

**YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: CHALLENGES OF PROMOTING BUSINESS,
EMPLOYMENT AND RECREATION**

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Abstract

Youth is an important stage both the individual person and society at large. To a society, youth are the potential “everything” that the society wants to be in future, while to the individual person, this is a transitional period from childhood to adulthood. This is a stage when the young are prepared for their future roles in the society. This preparation lies squarely with the society and individual person. As a society, the government of Kenya has been concerned with this issue, and for the last one decade, it has attempted to address it in various ways; among them the establishment of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, introduction of youth fund, creation of employment opportunities, and even including them in decision making processes. The Kenya Vision 2030 talks of promoting equity in power and resource distribution even to the youth and vulnerable groups, and improving livelihoods, and forming responsible, globally competitive and prosperous youth. Whereas we acknowledge that substantial steps have been made, experience, however, shows that the question of youth empowerment in Kenya still has a long way to be realized. Consequently, this paper discusses various challenges affecting the process of youth empowerment by promoting them in business, employment and recreation. It cites both personal and societal challenges and argues that attention to the challenges will speed up the process.

Introduction

This paper discusses the challenges of promoting business, employment and leisure in the attempt to empower youth. In the Kenya National Youth Policy, youth is defined as persons resident in Kenya in the age bracket 15 to 30 years. This takes into account the physical, psychological, cultural, social, biological and political definitions of the term (Ministry of Youth Affairs, MoYA 2006). The aspects considered in this definition imply that youth is not only age, but is recognized so even physically socially, psychologically, culturally and even politically. Youth thus is a special age distinct with its own distinguishing features and characteristics.

Before its application to the youth, the term empowerment has been applied in various disciplines to denote different things. Sociologically, empowerment often addresses members of groups that social discrimination processes have excluded from decision-making processes through - for example - discrimination based on disability, race, ethnicity, religion, or gender or even age. This understanding implies that some group of people, class, gender or even age have been unfair to the other by denying them some opportunities to enjoy or utilize some things in life.

Empowerment then, is the process of obtaining these basic opportunities for marginalized people, either directly by those people, or through the help of non-marginalized others who share their own access to these opportunities. It also includes actively thwarting attempts to deny those opportunities. Empowerment also includes encouraging, and developing the skills for, self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals of the group. This process can be difficult to start and to implement effectively, but there are many examples of empowerment projects which have succeeded. An empowered person is one who has control of the decisions which impact his or her life. Empowering people implies helping them gain the kind of control of their lives that others enjoy.

According to the Wikipedia dictionary, Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other people,

including youth and adults. Youth empowerment by implication indicates that youth as a group, lacks some ability or authority necessary for independent decision making which is needed to propel their lives in the desired direction. Or, that even with independence, some youths have no ability for positive and progressive decision.

In the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment 2007-2015, empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others. It goes on to explain that this enabling conditions fall into four broad categories: an economic and social base; political will, adequate resource allocation and supportive legal and administrative frameworks; a stable environment of equality, peace and democracy; and access to knowledge, information and skills, and a positive value system.

Youth empowerment thus has to do with instilling a sense of ownership in the efforts to improve their well-being; and building their capacity to realize their aspirations and boost self-motivation. Empowerment of the youth is based on the belief that the youth are the best resource for promoting development and they are agents of change in meeting their own challenges and solving own problems. The youth are empowered when they acknowledge that they can make free choices in life, take action based on their decisions and accept responsibility for the action (MoYA op.cit).

This paper thus discusses the aspect of youth empowerment in relation to business, employment and leisure. The notes that various issues, internal and external affect and individual youth's attempt to make any meaningful progress in these areas.

Youth Empowerment in Kenya

The needs, opportunities and challenges facing the youth are concerns for the whole society. Hence, the Kenya government acknowledges that it is the obligation of the State to ensure that all its citizens are served to their expectation. It should carefully plan and be involved in developing the youth to be responsible and available to contribute to the current and future nation-building efforts (MoYA ibid). Since its independence in 1963, the government has attempted to address the youth issues and tried to put in place various

measures that would ensure they fully realize their potentials. Whereas the colonial government did not consider youth empowerment as an area of concern, the independent government, through an act of parliament in 1964 established the National Youth Service with an objective of training the youth in important national matters such as service in the armed forces, national reconstruction programmes and disaster response.

