

The Efficacy of Youth Empowerment Initiatives: Lessons Learnt from the Young Africa's Technical Vocational Education and Training Model in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been adopted as a viable solution to socio-economic challenges facing youths in Zimbabwe. Although this type of education has been promoted for a long time, evidence to show the efficacy of this education remains debatable and scarce. This article examines the effectiveness of Young Africa's (YA) model of youth empowerment showing its impact on the livelihoods of university graduates. A mixed methods approach was used to gather data whereby a graduate tracer survey was used to obtain quantitative data while in-depth interviews and key informant interviews were used to collect qualitative data. The Critical Youth Empowerment Theory was used to explain the findings. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis, while quantitative data were examined through Qualtrics survey tool and Excel. The article establishes the positive transformation of

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graduates towards community and national development at both micro and macro levels. Livelihoods were improved and in other instances; diversified, while community participation was also noted. The article gathers that the model of Young Africa has a unique positive contribution to youth empowerment through its holistic nature. The article has also noted some challenges associated with the model which include limited number of training institutions and financial implications. In line with these challenges, several recommendations are put forward as a way of proffering policy options for future youth empowerment endeavours.

Keywords: vocational training, skills education, livelihoods, positive transformation, policy regime

INTRODUCTION

Zimbabwean youths constitute 67.7% of the overall national population, according to the Zimbabwe Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT, 2022). Many young people are failing to secure jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors in Africa due to closure of industries, lack of required skill sets and poor economic performance of many countries on the continent (Alfonso *et al.*, 2020). The unemployment rate in Zimbabwe is highly debatable. For instance, ZIMSTAT (2019) avers that the national unemployment rate was 16% in 2019, while the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU, 2019) puts it at 95% in the same year. Despite these ideological differences and contestations around the matter, Zimbabwe is grappling with high a unemployment rate, especially among the youth. The youths are defined as people between the ages of 15 and 35 years (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment, 2013). This definition is guided by the Africa Youth Charter which Zimbabwe is a signatory to. This article examines the effectiveness of Young Africa's (YA) Technical Vocational Education Training (TVET) model on the empowerment of

youths in Zimbabwe. The point of is that young people are not being effectively absorbed into the formal employment sector due to the socio-economic and political challenges bedevilling the country. As a result, the TVET model was introduced as a strategy to address youth unemployment in Zimbabwe. This article, therefore, analyses how training received by young people through Young Africa TVET programme has impacted their livelihoods, their communities and direct impact of the programme to national development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is hinged on the Critical Youth Empowerment Theory (CYE), developed by Jennings *et al.* (2006). The theory explains the empowerment of individuals at micro and macro levels. Thus, the influence of Young Africa graduates in the community and their personal empowerment is understood through the lenses of this theory. The core tenet of the CYE Theory emphasises a welcoming and safe social environment in which young people feel they are respected, encouraged, supported and valued Heath (1991). The idea is that such an environment creates room for young people to share their feelings, take risks and have a sense of belonging to their communities. Conducive environments are those in which young people have a sense of ownership to various developmental projects and programmes. Wallerstein *et al.* (2005) submits that young people and adults have several chances to interact as co-learners. For the CYE, opportunities to engage in meaningful activities where youths make a genuine contribution are very important. Opportunities for young people to learn and practice important leadership and participatory skills, are opened through participation in community affairs. Heath (1994) observes that young people need to be engaged in activities relevant to their lives, those that genuinely excite and challenge them. Kim *et al.* (1998) stress the point that activities should promote underlying competence and stir inborn motivations of young people in order for them to

master their innate interests. Genuine youth participation contributes to more sustainable and prolonged engagement, which is central to skill development and positive youth identity advancement (Cargo, 2003). Chinman (1998) argues that meaningful roles provide young people with opportunities to advance positive self-identity, improved self-worth and enhanced self-efficacy.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE INFORMAL ECONOMY: A TRIAD SYNOPSIS OF THE ZIMBABWEAN CONTEXT

