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Research Article

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ON PERFORMANCE OF YOUTH OWNED ENTERPRISES, IMENTI NORTH SUB COUNTY, MERU

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ABSTRACT

This paper is on influence of youth empowerment on performance of youth owned enterprises in Imenti North Sub County, Meru. Three study questions guided the study. Literature review focused on call for adequate youth empowerment to enhance performance of youth owned enterprises in Kenya and internationally. The study also focused on the variables that influence the performance of the youth owned enterprises which include intrapersonal empowerment, behavioural empowerment and interactive empowerment. The study used the descriptive survey design. The target population for the study was 560 comprising of 110 agriculture enterprises, 210 trade enterprises, 240 services enterprises from the department of trade, Meru County. The sample size of 233 youth owned enterprises was selected from the target population. Based on the findings the following conclusions were made: majority of the youth were motivated to form their enterprise by the desire to create wealth and as a form of employment. Youths also possess high entrepreneurial skill for management of enterprises attributed by education and training in management skills. However, youth still needed more training and development on management skills. The study also concluded that youth owned enterprises should conduct frequent assessment to improved performance of their enterprises and that most enterprises should conduct benchmarking to acquire new ideas to help boost performance of their enterprises. The study revealed that effective leadership practices were enhanced which encouraged goals setting and motivation. In addition, leadership also enhanced provision of enthusiasm and creative encouragement. The study concluded that adult mentorship, impacted on the success of enterprise and that resources provided by adults, contributed to success and delivering of set goals of youth owned enterprise. The study also concludes that youths networked and it impacted positively on their business activities with majority rating at average level but very useful. The study established that most youth owned enterprises had borrowed loan maybe for expansion purposes, or for financing activities of the business. Also the study revealed that youth owned enterprises faced competition especially from other youth owned enterprises when carrying out their business activities. The study concludes that location of the enterprise is a contributor to good performance of youth owned enterprises. The researcher also concludes that availability of customers, influence performance of youth owned enterprises. This study also concludes pricing or costing of various products and or services influence performance of youth owned enterprises.

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INTRODUCTION

Youth are defined in context of and depending on the social, cultural, political and economic environment. According to Durham, Deborah (2013), the concept of youth is a social shifter, it is a relational concept situated in a dynamic context, a social landscape of power, knowledge, rights, and cultural notions of agency and personhood. The African Union (AU) considers youth as those persons between the age of 15 and 34 years.

Youth in any society are known as the leaders of tomorrow. They play a crucial role in the prospect matters of development and it's relevant to include them in all national development plans and programmes of the nation. The youth power to drive global development was recognized by member states of the United Nations (UN) in 1965 when they endorsed the declaration on the promotion among youth of the ideals of mutual respect, peace and understanding between peoples (United Nations, 2007).

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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 (Vavrus & Fletcher, 2016).

Members of youth groups in Kenya are among the economically vulnerable people that require finance to deal with the twin challenge of poverty and unemployment major disempowering factor the poor. It was for this reason, the government of Kenya in 2006 recognized the value of credit and financial services to the poor youth in enabling them invest in activities that generate income to meet their social and economic obligations and established Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF). The youth represents an important segment of Kenya's population. The number has almost tripled from 4.94 million in 1979 to 15 million in 2016. It is projected that Kenya's population will be 52.56 million by 2020, 59.06 million by 2025 and 65.93 million by 2030. It is expected that youth will constitute 34.79 per cent in 2020, 34.55 per cent in 2025 and 35.18 per cent in 2030 (Omolo, 2012).

Ryan, (2013) as quoted in Irene, (2009) observes that within the framework of potential efforts and strategies to boost employment and job creation for young people, entrepreneurship is increasingly accepted as an important means and a useful alternative for income generation among young people.

Small enterprises in Kenya cut across all sectors of the economy and provide one of the main sources of employment and generate widespread economic benefits (GoK, 2015). According to the economic survey of 2003, the Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) sector accounted for 74.2 percent of the total persons engaged in employment and contributed up to 18.4 percent of the country's GDP in 2003. Further the Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation 2003-2007 recognised the need to establish and maintain a conducive environment for the growth and transformation of SMEs into medium sized enterprises that have capacity to create more employment opportunities (GoK, 2015). Since then, the GoK has embarked on a long term development strategy-Kenya Vision 2030. The first medium term plan-2008-2012 prioritise faster job creation among others.