It can acknowledge that the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) Government has taken a keen interest in youth issues akin to empowering them. When it took power in 2002, the government pledged to support the youth and prepare them for leadership. This pledge was realized when the government established Ministry of Youth affairs and Sports to be in-charge of youth affairs. Through this ministry, the government also initiated Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) in 2006. Among the objectives of YEDF was the facilitation of employment through the Youth Employment Scheme and to provide loans to existing micro-finance institutions (MFIs), registered non-governmental organizations, community based organizations and youth groups in order to empower the youth financially.

The government promised free education once it came to power. In the 2003, primary education was declared Free. Three years later, in 2007, secondary education was also declared tuition free. This move was meant to make education accessible for all regardless of status, while secondary education aimed at garbing the low transition rate from primary to secondary. It is reported that this move towards free and tuition free education resulted into a high enrolment both at primary and secondary level. Besides this free education, the government has expanded tertiary and middle level colleges making it easier for the youth to access professional training. To encourage students to join, the government has also undertaken to offer bursary for the students enrolled in some courses, such as engineering and technology.

On the higher education, there has been some considerable expansion that has seen the public universities rising from one at independence to seven. Private and religiously sponsored universities have also grown. Generally, there has been some positive

indication of the government's commitment towards eradicating illiteracy among the youth while at the same time empowering them to undertake various responsibilities.

Another area in which the government has shown commitment to youth empowerment has their inclusion to decision making process and involving them in development projects. Through affirmative policy, youths have been adopted in decision making committees and meetings.

In 2006, the government formulated the National Youth Policy in line with the United Nation's recommendations of "Empowering Youth through National Youth Policies." According to the Director General of UNESCO, at the national level, the process of formulating youth policy has the potential to identify the distinctive needs and concerns of youth and to promote substantial youth participation and integration in the making of our societies (UNESCO, 2004). The National Youth Policy in Kenya has attempted to address various issues affecting the youth such as unemployment, health issues, sports and recreation, among many others. The overall goal of the youth policy is to promote

Youth participation in community and civic affairs and to ensure that youth programmes are youth centred (MoYA 2006). In its Vision 2030, the government identifies youth as among the vulnerable group and thus seeks to enhance promote equity in power and resource distribution, improved livelihoods for them and mould them into responsible, globally competitive and prosperous youth. In addition, Kenya aims to capitalize on her international reputation as an "athletic superpower" by opening up the country for top global sports events, encouraged by corporate sponsorship (GoK, 2007). Obviously, this is a move meant to secure the future of the Kenya youth while empowering them socially, economically and preparing them leadership.

The government of Kenya also acknowledges the presence of some obstacles such as lack of enough funds to undertake and fulfill her commitment to improve the life of the youth as well as empowering them into responsible citizens. Nonetheless, the above mentioned are just but some of the areas to show the role of the government in youth empowerment. These efforts, however, cannot be fulfilled without youth themselves accepting the

change and being involved in it. As Youth Agenda (2000) asserts, the changes cannot begin to take place unless young people, individually, re-examine and re-dedicate themselves to a number of shared values. For the government to realize her objectives, the youth need to take the centre stage.

Challenges Affecting Promotion of Business, Employment and Recreation

Employment

Employment has been defined as an activity an individual engages in for pay. Employment has been seen as a way of earning a living for many and it is expected that an individual in a way has to be attached to some form of employment. In Kenya, education has been linked to education in that once an individual completes his formal studies, then he/she has to be absorbed. The situation has somehow changed in that a large number of those completing their studies are ending up being unemployed. For example, while it is estimated that a total of 500 000 graduate enter the labour market annually, the government observes that the economic growth rate has not been sufficient to create enough employment opportunities to absorb the increasing labour force. Only about 25% of youth are absorbed, leaving 75% to bear the burden of unemployment.

Employment creation, particularly formal employment has been a growing problem in Kenya as well as a global one. Many countries, especially developing ones are engaged with a challenge of finding an alternative form of employment instead of relying on white collar jobs. This implies that there is need to look beyond the usual approaches of job creation. Kenya has identified agricultural sector as one of the alternatives and its first priority. Other sectors include *Jua Kali* sectors, small industries, etc.

