

Kazi Kwa Vijana: Youth Empowerment in Kenya

In 2009 the Government of Kenya launched the Kazi Kwa Vijana (Work for Youth) programme, aiming to employ both urban and rural youth in labour intensive public works projects like road maintenance, water harvesting, afforestation and waste collection. The Government also supports a fund providing young people finance for self employment and entrepreneurial skills' development. What's most significant about the project though is their involvement in its management and implementation: the implementation team consists entirely of local youth. Moreover, the junior staff are allowed to make decisions without being micro-managed. The community has gained a sense of ownership in the project, as well as responsibility towards their environment. The donors' role has been to support an existing national process by scaling-up its dimension through additional financial support, as well through specific technical assistance.



Photo: ILO

(a) involve the youth in income generating activities and thus empower them economically

(b) involve the youth in the conservation of the Zaina forest

(c) contribute towards food security and poverty reduction

The Need for the Programme

Although poverty in Kenya has declined since 1997, poverty and inequality remain serious concerns. Almost a third of Kenya's poor population is between 15-29 years of age and they face serious challenges, including high rates of unemployment (twice the national average) and underemployment. The violent protests of early 2008 highlighted the critical importance of addressing the problem of poverty and inequality and, in particular, the increasing problem of idle youth. According to the Country Social Analysis by the World Bank (2007), youth unemployment, especially among males, is a major contributor to frustration and tension, particularly in urban areas, and a matter of serious policy concern in the country.

The Government of Kenya (GoK) developed a plan in 2007, emphasising the importance of a coordinated and multi-sectoral approach to addressing the problem of youth unemployment. In April 2009, the Kazi Kwa Vijana (KKV), the Work for Youth programme, was launched. It was aimed at the employment of youth in rural and urban areas in labour intensive public works projects, focusing on smaller projects that can be implemented rapidly. Examples are road maintenance sub-projects, small-scale water supply and sanitation, water harvesting, afforestation and waste collection. In addition to the KKV, the GoK continues to support the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF), providing young people with access to finance for self-employment and entrepreneurial skills' development.





Photo: ILO

“ There are over 50 Ha of land in the forest that need to be planted with trees. The greatest advantage of using the youth group is that it is easy to mobilise and that can be held to account for work not done satisfactorily, hence it minimises the need for close supervision ”

– Mr. James Gathegea, the forester in charge of Zaina

The Programme at Work

One illustrative example of KKV is the Kimathi Horticultural Tree Nurseries Group, which started in April 2009. The Zaina forest area lies at the foot of the Aberdares and the predominant economic activity is smallholder tea growing and subsistence farming. The youth are employed in picking the green tea leaves, for which they earn an average of 100 KES/day. During the wet season, the frequency of picking increases and the average incomes rise. Following the prolonged drought of 2008, the earnings from tea picking dropped drastically, by about 80%.

Mr Gidraf Mwangi the vice-chairman of Kimathi Horticultural Tree Nurseries Group says, “*Before the KKV programme, the local youth were mainly engaged in tea picking activities where they would earn an average of KES 100/day for 6-7 days a week when the weather favoured the growth of tea. However following the prolonged drought, which affected most parts of the country, the frequency of tea picking in the Zaina area dropped drastically to 1-2 days a week. This effectively reduced the potential earnings of the local youths from KES 700/week in the wet season to KES 200/week during the prolonged dry season. Indeed, many young people lost their source of income.*”

The timely launch of KKV in early 2009, and in particular the Kenyan Forestry Service (KFS) tree planting and nurturing project in Zaina, thus presented the local youth with an excellent opportunity to earn additional income. The money earned has been used to start up small income generating activities such as poultry farming and rabbit rearing.

Ironically, the idea of forming the group was first mooted by three elderly women from the local community. One of the founder members, Ms Alice Wanjiku, says the idea of forming a group to plant trees followed constant clashes with the KFS guards who would chase local women away from the protected Zaina forest on which the local community depended for firewood. The three women, together with Mr John Muthui the current chairman of the Zaina Community Forest Association, mobilised the youths,

who were then being employed under the KKV Programme, in tree planting activities in the Zaina forest.

