

**YOUTH EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN ZIMBABWE:
THE CASE OF GWERU YOUNG PEOPLE’S ENTERPRISE (GYPE)**

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ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment is one of the greatest challenges being faced by African economies and Zimbabwe is not spared from this predicament with an unemployment rate of eighty percent (80%). Sixty-eight percent (68%) of this figure are youths. Of these youths unemployed females constitute nineteen percent (19%) and males constitute (11%). This study sought to address this prevalent issue of youth unemployment and poverty in Zimbabwe’s Midlands Provincial Capital City of Gweru. The idea was to introduce and reinforce the importance of obtaining a self-employment mentality through an entrepreneurship thrust based on small enterprise development education to youths in Gweru. Participants met once a week to participate in group building activities, get insights to what it will take to run a small enterprise, and receive information on services that are available to help them along the way. Twenty youths ventured in a brick moulding project and successes and challenges were noted. Through interviews, questionnaires, focus group discussions and observations the researcher found out efforts being made by their generation to make ends meet and to have a sustainable project..

Keywords: Youth, Empowerment, Self-Employment, Small Business Project, Sustainability, Poverty

INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

Poverty alleviation has become a serious global concern. Many efforts have been made worldwide to eradicate poverty such as economic modernisation, Marxism, structural functionalism, dependency and scientific socialism. Development strategies such as donor aid have created a dependency syndrome among recipients and in most cases it has failed to become a sustainable solution to development. Imposed interventions have not alleviated poverty and it's a sign that solutions should be people-driven since the people are not subjects but custodians of development. Youths of today ought to be empowered by developing in them competencies; knowledge and skills require producing goods and services to satisfy their needs. According to Swaneapoel (2000), this amount to capacity building, making productive resources available to the underprivileged and establishing efficient and effective administrative and institutional structure. The topical issue in this twenty first century is to establish sustainable projects which satisfy the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs (World Commission of Development and Brundtland report, 1987).

A research study on development programmes focusing on youth unemployment is not only desirable, but also a challenge. Mokoena (2013), pointed out that unemployment plunges youths in poverty which implies social exclusion, lack of participation, lack of command over resources, insecurity and vulnerability. Unemployed youths are among the poorest people of the world. Furthermore, unemployed youths are susceptible to sexual abuse by wealthy adults, thus exposing them to ravages of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. They must be empowered so that they resist the temptation to engage in promiscuous behaviour as they try to salvage their desperate plight. In light of this, a study of youths' capacity building programme entails an evaluation of the effectiveness of Gweru Young People's Enterprise in the city of Gweru in Zimbabwe. The aim of the programme is to empower these vulnerable youths and save them from a desperate situation which may lead to vicissitudes. This might result in attainment of self esteem, like sustenance and freedom from servitude, which are the core values of development. I argue that youths in Gweru are among the most vulnerable to poverty and diseases and the initiative by the Gweru Young People's Enterprise (GYPE) maybe an effective and sustainable way to alleviate their poverty.

The government of Zimbabwe undertook to empower youths. According to the Zimbabwe National Employment Policy Framework (ZINEPF) prepared in 2009, the Government of Zimbabwe fully recognises that productive employment and decent work, especially for the youths, cannot be achieved through fragmented and isolated interventions. On the contrary, this requires sustained, determined and concerted efforts by all stakeholders, including those most affected, mainly youths. The Zimbabwe government has a ministry set aside for youths that is Ministry of Youth Development, Indigenisation and Empowerment where youths funds are available for them to borrow. However, this remains a mere rhetoric that youths are assisted by the government to create employment as there are several bottlenecks to achieve this goal, lack of political will, corruption and lack of funds. In such an environment youths should not lay idle waiting for assistance from the government or non-governmental organisations (ngos), as assistance is not always available or forthcoming. Therefore youths should change their mentality of being employment seekers but to be self starters and become employers.

Zimbabwe had an underperforming economy since 2000, and the youths were the hardest hit. The wave was not discriminating; it affected all youths that including university graduates, “A” and “O” level holders and the uneducated..

