

Self-Reliance Projects - The Future Core Driver of Rural Youth Livelihood Development Outcomes

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Abstract

In Kenya today majority of the youth are out of school and not employed in the formal economy and private sector jobs are also scarce. Acknowledging this reality, the Kenyan government and other youth service organizations are learning that proper strategies need to be put in place to help youth penetrate into the formal economy. The strategies should further assist and accelerate this process while improving the short-term well-being of youth and their households. When appropriately engaged and adequately prepared for roles in the worlds of work, family life, and society, youth can be definite assets for sustainable development. However, if governments and communities disregard the huge numbers of youth with minimal attachment to the formal sector, youth can also become a profoundly de-stabilizing force. Specifically, the absence of livelihood development opportunities for youth can impede a nation's development in the form of increased crime, violence, extremism, and both social and political instability. This paper examines the self-reliance projects as a future core driver of rural youth livelihood development outcomes in Kenya. The paper is based on a study conducted to determine the effects of self-reliance projects on the livelihoods of youth in selected rural areas of Nakuru County. A descriptive survey research design was used for the study. Data was collected using interviews and questionnaires. Data collected was analyzed using SPSS where frequencies and percentages were derived. Descriptive statistics was used in providing relevant information. Findings indicate that successful rural self-reliance projects have to integrate important basic services such as entrepreneurial training; infrastructure as well as financing. The study further established that development partners enhancing youth participation in self-reliance projects should ensure substantive dialogue or the involvement of youth from the rural areas. The recommendation is that interventions designed for youth self-reliance projects must engage and support youth. Most of the youth are already economically active and focused on the immediate needs of their households, and the rural youth desire is to realize more sustainable and socially constructive livelihood means.

Keywords: Self-reliance projects, rural youth, livelihoods, strategies, entrepreneurial

Introduction

Kenya's population dynamics manifested by a large and growing proportion of the youth presents key policy challenges according to a report by the Ministry of Youth Affairs (2007). With more than a third of the total population or slightly below two thirds of the adult population being young, the energies of these youths must be redirected to productive ventures for sustainable growth and development, otherwise it becomes a liability. Consequently while rural youth are still the demographic majority in most parts of Kenya and Nakuru County in

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particular, they are less involved in decision-making processes. This has resulted to marginalization of the youth living in the rural areas. Youth problems have been worsening despite the remarkable increase in the number of agencies dealing with matters affecting the youth.

The Kenyan Government has implemented a series of funding support programmes; such as the Small Scale Business Project, the Kenya Youth Empowerment Project and the Youth Enterprise Fund (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2006). The UWEZO Fund which was established in 2014 is another milestone by the Government aimed at empowering youth and women and persons with disabilities by providing interest-free loans as start-up capital for small and micro business. These Government initiatives seek to ensure access to credit facilities by young women and men in Kenya to enable them establish businesses and earn income to improve their lives. The Fund's strategic focus is on enterprise development as a key strategy for increasing economic opportunities for participation by the youth in nation building. It has thus become increasingly clear that older teenagers and young adults need livelihood development. Evidence suggests that livelihood development is the core driver of positive youth outcomes in other areas, such as education, public safety, and democracy and governance (IRIN 2007). These linkages, however, must be designed with specific sector outcomes in mind.

Access to financial services such as savings and loans to rural youth may be of fundamental importance to start any self-reliance activity. Payment and trading services, such as mobile banking and Internet trading, may equally be important tools for marketing their products. In order to meet these needs, financial service providers (IFAD, 2010) have to play a crucial role. Financial service providers include formal banking systems (commercial and development banks), semiformal banking systems (Savings and Credit Cooperative Organizations [SACCOs]) and informal banking systems not officially registered at national level (e.g. Self-help groups grass root savings and loan associations, moneylenders and traders). While financial services have become increasingly available to young people, there is still much to be achieved to improve the availability of such services to young people in rural enterprises (Dalla Valle, 2012).

