



**HOME-GROWN SOLUTION TO COMBAT YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN KENYA THROUGH BLENDING THE
COMMUNITY SERVICE WITH YOUTH POLYTECHNIC PROGRAMMES**

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ABSTRACT

Kenyan youth like in the rest of Africa and developing countries, face two significant challenges namely – lack of skills and lack of financial resources, which are vital attributes to make one either self-reliant or employable in public or private sector. In fact, possession of relevant skills equips one to be self-employed or even generate jobs for others, for instance, through Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The objective of this study was to explore home-grown solution to combat youth unemployment in Kenya through blending the community service with youth polytechnic programmes. In this regard, the study identified various home-grown solutions strategies. The study concluded that youth among other investors play a significant role in the realization of the ‘Big Four Agenda’.

Key Words: Youth Unemployment, Community Service, Kenya

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INTRODUCTION

Studies show that possession of requisite skills enable the youth to engage in self-employment that can assure them of a reasonable income and also facilitate the provision of basic goods and/or services to the rural communities. Hence providing training to the youth goes a long way in increasing the youth’s productivity and wealth creation which in turn helps to alleviate poverty in our society. Indeed, one of the important exit routes of poverty

is acquisition of appropriate skills and especially where it improves the quality of labor.

Second, the youth face the challenge of accessing capital to do business and thus reduce the opportunities for self-reliance. Studies conducted on youth polytechnic graduates indicated that most of the graduates from polytechnics and other TVET institutions had no access to the loan/credit schemes and consequently had a poor capital base. Further, the acquisition of business/trade licenses was also found to be hampered by various obstacles

that included lack of resources. These inadequacies have had negative influences on the ability and capacity of some technical/youth polytechnic graduates to enter into productive self-employment.

Problem Statement

Every year over 500,000 youth leave basic and post-basic education and seek access to further education and training in order to access gainful employment. Statistics show that the trend of those leaving Form Four have been increasing. For example, in the years 2015, 2016 and 2017, the Form Four School Leavers have been 521240, 571161 and 610501 respectively, denoting an upward trajectory as shown in the table below. In the same years, only 17.5 per cent; 14.2 per cent; and 11.48 per cent of the Form IV School leavers were absorbed in universities. Further, a total of 10,935 of the Form IV School Leavers were absorbed in either National Polytechnics, Technical Vocational Colleges or Vocational Training Colleges (Youth Polytechnics) in 2015; a total of 49,242 was absorbed in the same institutions in 2016; and a total of 72,583 in 2017. This shows an increasing trend in the provision of technical and vocational training. However, most Form 1V School Leavers

are excluded from the formal education. As highlighted in the table, an assessment of the three years shows that a total of 102,345, 130,171 and 142,656 Form Four School Leavers were absorbed in either Universities, National Polytechnics, Technical Vocational Colleges or Vocational Training Colleges (Youth Polytechnics) respectively. This left a total of 418,895 School Leavers in 2015, a total of 440,990 School leavers in 2016 and a total of 467,845 School Leavers in 2017 excluded from the formal schooling.

From the above analysis, it can be inferred that majority of the youth (about 500,000) are excluded from accessing further education and training, making them unprepared for either employment or self-employment. In fact, it is this group that faced high levels of unemployment, poverty and inequality rendering them vulnerable to anti-social vices and violence. This is supported by the Report on Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence of 2007/08 which identified unemployed and poor youth as both the primary perpetrators and targets of the post-election violence.

Table showing the absorption of Form Four leavers in Universities, National Polytechnics and Technical Vocational Colleges.

Table 1: Absorption of Form Four leavers in Universities, National Polytechnics and Technical Vocational Colleges

Education Data on School Leavers	2015	2016	2017
Form IV School Leavers	521,240	571,161	610,501
Number Absorbed in Universities	91,410	80,929	70,073
Number Absorbed in National Polytechnics	2,721	16,374	11,577
Number Absorbed in Technical Vocational Colleges	4,444	29,428	37,470
Number Absorbed in Vocational Training Colleges (Youth Polytechnics)	3,770	3,440	23,536
Number of Registered Technical vocational Colleges		444	718
Number of Registered Vocational Training Colleges (Youth Polytechnics)	816	845	1,233
Number of Registered National Polytechnics	3	11	11
Not Absorbed	418,895 (80.36%)	440,990 (77.2%)	467,845 (76.6%)

Source: KNBS,2018

Proposed Solution/Restructuring The Youth Polytechnic Programme

The Government has come up with various interventions aimed at addressing the youth

unemployment, inculcation of requisite skills to the youth and providing avenues for the youth to access credit. This concept note narrows down to the Government intervention through training by National Youth Service (NYS) and how this can be blended with youth polytechnics in order to enhance effectiveness and success of youth programs.

Between 2015 and 2017, the NYS was carrying out community service whereby Service/Men/Women passing-out-parade were deployed all over the country and mentor other youth, popularly referred to as cohorts. The number of Service/Men/Women recruited on annual basis had been increased from 5,000 to 20,000. After community service, the S/Men/Women join vocational centers within and outside the Service. Those mentored were paid on a daily basis but substantial amount of money was saved. These cohorts were in groups of 15 and after several months of saving, they could apply for loans and start businesses. This was a commendable venture from the Government.

