

Original Article

# Factors Leading to the Establishment of Youth Empowerment Programs as a Response to Mitigating Youth Unemployment in Kayole, Nairobi County, Kenya

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**Abstract** - The purpose of this paper is to investigate the factors leading to the establishment of youth empowerment programs in Kayole, Nairobi County Kenya as an antidote to youth unemployment. The theory of empowerment describes diverse ways of measuring the construct in different contexts thus making the construct multi-disciplinary. Whatever the context is chosen, the beginning point is to focus on the process, and the desired outcomes or goals. Over time, the theme of empowerment has been with us now for about four decades (since the 1980s). Generally, empowerment is about the emancipation of the disadvantaged and vulnerable to regain their rights; obtain access to resources; and have active participation in the process of decision, power to express and act on one's desires, and determining the social destination. The image of an empowered person:

- Has the power to challenge constraints (voice, interests)
- Increased individual capacity and opportunities for access
- Increased solidarity to challenge underlying assumptions
- Increased awareness and desire for change

Despite the rise of youth empowerment programs as a response to mitigate unemployment the number of unemployed youths in Kenya is on the rise. World Bank indicates that youth unemployment in Kenya has averaged 20% in the last ten years, rising from 17.1% in 2011 to 17.4% in 2014. The unemployment situation has worsened by the numerous challenges youth empowerment programs are facing such as the lack of adequate funds to run the programs, corruption, and lack of accountability mechanism. Hence, the ineffectiveness of youth empowerment programs leaves the young people exposed to unemployment rendering them waste away their capabilities, resilience, energy, motivation, and ideas. In addition, the unemployment situation leads to various challenges among the youth namely hopelessness, stress, dependency syndrome for economic help from parents or the government,

delayed entry into the labor force, and engaging in vices such as crime in order to sustain their livelihoods.

**Keywords** - Youth Empowerment, Unemployment.

## I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Youth empowerment programs have been widely used by governments all over the world to address the issue of youth unemployment. This is in recognition that unemployment continues to be a problem globally, regionally, and locally making it important to increase the employability of the youth who comprise the majority of the unemployed in society. Trochima and Donnelly (2006) note that the economic and sustainable development of a country is judged by its human capital; through the continuous intellectual and skillful investment of the youth in order to reduce the chances of unemployment. However, youth empowerment programs have been unable to live up to their expectations especially in mitigating the unemployment situation among young people. This, therefore, offers a major development challenge to countries as the youth fail to take up from the older generation and be the backbone to the political, social, and economic growths of their respective countries.

Globally, the youth continue to face the harsh reality of unemployment. United Nations (2001) asserts that the youth continue to be almost three times more likely than adults, to be unemployed thus contributing to the upward trend in global unemployment. The youth offer little or no contribution to the growth of the global economy despite their bulging population. Youth empowerment programs come in as urgent interventions by countries of the world to mitigate the unemployment situation. The hurdle comes in when programs geared for youth empowerment are



mismatched and are unable to meet the demand of labor markets on the ground. The rush to solve the youth unemployment crisis with irrelevant programs continues to curtail the release of the energy, entrepreneurial spirit, and technological genius of the youth (Wambui, 2010).

In Europe, the European Union (EU) member states were alarmed with the rising rate of youth unemployment as it was twice (20%) as high as the adult unemployment rate (10%) in January 2015 (Uddin and Osemegbe, 2013). In light of that matter, the member states in a bid to cushion the shock of the youth unemployment crisis developed youth empowerment frameworks such as the Lisbon Process of 2000, Youth Guarantee Recommendation of 2013, and Europe 2020 strategy. These mitigating measures aimed at correcting the mismatch in the European labor market by ensuring the youth got access to good quality education, apprenticeship, and traineeship that enabled them to be absorbed in the job markets or end up creating jobs themselves. Youth empowerment programs unfortunately have not achieved many results due to many hurdles that countries in Europe faced when it came to the implementation process. For instance, in-house fighting between government, trade unions, and business people. This led to an unwillingness among stakeholders to support a comprehensive youth employment policy that ensured the youth had an opportunity to transition into an inclusive labor market and are equipped with the right skills (Omolo, 2012).

