which provides 9 different types of services, and

Small scale youth center: a youth center which provides 5 of the 16 services listed in the youth centers service provision standard guideline.

The classification of the youth centers by region and level is presented in Table 1. As it can be referred to in this Table, out of a total of 1,545 functional youth centers, 2% (n = 31) were classed as models, 9% (n = 143) as multipurpose, 15% (n = 232) as medium level, and 74% (n = 1139) as small scale centers. The 94 sample youth centers were then considered following this proportion.

As regards participants, a large sample was drawn from two groups: service providers (personnel of youth centers) and beneficiary youth. A total of 2,165 participants (553 service providers and 1596 beneficiaries, 16 unidentified) were drawn from the nine regions (data from Gambella was not in fact secured)[**] and the two city administrations using convenient sampling method. While all available service providers were taken as participants, an average of about 20 service beneficiaries were conveniently sampled from each youth center.

The selection of participants followed convenience for and availability and willingness of the individuals contacted for data collection.

[**] However, data were not collected from Gambella because youth centers were not functional during data collection period.

Table 1: Youth centers in Ethiopia by region and level: Population and sample

Reg.	Non-functional	Functional use centers by level					Sampled youth centers by level						Sampled participants		
		Model	Multiple p.	Medium	Small	Total	Model	Multiple p.	Medium	Small	New	Total	Service providers	beneficiaries	Total
Amh.	143	1	5	41	249	296	1	2	6	7	0	16	75	203	278
Tig.	21	2	3	9	46	60	1	1	1	3	2	8	51	160	211
Afar	5	-	1	1	-	2	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	19	22
Har.	5	-	-	2	9	11	0	0	1	0	0	1	8	20	28
SNNP	879	-	84	103	677	864	2	10	8	10	1	31+2*	207	655	862
BG	4	1	-	-	16	17	0	0	1	1	0	2	16	37	53
AA	3	27	42	27	10	106	3	6	2	1	0	12	93	221	314
DD	2	-	1	7	7	15	0	1	0	0	0	1	7	21	28
Som.	-	-	4	14	7	25	-	1	-	-	-	1	0	27	27
Oro.	84	-	2	26	118	146	0	0	2	16	0	18	93	233	326
Gam.	1	-	1	2	-	3	0	1	0	0	0	1	-	-	
Total	1147	31	143	232	1139	1545	7	22	22	38	5	94	553	1596	2149 (16*)

Source: Ministry of Women, Children, and Youth (nd.). Addis Ababa
Reg. = Regions; Multi P. = Multi-purpose; Amh. = Amhara; Tig. = Tigray; Har. =
Harari; BG = Benishangul Gumuz; AA = Addis Ababa; DD = Dire Dawa; Som. =
Somali; Oro. = Oromia; Gam. = Gambela
*unidentified

Tools of data collection

Questionnaire: The questionnaire was developed by the authors of this article based on extensive review of empirical literature, analysis of various youth related policy documents, and based on the standards indicated in the revised manual of services delivery and management of youth centers (MoYS, 2017). The questionnaire comprises of three sections. The first section contains items that measure the positive contributions of youth centers. It contains 32 items with six sub-scales: general impact, constructive use of time, getting knowledge and experience, building personality, changing undesirable behaviors, and job creation and entrepreneurial skills. The second section contains items that assess the negative impacts of youth centers. It consisted of 13 different statements that possibly capture unintended negative outcomes to be rated by service providers and beneficiaries as to the extent to which the young people using the services display them. The third part of the questionnaire is composed of two additional open-ended items for participants to respond regarding other perceived positive and negative contributions of youth centers to the development of young people.

The psychometric properties of the tools were examined prior to the final data collection. Draft tools were prepared in Amharic and then commented by experts in the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth for checking the validity of the tools. Then comments were incorporated and the tools were improved. Further refinement was made by trying out the tools in the field with the data collectors that worked in pairs in which one asks and the other responds. This procedure enabled us to check the clarity and feasibility of the tools as well as providing training for the data collectors. This was conducted in one of the youth development centers in Addis Ababa that was not included in the main study. With this procedure some unclear and vague words were revised. Then the Amharic version of the tools were pilot tested and the results showed excellent internal consistency for both the overall positive contribution scale ($\alpha = 0.97$), and its subscales of general impact ($\alpha = 0.89$), constructive use of time ($\alpha = 0.84$), getting knowledge and experience ($\alpha = 0.87$), building personality ($\alpha = 0.93$), and job creation and entrepreneurial skills ($\alpha = 0.95$). However, the internal consistency reliability for the changing undesirable behaviors subscale was low ($\alpha = 0.22$) may be due to small number of items (3 items). The reliability coefficient for the unintended negative impacts scale was $\alpha = 0.86$. The final version was then translated into Afan Oromo and Tigrigna (using two language experts) for administration in regions whose working language is not Amharic. Participants were requested to rate their level of agreement on a four-point Likert type scale

