



# YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT PROJECT [YEEP]

Understanding Barriers to Youth Employment  
in Uganda and Kenya: A Participatory Action  
Research [PAR] Report.

**June 2018**

In Association with Balloon Ventures and with support of the Citi Foundation.



Citi Foundation



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# QUOTES

## CAUSES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT ACCORDING TO PAR



## BARRIERS PREVENTING MICRO ENTERPRISES EMPLOYING YOUTH



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report captures the findings from a series of studies conducted in the Gulu Municipality in Uganda and the Machokos and Nakuru Counties in Kenya. The report forms part of the pilot Youth Entrepreneurship and Empowerment Project [YEEP] funded by the Citi Foundation, and delivered in partnership with Balloon Ventures and VSO. This programme's objective is to achieve inclusive and sustainable economic growth [SDG #8] through providing support to micro-entrepreneurs through business mentoring and to job seekers through skills training and development. The studies were conducted via unique Participatory Action Research [PAR] methodology, in which young people from the communities were recruited and trained to design and implement the research. These youth researchers were challenged to better understand the barriers to young people being employed or starting their own micro-enterprises, both from the perspectives of the businesses and the young people. The youth researchers designed the research tools and conducted the surveys and once completed, they analysed the findings of the studies and engaged stakeholders within the community to collate a range of suggestions and actionable next steps to address the problems identified. Findings from the youth led research include, barriers to employment, challenges of starting micro-enterprises, skills required to gain employment and start businesses, as well as perceptions of 'decent work' and entrepreneurship. Recommendations are made to address these findings and actions mapped according to organisations able to deliver them, with their action status to date.

# INTRODUCTION

Citi Foundation, VSO and Balloon Ventures have been working together in Uganda and Kenya since 2016. In this time they have sought to better understand and address the challenges young people face in gaining good quality employment or starting their own business. Despite positive signs of economic growth in these countries, youth unemployment and working poverty are persistent and growing challenges. In Uganda, as host of the world's youngest population, these issues are especially critical. According to the International Labour Organisation [ILO] Ugandan "livelihoods [...] are characterized by underemployment, informality, [and] high rates of working poverty which disproportionately affect the youth." In Kenya, the youth unemployment rate has risen above 20% which means it now has the region's highest proportion of unemployed young people aged 18-24.

In response to the lack of formal employment opportunities, most youth in Uganda and Kenya turn to the informal sector and either seek employment in micro enterprises, or setup their own small businesses. This informal sector is a hugely significant part of the economy, accounting for ~75% of all employment, and 55% of GDP in East Africa.

## **There are a few key challenges which hinder employment and the creation of micro-enterprises:**

- 1. Stagnant businesses:** Very few of these micro enterprises are growing. Many entrepreneurs in this sector have the drive and energy to succeed. However, due to barriers, including poor access to credit and limited experience of good management practices, their businesses are stuck. This negates their enormous potential to grow and create critical jobs for more youth.
- 2. Inability to source talent:** Informal sector businesses that are growing find it difficult to recruit and retain staff that have the right skills and attitudes to succeed as an employee. One of the main barriers for entrepreneurs experiencing growth is finding committed staff who they trust to deliver excellent work.
- 3. Lack of support to emerging entrepreneurs:** Youth entering the informal sector as start-up entrepreneurs, often lack what it takes to successfully get their enterprise off the ground (knowledge, experience, mind-set etc.).

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<sup>1</sup>International Labour Organisation. (2012). Uganda Decent Work Country Programme 2013-2017. Geneva: ILO.

# YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND ENTERPRISE PROGRAM [YEPP]

In response to these needs, VSO, Citi Foundation and Balloon have leveraged their skills, experience and resources through the Youth Entrepreneurship and Empowerment Project (YEPP) through various activities including:

1. Research into the reasons for youth unemployment in informal sectors, to better understand the barriers to young people being employed through growth enterprises, both from the perspective of businesses and young people.
2. Training in life skills, financial literacy and entrepreneurship of youth in particular those with disability, to create a youth workforce that is well prepared for employment in these businesses, with the necessary tools to succeed as employees and to help fuel growth.
3. Mentoring and support to existing micro-enterprises to accelerate their growth helping build the SMEs of tomorrow and provide good quality jobs for youth.
4. Support youth who want to start-up their own micro-enterprise by supporting them with the resources they need to build high potential businesses

The remainder of this report will examine the research into the reasons for youth unemployment, through a youth led study across three regions. It will then examine actions and recommendations arising from this study.