The informal sector has co-existed with the formal economy for a long time in Zimbabwe, although at a small-scale level, until the early 1990s (Nugundu and Lombard, 2014). The abrupt rise of the informal economy in the early 1990s can be linked to the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), together with other economic policies such as price control, the fast-track land reform programme and the enactment of the Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Act (Shah, 2008). Out of the 67.7% proportion of Zimbabwean youths, approximately 7% are employed and 9% of them are entrepreneurs (Chikova, 2020). At a global level, 17 promises should be delivered under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. These goals are pertinent to youth empowerment. Thus, youths remain important in the realisation of the much-needed sustainable development. This is consistent with the remarks of the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed, at the 6th session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (AFRSD, 2020), where he implored young people to be the movers of sustainable development on the continent because the “future is young and the future is now”. This means that the youth dividend in Africa is a reality that cannot be ignored in development discourses. The World Youth Report (2005) urges governments, donors and civil society organisations to follow a comprehensive national perspective in addressing poverty

among the youths. In Africa, underdevelopment is common. Young people in Africa remain the most affected group since the population is predominantly young and major means of production are owned by the aged. As a result, there has been increased interest in initiatives that seek to empower young people. In Zimbabwe, the government scaled-up accessibility of vocational skills training centres across the country. Many young people have been churned out as graduates from these institutions, but they have remained disempowered (Chikova, 2020). Thus, youth empowerment remains a central issue in the development discourses around the globe. In its National Youth Policy document (2000), the Government of Zimbabwe provides a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach to addressing young people's problems believed to be hindering the realisation of sustainable socioeconomic development.

As argued in a situational analysis of the country, as recorded in the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1 2021-2025), Zimbabwe's total population is estimated at 14.8 million. A little over half (53.6%) of the population is below 20 years of age, while 62.9% of the population is below 24 years. This youth dividend, as argued in NDS1, is a blessing to the country. However, the same youths are said not to have valued the culture of hard work and the principle that working hard and honestly pays. Thus, the same document argues for the development of a cognitive construct for youths to embrace honest and hard work. In this regard, unemployment among the youths is a result of their own attitude. It is against this background that the NDS1 aimed to empower youths through their participation in decision-making and development processes from 3.3% in 2020 to 25% by 2025. Similarly, the NDS1 aimed to increase empowerment opportunities for youths in all sectors of the economy from 16 000 in 2020 to 200 000 by the year 2025.

CONCEPTUALISATION OF THE YOUNG AFRICA'S TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING

TVET comprises technical education and training, which in addition to its vocational aim, cannot neglect the general objectives of education. Vocational training and education include training on-the-job and in-training centres. As argued by Konayuma (2008), since the early 1990s, African governments adopted TVET reforms, resulting in the formulation of several TVET policies on the continent and Zimbabwe is no exception. The Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ, 2005) points out that the colonial the TVET system was highly racial, with blacks being the marginalised group. After independence, the government phased out the colonial TVET system and adopted the Education for Self-Reliance system as per Nyerere's philosophy (Nyerere, 1967). With the rationalisation of TVET by the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (MHTE) in the early 1990s, the curricula were designed by the Higher Education Examination Council (HEXCO) after close consultation with industry. However, the implementation of TVET policies faced many challenges due to the lack of a sustainable funding policy.

REGULATION OF TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET)

In Zimbabwe, TVET is governed institutionally. As argued by UNESCO (2005), MHTE regulates higher and tertiary education and skills training. The designing of curricula and running of examinations for all national TVET courses in the country is done by the Department of Standards Development and Quality Assurance (SDEQA) through the Curriculum Research and Development Unit (CRADU). Having noted the growing need for empowerment of young people in Southern Africa, Young Africa came up with a blueprint that seeks to holistically address the multifaceted problems of youths. It was founded in the Netherlands in 1998 and currently operates nine TVET centres

in five countries through a confederation of independent and local registered organisations and its affiliates (www.youngafrica.org). The integral model is designed in a way that encompasses the intellectual, economic, social, emotional and spiritual empowerment needs of targeted applicants. Through its franchise business model, it seeks to shape skills training and production units into a blueprint for workable economic and self-reliance enterprise (*ibid.*), thus enabling the graduates to generate wealth and create jobs in their communities. Those areas of focus by Young Africa are important, especially considering the increased number of unemployed youths in Zimbabwe, graduates or non-graduate. It becomes imperative to assess the impact of the model of the institution on youth empowerment. This is especially important, considering that SDGs advocate for the empowerment of youths as a positive way of ensuring a better future.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a mixed methodology whereby both qualitative and quantitative research methods are employed to improve data credibility and reliability. Participants were drawn from youths receiving training from Young Africa's Chitungwiza Centre. Chitungwiza is a satellite town of Harare Metropolitan, located 25km South of Harare Central Business Centre. Mixed methods research design enabled the researchers to explore the research problem both qualitatively and quantitatively through the use of in-depth interviews, key informant interviews and a survey questionnaire. The researchers systematically selected 30 male and 30 female graduates between the ages of 18 to 35 from Young Africa Chitungwiza TVET programmes. The study was gender-sensitive since both male and female graduates were given equal chance to participate in the study. In addition, six key informants were purposively sampled from Young Africa International and officials from the MHTE. Thematic content