It is widely alleged that youth development is at the periphery of the development agenda in most countries as noted by Atchorarena and Gasperini (2003). Further observes the two authors; that yet, given that youth comprise such a large proportion of the rural labour force, most development projects and programmes in rural areas do not promote youth livelihoods to a large extent. Entrepreneurship is central to job creation. In order to start a business, youth require additional training. Entrepreneurial skills are simply business skill, which an individual acquires to enable him function effectively in the turbulent business environment as a n entrepreneur of a self employed (Folahan and Omoriyi, 2006). Vocational trainings are potentially effective tools for enhancing entrepreneurial skills and providing capacity-building for rural youth, but they do not always transmit the necessary skills, and so can result in poor employment outcomes (Bennell, 2007). Low education levels among many rural youth further limit training possibilities (IFAD, 2010). Thus rural youth have repeatedly reported lack of skills in areas such as leadership and business management as well as the need for apprenticeship opportunities (GoK, 2007)

Most youth in developing countries, especially those from more marginalized backgrounds, find livelihood opportunities in the informal and household-based sectors (UNESCO 2001). Thus, this paper focuses on improving opportunities in these domains. Compared to formal employment, the informal sector is generally an underserved segment of the youth economic opportunity continuum. Successful self-reliance projects reflect actual youth realities and respond to the existing goals, plans and strategies of young people themselves and their community (especially at the household and extended family levels). Perhaps the greatest misconception is that poor youth without jobs are idle and economically

inactive. Research carried out in countries as diverse as Uganda, Morocco and others with young people suggest that most contribute to household income through work in the informal sector, in household-based enterprises, or in family-based farming, fishing and petty trading activities (USAID 2005, USAID 2006). This mirrors the research of other youth development actors that indicate that youth frequently use their work in the informal sector as a means of paying for continuing education and building informal peer networks linked to accessing start-up capital or introductions to employers (ILO 2005, World Bank 2007, USAID 2006, UNESCO 2001). Other research suggests that many poor families do learn to save and build assets, and that effective livelihood interventions reflect marketplace opportunities, constraints, and barriers (ILO 2005).

The Research Problem

Youth unemployment rates in the formal economy exceed 50 percent, and educational opportunities beyond the secondary school level cannot be accessed by most of the youth population. Equally there is a clear mismatch between the skills provided by tertiary institutions and universities and the ones that employers want. Similarly the growth of the country's economy has trouble keeping up with the rapid growth of its youth population. Such would describe the plight of today's youth in several Kenyan counties, particularly those with high rural youth population. Acknowledging this reality, the Kenyan government and other youth service organizations are learning that proper strategies need to be put in place to help youth implement self-reliance projects and that interventions should assist and accelerate livelihood development process while improving the short-term well-being of youth and their households

Research Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive research design. It used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Questionnaire administration was conducted face to face with the help of trained research assistants. The questionnaire had 29 items with five sections; Personal Information, Kind of Youth Self-Reliance Projects Implemented, Financial Access and Self-Reliance Projects, Entrepreneurial Skills and Enterprise Development and Economic / Social Welfare of Youth in relation to their Participation in Self-Reliance Projects. Data collected was analyzed using SPSS where frequencies and percentages were derived. The quantitative analysis was used, to determine frequencies and percentages of the responses while qualitative analysis was used to determine relationships.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Characteristics of the youth

It was assumed that the demographic characteristics of rural youth influence the self-reliance projects to a significant extent. Three characteristics of rural youth were selected as interpreter variables in order to explore their significance on income sources as well as on rural youth's livelihood. Among the sampled respondents 93 (67.4%) were male and 45 were female (32.6%). This is in contrast with the 2009 Kenya population and housing census estimates of 51.7 % for female and 48.3 % male youth respectively. This indicates that there were more males involved in self-reliance projects in rural areas as opposed to the female youth. The age of selected rural youth varied from 18 to 35 years with a mean, median and standard deviation of 38, 39 and 9 years, respectively. Most of the respondents' ages ranged from 26-35 years (69.3%). The number of rural youth below 18 years was very low (1.5%). The data generated from the study shows that 98.5% of the rural youth were within the age bracket of 18 - 35

years described by the Government as youth in Kenya. The age of rural youth has a great influence on their ability to actively take part in economic activities and, of course, influences benefit from the SRPs in the study area.

