

The Role of Youth Self-Help Groups in Skill Development in Njoro District, Nakuru County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study was motivated by the emerging need to promote youth empowerment through skill development and enhancing self-reliance. SHGs are proving effective in empowering women and transforming lives and as a result enhancing self-reliance, replicating them among youths could also yield positive results. Documented evidence shows that young people in Kenya are less likely to engage in SHGs and prefer, to go it alone. The government of Kenya has allocated funds to youths who are in groups and it is for this reason that youths are finding it convenient to join groups and access government funds. This study provides an enhanced understanding of youth groups' operations, importance in skill development thus can lead to formulation of a more pragmatic and enabling policy effective for local institutions in designing and implementing local development initiatives. The objective of this study was to provide understanding on the role of Self-Help Groups in terms of skill acquisition and development as an empowerment strategy. Using multistage sampling, twenty seven groups were sampled from registered groups across the area under study and a total of 135 respondents interviewed. Data was collected using structured interviews, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analysed using appropriate descriptive and statistical techniques. The findings of this study indicate that 46% of respondents had acquired relevant vocational skills with only 10% utilizing their skill in relevant field. This study identifies SHGs as pertinent in youth development but largely unutilised in imparting relevant and modern skills among its members it recommends youth SHGs to design programmes that can enable easy access of relevant and modern skills that match modern market demands and technology.

Keywords: community development, empowerment, self help group, vocational skills, youth

INTRODUCTION

Self-Help Group (SHG) is a grass root organization formed by members of the same socio-economic status, usually low-income households having similar objectives, aims and aspirations. They are voluntary associations that ought to function democratically and accountably to achieve a common goal. Members support each other in solving common problems, share resources and find solutions together. All members make decisions in these groups and each member plays a role in the group (Henderson & Thomas, 2005; Agbola, 1998; Biddle & Biddle, 1965). Their main aim is to meet emergency, consumption and production needs through accessibility of credit, stimulating members' entrepreneurship and economic development and gain economic prosperity. These groups are mainly associated with women as they were the main founders (Agbola, 1998; Biddle & Biddle, 1965). However, due to economic repression in developing countries, Self-Help Groups are no longer a domain of women, but we have youths and male adults joining these groups for empowerment purposes. Youth exposure to various economic and social challenges in society makes them a special group with needs that need satisfaction. They are unemployed and belong to the low income

households lack access and ownership of property hence, the need for empowerment. Thus, this study concentrated in bringing into light how these groups affect the social and economic lives of participant through skills acquisition and development.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The introduction of Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) in 2006, *Kazi Kwa Vijana* and National Youth Fund rekindled hope in most youths. Through such initiatives, youths were compelled to form groups as it emerged as the only way to access government funds progress in growth and development of SHGs in Kenya and the area under study as well. However, youth poverty, youth unemployment, illiteracy, low trade skills still dominates the area of study. Skill development is a long term investment that needs readdress among youths and since youths SHGs are mandatory for acquisition of funds there ought to be programmes within and without SHGs that should promote skills among youths.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth skill development is a process of improving and expanding economic and social capacities of an individual with an aim of making that individual

better placed for development activities. Oakley & Marsden (1984) argues that it requires dependence on local people and resources rather than depending on external resources to change society. Skills development is desirable for youths whose unemployment rate is still at 75%. Kenyan youths have a higher dependency ratio due to unemployment, limited skills, lack of resources and opportunities (Republic of Kenya Vision 2030, 2007). In the recent past the government of Kenya has continuously urged youths incorporated youths in various issues to the extent of allocating quite a good percentage of jobs and tenders to youths. Moreover, encouraging youths to form groups and access funds, meaning resource availability is improving from time to time youth inclusion in development issues has also improved but youths are still languishing in poverty. According to Ileri (2010) “youth remain a category deserving attention, in many of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (2007), they are given marginal space that limits their potential to participate in national development issues”. This incongruence could be attributed to lack of skills making it almost impossible for one to take part in the processes of community development. Research on adolescent development, also emphasized that the centrality of youth participation is helping steer young people away from violence and other problem behaviours through increasing their skills, and preparing them for lifelong civic engagement (Carroll et al., 1999, Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Their lack of relevant skills incapacitates their engagement in development within the community thus displaying minimal potential.

