Ensuring the Future of Youth Polytechnics: A Survey of Public Youth Polytechnics in West Pokot County, Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the future of youth polytechnics considering the growing number of universities, prospect of Free Secondary Education and accelerated demand for skilled labor. Significantly, as a result of globalization of which Kenya is no exception YPs play an important role in the achievement of MDGs. This was a survey study of 10 Public Youth Polytechnics in West Pokot County in Kenya. These were selected for the study on the basis of—among other reasons: accessibility. The instruments used to collect data were questionnaires and interviews. Data collected was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. This study revealed that youth polytechnics offer technical skills specific to the informal sector, lack sufficient modern training equipments, have inadequate number of qualified instructors, depend on PTA annual subscription fees, grants and donors for funding and have low enrollment. As a result of these the institutions are operating on a beam balance trying on their survival chances. In summary, the findings of this study revealed that the future of youth polytechnics is uncertain. The findings are limited to the institutions studied, but future replication may provide additional information and enhance what is already known about the relations between the variables examined. Among the major recommendations mentioned are allocation of a higher percentage of government budgets to TVET; diversification of funding options by the institutions; Upgrading of YP to cater for secondary graduates too and to offer skills for formal and modern sector too.

Key Words: TVET, PTA, Youth Polytechnics, Public Youth Polytechnics.

Introduction

Youth Polytechnics under this study will be limited to rural post primary training institutions that offer technical and vocational skills. Youth polytechnics were started in Kenya way back in 1960s as low cost post primary training centers. At the time they were created, Kenya was producing about 100,000 primary school graduates each year who could not be absorbed into the secondary cycle (Kalemba, 2010). YPs were thus started as a means of alleviating unemployment by enhancing self dependency that is they were flexible and would meet individual’s needs. They were meant to provide technical and vocational skills. According to Court and Ghai (1974), Youth polytechnics were started as a shadow form of education meant to complement formal education by meeting the needs which it is not covering, to challenge and act as a catalyst in reforming the formal
system. They were involved in training various subjects such as carpentry, accounts, welding, mechanics, catering and teaching.

Despite being at the lower level in the hierarchy of technical training levels, Youth polytechnics have been considered the most effective because they emphasize on manipulative and practical skills. However their future is at stake considering the increasing number of universities in a bid to affect the new rule of each county should have at least 2 Universities, and more so some YPs are being converted into universities. Also for most youths in Kenya, university education is the preferred choice. Although, the sheer number of those completing secondary education cannot find places in higher education. They would rather venture into other TVET institutions consequently youth polytechnics are left for primary school leavers.

Furthermore the society has a negative attitude towards YP. They are seen as a place for school drop outs, primary school leavers and a training centre for blue collar jobs. These factors posses a major challenge to the survival of youth polytechnics. Hence this study sought to find out what the future holds for youth polytechnics and to suggest necessary actions to enable future sustainability of these precious institutions.

**Literature Review**

**YPs in Kenya**

Youth polytechnics were established in Kenya after a conference organized by the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) in 1966 whose theme was: ‘After School what?’ Currently, the transition rate of pupils from primary to secondary school level stands at 70%; hence, the remaining 30% of primary school graduates and drop-outs from primary and secondary schools provide the catchment for youth polytechnics. Although there are about 817 youth polytechnics spread across the country, which have been mapped by the Ministry of Education, the institutions are yet to operate as centers of choice rather than as centers of ‘last resort’ (MoE, 2009 in Kalemba 2010)

Currently, Kenya has more than 817 Youth Polytechnics previously known as village polytechnics. These institutions offer a wide range of training programmes from certificate to diploma levels. A variety of courses are offered including building construction; carpentry and joinery, commercial-based fields; engineering, textile- leased programmes, catering, hospitality and information and communication technology.

**Public Youth Polytechnics in West Pokot County**

YPs in WPC were started in the 1980s and by 1990, there were 4 PYPs and currently there are 6. The 3 YPs selected for this study are Kapenguria YP, Ortum YP, Chepareria YP.