AREA OF STUDY

Woodlands Park is a new residential location found in Gweru and comprise of high, medium and low density stands. Gweru is Zimbabwe's third largest and most central city. It houses approximately 200,000 inhabitants and is the capital of the Midlands Province (www.zimbabwe.8m.com/zimgwe.htm). Gweru is an industrial, commercial, agricultural and educational centre with all the modern amenities that one would expect. It is situated on the main link of rail between Bulawayo and Harare and is the principal rail junction with lines radiating to Masvingo, Shurugwi, Zvishavane and the Lowveld. However, since 2000 most industrial hubs of the city have been underperforming that is Bata Shoe Company a once renowned shoe manufacturing company, Zim Alloys, National Railways of Zimbabwe, Anchor yeast. According to Shava (2014), Bata Shoe Company was once one of the area's biggest employers but it is scaling down its operation. At its peak Bata employed more than five thousand (5000) workers but has trimmed its workforce to about one thousand and five hundred (1500) due to viability problems caused by the country's more than a decade- long economic crisis.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The study set out to establish the following

1. Is GYPE effective in eradicating poverty among youths through its training, entrepreneurial skills, development and small enterprise management strategies?
2. What challenges does GYPE face in implementing its youths' capacity building and poverty alleviation programme in Gweru?
3. What recommendations can be offered to improve the effectiveness of the programme.

METHODOLOGY

In this study we mixed theoretical literature study and empirical research methods. Literature for secondary data collection included journal, newspaper and magazine articles as well as Masters and Doctoral Dissertations. Ministry of Youth Indegenisation and Economic Empowerment policy documents, workshop reports and minutes of meeting were also visited. Primary data was collected through structured interviews. Permission was obtained from GYPE management to conduct this research among its members. Interviews were carried out with the Director, Administrator, programs officer and programmes assistant. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain views and the challenges faced in complementing the GYPE programme in eradicating poverty by tackling the social problem of youth unemployment. Information from these interviews was compared with that from observations and literature review to gain a balanced analysis.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

There is no consensus among scholars, nations and youth organisations on the precise definition of a youth. According to Chirisa and Muchini (2011), there are three categories used to define a youth which are age, as a stage in personal development and as an emotive and troubling image. Youth is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood's independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) acknowledge that the term youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age group. The United Nations defines the youth as those persons between ages of 15 and 24 years but particular states have their age ranges. The African Youth Charter's differs from the UN; youth means every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years. Zimbabwe considers the African Youth Charter's definition of 15 to 35 as its accepted definition of youths. So in employment issues it is this group which is most vulnerable.

Youths have a tense and complex relationship with unemployment. In his biographical analysis of youth unemployment, Hearn (1994), came up with the following conclusions. He identified the social problems of unemployment as among others, disruption of social reference points, dramatic change in everyday habits or habits of a lifetime, loss of identity and mental depression. Hearn proposes that youth who are unemployed experience feelings of rejection and humiliation while the lack of financial resources prevents them from becoming independent. Alheit (1994), adds that the loss of work may be more than a smooth biographical discontinuity such the death of a close relative, instead it may be a chaining together of different discontinuity experiences which can be coupled with individually in different ways. These ways may be both aggressive and depressive such as in correcting minor mistakes such as an exam pass or redundantly overwintering a period of unemployment.

Some of the effects of unemployment on the social level include threat to identity, that is, disruption of wishes and self definition. This often leads to drug and substance abuse by youth. Unemployment can also facilitate the formation of youth groups either as youth gangs or as formal youth groups such as youth clubs. These are necessitated by the fact that exclusion from unemployment often leads to social exclusion hence youth are likely to form own groups in order to compensate for this exclusion. Such groups where they do not involve criminal activities are healthy to the personal and social development of the youth. Therefore, GYPE came up with different initiatives to curb against negative effects of unemployment.

It has been said that small business entrepreneurship is the way to go for development. The informal sector can promote economic growth and development informal sector by creating wealth and employment. The Small Enterprise Development Corporation (SEDCO) defined a small business as one of less than fifty employees, and annual capital credit requirement of less than one hundred thousand Zimbabwe dollars as valued in early 1990s. GYPE fits into the smallholder informal sector in Zimbabwe. The question is whether small enterprises are viable or not and what contributions they are making towards developing the country's economy. Their performance is critical to poverty alleviation and development through fostering employment creation. This study argues that with the availability of adequate business management skills, markets, capital and technology small enterprise such as GYPE is a sustainable source of livelihood.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study borrows Ian Scoones' framework of sustainable livelihoods. The framework shows how, in different contexts, sustainable livelihoods are achieved through access to a range of livelihood resources (natural, economic, human and social capitals) which are combined in the pursuit of different livelihood strategies. Basing on this framework, GYPE made use of resources available such as water, sand and labour in their brick manufacturing project. Central to the framework is the analysis of the range of formal and informal organisational and institutional factors that influence sustainable livelihood outcomes. The Zimbabwean government created institutions which support small businesses such as the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Zimbabwe Youth Council and Ministry of Youth and Indigenisation. Drawing on Chambers and Conway (1992) among others a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base.

