

Case Study

MITIGATION FOR YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN VIHIGA COUNTY, KENYA

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Abstract: Unemployment among the youth, especially in Africa, is continuing to pose a serious threat to current and future governments. Most of the countries, Kenya included continuous to grapple with the increasing rate of unemployed youth graduating from secondary level of education and higher institutions of learning. Higher institutions of learning continue to graduate thousands of graduates in different fields each year, with very little jobs created in the economy, that is from both the private and public sectors. This leaves very many graduates at all levels grappling with unemployment, both in the formal and informal sectors.

Keywords: Youth Unemployment, Vihiga County, Policy Analysis, Economic Development, Skill Development

Background of the Study

Unemployment among the youth especially in Africa is continuing to pose a serious threat to current and future governments. Most of the countries, Kenya included continuous to grapple with the increasing rate of unemployed youth graduating from secondary level of education and higher institutions of learning. Higher institutions of learning continue to graduate thousands of graduates in different fields each year with very little jobs created in the economy that is from both the private and public sectors. This leaves very many graduates at all levels grappling with unemployment both in the formal and informal sector.

The term Youth according to United Nations is any person between the age of 15years and twenty-four years but in the Kenyan Context eighteen years to around thirty-five years. (United Nations, 2007a). Each society ranks youth depending on different factors such as culture, politics and education among other factors that define youth and youth unemployment differently. A major concern among policy actors and the society in countries especially in Africa is the rising unemployment among the youth.

Countries and communities vary considerably in their definitions of the youth. From a broader sociological point of view, youth is defined as the transition stage from childhood to adulthood, in which case the age at which this transition begins will vary greatly between societies and indeed within the same society (International Labour Organization, 2006a).

In Vihiga County, an analysis of data from the Kenya Integrated Household Budget Survey report (KIHBS 2015/16), most of the youth have low educational attainments and are employed in the agricultural, transport and other informal sectors within the County. These sectors attract low wages and have little or no access to medical allowance and services. This is attributed to the fact that each year, an increasing number of the young populace graduate from educational institutions thereby necessitating an increase in the creation of employment and income opportunities match the demands of this young group.

With inadequate positions and resources to match these demands, the socio-economic development of the county will be greatly affected with the increase in the youth population. In the Luanda case, the large population of young people will become an asset to the County and Country as a whole. Several mitigations and initiatives aimed at improving the socio-economic opportunities and wellbeing of the young people.

The high unemployment rate has had devastating effects on the behavior and conduct of most youths within the County. Most of them apart from engaging in the boda-boda sector, agriculture and artisanal mining, they sometimes find themselves engaging in criminal activities. The study aims at looking at some of the strategies that can be put in place within the County and Sub-County to help reduce the level of unemployment among the youth.

With over 35% of Kenyan Youth aged between fifteen and thirty-five years remain unemployed (KIPPRA 2024) This is concerning and related efforts are traceable to the Kenyan context as well spanning from sessional paper No. 2 of 1992 on Small Enterprise and Jua Kali Development, Government of Kenya. (1992). This paper acknowledged the micro and small enterprises as the main sources of youth employment in Kenya. It is from where the promotional campaign for vocational trainings, self-employment, and informal sector development emanated. Consequently, this policy is more often cited as the foundational policy for SME focused on employment programs that target the youth in Kenya- while appreciating the role of self-employment in solving the youth unemployment crisis.

STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

This strategy is where by the government or non-government entities offer structured training initiatives tailored towards helping individuals. For instance, in the Kenyan and Vihiga County context, the youth can focus on practical occupation-based learning such as enrolment in technical and vocational training in the local training institutions in order to boost employability, support career advancement and adapt to modern workplace requirements. With skills development in the area of study developed

and improved, there will be continuous growth of the youth thus encouraging lifelong learning and growth of professionalism which will in turn help the youth adapt to new technologies, the new globalization and the shifting industry workplace.

With a large number of youths in the County gaining more skills, the ripple effect will be an economic boost which will create a more competent, productive workforce of individuals who will in turn contribute to national development. In appreciating the issues from the preceding policy initiatives on skills development, the government of Kenya has moved ahead to deliberately focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training reforms. These were actively pursued placing skilling at a central position to the youth unemployment discussion. The Human Capital Theory finds application in these initiatives where for instance, the National Youth Service reforms – building from the traditional paramilitary training of the youth by the government incepted through the NYS Act of 1964, appreciated the inadequacy characteristic that was associated with traditional youth trainings through the program.

As a result, in 2013, the government of the day sought to deliberately transition the NYS trainings from the traditional paramilitary approach, to a youth employment and empowerment agency. Consequently, many youths were recruited into the program. Self-employment and entrepreneurship support was given through environmental conservation initiatives by the government and community service initiatives. Some of the government's infrastructure projects were also deliberately implemented by the NYS trained youth. According to the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs (2018), the enrolment into the NYS program increased from the traditional 6000 to more than 20,000 youth per year as of 2017.