The objectives of the group were to: (a) involve the youth in income generating activities and thus empower them economically; (b) involve the youth in the conservation of the Zaina forest and; (c) contribute towards food security and poverty reduction. The financing, as for all KKV activities, came during the first phase from regular government budget for forestry management. Activities were sub-contracted to youth organisations living in villages around the forest.

The group saw the lack of adequate seedlings in the local KFS tree nurseries as an opportunity to earn extra income, firstly from the growing of seedlings for sale to the KFS, and secondly by providing the labour for planting and maintenance of tree seedlings. The chairman engaged the youth in discussions on how to improve the group’s income generating capacity and it was agreed that all members of the group would contribute KES 100 each month from the earnings of tree planting activities under KKV.

They first started small tree nurseries in each of the members’ homes for the initial six months and later decided, for easy management, to have one central tree nursery as well. The group rented a piece of land from a local farmer, at a cost of KES 20 000 for three years and entered into a written agreement that was witnessed by the local Chief.

The group has a total of about 41 950 indigenous and 22 000 exotic tree seedlings in its central nursery and members’ individual nurseries, with a net value of about KES 1.2 million. They have planted some 45 000 assorted tree seedlings in the Zaina forest area. The trees planted included *Croton Megalocarpus*, *Prunus Africana*, *Olea Africana* and bamboo among others. About 80% of the trees survived the poor weather conditions and the group looks forward to the KFS also engaging it in the first weeding for the trees.

The KKV Programme has provided employment opportunities for youth and this has evidently reduced the incidence of crime and poverty



Photo: ILO

The forester in charge of Zaina, Mr James Gathegea, confirms: “There are over 50 Ha of land in the forest that need to be planted with trees. The greatest advantage of using the youth group is that it is easy to mobilise and that can be held to account for work not done satisfactorily, hence it minimises the need for close supervision”. He has also continued to use the youth group for pruning activities in its cypress plantation forests. Tree pruning is a highly labour intensive activity that lends itself to the objectives of the KKV Initiative. The over 100 Ha of young cypress plantation forest is overgrown because of adequate pruning.

Other Benefits

Mr Eliud Gachogu, a group member, says: “The KKV KFS forestry project in Zaina came at a time when the local youth were fast losing hope. The prolonged drought exacerbated the problem and with the local youth despairing, many were beginning to turn to drug abuse and to drinking illicit brews. The project has given the youth some hope and increased sensitisation to the importance of forest conservation. The protected forest area is vast and is not adequately attended to by the KFS because of a lack of funds. I would like to appeal to the Government to increase its funding to the KKV to employ more youth for longer periods.”

The active participation of women in the group’s activities is high. The positions of vice chairperson, secretary and treasurer are all held by women. Ms Joyce Nyawira, the secretary, says: “Under the KKV Programme, where all the group members first worked, the recruitment of workers was done through the use of ballots but a minimum of 30% of the employment slots were always reserved for women.” Since the membership of the groups is drawn from those who participate in KKV activities, the requirement for 30% employment opportunities for women has facilitated the full participation of women in the group’s activities.

The Kimathi Horticultural Tree Nurseries Group has had a positive impact on the local youth, resulting in the formation and registration of another local group, the Zaina Highland Tree

Nurseries, Bee Keeping and Volleyball Group, early this year. The group has a membership of 18 and is registered with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development.

This group has added an innovative approach to keeping local youths positively occupied by introducing bee keeping and an amateur volleyball team. The Dedan Kimathi Volleyball team was formed when the chairman in Zaina thought it important to keep the youth occupied after KKV work in the Zaina forest, and also as a way of identifying young talent in sports. The Dedan Kimathi volleyball group comprises women’s and men’s teams. The group was started at a meeting at the Kanyinya ground designed to sensitise them to the importance of sport as a form of recreation and as a means of enhancing social ties among the youth.

