AGENCY IN TIGHT CORNERS
ASPIRATIONS AND RESILIENCE
AMONG YOUTH IN KENYA

Country Report | November, 2023

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AfDB	African Development Bank
AU	African Union
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease-19
FGDs	Focus Group Discussions
KEPSA	Kenya Private Sector Alliance
KIIs	Key Informant Interviews
KNBS	Kenya National Bureau of Statistics
MCAs	Members of County Assembly
MPs	Members of Parliament
MTP	Medium Term Plans
NEET	Not in employment, education or training
SoARYR	Status of the African Youth Report
USD	United States Dollar
YEDF	Youth Enterprise Development Fund

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kenya's 2010 constitution defines youth as those aged 18 to 34 years. This proportion of youth accounts for 25% of Kenya's total population, while those under the age of 15 account for 43%. The high rate of youth population growth presents both a challenge and an opportunity for development. Despite their number, youth's economic and social potential remains largely untapped for a variety of reasons. The first is the challenge of youth unemployment and underemployment that the current generation of African youth face. The second is progressive government reforms that increase citizen participation but do not engage youth populations in novel ways. Thirdly, governance challenges have resulted in insufficient resources for youth planning and, finally, a dearth of research on youth opinions and employment priorities.

This synthesis report draws from two datasets, quantitative and qualitative collected from a cross section of the youth in Kenya in 2019 before the outbreak of covid-19. Overall, 832 participated in the survey component of the research and there were 14 focus group discussions (FGDS) and 17 Key Informant Interviews for the qualitative component.

The results showed unemployed youth are diverse and they represent a huge population of youth in Kenya. However, the lack of an intersectional approach to youth programming has often prioritised the needs and aspirations of male youth. This neutral approach to youth aspirations has further excluded female youth, disabled youth, queer youth and marginalized regions from planning contributing to their discrimination and eventual inequality. According to the Status of the African Youth Report (SoARYR) 26.21% of youth were unemployed in 2017 in Kenya. This included young men with an unemployment rate of 20.09% and young women at 33.14% of the total unemployment rate (AU)[1]. The gender gap caused by unequal education opportunities further exacerbates inequality.

This synthesis research report presents the views from diverse Kenyan youth interviewed before the COVID-19 pandemic on their aspirations, attitudes to work and adaptations to various unemployment challenges. The research findings indicate youth have strong aspirations for stability, security and status through employment or thriving businesses. They also view the government as a hindrance to their aspirations due to the lack of transparency in inclusivity in public finance management and harassment. Despite these challenges, youth are resilient and are willing to take advantage of technology and quick returns from youth projects that can tackle their unemployment challenges through 'hustling'. Youth need support from stakeholders in providing equal opportunities for all youth, providing relevant training for employment and business development, providing affordable loans using the "Somali business model", providing opportunities for value chain linkages by linking their products to markets, mentoring and funding opportunities that are focused on unique circumstances instead of the general model currently in use.

The Kenyan government needs to address its failing image among the youth as it is less inclusive and less transparent in creating employment opportunities for the youth at national and sub-national levels. Gendered dimensions to youth aspirations revealed that female youth are often ignored in youth employment programmes despite the rhetoric on their inclusion. Young women face unique challenges in realizing their aspirations including domestic responsibilities and demands on their time, sexual harassment and precarity in employment. Stakeholders in youth employment including governments and the Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) could ensure training of youth employers especially the informal sector to raise awareness on sexual harassment at the workplace.

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1   *The Status of African Youth Report (SoAYR) | One Million by 2021 Initiative (au.int)*

INTRODUCTION

According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Kenya's current population is e 53 million, with the youth population being roughly 20% (16-24 years) and 25% (18-35 years) (KNBS 2019). Overall, an estimated 75% of the entire Kenyan population, which is 35.7 million, are 35 years and below, while 48%, which is 23 million, are 17 years and below (KNBS 2019). Unemployment is the biggest problem facing Kenyan youth, with an estimated 39%, which means 5.3 million unemployed. Only 61% of Kenyan youth, fewer than 35 million, are employed, according to the Kenya Bureau of Statistics (KNBS, 2020; Wise, 2016). With the increased uptake of mobile technology, many youths are currently relying on technology for employment and for 'making money' through gambling. The number of unemployed youths is expected to increase post-Covid 19.

The COVID-19 pandemic is likely to increase the number of youths not in employment, education or training (NEET) as many young people were the first to get laid off further increasing the NEET rate. For instance, in Kenya, the unemployment rate doubled from 5.2% in 2019 to 10.4% two months after the first COVID-19 case was recorded in March 2020, according to the Labour Force Report by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS 2020). The rate of unemployment in June 2020 was 10.4% due to Covid-19, compared with 4.7 % in June 2019 (KNBS, 2020). The report noted that the unemployed increased to 4,637,164 between April and June 2020, compared to 2,329,176 in 2019, because of layoffs linked to the pandemic. Job entrants aged 20–29 years were most affected by the rising unemployment as employers laid them off first (KNBS, 2020). The African Development Bank (AfDB) estimated that nearly 2 million people fell into poverty and nearly 900,000 lost their jobs in Kenya. The pandemic had disproportionate effects on the urban poor, women and young people who have precarious and informal jobs.

The Kenyan government and stakeholders have designed and implemented policies ensuring youth are included in the development. The Constitution of Kenya (2010), Vision 2030 and its associated Medium-Term Plans (MTPs) provide the overarching framework and underscore the importance of youth in national development. The Kenya Youth Development Policy of (2019) provides the overarching framework for youth development. Other institutional national frameworks include the following; Youth Marshall Plan for 2008, The National Youth Service Act, 2018, the Youth Enterprise and Development Fund State Corporations Act of 2007, the National Youth Policy 2007, Sessional No. 2 of 2007, the National Youth Council Act 2009, the Medium and Small Enterprise Act 2012, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Act of 2013, the Uwezo Fund (Public Finance Management Act 2014), the Public Procurement and Asset Disposal Act of 2015, the Employment Policy and Strategy for Kenya Sessional Paper no. 4 of 2013, the National Government Affirmative Action Fund (Public Finance Management Act 2012) and the National Employment Authority Act of 2016.