analysis was used to make meaning of qualitative data while Qualtrics and Excel were used to analyse quantitative data. Research participants were asked to participate voluntarily and were made to sign consent forms before answering any question. Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity were observed during data collection and presentation of findings since no participant was identified by their name. The demographic characteristics of participants in relation to participants' age, sex and educational level are given in Table 1.

Table 1: *Demographic characteristics of Participants*

Demographic characteristics	Percent %
<i>Age group</i>	
18-22	32.95
23-27	21.49
28-32	30
33+	15.56
Total	100
<i>Level of education</i>	
Primary Level	0.00%
Secondary Level	64.57%
Tertiary Level	35.43%
Total	100
<i>Sex</i>	
Males	50%
Females	50%
Total	100

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings of the study. The research thereafter provided the findings on the curriculum structure of the programme, entry requirements and impact of the programme on the livelihoods of youths in Zimbabwe.

YOUNG AFRICA'S TVET CURRICULUM STRUCTURE

Through the Young Africa TVET programme, young people are equipped with employability and entrepreneurship skills. These

are referred to as skills of the hands that capacitate young people to be economically, socially and politically active. The training policy of Young Africa stipulates that 70% of training comes from practicals while the remaining 30% comes from theory in all technical courses. One participant narrated that:

Here we do much of the practical work than theory...in my programme we do on-the-job training in the franchisee's production unit for a minimum of three months on industrial attachment outside Young Africa at the end of the training...70% practical distinguishes Young Africa and the business sense of it makes us as students produce the product knowing the targeted customers.

This shows that hands-on practice is more valued in Young Africa curricula than the theoretical part. That, as argued by these key informants, makes students highly competitive because of their practical capabilities.

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

It was brought to light through interviews with KI-2 that entry requirements into Young Africa programmes were different from government and other TVET providers. While other providers focused more on academic requirements upon enrolment, Young Africa is unique. One key informant had this to say on the enrolment:

Having failed 'O' Levels and obtained an opportunity to study for something... It touches lives. *Mwana uyu aingoswera akagara pano apa at least ava nechaanacho...* (This child would always spend his time sitting idle here at home, at least he now has something to his name).

This reveals that Young Africa programmes are open to everyone, including those who performed badly in the Ordinary Level examinations. The programme is also open to individuals who failed to reach secondary level.

DURATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME

The duration of the training in technical stranges from six to 12-month courses for one to get a Young Africa certificate. For commercial kkills, training ranges from six-month certificate courses to four-year diploma courses. Also, where necessary, Young Africa affiliates are encouraged to accredit courses with relevant public and private examination boards. This was supported by KII when he mentioned that in Zimbabwe, commercial courses were accredited by the Higher Education Examinations Council HEXCO. The Young Africa programme is implemented through centre-based and mobile outreach trainings. Young people participate in the integrated TVET training at the centre while doing different courses. The documents reviewed showed that through the franchisee business model, the 70% practical component is achieved. The centre-based approach is more comprehensive as it allows the administration and transmission of the integral youth empowerment in full. The reviewed documents also testified to the idea that Young Africa centres are safe for youth empowerment.

However, the centre-based implementation strategy is costly in terms of time and resources. The implementation of the programme through mobile training is designed to reach out to young people who are disadvantaged and on the margins of society. Through a mobile unit consisting of trainers, equipment and training consumables, outreaches are done in remote areas to transmit mini versions of the Young Africa programme offered at its centres. When young people are trained through this strategy, they are attached to local entrepreneurs, also known as master crafts persons, that is another version of franchisees. During that time, youth would be under the supervision of the masters' crafts for at least three months in order for them to gain on-the-job experience. Data from the document analysis

concur with what was said by KI-2. He had this to say concerning mobile training:

The skills on live projects that we were working on had an aspect of mobile training, so we were doing training for young people in Chirundu. So, the training was running for three months. You would realise that some of these students who didn't know what a spanner was could; in just one month, now safely change brakes, suspension, you know...to do the basics. After three months, we had success stories of u-u-m... I think over 25% of these students were actually retained by these master crafts persons...