“I am very proud to be a member of our volleyball team, which has enabled us to identify our hidden talents. The participation of the local youth in volleyball helps to keep them away from idleness and the dangers of drug abuse. I hope that with our registration with the Kenya Volleyball Federation we will be able to enter competitive tournaments and I also hope we might attract some sponsorship from big companies”, says Mr. Isaac Ndiritu.

The local church, too, has played a positive role in youth mobilisation. In the words of Rev. Francis Maina, who is the Kimathi Parish leader in the community: “Whenever I make my weekly visits to a new parishioner’s home for fellowship I always plant a tree before I leave and I ask the home owners to nurture it until my next visit.”

Ms Alice Nyokabi, one of the founder members of the group, says: “The employment opportunities that have been created by the KKV Programme have raised the hopes of the youth in the community who now see income generation prospects in the future. The programme has also raised the level of awareness of the importance of the protection and conservation of forests and particularly of indigenous trees. This is demonstrated by the active participation of the group members in the Community

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Photo: ILO

Forest Association activities that include an element of community policing whereby the group members report cases of illegal logging to the area Forester.”

Mr Joseph Maina, the area Assistant Chief, confirms: “*The groups have also given the youth a forum through which to present their views to the local administration and leaders and I always attend their meetings whenever I am invited.*” This demonstrates that the formation of the groups has enabled the youth to be recognised socially by the local community and the local administration, as well as by the church.

The group chairman says they are now planning to approach corporate businesses such as local banks and industries for sponsorship. They hope that with improved cash flow they will be able to market their products better and also engage in more income generating activities such as poultry farming and bee keeping on a commercial scale.

The groups have made several achievements in their short period of existence; notable among these have been:

- Raising the level of awareness of the importance of forest conservation and protection among the local community through the Community Forest Association and the KFS.
- Improving income generation potential for the local youth through the sale of tree seedlings, the planting of trees and the pruning of forest plantations. Mr Isaac Nderitu has started a bee keeping project, initially with four hives, from income generated directly from the KKV project. Mr Samuel Juha, another group member, has, with his KKV earnings, started rearing rabbits and chickens for sale. Mr Mark Mwangi, a 26 year old group member, has started saving to buy a push cart, which he will use to transport firewood and farm produce for the local community.

Shortcomings

Some deficits of KKV have been identified, among them the fact that stakeholders were not properly sensitised on the objectives of KKV at the beginning, resulting in false perceptions and unreasonably high expectations among the youth. The second phase of the KKV has been launched end 2010 with several mini workshops in the selected districts. The objective is to present

the exact content of the programme and the conditions of employment in a realistic way, which will help to avoid problems at a later stage. It is also part of the strategy to make the process more transparent.

The first phase of KKV largely targeted unskilled labour, thus leaving out a substantial number of youth who have completed tertiary level education and, therefore, possess some vocational skills. This was the result of a government strategy to maximise the labour content with a targeted labour content of 90%. The next enhanced phase of the project will have a more balanced share between labour and other inputs, which, in turn, increases opportunities for more skilled youth.

Outcomes and sustainability

The KKV Programme has provided employment opportunities for youth and this has evidently reduced the incidence of crime and poverty. In 2009/10, the KKV employed between 200 000 and 300 000 Kenyans, primarily youth, enabling them to buy food and other basic items and to support their families, thus escaping from direst poverty.

Since the launch of the KKV initiative, there has been little direct support to the programme by outside development partners. The programme has been inspired by local initiatives and has been exclusively driven by the Government of Kenya. The World Bank, working closely with the ILO, has been more recently supporting the Government of Kenya by:

- Increasing the scale of the KKV, by providing additional funding and enabling the programme to reach more male and female youth.
- Enhancing KKV by providing resources to test innovations on KKV projects, which can then be mainstreamed into the programme as a whole.
- Improving and supporting the monitoring and evaluation of the KKV by further developing the Management Information System and monitoring and evaluating activities.
 - Providing technical assistance for project management.