Given the importance of small business to the people and their economies in the developing countries, research effort should be directed towards understanding the factors that foster the creation and growth of successful small business activities among youths in these regions. In this study, the researcher sought to better understand the concept of youth employment and income generation through empowerment in youth owned enterprise development in the context of Imenti North sub county, Meru.

Statement of the problem

With more and more youth entering the job market from learning institutions, there is need to ensure that they can get decent jobs; whether in the formal or informal sector. According to study research, young people aged between 16-30 years have potential to become entrepreneurs and own enterprises but only 5% do so (Youth business International,

2013). Njonjo (2010) posit that in Kenya today, businesses employing between 1 to 99 people account for about 48 percent of all businesses the with a majority of these being managed or owned by the young people (25-34 years). Unfortunately, three out of five of these businesses have been found to fail within the first three years of operation and those that continue, 80 percent fail before the fifth year (Government of Kenya, 2007). Generally there has been efforts in Kenya to increase the proportion of youths owned enterprises through affirmative action like establishment of Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) in 2007, the ambitious budget of 2013/2014 that introduced the ambitious Uwezo fund and the presidential directive of thirty (30) percent access to government procurement opportunities to youth, women and persons with disabilities (GOK, 2013). This has been found not to have achieved much. Despite all these interventions by the government and private sector to boost the performance of SME sector, Wanjohi (2010) states that, the youth enterprises have not been performing as expected. Majority of the research conducted have focused on other factors influencing the performance of small and medium enterprises in general such as youth enterprises development fund, constituency development fund. It was important to carry out a study that encompasses how youth empowerment influences performance of youth owned enterprises. No such study has been carried out in Imenti North Sub-County, which implies the proposed study is necessary and will be of value to the corpus of literature on performance of youth owned enterprises.

Objectives of the study

This study was guided by one main objective, to examine the influence of youth empowerment on the performance of youth owned enterprises in Imenti North Sub County, Meru and guided by specific objectives:

- i. To investigate influence of intrapersonal empowerment on the performance of youth owned enterprises in Imenti North Sub County, Meru.
- ii. To find out the influence of behavioural empowerment on the performance of youth owned enterprises in Imenti North Sub County, Meru.
- iii. To examine the influence of interactive empowerment on the performance of youth owned enterprises in Imenti North Sub County, Meru.

Keywords

Behavioural empowerment: is a psychological empowerment which includes actions that address needs in a specific context. It might range from individuals adjusting to adverse conditions that are not malleable to change, to working with others in a voluntary organization to alter the distribution of community resources.

Intrapersonal Empowerment: is a psychological process in which individuals think positively about their ability to make change and gain mastery over issues at individual and social levels. This includes the notion of self efficacy, perceptions of competence, personal control and positive self-image.

Interactional empowerment: is a component of psychological empowerment that assesses how people understand and relate to their social environment. It addresses one's ability to

develop a critical understanding of the forces that shape their environment and knowledge of the resources required and methods to access those resources to produce social change.

Youth owned Enterprises: it refers to businesses that are developed and are operated by people aged between 18 years and 34 years.

Literature Review

Specific Variables Influencing Performance of Youth Owned Enterprises

The study reviewed both theoretical and empirical literature based on the themes of intrapersonal empowerment, behavioural empowerment and interactive empowerment.

Intrapersonal Empowerment

Encarta Dictionary (2007) defines empowerment as that act of giving somebody a greater sense of confidence or self-esteem to perform perfectly well. To add, Larson and Wood (2016) argue that the more skills youth have, the high confident they have in themselves and in accomplishing tasks. Therefore, youth empowering benefits them in gaining skills, competence, and self-confidence.

Increasing youth empowerment enhances youth to gain a sense of contribution as well as sense of ownership in the performance of their enterprises. When youth are taught adequate skills they gain high confident and improves their abilities. As they learn and benefit in such ways, youth are more engaged in their enterprise activities. Youth provided with the opportunity to be part of the every decision making process and activities, became more engaged in their program and also in their communities (Zeldin, 2014). Youth benefit for development from the type of programs they are engaged in and also enhance a leadership role (Hansen and Larson, 2007).

Illo (2007) affirmed that leadership is earned. We need to change our poor attitude toward self improvement and personal empowerment. Obijole (2014) observed that many youths these days spend more time on social networks chatting while their education suffers. Many graduates also do nothing to improve their own lives after school, feeling that being graduates automatically qualifies them for well paying jobs.