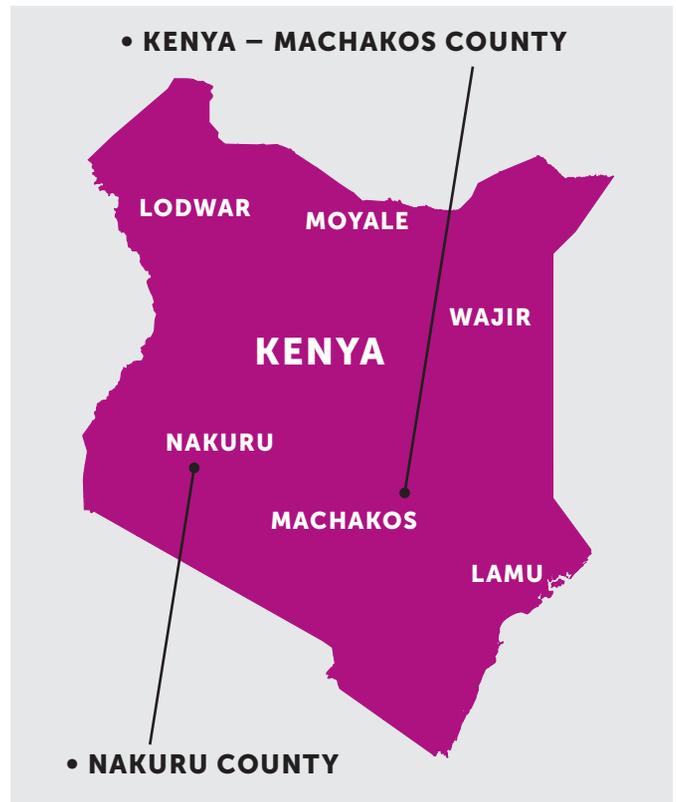
**#20 young people trained in Participatory Action Research [PAR]**

**#102 microenterprises and 620 youth surveyed in the PAR**

**#90 businesses mentored, 12 000 hrs of support and 75 good jobs created through Balloon Ventures and Citi Group partnership**

**#472 young people trained in soft skills, financial literacy and entrepreneurship by VSO**

# WHERE WE ARE WORKING



VSO and Balloon Ventures have selected these places in Uganda and Kenya because as their population expands rapidly, they have great potential to provide much needed youth employment. They are often ignored by funders and NGOs who instead focus on the major cities in the region like Nairobi, Mombasa and Kampala, meaning the potential in these urban areas is largely untapped.

# WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

As part of this project, research has been conducted to identify the barriers young people face in gaining employment in micro and small enterprises. The research conducted uses an innovative methodology called Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Empowerment and accountability are critical factors in creating bottom up solutions to development challenges. Through PAR, VSO seeks to reframe youth from passive “beneficiaries” to “active citizens” and “change agents” taking control of their own destinies. Where traditional research projects have an extractive process whereby stakeholders provide answers to questions posed by outside researchers or experts, PAR facilitators from VSO engage and support the youth to take control of the research project. VSO has given selected youth the skills to identify their own research questions, develop their own research tools, conduct the research and analyse the results, compile findings and transform them into action plans that are then relayed back to the entire community for feedback and engagement.

This form of research, by the youth for the youth, ensures that the research is context based and better aligned to the needs and aspirations of the participants and their communities. It empowers youth by allowing them to take ownership of their own challenges in finding decent employment and upskills them so they may identify solutions. Furthermore, the structure of community engagement in the research through validation meetings allows the young people to hold duty bearers and other stakeholders to account for delivering parts of the solution. Critically, the process is action rather than recommendation focussed with the research becoming an ongoing interactive process.



# PART I: METHODOLOGY

## SELECTION AND TRAINING OF THE YOUTH

In each region, a group of youth research assistants was recruited and trained with the skills required to conduct PAR. These youth researchers were responsible for the formulation of the research questions and tools.

In Machakos, six youth were selected by the VSO staff via interview. These youth researchers were then trained for two days by VSO staff. In Nakuru, six youth were selected with the help of Balloon Ventures and screened by VSO, and also trained for two days. In Uganda, a team of eight youth were selected to work as research assistants on the basis of their qualifications of some tertiary studies, interest and availability during the study period. These all underwent a five day training on research methods and participatory action research and another three days training in data collection.

## FORMULATION OF THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

After basic training on research and what is PAR, the youths were asked to come up with a problem statement.

The statements they came up with were:

KENYA - NAKURU	KENYA - MACHAKOS	UGANDA - GULU
The many challenges youths are facing in micro-entrepreneurship in Nakuru County.	Numerous barriers hindering youth employment in micro-entrepreneurship in Machakos County.	Numerous barriers hindering the young people from accessing employment/ starting and running businesses.