METHODOLOGY

Njoro District is in Nakuru County, Rift Valley province, Kenya. It has four divisions, fourteen locations and twenty-seven sub-locations, (Molo DDP 2008-2012) with a population density of 399 people per Km². There are 72 registered youth groups in the area of study and using multi stage random sampling, twenty-seven groups with a sample size of 135 respondents participated in the study. Both primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data was obtained from the sample size of the target population using a structured questionnaire. Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft Excel.

Asset-Based Approach

This study adopted the use of Asset-based approach to community development as used by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). This approach perceives community members as active change agents rather than passive beneficiaries. Asset-based approach to community building, assumes that social and economic revitalization starts with what is already present within a community - not only the capacities of residents as individuals, but also the existing

associational and institutional foundation. This involves pinpointing all of the available assets in the community, and connecting or mobilizing them in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness. In this case, youths must realize that they are useful resources to the community. Internal change has lasting benefits to an individual and community at large as compared to externally influenced change. This model emphasizes the need for youths to internalize that they are the resources that society needs for development thus, change should start from within extending its spill over to the larger community.

RESULTS.

Age is a very important socio-economic factor that mostly determines the level of participation in decision-making processes at household, group and societal level. This study was carried out among the youth. Age distribution was as follows.

Table 1.1: Age Distribution of Respondents

| Age of Respondents | Total No. of Respondents | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|------------|
| | Frequency | Percentage |
| 18-23 | 33 | 24% |
| 24-29 | 43 | 32% |
| 30-35 | 46 | 34% |
| Above 35 | 13 | 10% |
| Total | 135 | 100 |

There were 135 respondents who participated in this study. Their age distribution was as summarised above. 90% of the respondents were the youths while 10% composed of individuals above 35 years old. This age disparity had a positive implication on the leadership and sustainability of SHGs. Groups where adults were involved seemed to be better and stronger in terms of commitment and contributions. Their leadership was strong, and exhibited proper management of group activities and this study concurs with Camino and Zeldin (2002) who in their study noted, “Youth ownership and adult-youth partnerships are two over-arching qualities that are vital to the success of civic engagement and community development”.

Gender of the Respondents

In terms of gender of respondents 68% were males and 32% were females.

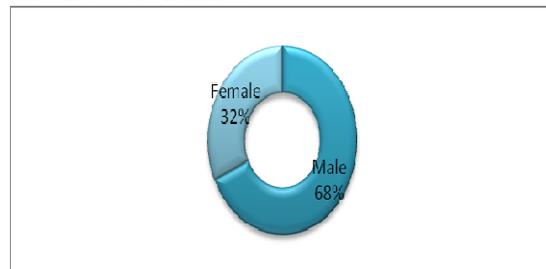


Figure 1.1 Gender of the respondents

The fact that most women get married in their twenties and hence diverting their productivity into marriage institution attributed to low participation. According to the respondents, married women under 35 years are too busy establishing their marriages, child rearing or housekeeping.

Marital Status of the Respondents

A family is a basic unit/ institution in the society both for its role in reproduction and socialization and marital status of the respondents is as summarized below.

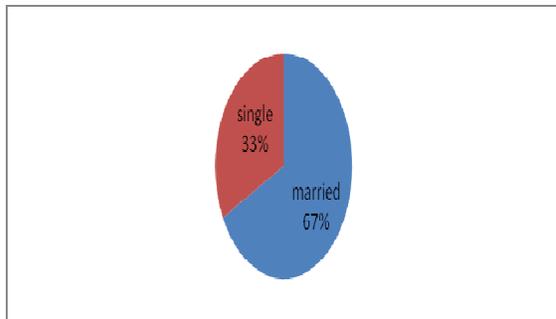


Figure 1.2. Marital status of respondents

Findings indicated that 67% of the respondents were married 33% of them were still single. Most of out of school and unemployed youths tend to marry earlier with full knowledge that marriage increases dependency ratio that pose further competition on the scarcely available resources.

Education Level of the Respondents

Education is both a social and economic development indicator. Various literacy levels define the education level of an individual or society. The figure below summarizes this study’s finding on the level of education of the respondents under study.