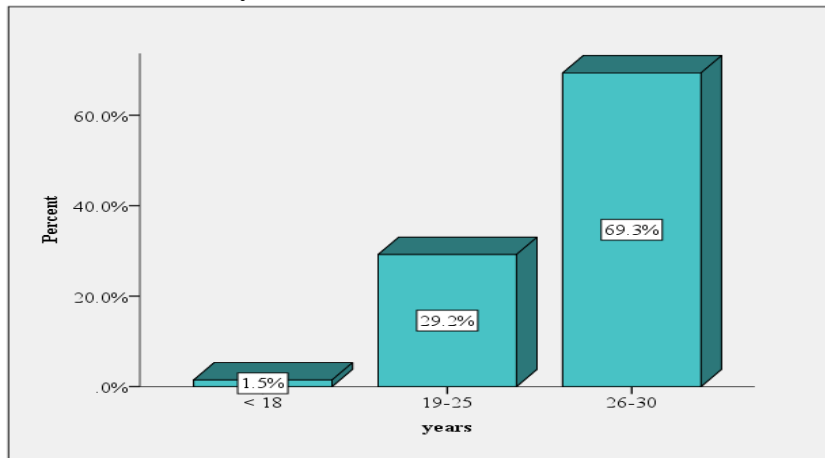


Figure 1: Distribution of rural youth by age groups (n = 138)

The majority of the respondents (62.3%) were married while 37% were single and the remaining 0.7% was widowed. The facts that 69.3% were aged 26-35 years shows that the result is consistent with the findings majority were married. This finding indicates that the married youth are more involved in self-reliance projects and that they try to change their existing socio-economic condition by using SRPs.

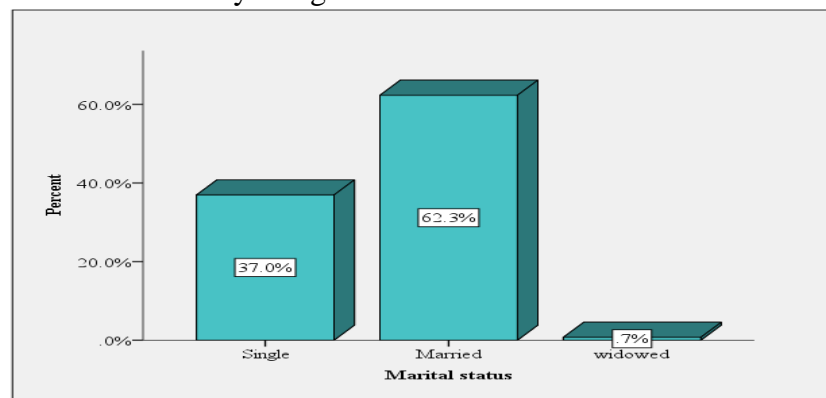


Figure 2: Marital status of the respondents

Education and skills development

Education was measured in terms of levels passed by the respondent. When asked about the level of education achieved, 27 respondents (19.6 %) reported they had attained Primary 5-8 education. Equally almost half of the respondents (46.4 %) had secondary education and only 34.0% (47 respondents) had attained College /University education. The level of education status is indicated in table 1.

	Education level	Frequency	Percent
	Primary 5-8	27	19.6
	Secondary	64	46.4
	Tertiary/ College/University	47	34.0

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	Total	138	100.0

More than half of the respondents (53.7%) had taken entrepreneurial training skills. However a substantial level of respondents (42.6%) stated that they had not been offered any entrepreneurial skills training. Farming skills, managing small business and savings and credit were the activities mentioned that most respondents had taken trainings on in order highest percentages.

Self-reliance projects implementation

Access to social capital enables rural youth to secure resources and opportunities. To understand the dynamics of social capital in the context of rural Nakuru County, this study inquired about rural youth contacts with different organizations working with the youth. Fifty two percent of rural youth had contacts with organizations and 46 % were not involved with any. The respondents mentioned three positive elements that influenced them to be in contact with organizations; Funding support/ credits, information access and Group activities.

Table 2: Projects involved in

	Frequency	Percent
Tree planting	8	5.9
Crop farming/ livestock farming	69	51.1
Bee-keeping	4	3.0
Milk collection and distribution	5	3.7
Table banking	10	7.4
Boda-boda transport	7	5.2
Savings scheme / table banking	9	6.7
Others	23	17.0
Total	135	100.0

The findings of the study showed the degree of their participation in SRPs greatly varied based on the type of projects they were engaged in. On the type of the projects, a high percentage of the respondents (97%) mentioned that they were involved in diverse types of self-reliance projects.