## FORMULATION OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

After discussing many of the problems they believed the youth might be experiencing, the youth researchers generated research questions, as seen in the table below.

	QUESTIONS KENYA - NAKURU	QUESTIONS KENYA - MACHAKOS	QUESTIONS UGANDA - GULU
1.	What are the risks that are making the youth not venture in micro-entrepreneurship? What challenges do the youths get in gaining employment in the informal sector?	What are the barriers for youth in fulfilling their employment aspirations? What barriers are the youths facing in accessing employment in micro-entrepreneurship?	What factors are hindering the youth from accessing employment/ starting a business? How can the barriers hindering youth from accessing employment or starting a business be addressed?
2.	What are some of the government barriers preventing youths from venturing into micro-entrepreneurship?		How are local councils supporting youths to access employment / start businesses? How can local councils further support youths to access employment / start businesses?
3.	What is the attitude of the youth towards micro-entrepreneurship? What is the perception of the community toward ownership of micro-entrepreneurship?	What attitude do the youths have towards micro-entrepreneurship as a source of employment?	What are the attitudes of the youths towards employment or starting employment?

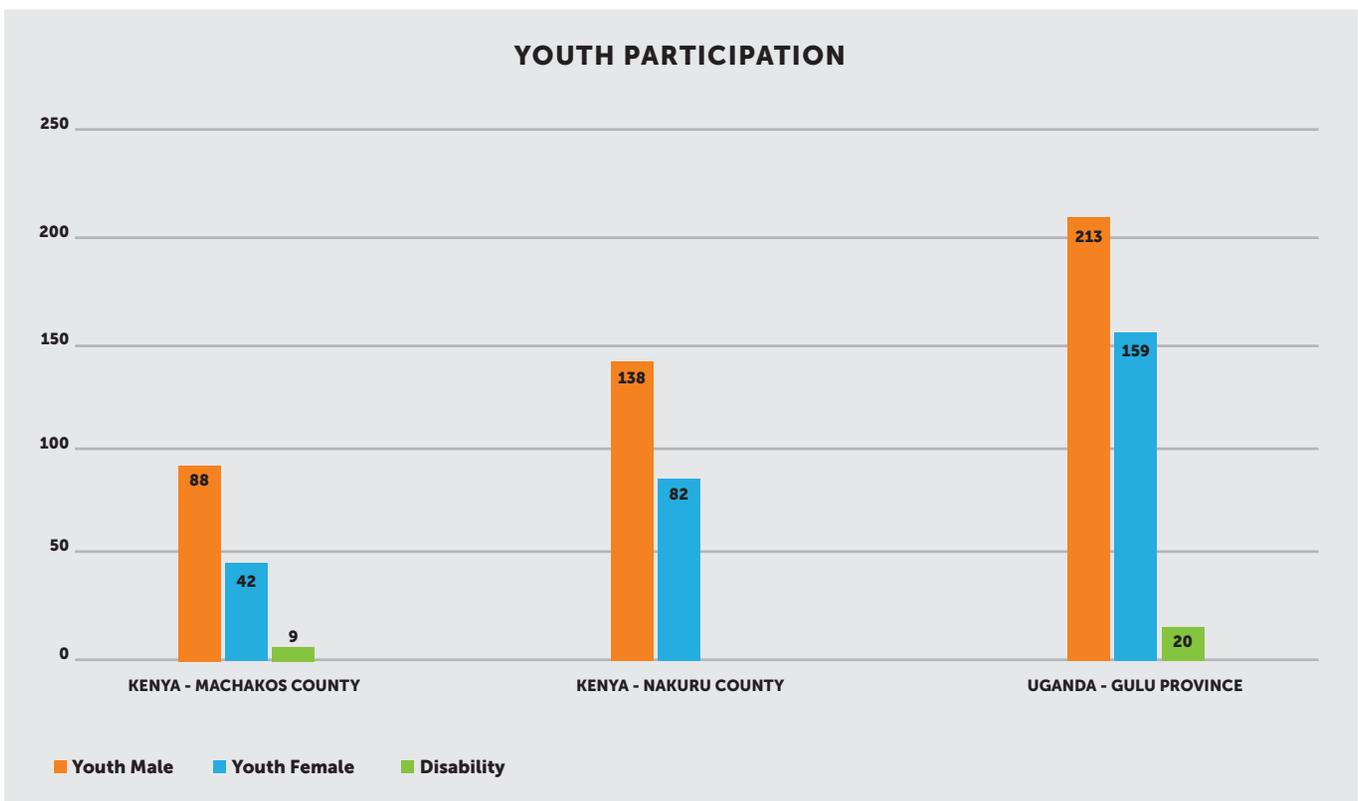
4.	Which skills do employers look for in the youths? What is the process of seeking work/ recruiting employees? What soft skills do employers look for in youth? What employability skills do the youths have?	What are the processes of seeking work/ recruiting employees? What soft skills do employers look for in youth?	What qualifications do business owners look for to employ young people?
5.	What challenges are the micro-entrepreneurship owners facing?	What are the barriers preventing businesses from employing more young people in the informal/ formal sector?	What barriers are the business owners facing in employing young people? How can the barriers preventing business owners from employing young people be addressed?
6.	What do youth consider to be a 'decent job'? What do employers consider to be a 'decent job'? How do these compare to the institutional views on what 'decent jobs' look like?	What do youth consider to be a decent job? What do employers consider to be a 'decent job'? How does that compare to institutional views on what 'decent jobs' look like? What are the distinctives to providing 'decent jobs'?	