This account shows that the model has an element of decentralisation to reach out to remote areas and it seems it is having positive results.

LIFE SKILLS TRAINING

Life skills training is a compulsory part of Young Africa's model of youth empowerment. It came to light through documentary analysis that Young Africa has its own Life Skills Training course that it developed. The extract points to the fact that life skills were taught to all students, regardless of the course one would be taking. The information was shared by KI -2 who pointed out that:

One can receive training in mechanics while at the same time learning Life Skills Education...One may choose mechanics for a technical skill with a duration of 26 weeks and we also teach students goal-setting, gender, relationship and love at least once a week during their training.

This form of training aims at empowering young people with several soft skills that help in boosting self-confidence, instilling a sense of responsibility and fulfilling purposeful citizenship in their communities, thereby guaranteeing them to live dignified lives.

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS

Entrepreneurial Skills Training is also part of Young Africa's model of empowering young people. It was revealed by KI-I that

even one training for mechanics would still learn the entrepreneurship component. The following was said in support of this idea:

...and entrepreneurship that helps graduates in starting their own enterprises because jobs are difficult to come by in Southern Africa.

In the same vein, documentary data supports the same idea as it emerged that the Small Enterprise Development programme is aimed at opening avenues for graduates to venture into entrepreneurship. As argued in the documentary analysis, the aspect is at two levels. These are: compulsory entrepreneurship training given as students will be doing their course of learning and provision or facilitating of graduates' access to start-up loans after graduation, thereby assisting them to start their own income-generating projects.

ACCESSIBILITY OF THE PROGRAMME TO DIFFERENTLY-ABLED YOUTHS

The model makes efforts to have an inclusive TVET in terms of the differently-abled youths. One key informant had this to say about the inclusion of differently-abled youths:

In Mozambique, the centres have been adapted to become disability inclusive. During the period 2015 to 2019, the two centres in Mozambique trained a total of 297 persons with disabilities as part of this project. In Zimbabwe, small efforts were made to do the same, although the efforts were aborted. In all projects now, it is standard practice to include a percentage of persons with disabilities in target group.

This idea is in line with the data reviewed in Young Africa Reports (2015 and 2019). It was noted in 2016 that the Government of Mozambique recognised Young Africa for providing TVET that includes the differently-abled youths. However, it was noted that employers are not yet willing to accept the reality that the differently-abled young persons can do the job they were trained for.

IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME ON THE LIVELIHOODS OF ZIMBABWEAN YOUTHS

This objective was answered by the data obtained through the survey, focus group discussion and in-depth interviews in an effort to examine how the Young Africa's TVET model has impacted the livelihoods of its graduates.

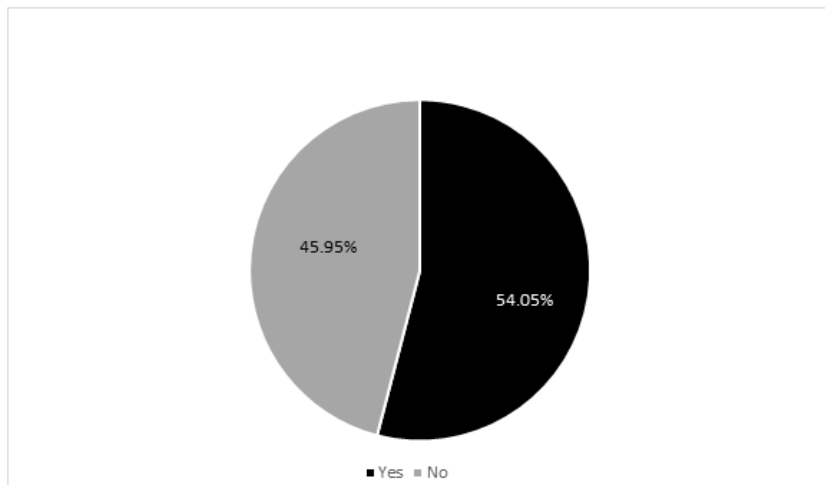


Figure 1: *Distribution of financial contribution in the family*

Figure 1 shows the financial contribution of graduates in the family. To get that data, graduates were asked if they contributed more money when compared to other family members. Of the 37 graduates who answered the question, 54.05% said they contributed more money as compared to other family members, while 45.95% said they did not. This shows a degree of financial capability for graduates. These findings concur with qualitative data obtained through in-depth interviews. During in-depth interviews, Participant 4 had this to say:

Everything changed, to be honest, because I can look after myself and make money with my own hands. That is what changed. People started to respect me because everyone respects mechanics, so I got respect from society. I can now put bread and butter on the table for

my family and take care of siblings. When I got my certificate, I came here (SA) and showed the people that I could do this and that. They gave me many opportunities and I did not have the experience that was needed, but through the years, I have gained experience, so everything has changed.

A similar account was given by Participant 7, when he said:

Honestly, I can say things were not easy because, in Chitungwiza, I was staying alone. I was looking for a job but I could not find something to do. Because of the love of art and being creative, I decided to find something to do so that I could get money. Life was not easy for me then because I was staying with my relative from an extended family. It was not that easy because around that time, there was a challenge with the economy. I can say things started to change by the time I finished... in fact I can say before I finished, I was one of the best students in my class together with my classmates who managed to learn very quickly. I was able to do some products on my own, so I can say before I finished school, I had already started my business and also managed to put something on the table and was also able to take care of myself. And then after I moved to South Africa where I managed to buy my machines I can say things started to get better and better. Now I can say things are totally different.

IMPROVED AND DIVERSIFIED LIVELIHOODS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Both qualitative findings from focus group discussions and in-depth interviews showed that graduates have experienced livelihood improvement and were able to diversify. The entrepreneurship spirit has also been implanted in them. Several accounts supported these ideas. Participant 3 said:

I also started my own business apart from my career. I own a butchery in Tafara, that is near Mabvuku and I am also a farmer. That one is a profession that I inherited from my father so I am still doing it again.

In a similar view, one graduate supported the idea that training at Young Africa helped in the improvement of livelihoods as well as entrepreneurship by saying:

I started to see myself in a different picture because it made me want to start my own business and it opened many opportunities for

me, like right now I am still planning to further my business and my education.

This narrative speaks about someone whose livelihood was transformed. Participants narrated the idea that Young Africa graduates are equipped with entrepreneurial skills.

INFLUENCE/PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNITY

The article was geared to examine the influence of Young Africa graduates in their communities. Figure 2 presents the participation of Young Africa graduates in community development in the country.

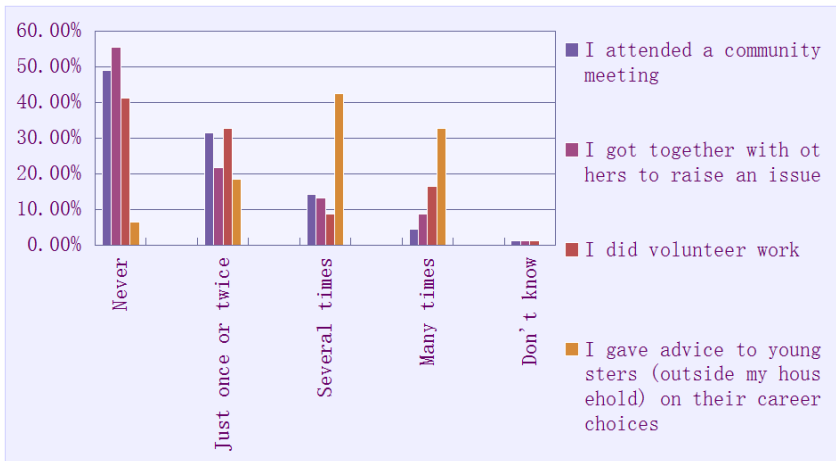


Figure 2: *Percentage distribution of community participation by graduates*

As presented above, of the 90 who answered the question, 48.91% never attended a community meeting, 55.43% did not come together with others to raise an issue, 41.30% never did volunteer work and 42.39% gave advice to youngsters outside their household on their career choices. These findings show that in terms of participation, Young Africa graduates were more active in advising other young people on career choices

than in other activities. In-depth interviews show that graduates offer counselling to others. Participant 4 had this to say:

I was a person who would look down upon people and I wouldn't help them as well. But when I was at Young Africa, through the word of God and love taught there, I now share with the less privileged and I help youths to stop drug abuse. All these, I learnt at Young Africa. I want to thank God for the time I had at Young Africa. I want to continue to teach them and all this, I learnt at Young Africa.