**The YP Curriculum**

Since 1966 youth polytechnics have been training in various vocational areas (e.g., carpentry, accounts, welding, mechanics, catering, and teaching), leading to certificates or diploma awards. However in 2005 Ministry of Youth Affairs (MOYA), together with the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE), carried out a review of the vocational training
curricula in use for training programmes and revised a new curriculum. The courses contained in the new curriculum include:


The common courses offered by most of the Public Youth Polytechnics in West Pokot County are: Carpentry and Joinery, Motor Vehicle Technology, Building Technology, Fashion Design and Garment Making Technology, Hair Dressing and Beauty Therapy and ICT Studies

**Role of YPs in the Future of Kenya and Development**

One of the major roles of YPs towards the future of the country and its development can be derived from the objectives of the revised curricula which are among others: to prepare the youth for productive livelihoods that contribute to sustainable economic development; to impart marketable and technical skills that respond to contemporary labour market demands by industry as well as to build on gains acquired in basic primary education by providing contemporary labour market demands by the industry, the informal sector and for self employment. The curricula target primary school leavers with Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) certification.

While there was no quantitative data on the number of young people engaged in entrepreneurship in West Pokot, the qualitative data collected suggests that young people are setting up informal micro-enterprises as an alternative to formal employment and as a way to achieve their independence. However, other information suggests that young people still regard the formal sector as their only employment option. “Despite efforts over the last decade to create an ‘enterprise culture,’ the impression is that self-employment is the second or third choice for those who cannot find wage employment. Most of the entrepreneurs are recruited among those with a weak educational background”

As a result of unemployment and the shortage of opportunities for gainful employment, some young people are drawn to a life of crime. A crime survey in Nairobi conducted by UN Habitat and the City Council in 2002 found that youth delinquency and crime is a major problem (UN Habitat, 2002). Society’s reaction to youth crime varies. Young people (who are also victims of crime) recognize the pressures that drive their peers to a life of crime. Therefore youth polytechnics engage youth and reduce incidences of unlawfulness in Kenya.

The government also recognizes that youth polytechnics are fundamental in Kenya’s efforts to lower levels of poverty and to create opportunities for out of school youth. Further, Vision 2030 places great emphasis on science, technology and innovation in general and TVET in particular as a means of socio-economic and technological transformation. Vision 2030 is the country’s new development blueprint covering the period 2008–2030. It aims at making Kenya a globally competitive and prosperous nation with a high quality of life by the year 2030. This policy comprises three pillars: economic,
social and political. The social pillar which is geared towards a just and cohesive society, enjoying equitable social development in a healthy and secure environment, outlines issues on education and training. In its quest for promoting lifelong education and training at artisan level, the Government of Kenya upgraded some youth polytechnics to ‘model’ status (Kalemba, 2010).

The government’s initiatives to sustainability of youth polytechnics began in 2005 with the creation of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MOYA) and the renaming of Village Polytechnics as Youth Polytechnics. The main purpose was to counter the negative perception of these institutions by the public and give them a national outlook as opposed to a local outlook. Also the development of legal framework for Education Training and Research in 2005 focused on reforming and improving skills to meet the needs of the economy in line with the changes in technology and the setting up of a Committee for Technical Training.

A department of youth training was also set up in 2005 to rehabilitate and revitalize YPs country wide. A steering committee headed by the Director of Technical Education set up in 2005 to manage TVET investment programmes.

Attitude and Perception of Society towards YPs in West Pokot

West Pokot is a rather conservative community. They have high reverence for their cultural practices and are not ready to embrace new practices such as western education. Girls either drop out of school for circumcision or get married before or after class eight. While boys prefer to venture into pastoralism rather than continue with education as this provides easy source of income and gains them high status socially.

There are low enrolment rates at youth polytechnics in WPCA. The major contributing factors are perception and their sorry state. Most parents see YPS as centres for failures because their intakes mostly comprise of primary school graduates or school dropouts. Although there are some secondary school graduates they are relatively few. The graduates of youth polytechnics end up in the informal sector to which the society has a negative attitude hence discouraging many youth from venturing into it. Most PYPs in WPC are at a very poor state in terms of infrastructure, staff and finances and are being poorly managed. With the setting up of private YPs government owned polytechnics would be closed down since there was a high influx of students to the privately owned as they were better equipped and managed.

The government in a bid to revitalize youth polytechnics in five selected PYPs in West Pokot County got support from Kenya/Italy Debt for Development Program (KIDDP) to support construction of twin workshops, equipping and training of instructors and capacity building of management teams.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research technique. The intention of survey research was to gather data at a particular point in time and to use it to describe existing conditions. The study was carried out in the West Pokot County, Kenya in Public Youth Polytechnics.
Table 1: Sample Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Total Population.</th>
<th>Sample Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kapenguria</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chepareria</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ortum</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>52</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>507</strong></td>
<td><strong>218</strong></td>
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</table>

Source: Researchers (2013)

There are a total of 6 Public Youth Polytechnics in West Pokot County out of which a sample of three was arrived at using Krejcie & Morgan (2007) propositions that 50% of the population makes up the appropriate sample size. The target respondents of the study consisted of the principals, the deputy principals, the heads of departments, the heads of sections, the dean of students and the students of the institutions. The institutions were deliberately chosen from the MOEs report of TVETs in Kenya (MoE 2009). In addition, the institutions were chosen due to their accessibility.