In the African continent, the youth continue to face the unemployment challenge despite their potential to be productive within their societies. Franz (2014) asserts that the youth constitute 60% of the unemployed in Africa, and many young people are lacking in relevant skills while those that have some form of education often exhibit skills that are at odds with the current demand of the labor market. Youth empowerment programs are critical in Africa, as the continent has been scarred with conflicts seen in countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Somalia, Nigeria, Chad, Mali, and Burundi among others. There are also the declining economic deficits that have made many African countries dependent on foreign aid in order to spur economic activities. There is a rising youthful population in Africa and lack of effective job absorption capacity and proper investment in youth empowerment programs only serves to escalate the unemployment situation (Olela, 2015).

The unemployment situation is a matter that most Kenyan youth face daily. Youth empowerment programs were formulated to challenge the existing narrow and market-led system of qualifications that

has locked the economic potential of the Kenyan youth (Babson, 2014). Youth empowerment programs have been rolled out in Kenya such as Kenya National Youth Policy of 2007, Kenya Youth Empowerment Project of 2010, *Kazi Kwa Vijana*, and Youth Enterprise Development Fund of 2006 among others. Despite the launch of such programs that are meant to increase the employability of the Kenyan youth, not all are able to transition into work and end up demotivated, desperate, and ultimately become an economic burden.

## II. DEFINITION OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Definitions of empowerment abound. For the purposes of this study, I will present three. Elima, (2015) defines empowerment as,

“...a process where individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship between their efforts and life outcomes.”

The gap in the definition by Obonyo (2015) is that it limits empowerment to the individual level of analysis. That shows there is no integration of the individual into the community; evidently, there is no interaction with his environment. Sigu (2017) defined youth empowerment as, “... a process whereby young people gain the ability and authority to make decisions and implement change in their own lives.” Gathura (2017) sees empowerment as, “...an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources.” The above definition fills the gap left out by Sunday (2017). For example, there is the incorporation of the person-environment interactions, a fact supported by Bhebe et al. (2016), “... is viewed as a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations and communities gain mastery over their lives”. From the definitions presented, there are common denominators:

- Empowerment is an emancipation process
- Efforts to exert control are central
- There is participation within a larger community to achieve goals
- Efforts to gain access and control over resources
- Development of skills, which make people independent problem-solvers; and decision-makers
- Empowerment activities are within economic, social, cultural, and political spheres.

By putting empowerment in the youth context, brings the dimension of collective action to improve the quality of community life.

### III. YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS IN KENYA

The advancement of youth empowerment programs has been developed as a means of ensuring that the growing young population aged between eighteen to thirty-five years are able to receive holistic skill development that increases their employability chances. It is no doubt that the unemployment situation makes the youth live with uncertainty as they fear falling into the trap of a lifetime of weak attachment to the labor markets that increase the risk of open unemployment and low-paid insecure work (Omolo, 2012).

Youth empowerment programs in Kenya have taken a multi-stakeholder approach currently involving the Government ministries of devolution and planning, education, and collaboration of non-governmental and faith-based organizations. Franz (2014) asserts that the increased concern about youth unemployment and the related risks for social peace and political stability has led to the formulation of policies and plans specifically targeting the youth. The youth empowerment programs were key issues highlighted in the country's development agenda of Kenya Vision 2030 that sets out to transform Kenya into a newly industrializing, middle-income country providing high-quality life to all its citizens by 2030. This cannot be attainable if the majority of the youth are unemployed and therefore these youth empowerment programs are to spur a competitive and skill-driven young generation to ensure the social, economic, and political prosperity of the nation.

Muthee (2010) underscores that the formulation of specific youth empowerment programs and policies that view youth as an important resource for Kenya's development creates a favorable environment for the youth to access basic goods and services in order to realize their potential and contribute to public affairs of the country in a more effective way. Youth empowerment programs come in to increase the employability prospects of the youth by targeting critical areas namely the promotion of entrepreneurial activities, skills training programs, labor market regulations and reforms, subsidized employment, and employment services. It is through youth empowerment programs that the youth become beneficiaries of education and training opportunities that help them build their skills which are relevant to the job market, hence making it possible for them to create jobs, get jobs and enjoy a good economic standing in the society (Sigu, 2017). Examples of the youth empowerment programs that have been developed in Kenya are but are not limited

to, *Kazi Kwa Vijana*, Kenya Youth Empowerment Project (KYEP), Youth Enterprise Development Fund (IDF), and Technical Industrial and Vocational Education and Training (TIVET) institutions among others.

