Social Networks Influencing Effective Utilization of YEDF in Isiolo County, Kenya.

Joram Kiarie Njuguna, Dr. Anne Sande (Ph.D.), Dr. Gilbert Miriti (Ph.D.)
Chuka University, Kenya

Abstract: **The Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) was founded in the year 2006 with the aim of enhancing the wellbeing of youth in Kenya. Although Isiolo County is among the counties with the highest targeted number of youth beneficiaries (78,526), there is evidence of low levels of economic empowerment among them. The purpose of this study was to assess the social networks influencing effective utilization of YEDF in Isiolo County, Kenya. The study integrated correlational research and descriptive survey designs. The total study population was 9,602 people. This included a target population of 1,919 youths who have benefitted from YEDF in Isiolo County as at December 2021. These youths were obtained from the 288 youth groups whose members have benefited from YEDF. The population also included 7 YEDF officials in Isiolo County and 7,676 community members. A sample of 384 respondents consisting of 277 youths who have benefitted from YEDF in Isiolo County and 100 community members was obtained proportionately and purposively respectively. All the 7 YEDF officials in Isiolo County participated in the study. Data collection was done using questionnaires and interview schedule. The questionnaires were self-administered. An interview schedule for the key informants was filled by the respondents. Research assistants were hired to assist in the process. The respondents were given time to respond to the questionnaires and those who were not able to read or write were be assisted. Piloting was carried out in Tharaka Nithi County to establish reliability of data collection instruments. Reliability of the instruments was estimated using Cronbach Alpha Coefficients. Descriptive statistics used included frequencies and percentages. The inferential statistics used in the study was linear regression. It was evident, from the study that social networks had significant effects on effective utilization of youth enterprise development fund. The study recommended the necessity of integrating YEDF entrepreneurship trainings with IT through inclusion of digital financial transaction technology experts in the training programmes such as M-pesa and the banking sector. Research findings and recommendations could be used to guide further research as well as policy makers in relation to YEDF**

***Key Words*: Social Networks, Effective Utilization, Entrepreneurial Partnerships, Financial Training, Information Technology Training.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Youth Enterprise Development Fund is an issue of concern in the modern society due to its pivotal role in stimulating economic development (World Bank, 2021). Governments have a major role in ensuring the success of this programme primarily by not only acting as the major donors, but also through enhancing such programmes that link the youth to employment. Governments worldwide strive to provide their youth the chances to reach their career potential while meeting the demands of the labour market in an effort to link them to employment. This effort, according to trends globally, has to be followed by proper utilization of any fund that may have been allocated to the youth in order to attain the set objectives (Omondi, 2013).

Effective utilization of YEDF enables the fund to achieve its main objective of youth empowerment. This utilization is, however, subject to some dynamics worldwide. In the United States of America (USA), for example, upon realization that formal jobs are not always available, the Federal government primarily focused on how to improve the chances of disadvantaged youth to start their businesses and organizations. In the mid-1970s, the rate of unemployment for the youths; especially coloured youths, was high. This factor motivated the Congress to pass the Youth Employment Demonstrations Projects Act (YEDPA).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, governments are concerned with enhancing effective utilization of youth funds to steer development. In different African countries, enhancement of youth entrepreneurship has been tackled in different combinations. These include through education, technical training, national youth service, youth entrepreneurship programmes and loans as well as informal sector development programmes. According to Kinyua and Kimando (2015) as well as Njogu and Kihoro (2012), African states should accord high priority to youth livelihoods by allocating significant budgets for youth funds due to their huge population. However, both Gachugia et al. (2013) and Kinyua (2015) attribute the contrary to the failure by many African governments to come up with comprehensive youth policies and institutional frameworks.

In Kenya, the Youth Enterprise Development Fund was established by the government in 2006 to provide an on-lending facility to the youth, with low interest rate and flexible to micro and small enterprises (NYP, 2006). Effective utilization of this fund by the beneficiaries was expected to create employment, which was in line with the government economic recovery strategy (ERS) for wealth and employment creation (2003-2007). The ERS estimated that, about 500,000 jobs needed to be created annually, of which 88 per cent were to come from the Micro and Small Enterprises sector. Data from the Federation of Kenyan Employers (FKE, 2016) indicated that youth represent 30% of the population and their unemployment rate is twice the country's average. Sixty-seven per cent (67%) of those unemployed are youths.