Despite this elaborate policy environment for youth development, youth unemployment continues to rise in Kenya with rates of 26% as of 2017[2]. This is attributed to several factors. One is policy and programmatic prescriptions that fail to capture the needs of the youth sustainably such as the 'Kazi kwa Vijana' programme under the Youth Marshal plan of 2008[3]. Kazi kwa vijana programme was meant to increase youth employment through labour-intensive programmes like road maintenance and garbage collection in Nairobi County. The programme was initially a success but later faced challenges due to poor planning and politics. [4]Second is the skill mismatch between government strategies and current labour needs. Third, limited training opportunities and discrimination by employers. Fourth, sexual harassment is still a major constraint for young women accessing work and fulfilling their aspirations.

Despite these challenges, there is increasing awareness of the missing voices of young African women and men in designing their own policies and programs that capture their aspirations and livelihoods. Increasingly, governments and development partners are now focusing on research to capture the needs of youth by understanding their own aspirations from their own perspectives. There is a need for in-depth research to capture the needs of young Kenyan men and women to re-

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2   *The Status of African Youth Report (SoAYR) | One Million by 2021 Initiative (au.int)*
3   *Youth Unemployment in Kenya, Policy Gaps Analysis, Policy Brief 2020, IEA 1610698846 (1).pdf*
4   *Kazi kwa Vijana good project dogged by poor planning and usual politics - Business Daily (businessdailyafrica.com)*

alize their potential despite governance challenges such as the lack of transparency, structural challenges, and exclusionary policies.

The Mastercard Foundation commissioned a study on youth aspirations designed by PASGR in 2019. This country synthesis report analyses data from the study, which included a quantitative survey conducted in 2019 with 832 respondents by Afrikpoll, and a follow up qualitative study by Farmerline. The qualitative data collection included 14 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 17 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The report explores the challenges faced by young women and men, as well as their adaptations and future aspirations regarding employment and sustainable livelihoods before the COVID-19 pandemic in Kenya. The analysis was conducted using open coding and closed coding. The central question for the analysis was: What is the youth's sense of their future, and what role does work play? How does the youth define dignified and fulfilling employment? What actions do youth undertake to advance their career goals? What are the challenges faced by employed and non-employed youths? What are youth opinions and attitudes around change, technology, and the future of work? This synthesis report hopes to address that gap by focusing on youth voices in Kenya. The following section will focus on the research questions that informed this study.

Conceptualizing of the term 'youth'

Conceptually, the youth in this Kenyan project is defined according to the Kenya National Youth Policy (18-34 years). However, the report recognizes that youth-hood is socially constructed as argued by Honwana (2013) who has observed that categorization of youth with age fails to capture the social and cultural contexts in Africa which keep youth as chronologically identified in a stage of waithood - 'a prolonged period of suspension between childhood and adulthood'.[5] Honwana argues that youth transitions to adulthood have become so uncertain increasingly leading to waithood. Cooper et al (2021) have also observed that young people improvise livelihoods and personal relations outside of dominant economic and familial frameworks.[6] Cooper et al (2021) have also argued for a rethinking about youth in the global south and how they

are affected by transitional challenges, which is often different from the global north.[7] In particular youth in the global south live precariously as they 'hustle' for long periods of time suggesting a need to centre studies in the global south on issues like precarity, livelihoods, struggles and formation of sociopolitical consciousness.[8]Technology was seen as an enabler for youth agency as some scholars have argued that youth are using technology to not only resist oppressive regimes but also form new communities (Iwilade 2020).

Young people in Kenya as observed elsewhere construct their perceptions of work and their general aspirations within the socio-cultural context in the global south. Hence, this theoretical perspective briefly discussed here provides a foreground to understand their aspirations, resilience, and adaptability. Kenyan youth as other youth from the global south live precariously constructing ideas about work and their livelihoods through a variety of everyday tactics like 'hustling' as they wait for the big break popularly known as 'kuomoka' in Kenya. A constructivist approach renders itself to an interpretivist paradigm, which informed the research and a qualitative approach for data collection. Interpretivists assume reality is socially constructed and as such meanings about aspiration, resilience, and adaptability are best formed from participants' construction of their reality obtained through their lived experiences and ideas.[9] DeJaeghere, Morris & Bamattre (2020), carried out a qualitative study where they reframed how youth livelihoods and wellbeing are evaluated in East Africa. Their study was a qualitative study that argued that knowledge in savings is not often enacted among youth despite the findings from earlier quantitative studies showing a positive correlation. They found that the qualitative study provided rich details of the contextual factors that were not visible in the quantitative study.[10] In a study on youth aspirations in Nairobi, King (2018) observed that education and employment programs fail in Kenya because they are built on dominant discourses focused on education and employment that make presumptions about youth and their interests.[11]

5 Honwana, A. (2013). Youth, Waithood, and Protest Movements in Africa. International African Institute.
6 Cooper, Swartz, & Ramphalile, 2021 Cooper, A., Swartz, S. & Ramphalile, M. (2021) Youth of the global south and why they are worth studying . In: Swartz, S., Cooper, A., Batan, C.M. & Kropff Causa, L. (eds).The Oxford handbook of global south youth studies. New York: Oxford University Press. Online.

7 Cooper, Swartz, & Ramphalile, 2021 Cooper, A., Swartz, S. & Ramphalile, M. (2021) Youth of the global south and why they are worth studying . In: Swartz, S., Cooper, A., Batan, C.M. & Kropff Causa, L. (eds).The Oxford handbook of global south youth studies. New York: Oxford University Press. Online.
8 Cooper at al 2021, Ibid.
9 Andrews, T. (2012). What is social constructionism? Grounded theory review, 11(1).
10 DeJaeghere J., Morris E., Bamattre R. Moving beyond employment and earnings: reframing how youth livelihoods and wellbeing are evaluated in East Africa (2020) Journal of Youth Studies, 23 (5) , pp. 667-685.
11 King, E. (2018). What Kenyan Youth Want and Why It Matters for Peace. Afri-

METHODOLOGY

Research Aim and Questions

The overall aim of this research was to explore young women's and young men's employment prospects for dignified and fulfilling work and to explore what their aspirations and opportunities are for work.

The quantitative research addressed the following issues: reasons youths stay in jobs, characteristics of the jobs and work that youths classify as dignified and fulfilling, the status of the youths with reference to their career/occupation and the salary they are currently paid. The study further explored youth's aspirations and optimism for the future in their career journey, challenges faced by youth in their career journey, the impact of technology on the lives of the youths both career-wise and knowledge-wise and the number of youths who have never worked and those currently working in the research sample.