Table1.2: level of education

| Level of education | Total No. of respondents | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Primary School | 45 | 33% |
| Secondary School | 63 | 47% |
| Tertiary College | 15 | 11% |
| University | 12 | 9% |
| Total | 135 | 100% |

In Table the above, the findings indicate that 33% of the respondents had acquired primary education that is a threshold for literacy in Kenya meaning that the respondents were all literate. About 47% had secondary education while 11% had tertiary education and 9% were either enrolled in institutions of higher learning or had already completed their under graduate studies.

Occupation

Income and occupation have direct influence on socio-economic status of the individual at household and society. Occupation of respondents was summarised in the table below.

Table1.3: main occupation of respondents

| Main occupation | Frequency | Percent |
|-----------------|-----------|---------|
| Employed | 2 | 1% |
| Day-labourer | 4 | 3% |
| Unemployed | 7 | 5% |
| Self-employed | 102 | 76% |
| Student | 20 | 15% |
| Total | 135 | 100% |

Majority of the respondents 76% were self-employed, 15% were students in various institutions, 5% were unemployed, 3% of the respondents were daily labourers and only 1% was in formal employment. This study found that most groups formed based on occupation were more likely to thrive for long due to commonness. Therefore, it is perfectly in line to say that occupation of individuals influenced the type of group joined, amount of money contributed and level of involvement in-group activities.

Religion of the Respondents

All respondents indicated that they had a religion in which they could refer to as their faith that was Christianity.

Relevant skills possessed by youths and influence on outcome.

From the findings, 46% of the respondents had acquired different skills through training, while having majority 54% of the youths having not attended any training. These trainings touched on different social and economic issues such as entrepreneurship skills, management skills and leadership skills among others.

Table 1.4: Respondents who have attended training under SHG on skills development

| Respondents who have attended training under SHG on skills development | Total No. of Respondents | |
|--|--------------------------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Yes | 62 | 46% |
| No | 73 | 54% |
| Total | 135 | 100% |

Vocational skills among youths in Self-help group

While access to financial capital is a pre-requisite to enterprise development and income generation, they are insufficient to solely generate self-reliance and economic sovereignty among unemployed youths. Skills acquisition and development is essential in assisting people to utilise local resources. Respondents confirmed possession of vocational skills and as illustrated in the figure below, only 46 % of the respondents had at least acquired a vocational

skill whereas a larger percentage of the respondents 54 % denied having acquired any vocational skills.

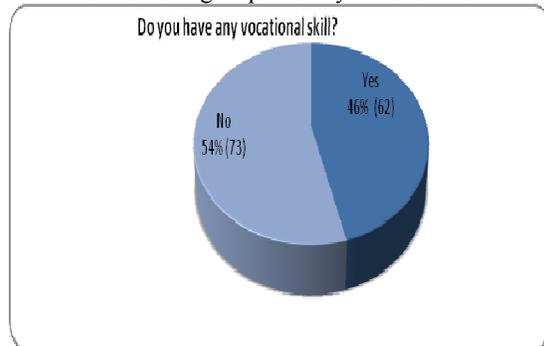


Figure 1.3: Respondents in Possession of Vocational Skills

The most common vocational skills acquired by respondents include welding, basketry, masonry plaiting, motor mechanics weaving, knitting and sewing. Respondents pointed out that these skills were easy to acquire first because it required less money for training, Secondly the availability of the Youth Polytechnic that is easily accessible in Njoro Town and lastly, the skills acquired required less time resource to complete the course. The respondents further concurred that these skills were acquired through own interest and that of government to improve skill development in the area.

Mode of Acquisition

This study went ahead to find out how the skills were acquired so as to establish its relevance to the current market demand. The following were findings.

Table 1.5: Mode of skill acquisition

| How did you acquire it? | Total No. Of Respondents with Vocational skill | Percent |
|-------------------------|--|---------|
| Formal training | 47 | 76% |
| Informal training | 13 | 21% |
| Others | 2 | 3% |
| Total | 62 | 100% |

From table 1.5 above 76% of the respondents who possess a vocational skill, acquired it through formal training, while 21% acquired vocational skills through informal training and only 2% of the respondents said that the skill is inborn/talent.