Isiolo County has benefited a lot (Kshs 30 million in National Budget of Kenya, 2022/2023) from the YEDF since it is among the counties in Kenya with the highest number of youth groups which have been formed and registered (1150 youth groups and over 23,000 youths). There have also been concerted efforts by the county government of Isiolo for instance through the enactment of the Isiolo County Youth Women and Persons with disabilities Enterprise Development Fund Act (2019). This has contributed to a lot of youths borrowing funds to start their own businesses. The youth groups funded have ventured into agribusinesses, financial businesses especially in the table banking, and hawking businesses. On the contrary, according to Isiolo County Development Plan (2018-2022), the wellbeing amongst the beneficiaries of the fund has been deteriorating despite increased funding (48.7%).

Independent assessment of the social networks influencing effective utilization of the Youth Enterprise Development Fund is unfortunately not readily available. Most researches done on YEDF have been limited to adequacy of the fund, evaluation of the impact, accessibility and effectiveness of the fund. Several scholars agree that most governments are guided by a vision that neither addresses the livelihoods needs nor meets the real expectations of youth (Catherine (2012), Orwa (2012) and Rajender (2012). However, Kisunza and Theuri (2014) as well as Wanjala (2014) focused on effective utilization of Youth Enterprise Development Fund and how this can affect Youth Empowerment in Kenya. None of the above studies, however, addresses the issue of social networks influencing effective utilization of such funds. Therefore, there existed a research gap on how social networks such as partnerships amongst youths as well as training programmes for the youth affect effective utilization of YEDF. In order to address this gap, the study sought to assess social networks influencing effective utilization of the Youth Enterprise Development Fund in Isiolo County, Kenya.

1.1 Social Networks Affecting Utilization of YEDF

In his writings on the strength of weak ties, Granovetter (1982) argues that people are socially disadvantaged if they do not have weak tie networks and bridges out of their own strong tie network of close partnerships, associations, groupings, friends and family. In another study on social capital and resettlement of internally displaced persons in Molo district, Kenya, Kiboro (2009) opined that one form of social capital are networks of associations representing any social group which gather regularly for a common purpose. ILO (2012) report on global employment trends advanced entrepreneurial networking theory and concluded that an entrepreneur is an individual who innovates within the context of an uncertain environment. Given that characterization, they argued that key to entrepreneurial success is the ability of the entrepreneur to exploit social networks which Granovetter (1982) terms as weak ties. In a network, flows between objects and actors and exchanges, which might contain an advice, information, friendship, career or emotional support, motivation, and cooperation, can lead to very important ties. Akwalu (2014) affirmed this assertion by concluding that the main social networks affecting youth entrepreneurship include entrepreneurial partnerships and groups as well as training programmes.

1.1.1 Youth Entrepreneurial Partnerships and Groups.

In the worldwide business environment, a network is a group of two or more firms that have banded together to carry out some new business activity that the members of the network could not pursue independently. This finding is asserted by Irungu and Kamau (2015) in their study on the effect of YEDF on growth of new enterprise in Mathioya district, Kenya. The study by Irungu and Kamau (2015) explored the three constructs widely researched in entrepreneurial networking; first the content of the networks which should be viewed as the media through which actors gain access to a variety of resources held by other actors and secondly, the governance of these relationships. Trust between partners is often cited as a critical element that in turn enhances the quality of the resource flows (Irungu & Kamau, 2015).

In Europe and USA, according to OECD (2012) report on policy challenges for young entrepreneurship, partnerships in entrepreneurship have a number of contributions for youth. First of all, they create employment for the youth. Secondly, they provide valuable goods and services to society and lastly they promote innovation and resilience. In Netherlands, for example, because youths are more likely than adults to be unemployed, partnerships in entrepreneurship gives them livelihood alternatives, economic independence, and positive psychological capital which will integrate them into the mainstream economy (OECD, 2012).