ranging from "Never" (1) to "Always" (4) in which higher scores indicated higher positive and higher negative impacts of youth development centers, respectively.

Observation: The observation scale was a structured "on-site observation" rating format used to check the possible contribution of the youth centers in the development of youth. Seven possible negative items were identified for the observation. Observers are to check out if these listed contributions were observed in the respective youth centers after collecting comprehensive data from multiple sources. First, observers paid short visit to a youth center and observe the environment and services, youth behavior and interaction in the service sites, then make reference to reports and assessments already conducted about the center, hold consultations with personnel and finally make summative ratings of experiences about negative impacts of youth centers.

Procedures and ethical considerations

Twenty three assistants who were pursuing their MA degrees in Addis Ababa University at the time of the data collection were recruited and carefully trained for data collection. The training focused on orienting them about the purpose of the research, their responsibilities, sampling of participants, ethical considerations, anticipated problems and measures to be taken. Prior to the departure for field work, an official letter of cooperation was produced from Youth Participation and Mobilization Directorate office of the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth and distributed to the data collectors so that they can present it to the relevant offices during the data collection period. Senior members of the research project supervised the data collection process.

In order to ensure ethicality and safety measures, oral consent was obtained from each participant after the purpose and importance of the study was explained to them. In addition, participants were informed that whatever information they provide will be kept confidential and their identities and names will remain anonymous.

Data analysis

Quantitative data analysis involved determining descriptive statistical values (frequency/ percentage, mean, standard deviation) to summarize the data. Then, One Sample mean test was conducted to determine level of contributions of youth centers for the development of young people. The comparability of ratings of service providers and service users was computed using independent samples t-test. Finally, the contribution of youth centers were also compared by the four levels/types of youth centers (Model, Multipurpose, Medium, and Small) through

One-Way ANOVA. The qualitative data obtained through open-ended items were thematically organized along the bigger themes of "positive" and "negative" contributions of youth centers through a continuous process of data classification and reduction that ultimately yielded themes that are manageable and, therefore, reported along with the quantitative analysis.

Results
Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants
A total of 2,165 participants involved in the survey. Of these participants 25.5% were service providers (29% were females); 74% were service beneficiaries (27% females), and about 1.7% were unidentified. The mean age of service providers and beneficiaries was 26.62 (SD = 6.9) and 21.36 (SD = 5.3), respectively. Educational level of participants ranged from primary school to first degree. It was also found that 13.67% of participants were with disabilities of one kind or another. About 27% of service providers were voluntary workers (91 unemployed, 55 students) while 14.3% of service beneficiaries were employed.

Table 2: Basic information about participants

	Variables	Service providers *n*	Beneficiaries *n*	Total
Responsibility	Service providers	553		2149
	Beneficiaries Missing	1596		16
Sex	Females	160	429	589
	Males Missing	368	1167	1535 41
Age in years	Mean	26.6	21.4	
	SD	6.9	5.3	
Educational level	Primary education and below	28	107	135
	Secondary education	198	840	1038
	Certificate / diploma	170	438	608
	First degree and above	132	151	283
	Missing			101

Contributions of youth centers

Positive impacts

Data presented on Table 3 depicts that the overall mean rating for the positive impacts (*Mean* = 2.43, *SD* = .88) was slightly below the expected average rating (i.e. 2.5) signifying that the contributions were below the expected level. In fact, while the impact of youth centers on changing undesirable behavior (*Mean* = 2.8, *SD* =.86) was closer to youth's rating of 'most of the time', impacts on constructive use of time (*Mean* = 2.5, *SD* = .86) was closer to the midpoint suggesting that it is moderate. In the contrary, the impact of youth centers on entrepreneurship and job creation skills was the lowest (*Mean* = 2.17, *SD* = .92). The impacts of youth centers on the remaining components were between these two extremes (see Table 3 for details).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on positive impacts of youth development centers on beneficiary youth