Amidst availability of vocational skills among youths, most of the youths did not use their skills in their relevant fields for reasons they mentioned as lack of market and high competition from their peers with advanced vocational skills. Most of the youths agreed that if there could be an opportunity to use their vocational skills, with availability and good market structures they could turn around their lives and contribute towards societal development.

Table 1.6: Main Occupation versus Vocational Skills

| Main occupation of the respondents | Do you have any vocational skill? | |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-----|
| | Yes | No |
| Employed | 50% | 50% |
| Day-labourer | 25% | 75% |
| Unemployed | 38% | 62% |
| Self-employed | 50% | 50% |
| Student | 56% | 44% |
| Total | 46% | 54% |

This study further sought to find out how the same skill impacted on the way of life to the youths who claimed possession. From the table above 50% youths with vocational skills were self-employed and the other 50% belonged to various occupations. However, it is important to bring out clearly that being self-employed did not necessarily mean utilization of the available skill.

This study on probing further, discovered that most of the self-employed youths had ventured into different small scale businesses such as charcoal burning and selling, groceries, shop vendors, motorbike transportation (*boda-boda*) as opposed to using their vocation skills to earn a living. They supported this trend by saying that they had no capital to start up their own small-scale enterprises. The money given to them through Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) was insufficient to start them as individuals thus it was put into a common group activity which had very low returns and furthermore these returns were long term hence most youths found it unreliable to solve their immediate felt needs such as food expenditure and upkeep.

Self-Help Groups' Expectation Gap

The objective was to investigate the expectation gap in the groups to determine the missing component that is most required by the group members yet it is not supplied to according to the demand. A new variable was generated that only included those respondents who ideally had some specified expectation and yet when asked whether they had gained the said demand they indicated to have not. The subsequent figure shows that 53% of the respondents who expected to access credit facilities through joining groups could not do so. Following closely was social skills with 49% and entrepreneurship skills at 48% as seen in the figure below.

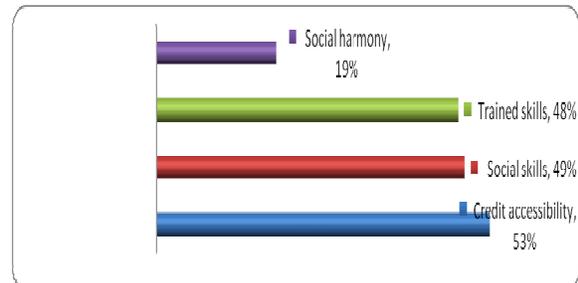


Figure 1.4: Self-help groups' expectation gap

This study further established whether this gap had any correlation with the outcome of a member either not recommending to someone else, whether they will be in the group for the next one year or thinks the group could collapse. Interestingly, social harmony comes out robustly in determining the above outcome with an odds ratio of 4.533 and 0.008 sig below the 0.05 significance level.

Table 1.7: Relationship between Expectations of Respondents and Group Outcome

| Logistic regression analysis | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------------|-------|------|------|---------|
| | | B | S.E. | Sig. | Exp (B) |
| | Credit accessibility | .825 | .534 | .122 | 2.283 |
| | Entrepreneurship skills | .240 | .434 | .581 | 1.271 |
| | Social skills | -.519 | .543 | .340 | .595 |
| | Social harmony | 1.511 | .572 | .008 | 4.533 |
| | Constant | - | .326 | .000 | .243 |
| | | 1.417 | | | |

Of remarkable interest worth noting is the fact that credit accessibility, trained skills and social skills gains, which had a bigger gap in terms of expectation and what was actually gained did not largely contribute to the negative outcome of either not recommending, leaving the group or the group collapsing. People who form a group tend to conglomerate around social harmony and shared way of life, culture and economic status. At any time there is disharmony in this core tenets, the groups cannot form and if they by any chance form the model indicates a unit change of Social disharmony (increase) leading to 4.5 chances of the above outcome. This finding was influenced by the outcome of Post-Election Violence 2007-2008.

Table 1.8: Skills Acquired through Group Training

| Type of skill acquired | Total No. of Respondents | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Leadership Skills | 24 | 39% |
| Entrepreneurship Skills | 34 | 55% |
| Peace Building | 21 | 34% |
| Management Skills | 51 | 82% |
| Vocational skills | 3 | 5% |
| Total | 135 | 100% |

From table 1.8 above, 82% of youths had attended trainings under SHGs had an opportunity to develop their management skills such as financial, time, business and resource management, while 55% had entrepreneurship skills, overall youths had other relevant social skills such as leadership, peace building among others as indicated above. These skills acquired were relevant in managing own business and life in totality.