Summary of Survey Questions

1. What are youth's employment and career aspirations?
2. How do youth define dignified jobs?
3. What actions do youth undertake to advance their career goals?
4. What are the challenges faced by employed and non-employed youths?
5. What are young people's hopes and fears about their future working lives?
6. Are there country contexts that are unique or particularly on the top of the mind for young people?

The qualitative interview guide asked the following questions: What is the youth's sense of their future? What role does work play in their sense of futures? How does the youth define dignifying employment? What actions do youth undertake to advance their career goals? What are the challenges faced by employed and non-employed youths? What are youth opinions and attitudes around change, technology, and the future of work?

Sample

The target population for this study are youth defined in the Kenyan constitution as young men and women between 18-34 years. The study also draws from the African Youth Charter definition of youth, which is 15-35 years to allow for cross-comparison with other countries in Africa since the Kenya study was part of a comparative study (African Union, 2006). The sample size for Kenya was a population size of 832 with 379 young men and 420 young women.

Out of the 832 number of youths interviewed, 51% were female while 49% were male as shown in the figure with majority were from Nyanza Province followed by coast and Nairobi. The distribution is as shown in the figure below.

Figure 1: Sample distribution
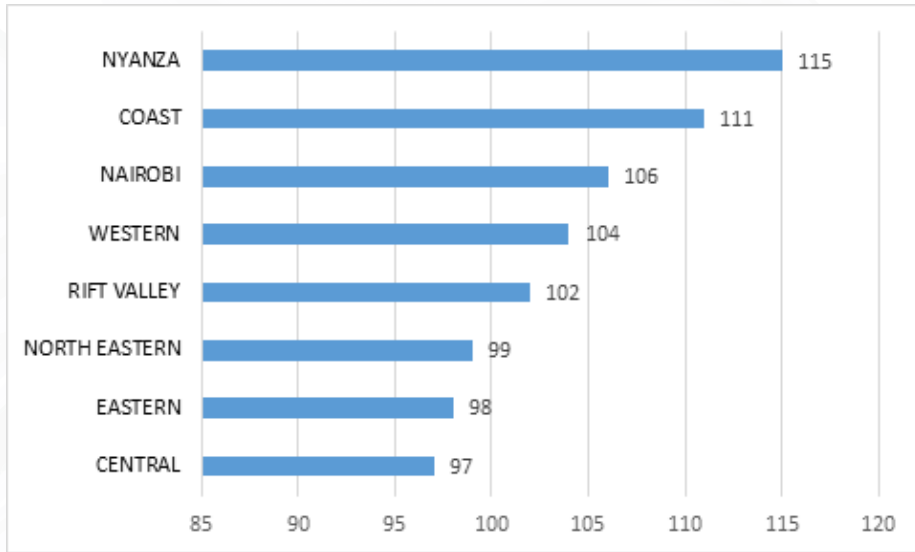
The sampling strategy was part of a survey conducted in several counties in Kenya which were urban (Nairobi), peri-urban (Embu, Nakuru, Tala), rural (Migori, Rongo, Nyasiago). The national survey adopted a multi-stage cluster sample that reflects the socio-economic and cultural distribution of the population factoring spatial, class and gendered differences. Quantitative approaches were employed to collect quantitative data using surveys. Interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect the qualitative data. The qualitative study approach conducted 14 focus group discussions (FGDS) and 17 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) commissioned by the Mastercard Foundation in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Quantitative Data Analysis

This section presents an overview of how the quantitative data was analyzed. The process involved coding the data, cleaning the data, aggregation of data to create groups, splitting the data and analysis by Hepta analytics. The analysis included data mining using PowerBI, sector descriptive analysis to explore demographic drivers. Data aggregation into groups was done by grouping demographic categories to make them easier to analyse. The following groups were created.

Table 1: Quantitative data analysis

Group	Categories
Age	15-19 years, 20-24 years, 25-29 years, 30-35 years
Highest Education	Primary & below, High School and Higher Education
Salary	1-49, 50-99, 100-149, 150-199, 200-500, Above 500
Dignified and fulfilling work	Respect in the workplace, good salary/income, Honest and reputable by society, Sense of satisfaction, purpose and accomplishment

Sector analysis was done through the questionnaire to categorise the youth in sectors. The youth are mainly involved in the Agricultural sector, Trading sector, Construction, Transportation and Domestic work. Chi-square was used to analyse the relationship between different demographic variables such as age-group, gender, residence, highest education level, employment history and school attendance history and region (rural, urban, peri-urban). The Correlation report, which accompanies this report is provided by Hepta analytics.

Qualitative Data Analysis

On data collection and analysis, the data on youth attitudes to work and career goals were recorded from focus group discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The qualitative data were analysed for emerging themes through open coding. Open coding allows for the exploration of emerging themes through a constructivist approach by teasing out how youth construct their current and future aspirations. In approaching the analysis this way, the Kenyan team began with in-depth content analysis followed by a thematic analysis using open coding.[12] By first conducting content analysis, the interview texts were analysed for content on youth perceptions of work and their aspirations and then analysed for emerging themes where we identified, analysed and reported the patterns in youth's perceptions of work.[13] This way, the synthesis report provides an account of young women and men's perceptions of work in their own perspectives and voices while grounding these within the relevant socio-political, historic and cultural contexts. The report employs an inductive rather than deductive content and thematic analysis. By following an inductive analysis, the research findings generated categories of codes directly from the text data.[14]

The data was collected in a specific socio-cultural, economic and political context, which may influence the perceptions of work on the young women and men who participated in this study. Lastly, we used a qualitative analysis software-NVIVO to manage the qualitative data while also ensuring every interview was analysed through manual-open coding by the lead analyst to ensure we don't lose anything in translation. Software may sub-optimally perform when it comes to analysing data relating to complex issues such as aspirations, resilience, and the social, political, and cultural complexities under which these are experienced and expressed. These complex issues are better captured through a manual coding process. Hence, the analysis mainly relied on the open manual coding and the NVIVO analysis was merely to organize and triangulate the emerging codes and resulting themes from the manual process. The Kenya analysis process involved five steps, which included close reading for familiarity, generating initial codes, searching for themes, defining, and reviewing initial themes, and final analysis. These steps were iterative and non-linear. The next section presents the themes that emerged from the quantitative analysis triangulated with the qualitative analysis.