As indicated in table 2, a majority of the youths representing 51.1% were involved in crop farming/livestock farming. The project with least youth involvement was bee keeping; only 3.0% of the youths were involved in this project. A significant number of the youths were involved in table banking (7.4%) and savings scheme (6.7%). Some of the youths were also involved in a myriad of other projects such as community development, milk collection and distribution, peace building, dip management, fish farming, etc.

The majority of the respondents, 82 (59.4%) indicated that most the projects were implemented through groups. However a good number of the youth (52) or 37.7% still implemented their projects individually. When asked about who selected the project being implemented, majority of the youths, 60.2%, claimed that the individual groups/CBO did the selection, 18% said that the projects were selected by youth development staff while 7% said the projects were selected by contact organization. It is worth noting that a significant 14.8% of the youths did not know who selected the project being implemented. This is shown in Table 3;

Table 3: Who selected project being implemented

	Frequency	Percent
Our group/ CBO	77	60.2
Youth development staff	23	18.0
Contact organization	9	7.0
Don't know	19	14.8
Total	128	100.0

Similarly 85 of respondents or 63.9 %, according to the study said that farming activities were the main source of their incomes. The rest indicated that their main sources of income was from running small business, Crafts and tailoring, hawking and Boda-boda transport activities. It is also evident from the study that a good number of rural youth were engaged in boda-boda transport, savings and table banking activity as well as tree planting while the rest were involved in other diverse self-reliance activities. A high number of respondents felt that the self reliance projects were either important or very important to them, 63 and 61 respectively out of the 138 respondents interviewed. The rural youth were asked to give an opinion for the effect of their involvement in SRPs. The effect of SRPs on rural youth's livelihood was measured by using a 5-point Likert-type modified scale, with six respective statements regarding the predispositions in rural youth's opinion. The study found that on the involvement of the interviewed youth in self-reliance projects had enabled the respondents to acquire better ways of selecting projects as evident from the study findings as shown in figure 1. Similarly a high percentage of those interviewed either agree (50 %) or strongly (42.6 %) that the projects had enabled them gain leadership skills.

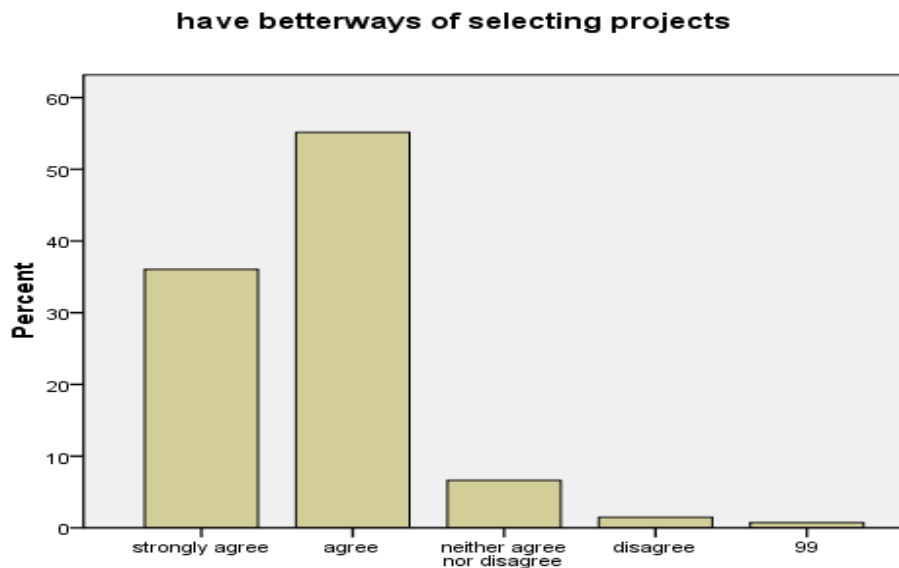


Figure 3: effect of being involved in SRPs in relation to selection of projects (n=138)

When asked if they were expanding their enterprises, a large proportion of the respondents 117 (86.7 %) indicated so and only 13.3 % were not expanding theirs. The interviewees who were expanding their projects as per the study showed increasing the incomes /profits (37.6%), meeting customers' needs (9.8%) and providing for family needs (6.8%) as the main reasons. However other diverse reasons were mentioned as improving living standards, personal satisfaction, increasing farming yields and gaining financial stability among others.