Table 1.9: Institutions that provide training to SHGs

| Name of institution that offered training to SHGs members | Total No. of respondents | |
|---|--------------------------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Government | 14 | 22% |
| Banks | 28 | 44% |
| NGO | 43 | 68% |
| Individuals | 17 | 27% |
| Total | 135 | 100% |

NGOs seemed a major stakeholder to youth development in the area with 68% of respondents receiving training from NGOs. They offered various trainings to the youths through their programs and encouraged youths to form groups. Banks also reached youths through training them on the importance of opening a bank account, accumulating savings and acquiring loans for various businesses. In conclusion, SHGs have played a role in changing the lives of most youths in the area and much support should for them to succeed.

Table 1.10: Respondents in need of Skills Development

| Do you think you need any skill development training? | Total No. of Respondents | |
|---|--------------------------|---------|
| | Frequency | Percent |
| Yes | 128 | 97% |
| No | 4 | 3% |
| Total | 135 | 100% |

As seen in table 1.10 about 97% of the respondents indicated their concern and interest in skill development training. They argue that receiving training will diversify their skills and expertise, thus enhance self-empowerment. The government has put a lot of emphasize on youth empowerment and has been equipping youth with modern skills through various institutions such as National Youth Service, youth polytechnics and technical institutes. It is now entirely on the youths to avail themselves for such trainings and become empowered.

DISCUSSION

Relevant Skills Possessed by Youth’s Self-Help Groups

This study examined whether youths had relevant vocational and entrepreneurship skills and the role played by such skills in influencing group outcome. World Bank Development Report (2007) skills for work, prior to the industrial revolution, were largely provided in the workplace, but over the past century have been offered as well in school settings at secondary and tertiary levels through technical and vocational education programs. Beyond this, opportunities for skills are available in non-formal

training programs offered by a diverse range of public and private institutions, including employers. From this study findings, there was no single incident where close to 100% of group members received skill training from various available institutions, reason being either training was available for few chosen or laxity from members to attend such events. According to World Bank (2007), “enterprise training is selective, with workers in small and medium-sized enterprises and those with lower levels of formal education having less access to the training” it is quite alarming that several years down the line youths still underestimate important matters such as training amidst availability of opportunities.

Where unemployment problem is a lack of job creation, high labour costs, or unrealistic wage expectations on the part of youth, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is less likely to be successful unless coupled with other reforms. This study established that the more learned youths are, the less likely they engage in vocational training and jobs. There is less regard for self-employment as an alternative livelihood because many youths lack relevant skills and basic skills for self-reliance.

When youths stay long without any form of employment, they become vulnerable and can easily engage in illegal activities such as crime and drugs. Unemployed youths face higher risks of engaging in illicit activities, and thus failing to acquire skills and experience during this critical stage of their development leading to concerns about longer-term employment prospects for these youths (Cunha, James, Heckman, Lochner & Masterov, 2005). Groups demand commitment of resources such as time and money. Additionally, they keep members busy from engaging in unworthy activities. The fact that groups have collective goals beside personal goals, exerts pressure on individuals to work together towards achievement of such goals. As was established by this study, most youths were self-driven, to engage in group activities.

Another major concern for developing countries is the creation of sufficient jobs for young people as they enter the labour market, a critical challenge because of high population growth rates. As observed around the world, youth unemployment and underemployment is prevalent not only because of demand-side deficits (inadequate job opportunities), but also because they lack skills, work experience, job search abilities and the financial resources to find employment (International Labour Organisation, 2006). While only 46% of the respondents had acquired relevant skills through various trainings, only 10% of them were able to use their skills in relevant fields. There was a lot of concern on lack of skills among youths especially entrepreneurship and

social skill, but even those who already possess these valuable skills have not been able to utilize them optimally. This kind of situation prevails in a society where many youths are unemployed and live below the poverty line, in order to achieve community development, this important segment of the population must be empowered through their established groups. Being organized in groups should be a simple and easy way to get to youths into training, because there will be less mobilization involved since these youths are already in established groups.