The passage captures the idea of advising young people to stop drug abuse and do charitable work. This speaks to the idea that the graduate participate in the community to a certain extent.

Table 2: *Graduates' influence in their community*

	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance	Count
1	People in the community look up to this person	1.00	5.00	3.12	1.15	1.32	90
2	This person is often invited to social events and celebrations in the community	1.00	5.00	2.73	1.20	1.43	90
3	This person is not afraid to stand out	1.00	5.00	3.14	1.16	1.35	90
4	Others in the community are inspired by this person	1.00	5.00	3.30	1.01	1.02	90
5	This person serves as a mentor to others	1.00	5.00	3.41	0.94	0.88	90

Participants were asked to show how much they resemble the described person using a 5-point scale: 1 Not at all like me; 2 Not so much like me; 3 Somewhat like me; 4 Very much like me and 5 Don't know. The findings show that there is no significant variance from the mean. The graduates, on average, have an influence in the community but are not sure about their influence. The findings are not at variance with qualitative

results that show that Young Africa graduates influenced the world around them to some certain extent through the activities they did.

DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings presented above in relation to the literature review and the theoretical framework. The uniqueness of the Young Africa model of youth empowerment resonates with the CYE Theory that advocates for a welcoming and safe environment that makes young people feel like members of a family-like community. The model promotes a safe and conducive environment that is friendly to young people such that they can freely learn to express their talents without fear. Such an environment boosts the confidence of young people with low self-esteem and encourages participation on issues that affect their lives and the world around them. The following aspects describe the identity of the Young Africa model and its uniqueness.

The model integrates technical skills, life skills education and entrepreneurial skills. This means that students are exposed to a comprehensive training package with several skills that are critical to the social and economic well-being of young people. This idea is supported by French (2015) in her conceptualisation of youth empowerment where the emphasis on creating an environment that promotes skills training in several fields. The combination of soft, entrepreneurial and technical skills serves a special function of producing a well-refined graduate who can perform several duties based on the training he or she received. The approach empowers young people with socioeconomic aspects concurrently. This points to the fact that all youth are given a chance based on their interests and talents, without necessarily focusing on one aspect, for instance, academic education only. As a result, young people with different capabilities are made to feel

comfortable in such an environment and a sense of belonging is created and fostered. The CYE Theory stresses the idea that young people should be made to feel a sense of belonging to a family-like community (Heath, 1991). In turn, young people participate freely, thereby realising meaningful empowerment. This concept of the CYE model explains the holistic approach to empowering young people, given the fact that an environment that caters to young people of different abilities is created. The support given to young people in the form of start-up capital and ways to access funds to run personal enterprises shows that there are practical efforts of promoting entrepreneurship.

Another key characteristic of the model is its implementation. The two ways through which the programme is transmitted show an element of flexibility. The element of decentralisation is at variance with the reviewed literature. For example, Lolwana (2017) argues the lack of decentralisation of TVET in most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. While the mobile outreach programme does not have the full package of the integral model, it has some positives associated with it. Mobile training is transforming lives in different places, especially remote areas as far as Chirundu. The programme is imparted to young people in remote areas quickly as compared to the centre-based approach. This decentralisation of the programme attempts to fulfil the global development agenda in the name of SDGs that advocate for development that does not leave any person behind.

In the context of Zimbabwe, TVET education is beyond the reach of many who may be in need of it. This is due to a limited number of training institutions and the associated financial implications. However, the model of Young Africa addresses such gaps in several ways. It has to be noted that the model is more open to a group of society that experiences a degree of marginalisation. The enrolment requirements show that the

Young Africa model focuses on empowering young people, regardless of academic achievements. For instance, giving a chance to those who have failed Ordinary Level and even those with only Grade Seven qualifications and the financially disadvantaged, is an impactful process. Such youths are included in the programme in a holistic way. The inclusion of young people who might have failed 'O' Level or had poor passes was observed by Mahuyu and Makochekanwa (2020) in their study of TEVT education in Zimbabwe. However, it varies with the Young Africa' approach in that, at Young Africa, even those with only Grade Seven certificates and those who do not have financial means to pay for their training are included. It also disputes the National Qualification Framework of the country in an effort to achieve an inclusive TVET system. This shows that the Young Africa programme addresses the concerns of academically and financially excluded citizens.