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12 We use content analysis here to mean a systematic coding and categorizing the interview texts to determine trends and patterns of words used, their frequency, their relationships, and the structures and discourses of communication (see Gbrich C. Qualitative Data Analysis: An Introduction (1st edn). London: Sage Publications, 2007) and thematic analysis to mean identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data (see Braun V, & Clarke V.Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qual. Res. Psych. 2006; 3: 77– 101).

13 Sparker A. Narrative analysis: exploring the whats and hows of personal stories. In: I Holloway (ed.). Qualitative Research in Health Care (1st edn). Berkshire: Open University Press, 2005; 191– 208.

14 Hsieh HF, Shannon SE. Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. Qual. Health Res. 2005; 15: 1277– 1288.

FINDINGS AND INSIGHTS

Classification of dignified and fulfilling work among Kenyan Youth

Youth in Kenya across the socio-economic divide based in rural and urban areas all define dignified employment as work that not only helps them attain their individual aspirations but also their immediate community. Qualitative research results show that Kenyan youth want dignified jobs where they are treated with dignity, respect and jobs that enable them to afford a home and support themselves and their families. All the youth interviewed said they wanted jobs with dignity. Dignity in Kenya meant a career- especially the professional ones or successful entrepreneurs in their communities. Dignity was interpreted to mean a job where they were paid a commensurate amount to enable them to achieve financial security as one discussant noted;

> *"A job which we earn enough to satisfy our needs and we won't have to beg or ask another person to solve our problems"*

On the contrary, Risky jobs with fatal outcomes like boda-boda riders (motorbike riders) and sex work for female youth were considered lacking in dignity or unfulfilling. The youth did them to get by waiting for a dignifying job. On the same note, youth do not want household jobs that are seen with little autonomy e.g. domestic help and criminal and immoral jobs like prostitution, robbery, drug dealing.

Indeed, according to the Quantitative survey, 31% of the youths in Kenya reported that they would like jobs with a sense of satisfaction, purpose and accomplishment, 44% desired jobs that were reputable in the society, while 24% wanted jobs with a good salary and income. The remaining 1% reported that they wanted jobs that earn them respect at work.

Interestingly, there were notable variations about how youth understand dignifying work. The significant differences in definition of dignified work varied across age, education level and employment status. Most employed youth defined fulfilling work as a Sense of satisfaction, purpose, respect and accomplishment, while unemployed youth defined Fulfilling Work as a Good salary/income. The difference could be explained by the fact that employed youth are more interested in fulfilment and satisfaction than unemployed youth who don't have jobs to begin with.

Table 2: Youths Perception of Dignified and Fulfilling Jobs

	Dignified jobs	Fulfilling jobs
Honest and Reputable to society	44%	7%
Meaningful and sense of accomplishment	31%	65%
Good Pay	24%	27%
Respected at work	1%	2%

Nonetheless, there is an inclination towards job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction. More than half 63% of the youth in Kenya responded that they would keep a job because of the good pay, 50% will keep their job because of the respect and the minority of 18% will keep their job because it fits with their passion.

Table 3: Job Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

Why keep a job?		Very satisfied with job		Very dissatisfied with job		Reason for leaving job	
Reason	Share	Reason	Share	Reason	Share	Reason	Share
Good Pay	63%	Well paid	80%	Not well paid	88%	Pay not enough	72%
Respected	50%	Respected	47%	Too demanding	44%	found better job	34%
Trusted	20%	Learned a lot	36%	Not respected	27%	Contract ended	14%
Fit with my passion	18%	Good social image	22%	Lack of respect	10%	Season work	6%

In a study on youth aspirations for peace in Nairobi, King (2018) found that youth career goals include a dignified income, improving their social status and making an impact in their community in addition to attaining education and employment according to the study by King (2018; 146). This was contrary to the dominant youth programming that assumes that youth mainly aspire for an income, education and training. There is a dearth of research on youth aspirations and career goals in Kenya and this study hoped to capture these aspirations beyond Nairobi.

Youth Job Landscape

While many youths lack jobs, they still have high aspirations and are also highly motivated to achieve their desired career ambitions. Exploring the nature of jobs they have and the jobs they desire, the trading sector was 1st topmost job preferred by most youth followed by construction as Hotel and tourism close the list of the top seven sectors preferred by the youth.

Table 4: Top Sectors in 1st and 2nd jobs

Sector	1st Job		2nd Job		Future Job	
	No	Share	No	Share	No	Share
Trading	305	20%	58	20%	236	16%
Construction	163	11%	27	9%	117	8%
Other modern Jobs	130	9%	33	12%	236	16%
Traditional Agriculture	127	9%	22	8%	75	5%
Transportation	113	8%	22	8%	63	4%
Fashion & Garments	105	7%	8	3%	142	10%
Hotel & Tourism	104	7%	29	10%	83	6%
Top 7 total	1047	70%	199	70%	952	64%

Jobs transition

Most of the youth are currently in the trading sector, however in the future, the majority (16%) prefer to join the modern sector jobs as shown below.

Table 5: Job transition

| Current Sector	%	Future Sector	%
Trading	20%	Trading	17%
Construction	11%	Modern Sector	16%
Other Modern Jobs	9%	Fashion & Garments	9%
Transportation	8%	Health	9%
Traditional Agric.	8%	Construction	7%
Hotel & Tourism	7%	Traditional Agric.	6%
Modern Agric.	1%	Hotel & Tourism	4%
ICT related	1%	Modern Agric.	2%
		ICT related	1%

Most of the youths were paid salaries below 200 USD in both genders. Above 500 had the least number of youths who all had higher education. Youths paid the least amount of salary had primary education as the highest level of education. The findings show that young people with primary education are still being paid below the minimum living wage despite laws. Young people are also likely to work in the informal sector where jobs are precarious and lacking in dignity. Young women are least paid, least educated and most likely to be employed in the informal sector leading to the increasing gender gap observed.

These survey findings agree with the qualitative research done in Kenya. Nationally, youth unemployment in Kenya is a major issue with 18-34 years olds more likely to be unemployed than those over 35 years. The resulting economic crisis from COVID-19 has exacerbated youth vulnerability. Youth were laid off first making them most vulnerable to economic shocks and pandemics according to the Kenya labour reports in 2021.[15]

The Aspirations of Kenyan Youth

The youths surveyed had high aspirations and the key pathways to success were examined based on several categories. The main aspirations of the youths in Kenya include: to be rich (46%); have a good job (45%); start a business (6%) while a few even aspired to support their family and community (3%).