Business

While formal employment is becoming scarce due growing population and slow economic growth, business is increasingly becoming an alternative employment and poverty reduction strategy. The government identifies this thus; the potential of small-scale industries in both employment creation and raising incomes for many Kenyan families makes them an important element in the poverty reduction strategy (GoK 2001).

Business, both small and middle level are being encouraged. For example, in collaboration with the United Nation Development Programme, Kenya has started training the youth in entrepreneurial skills so that they turn from job seekers to job creators. It is expected that ones the youth are equipped with the necessary entrepreneurial skills, they start their own businesses thus becoming self-employed.

Leisure

Leisure has been defined as all the time activities to which the individual may devote himself voluntarily, whether to rest or to enjoy himself, to increase his knowledge or to develop his non-professional education, his voluntary participation in social affairs or his free creative abilities, when he has finished his social, family and occupational duties (C. Gerardo, 1986). In the Dakar conference (2001) youths resolved that Sports and leisure activities allow individuals to manage their free time without constraints. Even in difficult situations, these activities give young people the opportunity to entertain themselves, to relax, to play, and to find cultural enrichment. Furthermore, sports and leisure activities give young people the possibility of self-expression, personal fulfillment, and personal development as an individual and as a member of a group. In addition, sports and leisure activities can raise awareness in young people that can inspire them to contribute to the improvement of their living conditions through volunteerism.

The government of Kenya (MoYA 2006) points out that Sports and recreation facilities provide the youth with an opportunity to socialize and spend their time productively, strengthening and developing their character and talents. It however acknowledges that such facilities are scarce and, where they exist, they are sometimes not accessible to the youth.

If follows from these explanations that leisure is not just a time out work, but a time to be utilized for self development. It is a time which also need some accountability and not for idling. As Gerardo (op.cit) further advice, not everything done outside of one's work and family duties, in other words during one's free time, can be called a leisure activity. To qualify as leisure, its purpose must be one of the following: relaxation or rest, entertainment or cultural development, exercise of some creative ability or social

intercourse. Such activities must be freely exercised without any pressure or obligation imposed by others; they also require certain involvement such as choice and decision.

Challenges Facing the Youth Empowerment Process

Poor attitude

Attitude plays a central role in an individual's approach and way of doing things. Attitude has to do with one's approach towards things. It is a complex mental state involving beliefs and feelings and values and dispositions to act in certain ways (wordnetweb). Attitude leads one to be selective in what to do and not to do. It is a driving force that enables one to either effectively undertake a given duty or not to.

In terms of the youth's approach to business, employment and leisure, attitude plays a big role and it can explain why some youths are employed and others not, why some use their leisure time effectively and other not, and even why some have positively ventured into business and succeeded despite having good qualifications. It is generally explained that the youth, especially the educated ones have a negative attitude towards informal employment as they associate it with the uneducated. On the other side, leisure time has been misunderstood to mean free time and hence not to be effectively utilized. Some have even gone as far as engaging into negative things as drug abuse and others.

Lack of appropriate skills and education

Kenya has moved from one education system to the other the aim of adopting a system that will be most appropriate to its situation; and indeed, the usefulness of any system must be measured in terms of its workability. Workability has to be in terms of how suitable it is in solving local problems. In solving local problems, it is implied the effectiveness of the system in training and preparing the citizens in suit and be absorbed in the available job openings. For example, the current 8-4-4 system of education was geared to imparting appropriate skills to enhance self-employment. MoYA (2006) however observes that the 8-4-4 education system and tertiary training institutions continue to release thousands of graduates, who are neither properly equipped for entry into the labour market nor possess the necessary life skills.

Furthermore, the youth cannot exploit career, business and education opportunities available because they lack access to ICT, due to unavailability especially in rural areas, and high costs (ibid).

Corruption

Youth Agenda (2002) observes that corruption in Kenya's public has become a disease. It has damaged our economy and reduces our development potential. It has damaged the country's image as a place where international financial and social investment can take place. Through corruption, most public funds have been diverted, jobs have been awarded on tribal and political basis instead of considering meritocracy. Qualifications have not been rewarded thus making the those who merit and who can propel this country into the next level being pushed to the background. As most of the youth have the necessary qualifications, they are the most affected with corruption. Corruption has even extended to social life where the few enjoy and make use of the public social amenities while the majority are left to suffer.