INCENTIVES AND TAX EXEMPTION PROGRAMS

Since a large percentage of youth are engaged in the transport sector, the government can exempt motor cycle imports with a deliberate intent to make them affordably to the Kenyan youth for Boda Boda usage- initiative that has seen over 1.5 million youth relying on this policy product to this date. It is on this foundational premise where the subsequent policies and incentives are discussed

The Youth Enterprise Development Fund (2006) for example became the country's first ever dedicated youth employment funding initiative. Kenya's Vision 2030 (2008), deliberately integrated the youth unemployment agenda into the national industrialization and economic transformation planning. Consequently, employment planning was linked to infrastructure, industrialization, ICT, SME development, manufacturing, and industrialization. This conveniently transitioned the youth unemployment debate from being a social issue to a central strategy to economic development. Over KES 15 billion was reported to have been disbursed to various youth groups to support their startups and entrepreneurial activities as of 2023. Wamalwa et al., (2024)

CONDUCTIVE ENTERPRENEURAL POLICIES

Improved policies targeted at new entrepreneurial business and small and medium micro-enterprises will have a direct impact on youth and employment. Although this approach aligns with Schumpeter's entrepreneurship theory, Scholarly critiques have maintained that entrepreneurship alone cannot feasibly solve the youth unemployment crisis on its own without bearing attention to the rest of the issues surrounding economic growth. The Kenyan government introduced the Access to Government Procurement Opportunities (AGPO) where 30% of the procurement opportunities would be preserved to these vulnerable groups- the youth included; National Treasury of Kenya. (2013). These reforms learnt a little from the preceding Youth Enterprise Development Fund by deliberately seeking to widen the inclusivity net. Thousands of youths accessed opportunities albeit unsustainably as most of the initiatives were on casual and informal arrangements.

Additionally, the Ajira program (2016) was instituted by the ministry of ICT to expand the youth's employment prism into the digital space. This was further augmented by the Presidential Digital talent Program (PDTP) which has been hailed for exposing hundreds of ICT graduates to paid internship opportunities within both government and private institutions. The aim? To enhance employment readiness of graduates. Ajira's program focus on the other hand, was to skill the youth on online works, digital freelancing, digital marketing, and digital entrepreneurship. As of 2019, the program was cited to have successfully exposed over 630,000 youth to digital opportunities with over 1.2 million job opportunities having been created by 2019- (Delberg, 2025). These two endeavors by the government were from the appreciation of Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory which has been successful albeit critiqued for its limited scale of impact.

Through the government's Bottom-Up Transformation Agenda (BETA), the nuggets of the Developmental State Theory can be traced. Where the state makes deliberate efforts to transform its economy. The government's direct investment in housing projects for instance, has created substantial job opportunities for its population. Albeit limited availability of trusted evaluation, the government has hailed the project's success in providing significant employment opportunities to its youth. The program has however received criticisms over its sustainability model. The deliberate government expenditure into the housing program clearly reflects the Keynesian employment theory by Keynes (1936).

DIGITAL EXPANSION

This approach to youth unemployment involves Digital market expansion strategies such as growing your business by reaching new customers through a variety of online platforms, adapting to local cultures, and expanding sales channels beyond your digital space. These approaches help brands connect with audiences worldwide and address challenges unique to international and digital growth. This approach can be achieved through formation of youth groups to help identify ideal customers and clients, tailoring content for each platform to boost engagement and discovery.

According to the Kenya National Digital Master Plan 2022-2032, the State plans to install a hundred thousand high-speed fiber optic infrastructure to provide internet to all schools, government institutions and offices, metro-cities, health facilities, rural businesses, homes and public spaces in order to boost digital economy. This was also to help establish 25,000 internet hotspots across the country to provide internet services to innovators, youth and entrepreneurs among other mechanisms, to boost digital expansion and job creation.

CONCLUSION

Unemployment among the youth in Kenya and specifically Vihiga County, remains a key concern among the policy makers today. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), by 2005, the number of unemployed youths worldwide had increased steadily to approximately 85 million, and approximately 2 million had given up searching for jobs. The ILO report further highlights that youth are three times less likely to be employed compared to adults. Furthermore, unemployed youth make up 44 percent of the unemployed worldwide (United Nations, 2007a)

Whereas demographic pressures have contributed to the situation immensely, incoherent policies can only shift the blame. From the conducted case studies, policies that have previously proven to be ineffective have been reinvented in different clothes in countries like Kenya for instance. A normatively objective approach would otherwise seek to maintain the good policy intent through handling the raised governance concerns. Deliberate efforts are therefore called for by the respective policy makers to intentionally adopt a comprehensive multi-faceted approach in their quest to address this ever-growing menace of youth unemployment and best mitigate solutions put in use.

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