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15 KNBS, 2021, Kenya Quarterly Labour Reports
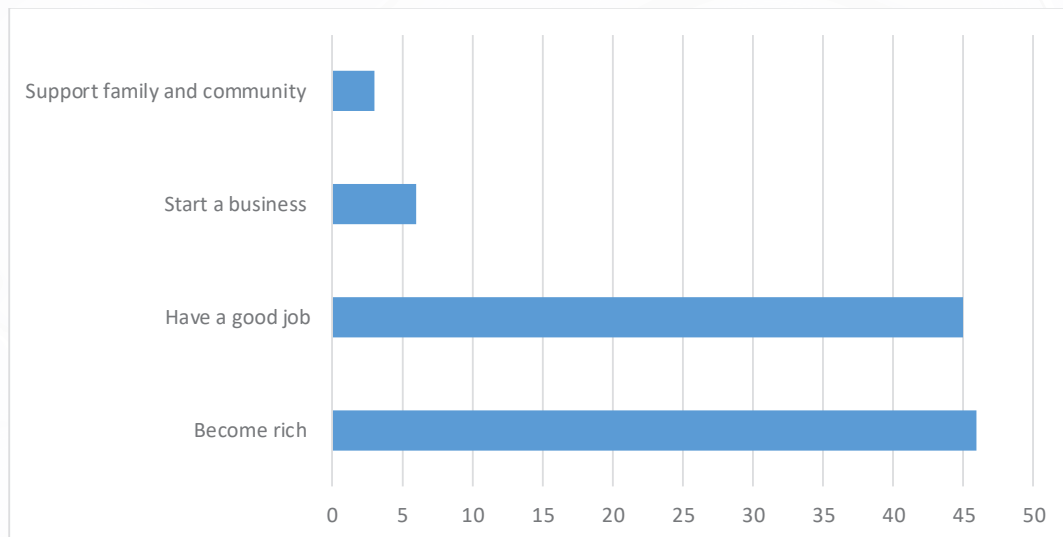
Majority of Kenyan youth have great hopes for the future despite the socio-economic inequalities and uncertainty. Drawing from the qualitative research, young people spoke about their views and aspirations of the future and what they imagined as prospects for success. In so doing, the following narratives were observed, pursuit for entrepreneurial dreams, healthy family and societal life and access to dignifying jobs.

Due to difficulty in accessing employment, entrepreneurship was viewed as the best means for achieving socio-economic mobility. One respondent explained;

"If you look at government employees, they are mostly old people employed a long time ago. There is lack of employment for youth. Those who are educated are forced to use their knowledge to set up a business and not rely on the government"

Surprisingly, youth aspirations were found to also center on having a healthy family and satisfying societal life. Youth were generally motivated by desire to find meaningful social connectedness in the society.

Nonetheless, the youth aspired to access dignified jobs with top key characteristics being "decent and well-paying jobs, job security, respect, and satisfaction. An expert opinion on youth sense of the future noted that;

"Most of the Youth only want dignified jobs, so when someone gets a job that's not dignified,

they will not do it."

Similarly, the aspirations of the Kenyan youths mostly surveyed was driven by what one aspired to and what they believed success meant to them.

Governance Challenges to Kenyan Youth Career Goals

Most of the youth interviewed in the Kenya study raised governance and structural constraints as a hindrance to their career goals. Youth interviewed reported that government was a hindrance to their aspirations and sometimes an enabler if one had the 'connections'. Most youth, however, decried corruption in the government as an impediment to their aspirations having been first-hand victims of being discriminated against for employment opportunities due to nepotism or ethnicity. One young female respondent explained;

"We had applied to the city council; we even passed the interview but when we reached the place there was a mark which you were marked with i.e black mark meant that the people knew people who worked there while the blue marks meant that the people came on their own. The ones with the black marks were given the job"

Corruption through nepotism, tribalism (ethnicity), cronyism and bribery were viewed as a great impediment to youth aspirations that put them in a 'tight corner' where their agency was constrained. One young man reported his frustra-

tion in the police recruitment process:

"I went for police recruitment and a person without qualification was selected because the person knows someone. So, for us who didn't have or know anyone, we were not selected. This made me decide to start my own business. Kenya is who knows who"

Young women and men reported systemic hurdles by the government officials including corruption, police brutality, political repression and sexual harassment for young women in their search for work. For instance, a youth group in Nairobi running a garbage collection association described how police often frustrated them through numerous arrests and accusations16

"The police, who were sent by the county council, were working together. When they arrested us, we had our licenses; we called the person who is in charge of this area at City Hall. He ordered them to release us as we had our licenses, but they refused because we did not bribe them. They said they would release people at city hall"

Despite providing a few youths with opportunities due to their ethnic and cultural connections, youth reported that the most significant impediment to their career and business aspirations was their exclusion from public opportunities due to what they reported as corruption.

Results from the Quantitative survey indicate that more than 50% of the youth, irrespective of gender, residence, and age, agreed that a youth needs family connections in government to succeed. This assertion evidenced that almost half of the youths in Kenya believe connections to the government matter in determining Success. The participants who reported political connections also acknowledged the government's substantial role in creating employment for the youth. It therefore seems that youth feel that lack of connections in government is a barrier to Youth aspirations and ambitions.

However, the study noted that a higher percentage (54%) of those with education level at tertiary level and above disagreed with this opinion.

Another governance challenge youth cited was the need for youth-friendly funding for en-

trepreneurs, a recurrent concern. Funding was a challenge for employed and non-employed youth activities due to the bureaucratic hurdles when youth attempt to access government funding for entrepreneurs. Youth reported having challenges accessing youth enterprise funds due to the stringent requirements that did not favour small-scale startups with no past banking record. A young rural female respondent explained.

"As a youth, you want to start a business that can help you in life, where will you get capital to start the business? So, when we think of going for the youth funds, they ask for guarantors, or title deeds. These funds are treated like something that we don't deserve. They ask for so many securities that we don't have"

Due to these funding constraints, many youths reported having been supported by family contributions, which emerged as the most important source of capital for youth start-ups despite the many youth financing opportunities from the government such as the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) and private sector that exist.