Themes/ indicators	Youth centers has helped/enabled youth to:	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Most of the time (3)	Always (4)	Mean	SD
General impacts	achieve their intended goal	264	552	655	120	2.4	.85
	access information	331	696	452	112	2.2	.85
	develop character and habit	228	678	523	158	2.4	.85
	develop talent	227	759	428	177	2.4	.85
	get the benefits needed	256	681	505	149	2.3	.86
	get multi-versed participation	314	683	457	137	2.3	.87
	Total	1620	4049	3020	853	2.33	.86
Constructive use of time	get protected from going to bad corners	169	537	632	252	2.6	.87
	effectively use time	216	587	578	205	2.5	.88
	engage in sport club, drama …	290	651	485	160	2.3	.88
	associate and have time with friends	152	600	649	184	2.6	.82
	get new friends/ people	173	609	577	228	2.5	.86
	Total	1000	2984	2921	1029	2.50	**.86**
knowledge & experience	achieve positive changes	170	578	652	178	2.5	.83
	develop reading habit	389	575	446	175	2.3	.95
	attain new knowledge	249	707	465	166	2.3	.86
	develop positive attitudes	223	709	508	145	2.4	.83
	develop life skills	261	666	511	147	2.3	.86
	Total	1292	3235	2582	811	2.36	**.87**
Undesirable behavior	change undesirable behavior	208	530	672	172	2.6	.85
	be free from addiction	228	549	603	201	2.5	.89
	be less vulnerable to bad behaviors	889	298	257	113	3.3	.97
	Total	1325	1377	1532	486	2.8	**.90**
Building personality	build self-confidence	224	597	621	122	2.4	.82
	build positive attitude to life	204	552	661	160	2.5	.84
	develop awareness about voluntary service	196	560	618	199	2.5	.86
	participate in voluntary services	217	605	546	202	2.5	.88
	maintain their health	291	542	568	176	2.4	.91
	develop social and political consciousness	211	238	180	55	2.1	.93
	Total	1343	3094	3194	914	2.40	**.87**
Job creation/ entrepreneurs hip	develop motivation and interest for work	182	283	187	91	2.3	.96
	build skills for work	204	339	184	80	2.3	.92
	create/develop business ideas	246	345	174	75	2.1	.92
	start business ventures	285	412	193	105	2.1	.94
	improve motivation and love for	257	410	251	95	2.2	.91

work					
reduced youth unemployment	364	572	181	108	2.0	.89
Total	1854	2953	1409	640	2.17	.92
Overall					**2.43**	**.88**

As indicated in Table 3, the mean ratings of positive impacts were found to be below the expected average in the five components except on the reduction of undesirable behavior indicator. The question is then how statistically significant these differences were from the expected mean. One sample mean test of perceived ratings of the possible positive impacts of youth centers showed that while overall impact t(884) = -6.74, p<.000) and sub-components such as general positive impact t(2135) = -10.2, p<.000), getting knowledge and experience t(2122) = -7.6, p<.000), building personality t(915) = --5.6, p<.000), and job creation t(1028) = -11.9, p<.000) were statistically significantly lower than the expected average. The mean for contribution of youth centers for improving constructive use of time t (2133) = 1.1, p<.274) was comparable to the expected average. However, the impact of youth centers were statistically significantly higher than the expected average t(2106) = 21.8, p<.000) for the changing undesirable behaviors sub-component (See Table 4).

Table 4: One-sample mean tests on impact measures of the youth centers and services

Indicators	N	Mean (observed)	SD	Mean Expected	t	df	p
General impacts of YCs	2136	14.07	4.23	15	-10.2	2135	.000
Constructive use of time	2134	12.58	3.46	12.5	1.1	2133	.274
Get useful knowledge and experience	2123	11.91	3.57	12.5	-7.6	2122	.000
Change undesirable behavior	2107	8.34	1.76	7.5	21.8	2106	.000
Building personality	916	14.06	5.07	15	-5.6	915	.000
Job creation/ creativity	1029	15.28	5.99	17.5	-11.9	1028	.000
Overall mean	885	74.68	23.51	80	-6.74	884	.000

Participants were also asked to qualitatively describe personal benefits young people secured from the youth centers that they attended. About 149 participants provided a list of benefits. This long list of benefits were thematized into eighteen different categories of which the most recurring ones include three themes: prevent youth from going to undesirable places where young people are reportedly predisposed to substances (n = 30), helped them change undesirable behaviors such as negative attitude to work, theft, substance abuse (n = 26), and improve their health, body posture, acquire physical skills and, thereby, build self-confidence as a result of such engagement in sport and physical exercise in the centers (n = 22).