# PART II: KEY FINDINGS

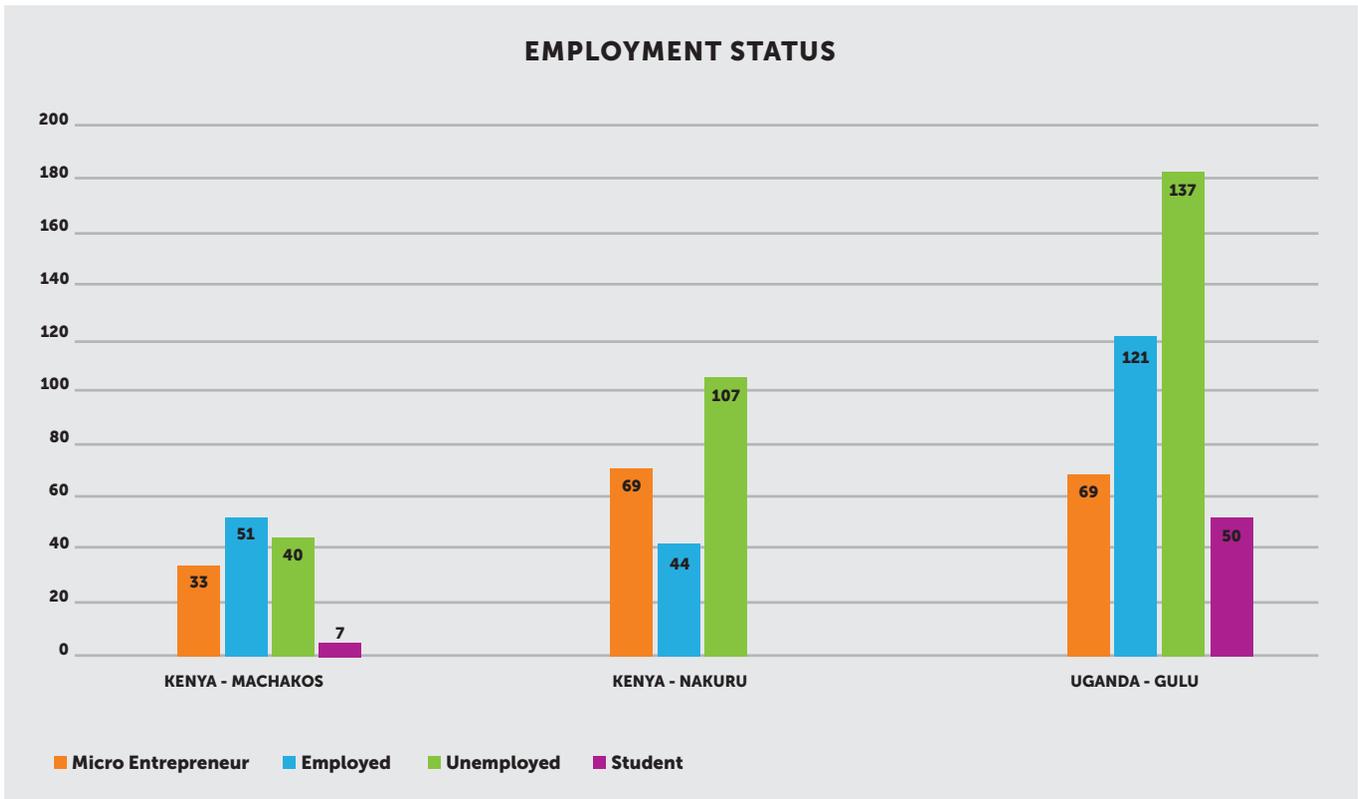
## YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Across the three regions, a total of 722 youth, including unemployed job seekers, those employed in formal or informal jobs and those self-employed small businesses or micro-enterprises were interviewed. This included a total of 439 males and 283 females across the three regions as seen in the tables below. A total of 29 youth surveyed had a disability.