Youth also reported high awareness of the existing entrepreneurs funding programmes and little success in accessing these government services for youth in urban areas because they preferred support from friends and family who did not have many requirements. Poor youth in urban centres were less aware of government programmes and when they did attempt to access them, they cited corruption and numerous bureaucratic hurdles that have prevented them from accessing the funds to fulfil their career goals. A successful entrepreneur in Embu a peri-urban town North of Nairobi cited familial support:

"I will say yes to support from my community and relatives. Just as stated earlier, I had a problem with getting capital. I raised most of my capital from friends and relatives even though I started paying back when my business started picking up"

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16   Male youth garbage collection group leader

# Future Preference between Public Sector and Entrepreneurship

Exploring the Youth views concerning their desire to engage in entrepreneurship vs working for the public sector, analysis of these results provide insights into who they are and their aspirations. In terms of the share of the two clusters, 44% fell into the cluster that desired to start their own business and 56% fell into the cluster that desired to work in the public sector. Kenyan youth have a much higher preference for government jobs compared to owning a company. As some of the respondents illustrated;

"The main reason why most youths prefer government employment is because of benefits such as; security of tenure, and assurance of pension upon retirement".

"The private sector has no job security; you can be hired and fired at any point in time. And the company can collapse at any point in time"

This indicates the desire for safety of government jobs. Government employment is therefore attractive due to stability and security. The quantitative research confirms the results from the survey showing that most Kenyan young women and men desired to work for the public sector rather than the private sector. The public sector was considered as the most preferred employer.

Figure 3: Future Job Desired
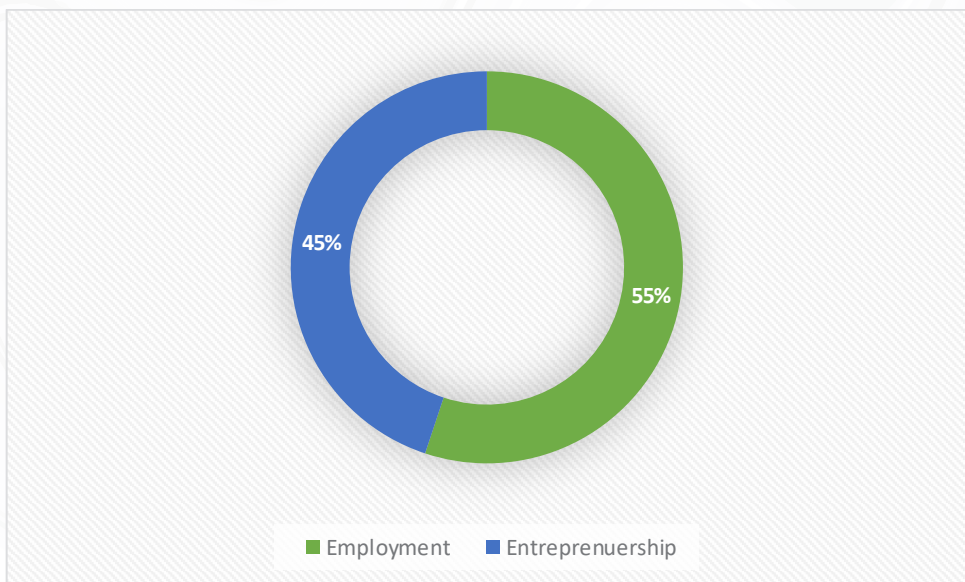
Despite the negative perception of government among the youth, many youths still confirmed that employment in government was attractive for the stability, dignity and security it provides. This feeling about government work was widespread across the different population segments interviewed. The youth however reported that the recruitment channel used by government and private sector organizations further marginalized them. Employment opportunities advertised in elite newspapers constrained youth in informal urban centers who lacked access to them. The demand for 'experience' was also viewed as a hindrance to youth career goals since youth often don't have experience.

However, majority of the youth employed in all sectors preferred to have their own business in future compared to being in the public service except those employed by the government where the majority (58%) are willing to remain in the public service. The results are as shown in the figure below

Figure 4: Future Preference between Public Sector and Entrepreneurship
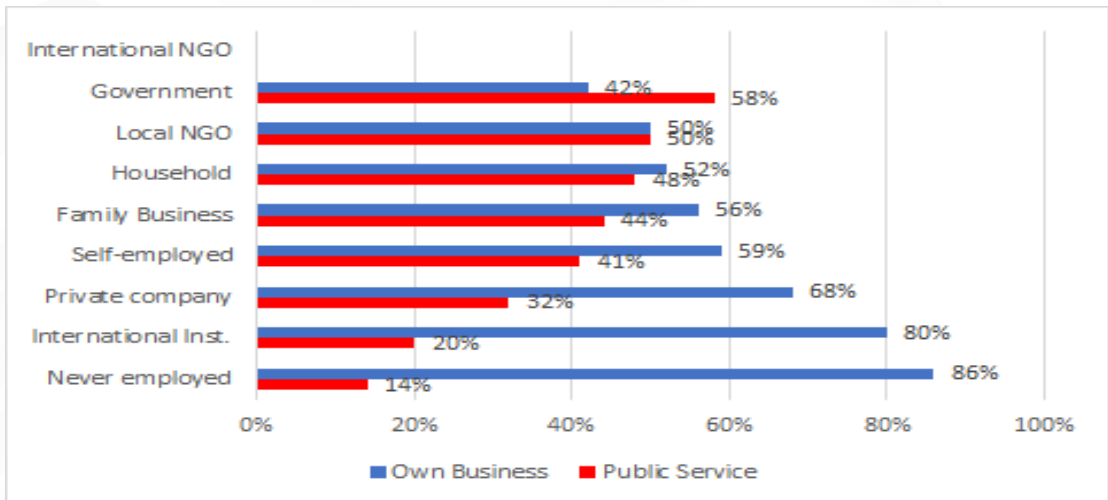
Gendered Challenges faced by youths when furthering career goals

The study found that youth attitudes to work were not gendered in Kenya, but the challenges encountered were sometimes gendered. For instance, several women in the research reported that they encountered sexual harassment in their workplaces that prevented them from achieving their career goals. Young women also reported that their career goals were sometimes constrained by their male partners and their parents who preferred their daughters working near home. A youth programme advisor reported that:

"This lady we were following up with. She rented a place, started her life after three weeks. We saw great change in her life because we saw a very jovial face smiling and doing business. So, one of the challenges was the mistrust especially with the husband 17

Gender-based violence and sexual harassment were often expressed as commonplace constraints among poor female youth. Young men also undergo gender-specific challenges in the pursuit of their goals and aspirations. Many young men interviewed in urban areas reported to have faced police harassment. Young men in urban informal settlements reported they often experienced police brutality and police harassment in pursuit of their livelihoods. Police harassment and brutality

were also associated with corruption as police pursued the youth for bribes for non-existent crimes. A youth group leader running a recycling business with his group in Nairobi's informal settlements reported how police often exploited them. On one occasion he narrated how they got arrested under trumped-up charges;

"We do not wash bottles; we do not have any business dealing with bottles. In city hall, if you deny a charge you stay for one week, if you accept you are fined 3000. We were three people, and we were fined 3000, we accepted, and we used the group savings to pay. We tried to complain but the person at the county council did not listen. We accepted our fate and continued with our business"

In another incident, the same youth group reported having been arrested and detained for not paying a bribe. These kinds of incidents are normal occurrences with youth operating informal businesses in Nairobi reducing their savings as they pay bribes and fines, and the government should address this by enabling a conducive environment for youth informality.

Youth Motivation

The youth have high aspirations, and they seem to be equally motivated. Our data shows that most youths are confident they can achieve their goals and shape their futures. They believe in hard work and that failure is not the end but just a transition journey to their success. Majority of the

17   *Interview with male youth organization manager in Nairobi in 2019*

Kenyan youth demonstrated resourceful and opportunistic ways in responding to the protracted liminality. The youth in one of the focused group discussions reported that;

"There is this perception among the youth that the government should do everything for you. So, we keep on blaming the government that it has not done this or that, we should instead think of our own ways of doing things like starting businesses, engaging in agriculture, and not waiting for the government to provide us with white-collar jobs which are not available"

While some demonstrated Self-efficacy belief associated with strong assertions that they could shape their own lives.

"Most of the youth rely on their talents as they have realized that education will not be of help. You find that somebody has a degree, diploma but it is not of any assistance, so we make use of our talents.

"It is not only through employment that youth can make it in life. Even if you have a certificate and there are no jobs for you, don't wait to get employed. Do whatever you come across to keep you moving because an idle mind is the devil's workshop.

The quantitative findings reveal that Kenyan youth are indeed motivated to overcome and navigate their own unique pathways to youthhood transition. The fact that a significant number of youths believe that success is hard work is a clear demonstration that youths are in a state of being and not just becoming.

More than 80% of the youth agreed that success is mainly driven by hard work, there is no failure if one is not able to achieve something today, they are confident they can shape their future if they work hard today and achieve their goals.

Figure 5: Youth Motivation
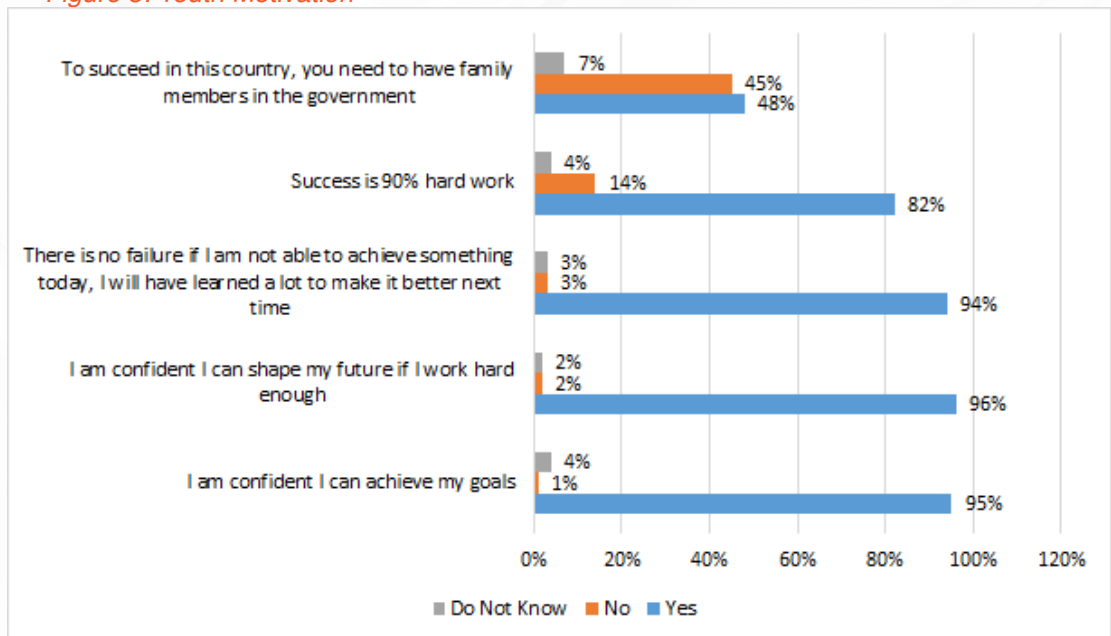
Resilience and adaptability strategies

Young men and women in Kenya demonstrated 'agency in tight corners' discussed in the earlier Africa-wide report despite myriad socio-economic, structural and governance challenges that continue to marginalize and exclude them from advancing their career goals. Kenyan youth undertake several activities to realise their career goals despite the challenges and structural constraints they have found themselves in. Unemployed Kenyan youth in urban, peri-urban and rural areas viewed the waithood stage they were trapped in as argued by Honwana (2013) as temporary. They creatively exercised their agency despite the structural constraints, which this report terms 'tight corners' such as lack of competitive education, ineffective government support, corruption, and nepotism and police harassment. Despite these challenges, youth exercised their agency in tight corners in several ways.