As youth are empowered by adult leaders, it is important that youth are given the opportunity to exercise their power. Thus, youth participation is an exercise of power (Rakesh, 2011). Youth participation involves adults recognizing and nurturing the strengths, interests, and abilities of youth and giving young people the opportunity to make decisions and see results at the individual and systematic levels as a result of those decisions (Gurstein, Lovato, & Ross, 2013). Participation is maximized when young people are able to be central to decisions that influence their lives and take actions on the issues youth care about most (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2012).

Larson & Walker (2015) suggest that there exist a multiple ways that the adults can aid youth reach their goals and yet still enabling them to achieve ownership of their own enterprises. Some of suggestions made for adults given to help the youth are; breaking down the goals into individual smaller tasks; directing the attention of the youth to clues and suggestions; modelling the youth behaviours or providing words for a context that youth may encounter; motivational support to

encourage the youth; guiding youth away from frustrating situations and challenging youth to the next level.

Behavioural empowerment

The behavioural empowerment includes actions that address needs in a specific context. Depending upon the context, empowering behaviours might range from individuals adjusting to adverse conditions that are not malleable to change, to working with others in a voluntary organization to alter the distribution of community resources, (Zimmerman 2015).

Olatunji (2015) believed that it is what we need to develop in our young people. Our task is to become effective leaders ourselves and train our youth to become leaders.

Pancer, Rose-Krasnor and Loiselle, (2012), argue that youth engagement is the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of a young person in an activity that has a focus outside him or herself. A person is seen fully engaged when impacted behaviourally, affectively, and cognitively. The behavioural component is doing the activity, the affective component is the pleasure derived from the activity and the cognitive component knows about the activity. These three components are influenced through the operation of various initiating factors whereby these factors can be divided into two levels: individual and systems. Individual factors consist of interactions with parent, adult advisors, peers, and intrinsic characteristics e.g. confidence, self-esteem, etc. At the individual level, engagement is sustained when youth have positive and supportive social experiences. These characteristics are largely based upon individual characteristics that programmers and practitioners have little control over, especially in the design of a program. We should focus youth at the degree of engagement based on systematic factors of voice empowerment, and participation. These are factors that practitioners and program designers have control over in developing programs with strong youth-adult partnerships.

Relationships are dynamic, prompting the development of sophisticated longitudinal models to explore how relationships form and how they influence behaviour over time (Snijders *et al.* 2010; Veenstra *et al.* 2013).

Similarly, Long *et al.* (2014) used longitudinal social network analysis to examine the influence of friends' recycling and littering behaviour on youth own behaviours within the context of a school-based members with roughly equal power over resources. These measures provide concrete setting-level diagnostics of empowerment that can be compared across context. Moreover, they can be used to delineate points of intervention where relationships can be created to turn disempowering settings into empowering ones.

Interactive Empowerment

The interactional empowerment assesses how people understand and relate to their social environment. Interactional characteristics address one's ability to develop a critical understanding of the forces that shape their environment and knowledge of the resources required and methods to access those resources to produce social change. Interactional characteristics include the role of collectives in community life, problem solving, and critical awareness (Kieffer, 2014) Northouse, (2007) argue that youth empowerment requires youth- adult mentorship. Power can be achieved by a person's

position or personal attributes. Initially power in youth organisation is given to an adult based upon their position as the adult leader. Due to the nature of youth organizations, adults are considered assigned leaders based on their position as the adult. Being the adult is one seen by youth as an adult's status as leader of the group based upon societal views of adult-youth relationships. With the title of leader, there is an unspoken amount of power that is bestowed to the individual holding the title. This power is the authority given to a leader over a group based on their ability to influence the group and their personal attributes such as knowledge, skills, and personality.

Some youth-adult partnerships do not go beyond giving youth a chance to voice their opinions, thus giving youth little more than a sounding box capable of bringing considerable clamour but without the means to make change. The purpose of partnerships among the youth is to incorporate youth voice, youth empowerment, and youth participation. When these tenets of the youth programs are incorporated, they challenge the traditional roles of treating youth as recipients of youth services and products by inviting them to the table in order to explore new roles as partners in building communities (Carlson, 2014).