In Asia, World Bank (2011) report on doing business and making a difference for entrepreneurs support sentiments by Tsekoura (2016) by observing a positive relationship between networking and venture performance. In another study Wachilonga (2018) assessed the effect of finance determinants on loan repayment among YEDF board beneficiaries in Trans Nzoia County, Kenya and posited that through collaborations and strategic partnerships, business incubators can support the successful development of entrepreneurial projects of youth business ideas through an array of business support resources and services.

In Africa, the engagement of marginalized sections of the population in entrepreneurship can empower these people and subsequently contribute to economic growth (Gatimu & Wanyoike, 2014). Up to 84% of the youth population is resident in Africa and the developing world (UNECA, 2016). Along the same line of thought, supporting youth entrepreneurship in Africa is crucial in fostering the creation of sustainable livelihoods (Issa and Kiruthu, 2019). In Sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that by 2025, one in every four young people in the world will be from sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2021), a region where most people are poor and live in rural areas.

In Kenya, findings by Muthee (2010) study on tackling the youth unemployment in Kenya revealed that YEDF was initiated with the core purpose of boosting youth entrepreneurship. This purpose, however, cannot be achieved without the target group having the requisite entrepreneurial partnerships. According to the same study, entrepreneurship training and provision of appropriate business development services are key to the fund's achievement of its mandate. The finding is in agreement with to KNBS (2016) basic report on wellbeing in Kenya that approximately 80% of the population in Kenya is youth and most of them are unemployed. The few who own businesses lack resources and start-up capital and thus operate small and micro enterprises (SMEs).

In Isiolo County, most youth employed in the informal sector are poorly paid thus continue living in poverty and cannot partner in groups (MIDP, 2018). Failure to engage the youth decently and productively has driven them to criminal activities. Fundamentally, without active youth participation in the economic sector, the region may never realize its full economic potential. Partnerships and creation of entrepreneurial activities for the youth was seen as the way out of the employment crisis. Despite this effort by the government, the entrepreneurial experience of youth in Isiolo County still remains wanting (MIDP, 2018).

1.1.2 Financial Training and Literacy

World Bank (2011) indicates that financial literacy has a relation with deposits, wealth creation and how business resources are managed. World Bank (2011) indicates that individuals who have financial skills and literacy participated more in financial markets. Muarya (2012) noted education levels contributed to financial literacy and thus affected individual level of income. In a related study by Mwangi and Ouma (2012) noted that low level of financial literacy affected economical transactions. The study also concluded that business growth is affected by financial knowledge of the entrepreneur.

In Asia and South America, one of the biggest challenges facing youth entrepreneurs is financial accounting. Klinger and Schundeln (2011) argue that most youth entrepreneurs' funds require that youth provide evidence that they have an understanding of financial management before funds or loans are advanced to them. This is a great challenge since most youth entrepreneurships start as sole proprietors, or partnerships, where personal funds are usually mixed with business funds, making it difficult to account for actual business funds and expenditures.

In Africa, Quaye (2011) reported that 38% of the MSEs surveyed in Ghana mention credit as a constraint, in the case of Malawi, it accounted for 17.5% of the total sample. This stems from the fact that MSEs have limited access to capital markets, locally and internationally, in part because of the perception of higher risk, informational barriers, and the higher costs of intermediation for smaller firms. As a result, SMEs often cannot obtain long-term finance in the form of debt and equity. Ott and Longenecker (2015) posited lack of planning, improper financing and poor management as the main causes of failure of small enterprises. Lack of credit has also been identified as one of the most serious constraints facing MSEs and hindering their development (Ott & Longnecker, 2015).

Mwangi and Kihiu (2012) observed that in Kenya, financial literacy needs to be enhanced so that individuals can make informed decisions when they evaluate products. According to women development fund report (2012), financial literacy equips individuals with skills necessary to make strategic business decisions. Rakodi (2016) in a study on the urban challenge in Africa and managing urban futures stated that in organizations providing financial education, participation rates is high for staff with skills, and that employer-based training on finance raises staff deposits. RoK (2014) report on YEDF also indicated that financial related seminars improved changes personal financial skills. Middle class staff preferred to be employed by employers who possess knowledge on financial plans as opposed to those who do not.