A further analysis was conducted to examine if there were differences in perceived contribution between service providers and service users as well as differences among the different types of youth centers. Results are presented on Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Independent samples *t*-test of impacts of youth centers by types of participants

Indicators	Participant	N	Mean	SD	t	df	P
General impacts	Beneficiary	1565	13.9	4.1	-2.659	2100	.008
	Service provider	537	14.5	4.7			
Constructive use of time	Beneficiary	1561	12.5	3.3	-1.836	2098	.067
	Service provider	539	12.8	3.9			
knowledge & experience	Beneficiary	1557	11.8	3.4	-2.920	2088	.004
	Service provider	533	12.3	3.9			
Change of undesirable behavior	Beneficiary	1536	8.3	1.7	-3.556	2073	.000
	Service provider	539	8.6	1.8			
Building personality	Beneficiary	645	13.8	4.8	-2.796	898	.005
	Service provider	255	14.8	5.7			
Job creation/ creativity	Beneficiary	728	15.2	5.9	-.887	1002	.375
	Service provider	276	15.6	6.4			
Negative impacts	Beneficiary	1535	14.9	3.61	2.155	2062	.031
	Service provider	529	14.5	3.8			

The t-tests indicated that service providers ratings on the general impacts $t(2100) = 2.7$, $p<.008$), knowledge and experience $t(2088) = 2.9$, $p<.004$), change of undesirable behavior $t(2073) = 3.6$, $p<.000$), and building personality $t(898) = 2.8$, $p<.005$) contributions were statistically significantly higher than ratings of service users; but ratings on job creation $t(1002) = .887$, $p<.375$) and constructive use of time $t(2098) = 1.8$, $p<.067$) were not statistically significantly different for the two groups. In the contrary, service providers had statistically significantly lower ratings for negative impacts of youth centers $t(2062) = 2.2$, $p<.031$).

Perceived impacts were also compared across the four types of youth centers. The ANOVA test showed statistically significant differences for all measures: general impacts $F(3,2034=103.1$, $p<.000$), constructive use of time $F(3, 2033=109.6$, $p<.000$), useful knowledge and experience $F(3, 2022=97.5$, $p<.000$), change of undesirable behavior $F(3, 2008=49.6$, $p<.000$), building personality $F(3, 851=80.1$, $p<.000$), job creation $F(3, 965=61.4$, $p<.000$), and negative impacts $F(3, 1998=19.8$, $p<.000$). (see Table 6). In all pairwise post hoc comparisons of the centers on positive impacts, significant differences were observed across the center levels in favor of model and multipurpose center types/levels.

Table 6: One-way ANOVA of impacts of youth centers by types of centers

Variables	F	P
General impacts	103.120	.000
Constructive use of time	109.587	.000
Knowledge & experience	97.461	.000
Change of undesirable behavior	49.558	.000
Building personality	80.079	.000
Job creation/ creativity	61.371	.000
Negative impacts	19.767	.000

Unintended negative impacts

Contributions of youth centers were also checked in terms of the extent to which beneficiaries were exposed to negative impacts such as, for example, exposure to smoking, substance use, gambling, and violence. Tables 7 and 8 present summary of data collected through questionnaire and observation of these threats. The mean scores and frequencies presented under each rating scale displayed on Table 7 shows that the youth centers had minimal unplanned negative effects on the beneficiaries. Looking into the frequencies in which the seven threats were observed (Table 8), we may still say that the prevalence is too small to consider them as threats.