However, Adult are able to accomplish advisory objectives by providing and exposing youth to opportunities in order to gain skills and benefits in maximum development. In addition, programmers and practitioners enable the youths to be in control of their development and thus they benefit from such opportunities (Larson & Wood, 2016). More so, as the young people are enabled to engage in various programs with greater levels of voice, empowerment, and participation, they are most likely to become involved actively in the program. To expose the youth to more opportunities to benefit developmentally youth should be engaged at the higher level of factors. Segregation mostly leads the youth to adults thinking whereby they know best and have the power to act on what they know without taking account of youths' views. Youth can also be the experts like the adults who often are more experienced and knowledgeable about their schools, their community, and other aspects of their environment. This enables the youth to be empowered to help them ensure that the perspectives of youth are heard and acknowledged (Gurstein, Lovato, Ross, 2013).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive research design. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) descriptive research is a process of collecting data in order to answer questions concerning the current status of the subjects in the study. The study attempted to describe what exists in terms of practices, trends, attitudes and beliefs among youth owned enterprise in Imenti North Sub County, Meru.

Target Population

The target population of the study was obtained from the department of trade in Meru County whereby the researcher obtained 560 enterprises which are fully registered with the county government of Meru for Imenti North Sub County.

Sample size and Sampling Procedure

From the population a stratified random sampling technique was employed to select the youth enterprises for the study. According to Mugenda and Mugenda, (2013) suggest that stratified random sampling technique ensures small subgroups called strata are represented, mostly as proportional to the sections of population. The divided population into strata, is then selected randomly only within strata. This means that out of the total population of 560 youth owned enterprises from department of trade, Meru County, 233 youth enterprises were sampled. The sample size was reached to 233 youth enterprises using Yamane (1967) simplified formula.

Research Instrument

The study used questionnaires consisting of both closed ended and open ended questions. According to Dornyei, Zoltan (2009) the questionnaire is a fast way of obtaining data as compared to other instruments. The questionnaires were randomly administered to 233 of the respondents from the sample population.

Validity of the Research Instrument

This is the degree to which results obtained from the analysis of the data actually represent the phenomenon under study (Mugenda and Mugenda, 2013). The researcher discussed the contents of the questionnaire with the University Supervisor on the relevance of the questions to the topic under study

Reliability of the Research Instrument

According to Best and Khan (2011), reliability of research instruments is the degree of consistency that the instrument or procedure of measurement demonstrates. The reliability of the instrument was estimated through a repeated measurement of split half method.

Method of data Collection

The researcher personally delivered the questionnaires to the respondent and picked them later. Other questionnaires were responded to in the presence of the researcher. The researcher also got an authorization letter to present to the respondent explaining the reasons and intentions of the study.

Data analysis Method

Data collected was edited for consistency and then coded for easy entry and analysis. Statistical Packaged for Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 21 was used to process quantitative data using descriptive statistics. This enabled the researcher to achieve statistical measures such as correlation between the variables, their mean, standard deviation which helped the researcher to come up with inferences about the topic under study. Descriptive statistics was then presented using frequency table, proportions and percentages.

Data Analysis, Presentation and Interpretation

The study results revealed that out of the 233 questionnaires administered 185 had credible information for analysis. This was a response rate of 79% which the researcher considered adequate and representative to make conclusions about the study. This response rate conforms to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) stipulation that a response rate of 70% and over is excellent for analysis and reporting. The study revealed that majority of youths at 47.0% of the respondents fell under the

age group 23 – 27. More males at 52.4% of the respondents owned enterprises than female respondents who were represented by 47.6%. Majority of the respondents at 35.7% had Tertiary/College education.