**Sample size determination**

Having a target population of 507, it was possible for the researcher to obtain the sample size $n$,

$$n = Z^2pqd^2$$

(Mugenda and Mugenda, 2003)

Where: $n$ is the desired sample size

- $z$ is standard normal deviate at the required confidence level
- $p$ is the proportion in target population estimated to have characteristic being measured
- $q$ is $1-p$
- $d$ is the level of statistical significance set

The target population is less than 10,000, so a final sample is obtained as follows

$$nf = n + \frac{n}{N}$$

where:

- $nf$ is the desired sample size (when population is less than 10,000)
- $n$ is the desired sample size (when population is more than 10,000)
- $N$ is the estimate of the population size

At 95% confidence, $n = (1.96)^2 (0.50)(0.50) = 384$

$$nf = \frac{384}{1+(384/507)} = 218$$

Two major instruments were used: questionnaires and interviews. In addition, document analysis was utilized to collect secondary data. Data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively using Excel worksheet. Both types of data were collected in order
to provide a balanced assessment and interpretation of past, current and developing practices. Findings were presented using descriptive statistical tools.

According to the CRA (2010) report on counties the total Population with primary education in West Pokot County is 72.6% while the Population with secondary education is 6.2% this confirms the MOE 2009 report on the primary to secondary transition rate. Primary Education Net Enrolment Report of West Pokot County is 51.1% while the Secondary Education Net Enrolment Report is at 5.7%. Although the PYPs in west Pokot County have realized an increase in enrolment since the introduction of Free Primary Education the number is considerably low considering the total number of primary school completion The YPs would register a high enrolment however they register the lowest. The table below shows the total number of enrolments in the chosen youth polytechnics for the last 3 years. There is a low enrolment in the selected PYPs considering the County’s primary to secondary transition. The institutions intakes mostly comprise of primary school graduates and dropouts although there are some secondary school graduates but they are relatively few. The number of Female enrolled in YPs is higher than Male. This indicates that the society is changing its attitude towards educating the girl child From the above table the rate of enrolment decreases as the level of education advances. The lowest enrolment being to other institutions under which Youth Polytechnics fall. Given that YPs are the last choice to the Kenyan youth it can be concluded that they have the least of the numbers.

**Analysis and Findings**

**Table 2: National Enrolment Status**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STUDENT ENROLMENT BY TYPE OF INSTITUTION AND SEX</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment in Primary School</td>
<td>4,362.5</td>
<td>4,201.3</td>
<td>4,509.4</td>
<td>4,332.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment in Secondary school</td>
<td>720.5</td>
<td>615.4</td>
<td>787.9</td>
<td>684.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enrolment in Universities</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>110.3</td>
<td>67.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrolment in Other Institutions 2</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>53.1</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Kenya Facts and Figures 2012*

1. Includes students in National Universities and Private accredited Universities

2. Includes students in Teacher Training Colleges, Polytechnics, Technical Schools & Institutions of Science &Technology.
### Table 2: Enrolment in the selected Public Youth Polytechnics in West Pokot County for the last Four Years

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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Kapenguria YP</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chepareria YP</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ortum YP</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Source: Researchers (2013)*

### Status and Challenges of the selected PYP in WPC

Some of the Public Youth Polytechnics in WPC are in a very poor state, in terms of infrastructure, staff and finances. With the setting up of private YPs government owned polytechnics would be closed down since there was a high influx of students to the privately owned institutions as they were better equipped and managed.

*Fig. I: Workshops in Ortum Youth Polytechnic*  
*Source: Researchers (2013)*

The state of the polytechnic acts as a point of reference for the negative perception of YPs by the society.
Leather work can be a financial aid to the institution but they lack modern equipments and also there is inadequate supply of materials due to delays in dispatch of Subsistence Youth Polytechnic Tuition Fund.

The government, in a bid to revitalize youth polytechnics in five selected PYPs in West Pokot County got support from Kenya/Italy Debt for Development Program (KIDDP) to support construction of twin workshops, equipping and training of instructors and capacity building of management teams.