Table 7: Perception of youth beneficiaries and service providers on the negative impacts of youth centers on service user youth

Youth center:	Never (1)	Occasionally (2)	Most of the time (3)	Always (4)	Mean	SD
is vulnerable to different problems	1599	334	141	55	1.4	.7
has made youth spend time on mere play and games than education	1599	334	141	55	1.2	.5
has made youth associate with bad guys	1746	235	72	75	1.3	.7
has made youth develop addiction habits	1957	135	22	13	1.1	.4
has made youth learn gambling	1876	192	32	25	1.2	.5
has made youth become preoccupied with sexual matters	1930	153	32	11	1.1	.4
has made youth become careless about their health	1967	125	18	17	1.1	.4
has made youth develop undesirable behaviors	1935	149	30	12	1.1	.4
is a place to learn/ practice chat chewing	2009	97	5	14	1.1	.3
is a place to learn/ practice other drugs	2037	73	8	9	1.1	.3
is a place to learn/ practice different crimes	2046	72	4	5	1.0	.3
is a place in which individual and group fights/ conflicts take place	1997	107	9	14	1.1	.4
is threatening/ unsafe for girls	1909	149	30	18	1.1	.4

Table 8: Negative behaviors observed during field visits to the youth centers

Negative behaviors observed	No, I didn't see but heard	Yes, but in disguise	Yes, I have seen	No, I didn't see/ hear
Smoking in the youth center	5	1	2	85
Gambling in the youth center	11		6	76
Chewing chat in the youth center	8		3	82
Use of other substances in the center	2		1	90
Practicing various criminal offences	5		1	87
Individual or group fights in the center	6		2	85
Teasing, insults, or threatens girls	8	2	2	80
Overall total	45	3	17	585

An attempt was made to check how significantly the mean ratings of perceived negative impacts of the youth centers deviates from the test value (i.e. 32.5). One sample mean test in Table 9 yields that the observed mean is statistically significantly lower than the test value $t(2097) = 220.8$, P<.000) suggesting that youth centers have a lower negative impact on beneficiary youth.

Table 9: One-Sample mean test of the level of negative impacts of youth centers

Indicator	Number of items	Rating points	N	Mean	SD	Expected mean	t	df	p
Negative impacts of youth centers on service users	13	4	2098	14.83	3.67	32.5	-220.8	2097	.000

Despite majority of the beneficiary youth (57.8%) perceived that the centers had no negative impacts on them, the cumulative number of negative effects reported in Table 10 is not something to be undermined. That is, when adding up the number of those with ratings that they have experienced each of the 13 threats in Table 10, it was found that nearly 40% of the participants had experienced at least 1 negative impact in the youth centers. The cumulative observation result in Table 10 also shows that about 28% of the youth centers seem to predispose beneficiary youth to at least one form of negative impact.

Table 10: Frequency of negative impacts of youth centers on youth

Perception of beneficiary youth			Observation during field visits		
Number of negative impacts	frequency	%	Number of impacts	frequency	%
Nothing	1252	57.8	Nothing	66	70.2
One	324	15.0	One	8	8.5
Two	122	5.6	Two	9	9.6
Three	115	5.3	Three	5	5.3
Four	58	2.7	Four	1	1.1
Five	62	2.9	Six	1	1.1
Six	46	2.1	Seven	2	2.1
7	34	1.6			
8	31	1.4			
9	15	.7			
10	8	.4			
11	13	.6			
12	4	.2			
13	14	.6			

Furthermore, findings on the negative impacts of youth centers on beneficiary youth examined through youth's perception and field observation was further corroborated through data collected from open ended items included in the questionnaire. About 75 responses were obtained from open ended items included in the questionnaire showing different kinds of negative impacts that are classified in the following nine themes. Despite the frequencies, the responses capture almost all those indicated in the rating scale. In fact, more extended and also additional negative impacts can be seen on this list.

Table 11: Summary of qualitative data on the negative impacts of youth centers on youth

Type of negative impacts reported	Frequency
Alcohol drinking, chewing chat, smoking, using other drugs	5
Sexual harassment, harass female youths, no security	5
Gambling	20
Female youths got pregnant, some see pornography pictures using WIFI	2
Youth waste their time in center instead of studying, youths come to the center during school time, some student skip class	34
Psychological problems, youths get into bad behavior	6
Sexual initiation	3
Fighting	4
Meet bad peer group	4
Total	75

Discussion

Youth centers are basically establishments that provide for the proactive than reactive, preventive than curative, educative than therapeutic needs of young people. Positive, strengths-based and pleasant experiences are characteristically built into these centers. They act as a hub for providing holistic and integrated services that ultimately ensure participation and empowerment of young people. Along this line, proliferation of youth centers in Ethiopia particularly in the last couple of decades underscores a changed philosophy of support for youth development that is indeed encouraging and promising. No matter how functional they are, over 3000 centers have been established so far. While there is a need for further expansion to address the growing population of young people in this country, there is, on the other hand, a need for concerted efforts revamping those already in place. The study on which this article draws on was conducted to pave the ground for this revamping exercise by delineating the contributions and then draw implications for improving future engagements. Data were collected through direct observation of 94 youth centers and a structured questionnaire administered to a total of 2165 service providers and beneficiaries.