The study established that many of the youth who owned enterprises were married as represented by 59.5% of the respondents. Most of the enterprise had been established 3 – 6 years ago represented by 50.8% of the respondents. Majority of the respondents (29.8%) operated Trade type of enterprise. The study revealed that majority were motivated towards formation of the enterprises they owned was wealth creation and as a form of employment represented by 57.8% of the respondents. The study also revealed that 35.7% of the respondents rated their entrepreneurial skill for management as high. The study established that 83.2% of the respondents needed more training and development on management skills. Most of the respondents agreed that self-drive and esteem contributed highly to enterprise performance as shown by mean of 1.5 with a 95% representation of the respondents. The study established that 56.8% of the respondents indicated that they practiced participatory/democratic leadership skill to help them manage their enterprise so as to perform effectively. The study results established that the percentage of cases at 143.8% of the respondents indicated that the effective leadership practices which were enhanced were goals setting and motivating the team to achieve these goals. The study also established that 96.8% of the respondents indicated that youths could do well if mentored. The study established that 77% of the respondents started their business themselves without any employees. The study established that 82% of the respondents had borrowed for expansion or finance purposes. Also the study revealed that a massive 98% indicated that they faced competition when carrying out their business activities. It was found out that, half of the respondents (50%) indicated that they made profits per month which was less than Ksh.30,000. From the results, it is evident that a significant number of respondents at 40% were of the opinion that their business performed averagely.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The study found out that majority of the youth was motivated to form their enterprise by the desire to create wealth and as a form of employment. This could partly be due to lack of formal employment hence needed to create their own jobs. The Government of Kenya should therefore come up with more youth friendly policies that will encourage them to venture in the blue economy and engage in economic activities. Despite the highly rate on entrepreneurial skills for management, most of youths felt that they needed to be trained more on management of enterprises. Lack of training is one of the reasons for the continued of high failure rates of small enterprises, with up to 80 percent of new business collapsing within their first three years of operation. It is therefore necessary to increase number of training to be done to acquire more skills and more experience.

The study also revealed that youth owned enterprises should conducted frequent assessment and conduct benchmarking to acquire new ideas that should lead to improved performance of their enterprises. Youth entrepreneurs should therefore look beyond their own industry to get better performance on particular processes or functions through benchmarking which

is a challenge to youth enterprises to rethink long-standing practices.

The study results established that effective leadership practices were enhanced which encouraged goals setting and motivation of the team to achieve goals by communicating effectively, recognizing the developmental requirements of the team members as well as modelling acceptable behaviour. Leadership enhanced provision of enthusiasm and creative encouragement. Hence, effective leadership should be driven towards a mission that everyone can rally behind. They should therefore, help to motivate and grow employee, move the business forward, create loyal customers and inspire other to become great. The study established that success of youth enterprises had greatly improved within the previous five years. The study revealed that youth were not provided with business mentorship and they could do well if mentored. Since adult mentorship impacted to success of enterprise it is necessary for youth to get good experienced mentors who will help in evaluating ideas and thoughts on major business decisions, learning business lessons from the mentor's knowledge and experience as well as gaining from the personal successes of the mentor. It may be that most youth enterprises fail since they do not get qualified opinion from people who have experience. This failure could be associated to wasted time and making uninformed decisions that are detrimental to any business.

The study established that resources provided by adults contributed to success of youth owned enterprise. In addition, availability of resources enhanced enterprises to successfully deliver the set goals. The study also concludes that youth networked with other youth owned enterprises impacted positively on their business activities with majority rating level of networking among the youth owned enterprises as average but very useful. Youth enterprises should encourage networking since it is an effective low-cost marketing method that helps generate sales opportunities and contacts through referrals and introduction, or by other contact methods such as phone, email, and so on.

The study established that most youth owned enterprises had borrowed loan maybe for expansion purposes, or for financing activities of the business. Access to loans can have a significant positive effect on growth of youth enterprises and therefore the government should try hard to meet the credit needs of these enterprises. Youth entrepreneurs face a lot of challenges in accessing finances to inject in their business both as startup, seed capital and finance expansion of the businesses.

Also the study revealed that youth owned enterprises faced competition especially for other youth owned enterprises when carrying out their business activities. Thus youth entrepreneurs should be motivated start businesses in diverse sectors to solve issue of many youth operating same line enterprises to avoid competition from them. Government should also consider giving youth enterprises incentives like tax relief and holiday so that they can compete effectively.

The study concludes that location of the enterprise is a contributor to good performance of youth enterprises. The environment in which youth locate their enterprises should be supportive in terms of investment friendly government business policies, business regulatory mechanism is efficient, legal parameters are relaxed, bureaucratic system is viable and

efficient, business advice, counseling, mentoring, widely available incubators, widely accessible financing system, vocational training and good infrastructure, the emergence of entrepreneurship is likely to occur. The researcher also concludes that availability of customers influence performance of youths owned enterprises. Sustainable markets for products and services are among factors that could lead to business success. Hence, youth enterprises should invest more on extensive market research in order to know their target market, as well as their market segments.

This study also concludes pricing or costing of various products and or services influence performance of youth owned enterprises. The price that youth enterprises charge for product or service remains one of the most important business decisions they should make. Hence, when youth enterprises set a price that is too high or too low will limit business growth. Setting of prices to charge for products and services should ensure that it allows the business to be profitable while comparing it with ones competitor

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