In Isiolo County, MIDP (2018) argue that in as much as it is necessary for youth to be trained on financial planning, applications for loans, management of loans, and business accounting, it is necessary also for government agencies to revamp their policies to make it easier for the youth to access funds. On the other hand, House, Ikiara, and McCormic (2011) argue that innovating delivery channels for youth entrepreneurship funds would eliminate the challenge youth have to utilize banking services even in places where there are no banking services. For instance, use of mobile money transfer services like M-Pesa makes it easier for youth to access funds and loans, than using bank accounts.

1.1.3 Training on Information Technology

In Europe and USA, Figura (2012) notes that youth venturing into entrepreneurship cannot avoid information technology. Most applications for entrepreneurship funds either from government agencies or the private sector are currently done via information technology platforms. Figura (2012) also argued that information technology eliminates the challenge of having to use bulky paper applications for youth entrepreneurship funds. In most cases where information technology is not being used, individuals applying for youth funds are required to submit paper applications that are accompanied with supporting documentation which takes more days to process compared to online applications that take minutes to file, and to be processed (Figura, 2012).

In Asia and South America, Sakyiamah (2015) in a study on an assessment of the effects of the Ghana Youth Employment and entrepreneurial development agency programme on beneficiaries contend that information technology training is important for youth entrepreneurs in helping them stay competitive and relevant in this digital era. Understanding how to utilize web platforms, navigate the internet and how to send online content is essential to business. However, the extent to which youth entrepreneurs are utilizing these platforms to access youth entrepreneurship funds is still nascent Sakyiamah (2015).

In rural Africa especially Sub-Saharan Africa, most youth entrepreneurs either do not have access to information technology, or when they do, they do not know how to use it (Rajendar, 2012). In a study done by World Bank (2021), 75% of youth entrepreneurs in rural areas of developing countries did not have access to information technology, while 64% did not know how to use online platforms to access financial services from government youth funds and other financial institutions.

In some East African countries like Kenya and Rwanda where youth entrepreneurship funding has moved online, there is a great challenge to youth in the rural areas who do not have access to information technology services. In Kenya, as much as Figura (2012) notes that youth venturing into entrepreneurship cannot avoid information technology, lack of training on information technology targeting youth entrepreneurs is also rampant. In most cases, youth entrepreneurs do incur extra costs by using cyber cafe attendants to help them do online loan applications (Figura, 2012). In these instances, accessing online application forms or scanning and attaching required documentation is a challenge to most youth entrepreneurs. Youth financial education is extremely significant in that it enables the youth to gain essential knowledge into the operations of business venture they are desirous to venture.

In Isiolo county, as stated by Kiyana (2018), as much as it is necessary for youth to be trained on financial planning, applications for loans, management of loans, and business accounting, it is also necessary and important for government agencies to revamp their policies to make it easier for the youth to access funds. To this end, information technology information is also important in making youth entrepreneurship ventures resilient and sustainable, and thus able to access funds due to track record of successful ventures. In other words, Kiyana (2018) revealed that with information technology, youth entrepreneurs are able to effectively keep proper records for their business transactions for a long time as well as retrieve the same when needed.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Isiolo County using correlational research and descriptive survey designs. The total study population was 9,602 people. This included a target population of 1,919 youths obtained from the 288 youth groups whose members have benefited from YEDF (Isiolo North-160 groups, Isiolo South-128 groups). The population also included 7 YEDF officials in Isiolo County and 7,676 community members directly affected by the programme (an average of 4 relatives per the 1,919 households of targeted YEDF beneficiaries). To constitute a sample of 384 respondents, 277 youths who have benefitted from YEDF were obtained proportionately from the 2 constituencies of Isiolo County (Isiolo North-177, Isiolo South-100). Each of the 277 youths was selected purposively to represent a youth group. All the 7 YEDF officials in Isiolo County participated in the study. The remaining 100 respondents were obtained purposively from community members targeted for the study specifically, mature relatives to the sampled beneficiaries of YEDF. Data was collected by use of questionnaires and interview schedule for the key informants. Quantitative data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics while qualitative data was analyzed thematically.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The null hypothesis subjected to regression analysis test was that there is no statistically significant relationship between social networks and effective utilization of YEDF.