A lot of work and expenditure have been put forth in establishing youth centers in different regions of the country not because this in itself is a goal, but

rather it is a means to expediting personality development of young people in the country. However, because of the fact that implementing these projects with the objective of establishing youth centers have been a very expensive, tiresome, and time consuming job, there seems to be a tendency to consider the exercise as an end in themselves. However, youth center establishment is rather the beginning or a means than completion of the work. Youth centers should be viewed as a catalyst for change. If youth centers are developed in partnership with young people, youth centers can be a useful way to provide young people with bits of information and services as well as providing them with a space to develop broader life skills and personality. Youth centers can provide invaluable contributions if they are safe, enriching, and supervised environments for children and youth during out of school time.

At the youth level, the contribution of youth centers to youth personality development was noted from the data suggesting that youth centers can be valuable resource for young people and communities and provide a second home (where young people can relax, feel safe and have fun) (IPPF, 2008) and school (where young people acquire experience that build their knowledge, skills, and desirable habits). However, it was also found, in this connection, that although the contributions of youth centers may not be contested, the level of sustainable and positive impacts associated with these centers do not seem encouraging. In fact, when the good fails to conquer the mind, it may open the gate for the evil to take hold. When the farmer fails to cultivate the land and plant seeds, then it is the law of nature that the unwanted weed gets the chance to prevail on the farm land. It is noted, on the one hand, that strong positive impacts are not taking hold. In the absence of this, evidences seem to unfold, on the other, that some negative impacts are taking hold basically showing unsupervised, unmonitored, unguided and, more importantly, non-participatory services. Particularly, youth participation should not be negotiated by putting young people in the periphery from their own affairs; but need to be viewed as equal partners in developing the center, its activities and management.

At the community level, youth centers also present an important opportunity to facilitate community change and to open a dialogue within the community on challenging issues (IPPF, 2008); despite the fact that this has not been the case of the youth centers examined in this assessment. A number of projects have demonstrated that wide-scale community change and acceptance of young people's wants and needs is possible when parents and community and religious leaders are trained on youth services and enabled to support youth programs. Moreover, it is becoming increasingly apparent that service approval by young people is

stimulated more by community acceptance of young people's needs than by creating new youth services. At the national and/or political level, youth centers should be seen as an important advocacy tool which can be used by organizations and communities to lobby for change. A successful youth center – which engages young people and their communities in young people's priority demands and rights – provides an ideal platform from which to advocate for the improvement of national youth policies and for the inclusion of young people's wants and needs in diversified service delivery policies and guidelines. Youth centers can also provide a place from which new and innovative policies and practices can be implemented, with feedback provided to relevant policy makers and practitioners in different fields (IPPF, 2008).

Conclusions and implications

In the light of the findings presented, we can generally conclude that the effectiveness of the youth center is not as much meaningful as it is supposed to be. Firstly, although establishment and proliferation of youth centers is very encouraging, it appears, however, that this exercise in itself seems to have become a goal rather than a means for expediting personality development of young people. Secondly, positive contributions were not, therefore, loudly evident on the beneficiary youth; some evidence also indicate possibilities for negative impacts though to a lesser extent. Finally, differences were noted in terms of the above measures by respondent type (usually service providers giving better impressions as expected) and level of youth centers (those providing more services apparently receiving better ratings).

The following measures can be taken to address some of the major problems and related other concerns:

- Strengthening the youth centers by improving the quality of services would enable them make better impacts.
- A more systematic monitoring and mentoring program be put in place in the youth centers so that negative impacts can be put to control.
- Providing training to service providers to impart knowledge and skills so that they can handle beneficiary youth properly - in an ethically sound and fair manner (without prejudice and favoritism), and also to inspire confidence on the youth to feel comfortable to communicate their needs.
- Creating experience sharing forum among youth centers across the country can help youth to learn important lessons from one other.

Acknowledgements

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