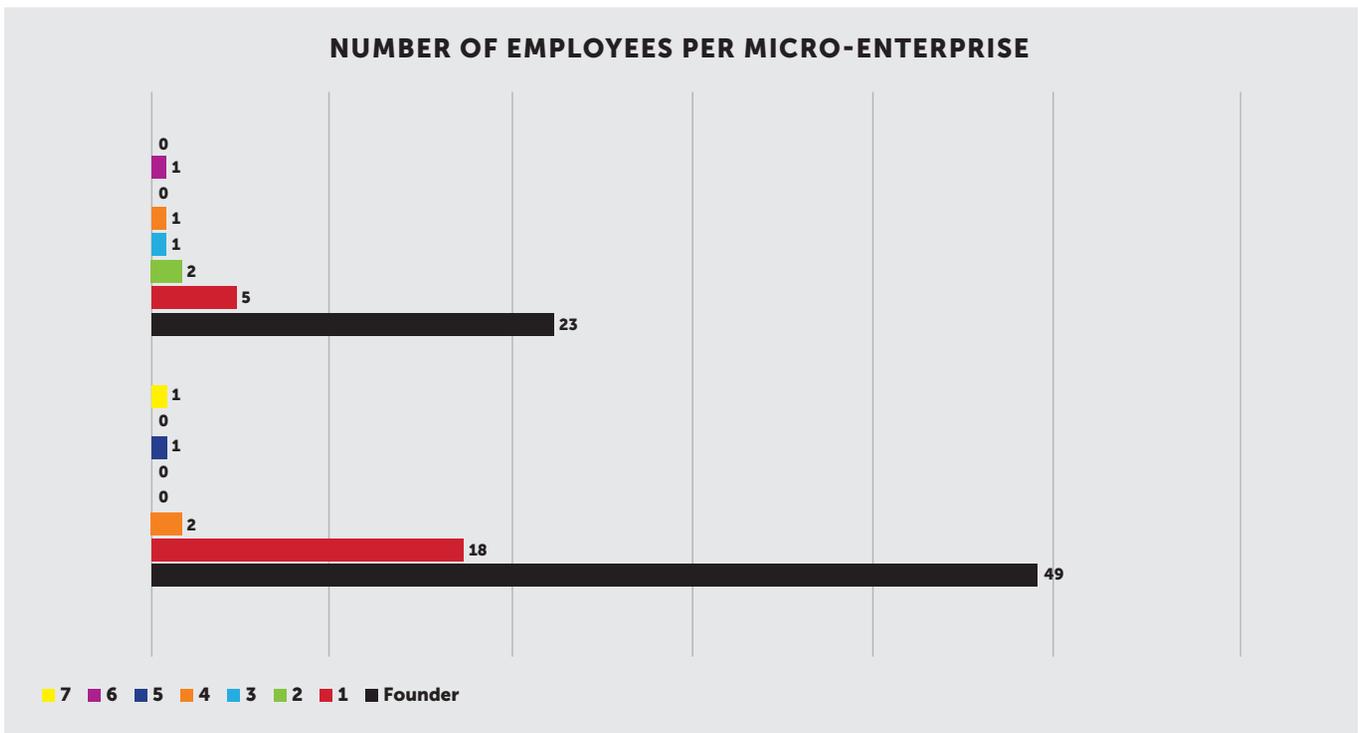
A reason noted by the youth researchers, for the disparity between genders surveyed, was due to the fact that young men gather in social locations and are easier to access for research purposes. The women interviewed were found in places of employment or at home.



As noted in the table below, Gulu Municipality had the highest percentage of unemployed. A number of youth interviewed were also not working because they were still studying.



Of the micro-entrepreneurs surveyed only an average of 30% were able to provide employment to other youth. Numbers of employees within the micro enterprises is reflected in the table below.



## SURVEY INSIGHTS

The following insights relate to the six common questions identified in the table of survey questions listed above in section I: Methodology. They contain relevant recommendations given by the youth researchers in discussion and analysis of the findings, after the research was completed.