FINDINGS

From August 2012 to July 2013 twenty youths, fifteen young men and five young ladies from Gweru mobilised and formed their organisation project and named it Gweru Young People's Enterprise. They realised that opportunities for getting new employment were not on their side. They approached the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises, Gweru Chapter to train them on business skills as they wanted to venture into small businesses. They were trained in the following areas; Micro entrepreneurship and business management, internal savings and lending, change management and conflict resolution, confidence building, purchasing and supply, company formation. The programme equipped them on how to start a business, run a business and close a business. The participants were equipped with knowledge on the basic principles of running and managing a business, record keeping, marketing and stock control. The ministry assisted the group in crafting a business plan and putting in place management systems. This training boosted their confidence in running a sustainable business competently.

These skills necessitated them to define a project they wanted to venture in and to identify their market. They discovered that there were several business opportunities they can venture into in Gweru. Types of projects they discovered were the creation of private schools, brick moulding, establishing internet cafes, car washing, music industry, typing, printing and photocopying. Of the various business projects considering that Gweru is a city which is still growing and there is a lot of construction taking place in suburbs such as Woodlands Park, Ascot in fill, Hertfordshire and many, they decided to venture into brick making because there is a ready market. Key suppliers and potential markets within Gweru were identified. Brick-moulding has not been a common enterprising project as it was exclusively for big and well established companies. They realised that the established construction companies were not located in locations and they were failing to supply demand for bricks. The youths comprised of O level holders, a level holders, university students and graduates. They established their industry in Woodlands park where most housing stands are still being built.

Before embarking on their projects, the youths toured NGOs and government departments in search of funds to kick-start their project. They submitted the project proposals to the Ministry of Youth and Indigenisation several NGOs and they are still waiting for response. However, they decided that they could not just lay idle waiting for funding but with the assistance from their parents they contributed five hundred dollars United States of American dollars (US\$500) each. The money was used to buy equipment which comprise of the brick making machine, cement, sand, bowser and other necessities. They asked for permission to use an open space. One of the group member highlighted that water is readily available in Woodlands Park and this makes their lives easier. They sell their bricks at a cheaper price that is twenty cents per standard brick compared the prices of renowned companies such as Summit where the standard bricks cost 25cents each.

“In the past brick-making was seen as something that only adults and established companies did, but we have learnt that youths are energetic and can make quality bricks too. If people see the houses that have been built with the bricks that we made, its testimony that youths can do a good job, if given the opportunity,” one group member said. Going forward their thrust is to run the business venture in a sustainable manner and for this they require support from individuals, organisations and corporate to place orders for bricks and/or blocks

The youths do not have to fork out money to transport the bricks because majority of their customers resides in Woodlands and from Mkoba which is nearby. Since 2012, the project had contributed immensely towards their well being. They have been able to supply local builders with bricks and to get income at the end of the month each one of them was able to pocket one hundred dollars a month. The youths have managed to create employment for them and income.

However, the group faces many challenges such as inadequate capital, unreliable government structures and volatile economic environment. The money contributed by GYPE members is inadequate to buy efficient machinery and various raw materials such as fuel. They also need big machines so that they produce many bricks a day. Although there are banks offering loans in Zimbabwe, bank finance is not easily accessible to youths, in most cases they lack the required collateral security needed to obtain a bank loan. Also, government funds are not readily available and they are a lot of bottlenecks to access them. Most of the youths lack marketing, business management and record keeping skills. Also, transport is a problem because in the long run the group should have their own trucks to ferry cement and sand Also, in some instances they lack expertise of moulding different kinds of bricks as a result most customers will not get the type of bricks they want. If the above challenges are not addressed fully it will affect the viability and sustainability of the project. Although there are support structures that promote youth entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe, there is still need to assess the extent to which their contribution can lead to sustainable entrepreneurship which creates jobs for the active population (Chimucheka, 2012).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has indicated that there are various strategies employed by youth in peri-urban areas in order to evade the negative effects of unemployment, and also to shun away from vices that negatively affect community and brick manufacturing is one of them. The youths should make their own initiative to create employment and venture into different kinds of business ventures. However, the government institutions must implement various

youth policies on ground rather than for them to remain on paper. Also banks must avail loans to youths so that it boosts their capital base and have sustainable projects. Other institutions such as ngos and youth organisations must offer capacity building to these enterprising youths so that their business grows to greater heights. For their small business to be sustainable, these youths require a big capital base, modern technology so that they sustain competition from well established companies. Local councils must provide a conducive environment for youth entrepreneurship and the local business fraternity must support them. All in all, brick manufacturing projects can be a salient avenue for employment creation and if pursued properly it leads to sustainable sources of livelihoods for the youths.

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