However, the above program of cohorts could likely favor challenges due to the fact that the concept assumed that all those involved had passion for entrepreneurship. It is also common knowledge that not all start-ups-succeed. I therefore wish to make the following recommendations on restructuring of polytechnic programs in order to make them attractive to the youth:

- Waive school fees in all Youth Polytechnic programmes. The Government should cater for tuition in all polytechnics.
- Every location in Kenya should have at least in Youth Polytechnic depending on its geographical size and demographic figures. This will make it possible for the youth to access the programme on daily basis. This means that beneficiaries of the programme will be day-scholars. This eliminates boarding expenses and other related costs.
- All youth polytechnics should be well staffed with trained instructors, who should be in the

Government payroll. Above all, adequate and appropriate training materials and equipment should be provided.

- Both Entrepreneurship and ICT needs to be taught in the programme as compulsory subjects. Also be included are leadership and national values.
- The training program should be structured in such a manner that learning should take place from Monday to Wednesday. From Thursday to Saturday (1.00pm), students should be involved in community service. This means that the community service program operationalized in the National Youth Service (NYS) should be replicated in Youth Polytechnics. This, therefore, means that the National Government should set aside funds for this purpose. Modalities of operationalizing community service program needs to be designed and agreed upon by both National and County Governments.
- The payment that used to be given to cohorts on daily basis should also be extended to youth polytechnic students for any manual work/community service they undertake. The whole amount should go to compulsory saving scheme. If each student was to earn kshs.400 per full day (Thursday and Friday) and 200 on Saturday, it means that on weekly basis, he/she will have saved kshs.1000. For a year, (52weeks) he/she will have saved kshs.52000. for two years, the student will have saved kshs.104,000. A vibrant financial institution needs to be identified, which offers competitive interest rates to the students' deposits which should be remitted to the bank on monthly basis. This is good money to start a small business. If about 5 students were to join hands, they will have a minimum of ksh.500,000 which can make them acquire a loan, start a business and create more jobs. The starting of SMEs in the rural areas will no doubt lead to broadening of the tax base which translates to collection of more revenue to the Government.

In a situation where a student is not interested in starting a Small and Medium Enterprise, he/she can purchase tools of work and start providing skilled labor which is lacking in most parts of the county. This is a person who can therefore sustain himself/herself.

- Although the program may seem costly in the first place, it will no doubt be very popular among the youth who would not be getting chances of joining university, and other tertiary institutions. The rate of absorption will be almost 100%. As such, rural-urban migration will be curbed, faster economic development will take place in the rural areas as the community service will give priority to feeder roads. Above all, the rate of crime and other social vices will reduce drastically.
- To make the youth polytechnic program more attractive, the Government should make it as a policy that no one should be recruited in the discipline services if he/she has not graduated from the youth polytechnic.
- Youth polytechnics should change names to County Technical Institutes. This will do away with the notion that these institutions are not village polytechnics.
- The training aspect in the program will enhance creativity and innovativeness among the students.
- Due to the fact that all Youth Polytechnics will be connected to the national electricity grid, people living near these institutions will also benefit from this connectivity. This therefore would lead to commencement of industrial revolution in the rural areas.
- Acquisition of skills and capital will lead to smooth implementation of the sustainable development goals and the country's long-term economic blueprint Vision 2030 which is founded on a strong human capital base. Polytechnics will address the shortage of skills

by training the youth and empowering them with the necessary skills to develop the country.

- The program will enhance economic devolution. This will be a plus on the National Government.
- The programme will enhance economic development in the rural areas. The program will also stem rural-urban migration.

Role of the County Governments

Youth polytechnics is a function of County Governments. Various Counties aspire to commence community service and incorporate it with Youth Polytechnics as a way of youth empowerment. An example is Meru and Makeni Counties. To make the program acquire uniformity and national outlook, it is hereby proposed that the programme be handled by both National and County Governments through collaboration and consultation. A taskforce comprising both entities need to be formed in order to thrash out all the issues that could act as a bottleneck towards implementation of the programme.

Linkage with “the big four” economic plan

Empowering Youth, Women and Persons with Disabilities in one of the enablers for “The Big Four” Economic Plan. The highlights of the Big Four Agenda are;

- *Increasing the manufacturing sector's share of GDP from about 9% in 2017 to 15% in 2022.* This will be achieved through interventions that support value additions such as textile - ginning and apparel making which should be focused on the export market. Leather, livestock and agro-processing sectors are other areas that can be exploited to take care of both the local and international market. Youth will appropriate skills and finances will take advantage of this opening.
- *Food and nutrition security for all Kenyans by 2022.* the opportunities available in this sector are small and large-scale farming of staple food (maize, rice and potatoes) and harvest. This also includes post-harvest technologies dealerships

such as hematic bags, cereal drying equipment, grain silos and Aquaculture equipment. Another incentive that could be explored is coordination of irrigated agriculture. Youth will form Agriculture and Education Sector Working Groups.

- *Provision of Universal Health Coverage* - This will give every citizen access to affordable health care by 2022. To begin with, those in the programme need to be registered with NHIF. But at the same time, as hospitals seek to upgrade their standards to serve a larger population, then the provision for medical infrastructure presents itself as another opportunity for investors, youth included. Developing those infrastructures require skills which will be available among the youth.

- *Provision of 500,000 units of Affordable Housing per year.* This is a very big area which youth will exploit while in training and post-training. With the help of their instructors, youth undergoing the program will undertake housing projects in their respective localities. This will be mostly during attachments. Above all, after completion of the trainings, those with skills in masonry, carpentry, joinery, electrical installation, plumbing, painting, upholstery, welding among others, will have a lot of work in this sector.

In conclusion, youth among other investors will play a significant role in the realization of the 'Big Four Agenda'. The fact that the community service, a role envisaged to be played by the youth, will involve developing rural access roads is a big boost to National Development Agenda.

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