**Key Finding #1: Unemployed youth lack employable skills and competencies.** Each region found very similar responses, discovering that young people cited lack of experience and lack of education as major barriers to accessing employment. In Machakos County, respondents also cited lack of sufficient jobs alongside lack of

skills, and mentioned attitude issues such as youth laziness. The majority of young people in Gulu, 81%, had not attended any training skills courses in the last 12 months, citing lack of qualifications as a barrier to applying for jobs and some cited tuition fees as a hindrance to attending school. Further youth challenges finding work include, 'long distance to work', and in Nakuru, a massive 16% reported they faced corruption when applying for work and 15% in Gulu reported discrimination.

Interestingly, while young people focused on experience and education as blockers for employment, business owners indicated lack of soft skills like trustworthiness were more significant blockers, see Key Finding #3 below.

**Key Recommendation #1: Boost employable skills and competencies among unemployed youth.**

Low levels of literacy and numeracy skills is due to many students not finishing school and there is need to enforce attendance at school for all. In Machakos, it was suggested that low levels of education be addressed with local chiefs and the enforcement of minimal standards of education in each province be affirmed, or at least, to better understand why in some cases this is not happening.

Among students who are finishing school but not attending university, more vocational education should be encouraged and linkages to these colleges provided to students who are eligible. Students who are not accessing training due to financial limitations should be supported by grants or loans. Moreover, job seekers require coaching and career guidance to consider volunteering and entry level positions and to change their mindset towards vocational work. These entry level jobs can provide valuable experience required in order to be promoted to more permanent and better paying employment. In Gulu, it was requested that VSO and Balloon extend the youth skills training and mentoring programmes to reach more youth.

Issues of corruption and discrimination facing youth seeking work requires deeper examination and solutions found.

**Key Finding #2: There is insufficient support to assist youth with employment and micro-enterprise development.**

In Nakuru, only 11.5 % of micro-entrepreneurs had accessed any help to start up or operate their business and in Machakos only 9% had accessed any support. The assistance received included bank loans or seed funding with one accessing government support for a poultry farm. In Gulu, many young people noted that the local authorities advised them of any opportunities available for work and some had started a project to create employment, for example, a Piggery. When asked what they needed, the vast majority of micro-business owners interviewed cited the most significant form of assistance desired would be capital for expansion. However, in Machakos, more than 90% had never tried to access funding or found the lack of information or legal requirements of loans too prohibitive. Rather than providing incentives and support for youth led enterprises, many of those interviewed listed regulations affecting the businesses including municipal council licences, and a government ban on plastic bags or small business taxation, all put pressure on small business operations, limiting their scope for growth.

**Key Recommendation #2 Increase support to youth seeking employment and starting their own micro-enterprises.**

There needs to be a focus on youth needs in government development programmes. In both Nakuru and Gulu, there was a suggestion of setting up a youth Bunge [youth-led political lobby group] as a platform where they could meet, discuss issues affecting them and devise solutions and present them to local government. A Bunge could in turn make youth more aware of support available by government and NGOs.

In Nakuru, the young people suggested setting up an office where youth can come for guidance about employment issues and operating their own micro-enterprise. Here young people could access success stories of micro-entrepreneurs and be inspired to start their own. It was also suggested that an online system to help youths seeking work whether informal or formal work to be as transparent and corruption free as possible was requested. Finally, in Nakuru and Machakos, the problem of drug and alcohol abuse among unemployed youth was raised with notes to find solutions to this issue.

**Key Finding #3: Many young people were favourable to micro-entrepreneurship as a source of employment.**

However, many were uninformed on how to earn income through informal jobs. In Nakuru, the dominant perception of starting or owning a micro-enterprise was positive, with most thinking it was good, would create

<sup>2</sup>To see the full findings of each report you can contact [boniface.ngeru@vsoint.org](mailto:boniface.ngeru@vsoint.org)

self-satisfaction and would create independence. Over 75% had thoughts of starting their own business including starting savings, and researching business ideas. In addition, many of the young people surveyed considered formal employment to be good, however, education and qualifications were required.

In Machakos, the majority of young people would prefer to be self-employed than to be a wage earner. Those interviewed state that micro-enterprises are the preferred form of employment for young people, because they offer a chance to grow, provides a source of income and reduce idleness. In Gulu, the majority of young people viewed starting their own business as the preferred form of employment but lacked the capital to start. This was followed by lacking the relevant skills. Formal jobs were mostly considered if the income was good but often simply as a stepping stone to self-employment later.