Kenyan youth exercise their agency by getting involved in different hustles to make ends meet. Youth Agency in Kenya embodies the popular concept of 'hustling' and 'being a hustler', which has become so popular that the political elite has appropriated it to create the 'hustler movement'. Hustling represents economic informality when people earn a living outside formal employment and formal institutions. Youth hustles among those interviewed included quick jobs that provided a daily income, such as selling fast-moving consumer goods. Hustling is not a new concept in defining economic informality in Kenya; it was previously popularly known as the 'jua-kali' sector in Kenya. The difference is that many Kenyan youths who described their informal economic activities as 'hustling' view them as a transitional for the meantime and not permanent as the 'jua-kali' sector has been viewed 18. In the transition period, youth hope to get a big break, a breakthrough as an entrepreneur, sports star, musician, digital influencer, politician or formal dignified employment that earns you respect and status. A female youth employer in Nairobi summed up the get rich quick hustles this way,

'This Kenyan system-the way we live, most of the people want to be MCAs, MPs and Senators. They see how Sonko adorns many "bling" (slang words for the golden necklaces Sonko wears). These Kenyan role models are not reliable. Youths are aspiring to get rich quickly, they view joining parliament as the quickest way to become rich. Once you get there, you get a tender, there are many kickbacks, people are viewing corruption as the only way you can go. It is an infectious disease, and I don't know how the government will deal with it' [19]

The second way youth exercise their agency in 'tight corners' in Kenya is using technology. The Kenyan population often takes up technology early according to technology reports. Technology has been an enabler of youth career goals for youth entrepreneurs and a source for employment. Youth have used technology for several functions including advertising and marketing their products and services. They have also employed technology in keeping digital records and for payments using the MPESA platform enabling easier payments and loans. A successful rural youth interview in Kenya had the following to say about the role of technology:

"Businesses depend a lot on advertising. I have been able to use social media like Facebook, Instagram to advertise my business. This has brought me a lot of customers because I have a large follower base on Facebook. Also, technology has helped me in record keeping. I do store most of my records on the computer and I do less paperwork".

Technology has provided youth with agency to make a living even through what is considered unsustainable livelihoods such as gambling. The rise of digital betting apps in Kenya in the last five years has offered many youth opportunities to make 'quick money' or lose it. Digital gambling became very popular compared to the longer routes like farming or employment for the fulfilment of their career aspirations for sustenance, a home and status. One youth manager complained that;

"Yeah, (gambling) is a problem for the youths. They are losing money to betting, they are losing hope in life. They want quick money. You find they come to do manual and heavy work, to bet the earnings aiming to win the jackpot of twenty million shillings"

18   Soroba Emmanuel, 2018, The jua kali sector – a safe haven for jobs in Kenya,< The jua kali sector – a safe haven for jobs in Kenya (howwemadeitinafrica.com)>

19   Interview with affluent female youth employer in 2019

Use of technology was especially common with youth in urban areas who have better access to technology.

Similarly, the question on what actions youth have undertaken to advance their career goals, quantitative findings indicate that more than half of the youth surveyed have taken some actions. The actions taken include: saving money for the future (45%), engagement in entrepreneurship (20%), furthering education (19%), and getting professional training (13%). Some youths are also seeking mentorship and networking to build social capital (3%). Mentoring and networking, which are key in building businesses, are being pursued by much fewer youths.

Youth sense of future when it comes to financial services is dim because the financial requirements prevent youth from accessing finances for startups. Some youth suggested future financial support to learn from the Somali business model. The Somali business model is based on trust and low profits which enables quick turnover. One successful youth observed that, 'When I become financially stable, I can do what Somalis do. The Somalis take youth and give them a loan and a place where to get the products. They give the youth a loan, which will buy products and supply the person who loaned him the money. After a few years, this youth will be established. The conditions are this youth that has been helped has to get another youth and help him the same way'.[20]

20   Carrier, N. , & Elliott, H. (2018, Jun 18). Entrust we must: The role of 'trust' in Somali economic life DIIS Working Paper

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presents several recommendations for youth career goals. First, at a conceptual level, there is a need to expand the notion of youth to accommodate concepts of youth-hood such as 'waithood' and 'hustling' from the global south as argued by Cooper et al (2021) and Alcinda Honwana (2017). The career goals of youth from the global south are defined by the socio-economic and cultural contexts. While goals like getting jobs with dignity are common in the global north and global south, goals like helping other people and making an impact are unique to the global south contexts like Kenya due to African conceptions of personhood that go beyond individual success to the community.

Second, the report observed that the governance and structural constraints have a huge impact on young women and men's career goals. The lack of inclusion and transparency in public appointments and resource distribution, and ineffective youth programmes in Kenya emerged as hindrances to youth career goals. There is a need for the Kenyan government to address the challenge of youth exclusion and transparency including, reports of bribery in national and devolved governments to reduce the apathy most youth feel about government as a hindrance to their aspirations. Youth programmes should focus on youth aspirations from below, not top-down government plans. Youth programmes should be accessible, have minimum barriers to entry, and be as transparent as possible in hiring and service delivery among other issues that hinder youth participation in government employment programmes, procurement processes and youth funds.

Third, despite the myriad challenges youth face, youth practice their agency in tight corners through 'hustling' and the use of technology for legitimate and illegitimate businesses like digital gambling. The report demonstrates that youth view technology as an enabler for their businesses. In Kenya, youth benefit from the use of technology and financial services offered through mobile platforms, and there is a need to partner with financial technology companies to create sustainable youth employment in the digital sector through providing training and financial support.

Fourth, on youth futures-youth still want dignified professional careers or enterprises that can earn them respect and status in their communities. In achieving this career goal, youth obtain loans from family and friends and keep 'hustling' while hoping for success. The Kenyan government needs to review how current youth enterprise funds constrain and enable youth enterprise. Successful youth were the only ones who reported benefits from these opportunities because they had the capital and security needed to acquire youth loans. Youth interested in startups could not raise the capital needed due to high costs and requirements, including the government Youth Enterprise Fund (YEDF). Youth suggested providing capital using the Somali business model discussed earlier as a recommendation for designing youth enterprise funds.

Still, on youth futures, the study found that youth were most inspired by local role models around them who had made it in similar circumstances and those who made quick money like the former Nairobi governor Mike Sonko. For instance, a local rice packer in Mwea had inspired a successful youth entrepreneur in Embu. Members of an urban youth group in Nairobi were inspired by a local footballer from their estate who had joined European football leagues. There is a need to support local role models who have achieved their career goals to support youth in their contexts. This report recommends supporting the local role models by offering mentoring and training sessions to youth.

Lastly, regarding youth futures, school and vocational training curricula need to be changed to ensure they equip youth with the skills needed in the job market. Youth complained that the current curricula were not in tune with societal needs. The youth interviewed observed that the curricula focused on manual work and agriculture, which was important but could have been more attractive to those more interested in jobs with quick money.

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