### IV. LINK BETWEEN EDUCATION AND YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS IN MITIGATING UNEMPLOYMENT

Education is one of the most important pillars of development as through it people are able to be skilled and contribute to different sectors vital for the political, social, and economic growth of the nation. Olela (2015) notes that education is a service industry that offers to prepare individuals in various capacities of operations for the execution of tasks; it is the process by which specialized knowledge, skills, and attributes are, either acquired or instilled in the learners to enable them to face the threatening changes in life. Therefore, for youth empowerment programs to be effective in mitigating unemployment education needs to be its foundation particularly vocational training. Vocational training involves the imparting of skills such as technological skills, tailoring, dressmaking, financial literacy, catering, communication skills, and leadership and entrepreneurship courses among others. Vocational training ensures that the trainees not only join the job market but also be entrepreneurs and be mitigated against unemployment. Wambui (2010) points out that vocational training offers an opportunity to enhance entrepreneurship by developing people with higher-level skills and analytical ability, who can create high-value small and medium-sized businesses. Vocational training within youth empowerment programs ensures the trainees are self-reliant in the future, using their skills to contribute to the growth of the nation.

Technical training is dependent upon the need for monetary investment: by the public and private sectors within the country. With the availability of funds, youth empowerment programs are able to run their operations in terms of curriculum development, employing a workforce, and ensuring the trainees are able to work with tools that are at par with modern technology such as those undertaking engineering and tailoring courses (Gathura, 2017). Good funding in technical training centers also encompasses the structures under which the training takes place. This is in mind that education is not only the training of an individual but also the setting of where the training takes place. Without proper funding, most technical institutions continue to deteriorate making the graduates of such institutions to be excluded as they have limited productive skills due to the mismatch between an institution of learning and work situation (Mwangi, 2015).

Another important pillar for the effectiveness of the educational infrastructure of youth empowerment programs is the deployment of a skilled workforce who are going to impart the right skills and knowledge that are required in the job market. It is critical then, successful implementation projects undertaking educational training, there needs to be skilled personnel who are able to tackle emerging issues of the job industry (Olela, 2015). Youth empowerment programs through the appointment of a skilled technical workforce ensure that the trainees are able to avoid the challenge of being deemed not with the right skills by prospective employers.

The presence of a skilled workforce also ensures the trainees are able to interact with instructors who are well versed in different knowledge areas in turn who are eager to join the job market or become entrepreneurs and serve the nation. Mwangi (2015) notes that knowledge and methodology in education packaging and training can be in several forms depending on who is being trained; such that with a competent instructor, learning becomes stimulating including induction training, technical training, and management training. The youth empowerment programs offered in different training institutions are able to bring out a skilled workforce as they are under the guidance of instructors who not only have mastery of the curriculum content but are also aware of the trends in the industry.

Vocational training also ensures that trainees are able to receive mentorship. Kweni (2017) asserts that mentorship activities translate into high self-esteem and self-confidence that are necessary traits for youth to engage in teamwork and community work and to be successful in life. Education within youth empowerment centers also can be boosted when industry players are able to be part of the growth and development of the youth undertaking different pieces of training in the technical institutions. This enables the youth to get real-life examples of challenges and successes awaiting them in the job market be it at the public and private sector employment or self-employment. Ultimately, the youth are able to grow academically, professionally, and personally.

In conclusion, quality education remains a strong foundation for youth empowerment programs as it enables the young generation to acquire lasting training and learning opportunities that are compatible with the labor and technological demands of the markets thus helping in mitigating unemployment among the youth. Sigu (2017) notes that skills forecasting and career guidance are critical areas of consideration in promoting the development of vocational education and institutions in enhancing the smooth transition of youth into employment. Investing in the young people through quality education enables them to impart skills to their

generation especially at the grassroots level ensuring the growth of the nation.