**Key Recommendation #3: Encourage more start-up micro-enterprises.** To achieve this, more training and mentoring opportunities are required to give young people the requisite business skills and knowledge. They require financial literacy courses and entrepreneurship courses to encourage them to consider or be able to start their own business. Once trained, micro-entrepreneurs require coaching or mentoring to operate, grow and scale their business. Making grants and affordable loans more accessible to youth entrepreneurs would greatly assist more small businesses to get started.

**Key Finding #4: Employers want youth with soft skills while young job seekers envisage they need experience and technical skills.** For example, in Nakuru, young people interviewed listed 'hard work', 'experience' and 'education' as the most sought after skills from employers. In contrast, the most common skills listed among business owners as desirable in employees, included 'hard work', and 'trustworthiness,' while 'experience' and 'education' were ranked relatively low in priority.

In Gulu, when asked what skills training courses the young people wanted, they listed tailoring, entrepreneurial skills, and business management. In Machakos, young people cite wanting to have more business and mechanical skills. However, the most common skills listed among business owners as desirable in employees included 'business skills', 'communication, and the 'willingness to learn.' The main reasons employers want to employ young people is that they are 'active', and 'are able to grow' and employers stated that the main disadvantage of having youth employees is 'untrustworthiness' and 'lack of focus'.

**Key Recommendation #4: Coach young-people on soft skills and mind set to compliment technical training.** Most of the youths require soft skills training to compliment the hard training and soft skills should be incorporated into technical courses within the country. Young people need to be linked to these courses and other available assistance is necessary. Another suggestion raised was to link youth to employers after training and follow up/ case manage young people in their new roles and to troubleshoot problems they or the employer may be facing.

**Key Finding #5: Businesses are not providing enough employment for young people.** This is in large part due to capacity and scale. As noted above in key finding #2, barriers faced by young people starting a business were dominated by the response 'lack of capital,' In Nakuru, this was followed by 'lack of proper location' and 'lack of customers'. Other current challenges facing businesses include lack of market, government regulations including taxes etc. and high cost of operations. Answers in Gulu mirrored those of Nakuru; the major barrier for young people to gain employment in a micro-enterprise is lack of capital, followed by marketing skills, and a competitive market place. They added the challenges of receiving late payments or managing cash flow. Only 31% of businesses surveyed offer employment opportunities. In Machakos, the youth who started their own businesses largely funded the micro-enterprise through savings or through loans from friends and family. For them, the biggest challenge small business face in offering employment to young people is cash flow, followed by business capacity. Most micro-enterprises are too small to be able to employ others.

**Key Recommendation #5: Support and develop micro-enterprises to the point that they can provide employment.**

Many micro-enterprises simply do not have the capacity to employ others, often being barely able to support their sole founder. Providing the business owners with mentoring to support them to overcome their challenges, to grow and become sources of employment for others is necessary. In addition to this mentoring, Moreover, brokering relationships with the government and try and find ways of subsidising taxes and duty for youth owned enterprises would provide critical relief. Local governments can help local businesses by creating policy around the purchase and procurement of local products and services which creates a local market for entrepreneurs and protects them from global competition. Once businesses have a strong foundation, providing access to capital to scale is critical for these small businesses to have the capability to provide employment.

**Key Insight #6: The perception of a 'decent job' is quite simple compared to the institutional views of what entails a 'decent job'.** Decent work is defined by the ILO:

Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men.<sup>3</sup>

In Nakuru, the most common responses to the question on 'what is a decent job,' include 'earns more money' and 'satisfies needs.' Young people considered a 'good income' to be the definition of a 'decent job', followed by 'enjoyment'. In Machakos, for most micro-entrepreneurs interviewed, a decent job is one that provides a high income, and self-employment. For most youth interviewed, a decent job entails a high salary, and provides self-employment. In Gulu, 32.2% stated high salary was the first priority for a decent job and youth and employers alike agreed that a decent job had a high income and entailed being self-employed.

NB. There are no youth recommendations in relation to this key insight.

# PART III – STAKEHOLDER VALIDATION AND ACTIONS

The youth researchers, also presented the data in stakeholder meetings, to an array of community leaders who were able to interrogate the findings and add their own reflections and recommendations. Many of the recommendations mirror those listed above and so only unique recommendations given in the stakeholder meetings are listed below:

## KENYA – NAKURU

1. Help youth know what services are available to them and help organisations know what services the youth are lacking.
2. Extend the PAR to other regions to better understand their needs; Map the county further for areas to engage youth

## KENYA – MACHAKOS

1. Involve other stakeholders including parents who are critical to encouraging the youth and curbing the school dropout problem.
2. Address the drug and alcohol abuse among young people by working with health organisations.
3. Address access to work experience through volunteering and internships to build skills and counteract idleness.
4. Address the numbers of young people who are providers for family and extended family which hinders them from education and career progression.
5. Enable families to support the young people
6. Address disparity of opportunity between males and females which is skewed in both directions in different contexts.
7. Address attrition among students and trainees to find out why.
8. Ensure career guidance support for young people in high school or by government. Change policy if necessary.