Youth Views on Challenges on Implementing Self-Reliance Projects

Overwhelmingly, the youth were concerned about support in implementing self-reliance projects. The first constraints affecting the implementation of SRPs were majorly lack of resources and capital (62.5%). This was followed by inadequate knowledge and skills (12.5%). The first constraints affecting the implementation of SRPs were majorly lack of resources and capital (62.5%). These included finances, securing loans, availability of funds, terms of accessing funds, long period taken to process loans and strategies of government funding. This was followed by inadequate knowledge and skills (12.5%) where the majority of respondents stated that Lack of relevant skills and inadequate access to information was a major challenge facing youth in implementation of self-reliance projects.

The third most important challenge identified by rural youth is leadership problems 3.9% of responses. Responses in this category included bad leadership, financial mismanagement, group membership composition, illiteracy among group members and project preference.

Table 4: Biggest constraint affecting SRPs

	Frequency	Percent
Inadequate capital	89	70.1
Bad leadership	5	3.9
Lack relevant skills	8	6.3
Time shortage	5	3.9
Low commitment by members	4	3.1
Others	16	12.6
Total	127	100.0

When asked about the biggest constraint, 70.1% of the respondents said that inadequate capital was the biggest constraint. Financial support is often viewed as the single biggest factor in the establishment of income generating activities and self-reliance projects. For rural youth the lack of financial support is often the difference between success and failure. The availability of credit often depends upon collateral and for rural young men and women the lack of collateral is a very real problem. Rural youth find it difficult to get financial support for individual and collective projects. This was followed by 6.3% of the youths who claimed that lack of relevant skills was the biggest constraint. Basic education in the rural areas rarely equips young men and women with the knowledge, skills and attitudes which enable them to achieve their full potential as individuals and as members of society.

Major Challenges faced by those who work with the Rural Youth.

Those who work with youth in the rural areas are often not satisfactorily supported. The problems faced by these workers range from lack of transportation to lack of a clear cut definition of what is expected to be accomplished through programmes for rural youth. The service providers identified the following as the areas of greatest concern to those who work with rural youth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Rural youth identified a total of twenty nine constraints hindering their participation in SRPs. The major ones identified were insufficient funds, inappropriate SRPs, inadequate training, lack of marketing channels, poor road access, and less cooperation from the group members. From the results presented, it can be concluded that; Self-reliance projects are core drivers of positive youth livelihood outcomes; in recent years funding agencies and the Government have been availing starter up funds to the youth groups. However many youth lack adequate knowledge and information on how to access the available capital, particularly those from rural backgrounds; as shown by the study, the rural youth ranked access to group support, new ideas and a sense of self confidence or courage as being more important to their self-reliance projects success; youth livelihood programs must therefore engage and support youth who desire more sustainable livelihood pathways; the challenge for the rural youth self-reliance projects is to determine how to encourage these youth and help them acquire the relevant competencies and resources necessary to enhance their livelihoods and youth livelihood projects can offer similar benefits for participating youth, often introducing them to new support networks and future-oriented peer groups such as sporting activities.

Recommendations

In order to improve prevailing livelihood situation of the studied rural youth, comprehensive initiatives are needed to be taken by the government organizations (GOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the community. The study recommends that in order to enhance the full participation of rural youth in self-reliance projects and improve their wellbeing, the youths should be facilitated to access affordable financial support. Also the government in collaboration with other service providers should build capacity for youths to use available start-up funding programmes efficiently. The following proposed specific measures may increase the effects of SRPs and improve their livelihoods as well as minimize the challenges of rural youth participation in SRPs: youth Service Organizations' and the Government should have opportunities to learn how to develop youth self-reliance projects already existing as part of livelihood development programmes; facilitate need-based education and training that is relevant to youth involvement in SRPs; youth livelihood programs for participating youth,

should often introduce them to new support networks and contacts; encourage Establishment rural youth's self-help groups and develop leadership among rural youth and policy options should be part of an integrated framework that promotes self-reliance projects and livelihoods enhancement. This integrated framework should combine macro-economic policies and targeted strategies addressing entrepreneurship as well as the kind of projects implemented by the youth,

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