Lack of resource

Resource Constraints: Most of the youth programmes, run by both the Government and non-governmental agencies lack adequate funds and equipment, which limits their success (MoYA 2006). Youths need resources to start their own businesses, to create employment and even to effectively utilize their leisure.

Competition

Competition is associated with business establishment as an alternative for employment. Generally, the older and most established people in business have been a challenge to the young and upcoming people. Since the youth do not have enough resources, they can not withstand stiff competition from the well established hence hampering their effort towards self fulfillment.

Poor governance

Poor governance has been blamed for corruption, incompetence and growing ethnicity in Kenya. It has also led to the growing lawlessness and even fear. Where there is poor governance, people do not thrive well as there is always fear of unknown as it directly touches on one's security. Poor government has been blamed for the failing structures in

the government hence which have also seen the failure to uphold rule of law. This has affected individual's lives as well as demotivating them.

Conflict

Conflict has characterized social, political and even religious life in Kenya. For instance, since the introduction of multiparty politics in Kenya, every election time has seen an eruption of some violence due to political differences. There has been unending conflicts between pastoralist communities especially over grazing fields as well as cultural practices of cattle rustling. Tribal conflicts have also defined Kenyan life and some have resulted into serious fights over borders and resources. Even within the government, there has been unending conflict between leaders from different political parties and who have differing political ideologies.

Generally, where there is conflict, people have no time to settle and engage into productive activities. Political and tribal conflicts have resulted to the displacement of people hence destabilizing life flow. The youth have not been spared and some time they have found themselves at the centre. This implies that conflicts in Kenya have affected the process of youth empowerment especially in business and employment. During the 2007 post election conflict, properties worthy millions of shillings were destroyed and businesses, some belonging to the youths were destroyed. This was a drawback to the struggling youth.

Towards Effective Youth Empowerment

Youth cannot effectively utilize their leisure time and unleash their potentials without proper orientation to live and support. The process of their empowerment in the areas of business, employment and leisure needs a concerted effort from the government, family and youth themselves for it to be successful. C. Gerardo (op.cit) summarizes the case for leisure thus; since free time is essential for rest and for the development of the personality,...we should not only be aware of what is it but also be ready to use it, and use it effectively whenever we have the opportunity – in other words, sensibly, rationally and responsibly. This will not be easy unless we have been properly educated to do so; otherwise free time means nothing but idleness, inactive and boredom. The implication of

this is that the youth cannot manage their affairs solely without the support of the entire society.

The State is the leading agent in supporting the implementation of the youth. Through the ministry of youth affairs, the government need to facilitate the establishment of resource centres at the community level where the youth can get information, training, recreation and counseling on employment creation. The existing centres, which are no longer effective, need to be made fully operational at the same time, the government need to make a Review of employment and training policies to encourage companies to offer temporary employment the youth so that gain some capital base to start their own business. Furthermore, internship and volunteer opportunities to the youth should be generated to give them the experience they require to be competitive on the job market.

The family, comprising of parents and guardians, has the responsibility of providing strong family ties inherited from our traditional societies, which called for mutual respect between the various age groups which have really weakened. As a result, signs of rebellion are visible among a number of youths (MoYA, op.cit). The family needs to provide conducive atmosphere and encourage the youth towards positive living. Besides, support has to extend in relation to provision of school fees and appropriate advice in career life. Issues such drug abuse arises due to lack of proper care and irresponsibility from the parents, it is thus also necessary that parents closely watch over the movements of the youth to avoid any eventuality.

Lastly, the youth should understand that life is in their hands. The efforts of the government and parents cannot bear fruits without commitment from them. Youths need to cultivate positive attitude towards life. They need to take advantage of available education and training opportunities; Develop a positive attitude towards work; Take responsible charge of their lives for them to be empowered.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the challenges of empowering the youth in business, employment and leisure. The started by highlighting the government's role and effort towards youth empowerment. The acknowledged the effort from the government, but pointed out that both internal and external challenges affect the process. In respect this, some challenges were discussed and concluded that for realization this task, there should be some concerted effort from the government, family and youths towards providing conducive atmosphere.



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