## V. UNEMPLOYMENT IN KENYA

Muthee (2010) asserts that the youth in Kenya are confronted with multiple challenges, with unemployment featuring prominently as it affects 60% of the youth population in Kenya. This is a worrying trend that if not tackled limits the chances of future young generations in contributing to the social, political, and economic growth of their country. Elima (2015) notes that the youth aged between 18 and 24 years seem to face the most difficult unemployment problem, and unemployment faced by females is worse than unemployment faced by males. Therefore, prolonged unemployment hinders the potential of the youth from raising their nation's economy and this drives the need for youth empowerment programs to help mitigate the unemployment situation.

## VI. CAUSES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN KENYA

The following are some of the drivers of youth unemployment in Kenya:

### A. Rural-urban Migration

Sunday (2017) notes that Kenya's unemployment crisis is piling up pressure on urban centers seen as refuges by the tide of jobless people moving away from the rural areas. The urban areas have always been viewed as centers of success especially by youth who come from the rural areas. Yet the true reality is that there are not enough employment opportunities in the urban areas and if found one works in a profession he or she is not qualified in order to survive in the urban areas.

### B. High Population Growth Rate

Elima (2015) notes that the youth unemployment challenge is significant in both the rural and urban areas due to the high rates of young people. Kenya is one of the countries in Africa that are experiencing a youth bulge that is not only causing stress within the economy but also leading to hopelessness among the youth who are inactive members of society. There are not enough industries especially in the processing sector that can expand the job sector and cushion against the growing number of unemployed young people in the country (Obonyo, 2015). This leaves many young people idle and unproductive members contributing very little to the social, economic, and political growth of the country.

### C. Poor Economy

Sunday (2017) points out that Kenya's unemployment crisis indicates that the economy does not expand enough, and the growth is equally

inconsistent to consolidate any gains made in job creation. This means that stagnation of the economy leads to little flow of money and in terms limiting the creation of more investment opportunities and sustainable youth empowerment programs for the youth.

#### **D. Poor Education System**

Bhebhe, Bhebhe, & Bhebhe, (2016) note that unemployed youths are graduates of an education system, which is irrelevant to the needs of the industry. This makes it difficult for graduates to seek employment as they are deemed unfit by prospective employers. Wambui (2010) points out that interestingly that 1.5% of the unemployed youth have formal education beyond secondary school level and the remaining over 92% have no vocational or professional skills and the majority are found in rural Kenya. The education system in Kenya has been seen as more of a read-and-do exam system that has failed to give practical work experiences to the youth. This renders them hopeless as they search for jobs and it begins the painful cycle of unemployment in their lives. It is also important to note that there has been a long-term emphasis on formal schooling and overlooking by curriculum developers of critical job training skills such as woodwork. Wambui (2010) underscores that unemployment is not just a lack of jobs, but also a lack of job skills due to inadequacy of the training infrastructure as well as the means to acquire these skills due to poverty. This leaves the education system in a continuous cycle of churning out graduates who are incompetent and are unable to contribute to vital economic sectors such as manufacturing.

#### **E. Youth Exclusion from the Development Agenda**

Most policies in Kenya fail to bring the youth to the round table discussion when planning for their wellbeing and possible contribution to the growth of the nation. Bhebhe et al. (2016) assert that youth have been left out from participation at all levels of economic and general policy formulation, planning, implementation, and evaluation and this may give rise to the sense of lack of belonging when youth empowerment programs are rolled out. Without effective participation of the primary beneficiaries who are the youth, there becomes a challenge on complementary development projects that meet the needs of the current young generation, which is critical in ensuring the political, economic, and social growth of the nation.

#### **F. High Influx of Graduates**

With the rapid growth of colleges and universities offering higher education in Kenya, there has been an increase in the supply of graduates above the number of job opportunities, rendering them unemployed (Uddin & Osemengbe, 2013). The graduates end up in a tiring cycle of looking for jobs that are limited

and end up hopeless, as there is not enough for everyone. It is also unfortunate that even though there is an existence of skilled workers they lack the capital to be job creators in order to create a sustained livelihood not only for them but also for other young professionals.