3.1 Hypothesis Testing

The Null hypothesis was rejected from statistical tests (Regression analysis) and therefore, there was a statistically significant relationship between social networks and effective utilization of YEDF as indicated in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1: Model Summary for Social Networks on Utilization of Youth Enterprise Development Fund for both Youths and Community Members

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.484[a]	0.234	0.232	0.51664
a. Predictors: (Constant), Social Networks				

Table 1 above shows that from the findings, R was found out to be 0.484 which represented simple correlation. It indicated high degree of correlation between Social networks and effective Utilization of youth enterprise development fund. R Square is 0.234 which indicated that 23.4% of the variable Utilization of youth enterprise development fund can be explained by the variable Social networks while 76.6% of the variable Utilization of youth enterprise development fund can be explained by other factors such as social institutions, workplace values and cultural values as well as exchange programmes on entrepreneurship with foreigners and reading of business journal, books and magazines to borrow best practices among other factors.

Table 2: Regression Coefficients for Social Institutions on Utilization of Youth Enterprise Development Fund for Both the Youths and Community Members

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	p-value
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.713	0.126		13.597	0.000
	Social Networks	0.407	0.038	0.484	10.708	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Utilization of Youth Enterprise Development Fund						

Table 2 shows that P-value was 0.000 and thus $P<0.05$ implying that social networks had a significant effect on Utilization of youth enterprise development fund. The t value was 10.708 and thus $t >2$ further confirming significant effect of Social networks on Utilization of youth enterprise development fund. Therefore, the null hypothesis H_{02} (There is no significant relationship between social networks and utilization of YEDF in Isiolo County, Kenya) was rejected.

The coefficient B, from table 3, was 0.407 which means that 1% increase in Social networks would increase Utilization of youth enterprise development fund by 0.407 % or 10% increase in Social networks would increase utilization of youth enterprise development fund by 4.07 %. In conclusion, there is a significant relationship between social networks and utilization of YEDF in Isiolo County. The simple regression equation to estimate the level of Utilization of Youth Enterprise Development Fund was as follows:

$$y = a + bx$$

Where,

y = dependent variable
= utilization of Youth Enterprise Development Fund (UYEDF)
a = constant
= 1.713
b = regression coefficient
= 0.407
x = independent variable
= Social Networks (SN)

Therefore,

UYEDF= 1.713+0.407(SN)

Where,

UYEDF= Utilization of Youth Enterprise Development Fund
SN= Social Networks

IV. CONCLUSION

The study aimed at investigating social networks influencing effective utilization of YEDF in Isiolo County, Kenya. The study found that entrepreneurial experience, financial literacy for the youths, their economic independence, continuous entrepreneurship training, knowledge in online business and trainings on IT, entrepreneurship or financial literacy influences effective utilization of YEDF amongst the beneficiaries. Entrepreneurial experience and economic independence for the youths were found to greatly influence utilization of YEDF by the beneficiaries as compared to the other social networks. It was therefore concluded that there is a significant relationship between social networks and utilization of YEDF in Isiolo County.

R Square was 0.234 which indicated that 23.4% of the variable Utilization of youth enterprise development fund can be explained by the variable Social networks. The t value was 10.708 which was >2 (t=10.708>2) further confirming significant effect of Social networks on Utilization of youth enterprise development fund. P-value was 0.000 which was <0.05 (P=0.000<0.05) which implies that Social networks had a significant effect on Utilization of youth enterprise development fund. The coefficient B was 0.407 which means that 1% increase in the variable Social networks would increase effective utilization of youth enterprise development fund by 0.407 % or 10% increase in the variable Social networks would increase effective utilization of youth enterprise development fund by 4.07 %. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The study identified limitation in information technology as a significant social network challenge among the youth and other community members. The study therefore recommended the need to integrate YEDF entrepreneurship trainings with Information Technology through inclusion of digital financial transaction technology experts in the training programmes such as M-pesa and other banks.

The study suggested further research on: Assessment of economic dynamics and effective utilization of YEDF.

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