Below are the twin workshops in Kapenguria YP and below Electronic Technology practical session. Kapenguria YP was chosen as a model polytechnic for the KIDDP projects and the new curriculum. Despite provision of equipment and the building of the twin workshops the old buildings were renovated and according to the Manager this has aided in the increase of enrolment. However a number of 250 students isn’t a considerable number for the sustainability of the institution.
The study revealed that the courses offered at the selected YPs in WPC are limited. For instance Chepareria YP offers only 3 courses these are: Garment Making, Masonry and Carpentry and Joinery. Also and most skills offered in these youth polytechnics are more of manual specific to the informal sector to which the society has a negative attitude hence discouraging many youth from venturing into it.

Most of the courses offered in these institutions require practical skills yet they lack sufficient modern training equipments. The existing equipments are either inadequate relative to the number of students or obsolete; there are some classes which have to be taken in shifts to ensure students access the equipments.

Fig. 3: Above the Twin Workshops in Kapenguria YP; below a a practical class on air conditioning machine provided by KIDDP.  

Source: Researchers (2013).

Fig. 4: A Garment Making Class in Chepareria YP.  

Source: Researchers (2013)
It’s evident that the number of students is more than the available sewing machines.

The Institution has only one Computer and classes have to be taken in shifts. Still five to seven students per computer doesn’t provide the best practicability

The society’s perception was ascertained through random interviews of the members of the society about what they think of polytechnics. YPs are regarded as inferior institutions reserved for school failures and dropouts, and as a training centre for blue collar jobs thus the society at large has a negative attitude towards youth polytechnics.

The Institutions under study depend on PTA annual subscription, tuition fees, grants and donors for funding. The government supports some of the tutors’ monthly salaries, while support staff depends on the fees paid by students for their pay.

There are inadequate numbers of qualified instructors. Each department should have at least one tutor. Ortum YP for example has 5 department and only 3 government tutors. Also considering the tutor to student ratio of 1:10, Kapenguria has 9 government tutors with a total number of 250 students.

**Findings Concerning the Institutions Initiatives to Ensure their Sustainability**

PYP have upgraded and diversified their courses to cover for technology changes and market needs. Some of these YPs have sought other financing strategies such as: sales of products made by students a case of Ortum Youth Polytechnic selling leather products; agriculture such as hatcheries and farming a case of Kapenguria and Ortum YPs,
Summary and Synthesis

In summary, the findings of this study reveal that the government is committed to sustaining these institutions and has taken steps to fund their revival and rehabilitation, review their curriculum and upgrade their facilities and provide the necessary equipment. More so it has taken the initiative to train the managers of YPs in leadership and management skills to guarantee good and quality management of YPs. However, the future of Public Youth Polytechnics in West Pokot County is uncertain given: poor management, low enrolment levels, lack of adequate and necessary equipment and instructors.

YPs have a big role in the development of West Pokot County and the country at large. These institutions need to upgrade, diversify the skills they offer to adopt the changing technology, modernizing their equipment. YP in WPC have the support of the Private and Non Governmental sector thus they have no justification to subdue to the slow painless death.

The findings are limited to the institutions studied, but future replication may provide additional information and enhance what is already known about the relations between the variables examined.

Conclusion

This study has established that the future of YPs in WPC is uncertain given the low enrollment levels, limited funding options and the perception of the society. However, there are various factors influencing the future of YP. The government for instance is committed to ensuring the future of YPs with the upgrading and widening of the YP Programs. The negative perception established from the interviews with the respondents is slowly fading, although some misgivings persist regarding manual work, as well as parental expectations about their children’s careers. The sustainability of an institution depends on increasing the enrollment level, variety of financing options, availability of adequate and qualified instructors.
The findings are limited to the institutions studied, but future replication may provide additional information and enhance what is already known about the relations between the variables examine

**Recommendations**

**The following recommendations are put forward:**

1. Allocation of a higher percentage of government budgets to TVET.

2. YPs should be upgraded to cater for secondary school graduates too to for these will increase enrollment levels and change the society’s perception towards them.

3. There should be frequent updating of skills taught at the Youth polytechnics to embrace changing technology and skills demand for formal sector employment.

4. YPs need to broaden their funding options or run projects that will enable the institution to meet their financial needs and obligations.

5. The institutions should take initiatives to find part time tutors while awaiting government postings.

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