Provision of public technical and vocational training has, been less than adequate as it often offers insufficient opportunities for practice. It is biased toward white-collar jobs in the urban wage sector; provides courses that are often rigid and too standardized to meet the multi-skill needs of the workplace; and often includes little accountability and few incentives to monitor and adjust to changes in the demand for skills of formal and informal sectors (Adams 2008). Although this study established the same, it however found out that youths are more than willing to diversify their skills to match modern technology and demand at any given opportunity. It is important to notice young people who want to change their lives and engage them in trainings that can propel them towards self-reliance that in return will minimize unemployment and crimes.

Study carried out by ILO (2013), shows that young people remain particularly stricken by unemployment. Currently, some 73.8 million young people are unemployed globally and the slowdown in economic activity is likely to push another half million into unemployment by 2014. The youth unemployment rate – which had already increased to 12.6 per cent in 2012 – is expected to increase to 12.9 per cent by 2017. The crisis has dramatically diminished the labour market prospects for young people, as many experience long-term unemployment right from the start of their labour market entry, a situation that was never observed during earlier cyclical downturns. Currently, some 35 per cent of all young unemployed have been out of a job for six months or longer in advanced economies, up from 28.5 per cent in 2007. Consequently, an increasing number of young people have become discouraged and have left the labour market. Such long spells of unemployment and discouragement early on in a person’s career also damage long-term prospects, as professional and social skills erode and valuable on-the-job experience is not built.

Therefore is important for the youths to take note of existing weaknesses of the economy and devise a way forward. An alternative to reducing the underemployment is encouraging entrepreneurship, a

driving force for initiating business ideas, mobilizing human, financial and physical resources and for establishing and expanding enterprises. Entrepreneurship is not youth specific, but can unleash the economic potential of young people and provide living alternatives for them. An enterprise and entrepreneurial culture is of primary importance. Societies that appreciate entrepreneurship and promote its values and norms can create a dynamic and vibrant class of young entrepreneurs. According to United Nations, Agenda 21, education is a continuous process that is widely accepted as a fundamental prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development. It is recognized as a means of changing consumption and production patterns to a more sustainable path.

Youths need to be equipped with literacy skills, vocational and technical skills that are relevant and able to empower them so that they can break from the inter-generational spiral of poverty, illiteracy and inequality that have taken root in the developing countries. A literate and skilled youth is a tremendous asset for development to the society. While on the other hand the illiterate and unskilled youth is a burden to the society. Workforce development is influenced by: education, apprenticeship and early work experience, labour market programs that include non-formal training programs. Other forces in the home, the community and economy shape the transition to work. Students have more opportunities to apply academic principles to practical problems. Obviously, training alone is not enough to ensure that group members take up Income Generating Activities; their success depends also on markets for the services and goods produced.

Equipping young people with skills does not necessarily translate into economic empowerment or independence unless the skilled person practices the possessed skills to earn a living out of it. With the implementation of our constitution and launch of devolved governments, most unemployed and under-employed youths have rekindled their hopes of being included in decision-making processes in their respective counties.

CONCLUSION

The rate at which Youth groups are developing is wanting and their lack of well laid down long term objectives has limited their growth. It is evident that most youths are interested in accessing funds than seeking long term benefits such as skill development and rural youths the most disadvantaged because they lack access to information and opportunities. There is also lack of knowledge on how to change their skills into wealth or income as only 10% of the youths with relevant vocational skills are using their skills appropriately. There is lack of external networking with other groups whether complimentary or

competitive and this to some extent explains why most groups are growing at a very slow pace, while others are collapsing or even stagnating.

RECOMMENDATION

Technical and Vocational education and training is essential to youths out of school but in groups to empower young entrepreneurs and encourage youths to join SHGs and collaboratively work with the government and design programmes that are likely to promote access to skill development thus promoting sustainable development. Such trainings should be administered through NGOs as they have been proved to be effective in group activities. NGOs and banks should help youth groups with accessing market though use of modern technology and this involves training youths on basic computer skills and internet services that will enable them to sell their products online. Online marketing is likely to enable youths to get a wider market for their products and learn from other producers.

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