#### **G. Corruption**

Uddin & Osemengbe (2013) point out that funds meant for youth empowerment programs have been misappropriated, diverted, or embezzled by incompetent and corrupt bureaucrats thereby leading to the loss of revenue that would have been vital in creating jobs for the youth in various sectors of the economy. Corruption is a plague for the youth as it only increases their unemployment situation, as the economy cannot sustain them leading to a sense of hopelessness and despair.

### **VII. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:**

#### **A. Factors that Led to the Establishment of Youth Empowerment Programs in Kayole, Nairobi County, Kenya**

The objective of this study was to examine the factors that led to the establishment of youth empowerment programs in mitigating youth unemployment in Kayole, Nairobi County. The respondents were requested to indicate their agreement level with various factors that have led to the establishment of youth empowerment programs in mitigating youth unemployment in Kayole, Nairobi County. The results were as shown in Table I.

**Table 1. Factors Leading to the Establishment of Youth Empowerment Programs**

	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	Std. Deviation
The need for soft skills	14.7	2.0	9.8	49.0	24.5	3.666	1.284
Breaking youth inequality in accessing opportunities	2.0	2.0	2.0	19.6	74.5	4.627	0.795
Poverty eradication	1.0	1.0	2.9	23.5	71.6	4.637	0.686
Improving education standards	6.9	2.9	2.9	62.7	24.5	3.951	1.008
Breaking bad social habits	4.9	3.9	0.0	40.2	40.2	4.323	0.945
Improving young leadership	1.0	2.0	0.0	24.5	72.5	4.656	0.682

*Source: Authors computation from SPSS*

With a mean of 4.656 and a standard deviation of 0.682 the respondents totally agreed that improving young leadership has led to the establishment of youth empowerment programs in mitigating youth unemployment. These findings agree with Jain's (2017) findings that a vibrant young leadership is very critical in ensuring good governance in Kenya and this is enhanced and guaranteed by effective youth empowerment programs.

They also totally agreed that breaking youth inequality in accessing opportunities has led to the establishment of youth empowerment programs in mitigating youth unemployment as shown by a mean of 4.627 and a standard deviation of 0.795. Youth empowerment programs are in place to make sure that equal opportunities are accorded to young people regardless of tribe or economic background. The findings are in line with the findings of Chinedu and Oladiran (2015) that improving young leadership and breaking youth inequality in accessing opportunities help young people strengthen positive attitudes, skills, and behaviors that improve proper functioning across a range of life activities. In addition, the youth empowerment platform offers a platform for youth to be productive and compete fairly as they transition into the labor market.

In addition, they partially agreed that breaking bad social habits had led to the establishment of youth empowerment programs in mitigating youth unemployment as shown by a mean of 4.323 and a standard deviation of 0.945. Jain (2017) had earlier indicated that Jain (2017) points out that it is easy for young impressionable minds to get waylaid and entrapped in anti-social activities because they were not empowered morally, academically as well as financially. However, youth empowerment programs become important platforms whereby the youth receive life skills that enable them to be pillars of good character and integrity in society.

Moreover, they partially agreed that improving education standards have led to the establishment of youth empowerment programs in mitigating youth unemployment as shown by a mean of 3.951 and a standard deviation of 1.008. These findings concur with Mwangi's (2015) findings that education is a means of transforming and empowering the youth through skills development which is important for economic growth, poverty alleviation, youth empowerment, and social inclusion. Further, they partially agreed that the need for soft skills has led to the establishment of youth empowerment programs in mitigating youth unemployment as shown by a mean of 3.666 and a standard deviation of 1.284. The findings are in line with the findings of Mwangi (2015) that breaking bad social habits, improving education standards, and the need for soft skills transform and empower the youth through skills development which is important for economic growth and poverty elevation.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that improving young leadership was the most important factor leading to the establishment of the Youth Empowerment Programs. This was followed by the need for poverty eradication, breaking youth inequality in accessing

opportunities, breaking bad social habits, improving education standards, and the need for soft skills. The study found that the most viable solution that needs to be incorporated into Youth Empowerment Programs is an expansion of post-secondary alternatives, followed by building entrepreneurial linkages, ensuring adequate youth empowerment infrastructure, promotion of quality education systems, and creating a shared youth agenda.

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