## UGANDA - GULU

- There is a need to engage more stakeholders including parents to helping the youth, particularly in encouraging the young people to achieve their dreams and curbing school dropout.
- Failing students need support and accessing polytechnic should be more encouraged.
- Career guidance at school can help and potentially a service the government can provide.
- Link health support services to young people struggling with drug and alcohol issues hindering employability
- Many young people have dependents within the family hindering them from achieving their dreams; how can families be more supportive of the young people to succeed
- There is a lack of mapping in the country on areas that enable youth employment.
- There is a lack of research on which specific businesses are run by the youth.
- Address the culture of receiving things for free; stimulate a culture of entrepreneurship

Although laziness was the least mentioned by the youth in relation to challenges faced gaining employment, it was a strong point emphasised in the focus group discussion:

‘The uneducated youth got used to a life and environment where things were given for free, especially like in the war times and you find that they are also undisciplined due to lack of moral upbringing and poor nurturing.’

**KI-Education Officer, Gulu Municipality.**

## ACTIONS IMPLEMENTED

As discussed, PAR involves a rapid shift from research validation to action planning and implementation of recommendations. Since the research validation meetings in early 2018 a considerable number of actions have already taken place and more are planned for the next year of the project:

## KENYA – NAKURU

ACTION STEP	ACTIONS ACHIEVED TO DATE
Establish a sustainable youth centre	Held planning meeting in APRIL 2018
Create more volunteering and internship positions for youth	Engaged with the county government during County Integrated Development Plan public participation in April 2018

## KENYA – MACHAKOS

ACTION STEP	ACTIONS ACHIEVED TO DATE
Mentorship for the youths and their parents	300 youth have already been mentored by May 2018
Softskills knowledge to the youths and employers	227 youth have been trained on soft skills by April 2018
Career Guidance	2 Career guidance forums have already been conducted by May 2018
Inclusion of Career Development at the Education Office	Establish a career and job centre (Ongoing)
Gender inclusion and people with disability	Ensure gender inclusion and PWD policy is followed (Ongoing)

## UGANDA - GULU

ACTION STEP	ACTION ACHIEVED TO DATE
Entrepreneurship and Life Skills Training	Entrepreneurship training to 201 youth; more than 90% have started up a venture
Competitive Grants process	Launched by Municipal CDO and speaker and funds given  Monitoring of youth led enterprises on going; New enterprises supported
Dissemination of the PAR findings for further action	Youth unanimously agreed to the documented findings Youth approved the clusters of actions and felt it would respond to their challenges and aspirations Youth expressed interest in an Entrepreneurship Hub Youth cluster themselves into skills interest groups to be trained in various skills
Support to existing micro-enterprises to employ or train youth	Micro enterprises offering skills not chosen by youth identified and supported to train youth in various skills
Youth entrepreneur hub under CDO Gulu Municipal	What's App group now operationalised as platform for sharing information Hub now launched and fully operational as a coordination centre for hub members
Tailor made learning to youth led enterprises and those employing the youth	Youth tailored made training for specific enterprises [started and ongoing with piggery and poultry]

<sup>2</sup><http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

# CONCLUSION

This report has summarised the research findings, recommendations and initial actions of youth participatory action research [PAR] conducted in three regions of East Africa from mid-2017 to mid-2018. The findings have shown that young people are willing to seek employment and interested in entrepreneurship, however in most cases lack the requisite education and training, including both technical and soft skills to effectively enter the job market or start their own business. While there are services available to the young people, in many cases the youth are unaware of what is available or how to reach career guidance, mentorship, health, education and training as well as business loans and grants. Moreover, existing micro-enterprises lack the resilience and scalability to provide sufficient employment to the youth demographic. The youth led research has outlined suggestions for a multi sectoral approach to addressing these issues including knowledge sharing, the provision of training, capacity building and mentoring services to young people and micro-entrepreneurs and more. While actions have been taken in response to these findings, due to the sheer size of this issue and the complexity of the challenges, government, civil society, and the private sector are required to join their resources and attention towards seeking sustainable solutions and this most critical issue facing Africa's youth.



Citi Foundation