In the same way, the empowerment of disadvantaged girls and young mothers is another important factor to consider. The availing of training opportunities to such young people could be seen in the light of a broader education agenda, Vision 2030, which calls for education that addresses inequalities. Thus, viewed from such a position, one may be justified to argue that the programme is fostering gender equity and inclusivity in terms of vulnerable young people in society. This principle is promoted through hostel and creche programmes which are specifically for girls and young nursing mothers. In this light, these programmes could be viewed as an effort to empower young people in an environment that is friendly to them as advocated for by the CYE Theory. The empowerment of girls and young women in different fields, including those that are traditionally viewed as male-dominated, is important and could be seen in light of the broader concept of gender equality.

From the findings, it is evident that the Young Africa model of youth empowerment has, to a fair extent, impact on the livelihoods of young people. Both quantitative and qualitative data testify to this idea. For instance, it emerged that graduates are able to financially support other people who are not of their household. Data from the survey revealed that most of the graduates offer financial assistance to three to five people. It shows a degree of some financial capacity on the side of graduates. While survey data could not directly link that financial empowerment to the Young Africa model, qualitative accounts pointed out that empowerment has its roots in Young Africa training. This finding is in line with the observation that TVET education is associated with increased financial well-being (Maclean, *et al.*, 2013).). The ability to support others financially while acknowledging the training received at Young Africa should be seen as a positive contribution by Young Africa programmes, not only to the graduates, but to the broader community, thereby validating the submission by Wheelahan *et al.* (2016) that capacitation of young people could be of great importance to the broader society.

The engagement of young people in employment and entrepreneurship by Young Africa graduates is pertinent. Gukurume (2019) notes that people are surviving in a dire situation due to poverty, brought about a protracted economic crisis in Zimbabwe. However, accounts from some graduates show that they were able to secure employment as they were capable of doing what they were trained in. Accounts of not securing permanent employment could be linked to the broad macro-economic situation in Zimbabwe, where even highly qualified citizens are unable to secure jobs. UNEVOC (2018) reports that many TVET graduates fail to secure jobs because the curricula used in Zimbabwe's TEVT are outdated. This seems to be at variance with the findings of this study because some graduates were able to secure jobs although securing a permanent one appears to be the challenge. This advantage of

Young Africa graduates over others could be associated with the franchisee model of training where students are exposed to real work situations while being trained by people who are not only qualified but also employers. This challenges Lolwana's (2017) view that the involvement of employers is very limited in practice, while it is valued in various policy frameworks. In this regard, the training has managed to give Young Africa an advantage over those who rely more on theory. The 70% practical component of the training model seems to be having a significant impact on graduates.

The ability of graduates to venture into entrepreneurship is another important component that cannot be ignored. In an environment where jobs are scarce and difficult to come by, entrepreneurship serves as a survival strategy. Jeffrey and Dyson (2013) note that young people engage in small enterprises in an environment of high unemployment. While this is also true to the Zimbabwean situation, for Young Africa graduates, the entrepreneurial spirit could be traced to their training at the Young Africa institution where entrepreneurship is a major component of the youth empowerment programme. This could be supported by the finding that Young Africa avails start-up capital to students and facilitates opportunities to get some sort of income. This could be seen through the lenses of capacitating young people to run their own businesses. The ability to diversify livelihoods, even among the employed graduates, points to the idea that graduates are; to a certain extent, practising what they learnt in real-life situations. This point is supported by accounts from participants. This evidence of demonstrated capabilities by Young Africa graduates could be a step to changing the perceptions of society on TVET, especially non formal ones like Young Africa. Mahuyu and Mukochekanwa (2020) argue that academic education is valued more than TVET in Zimbabwe, an observation also made by Oketch (2014) who argues that there is lower enrolment in TVET when compared to academia in Kenya. However, the

returns of academic education in Zimbabwe are hardly being realised since it seems to be worsening the employment needs of young people as lamented by Coltart (2011). In this regard, it could be argued that the ability of the Young Africa model to mitigate youth employment and entrepreneurship challenges is a positive transformation, bearing in mind that of the 67.7% youth population in Zimbabwe, very few are employed and in entrepreneurship (Chikova, 2020).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the insights of this study, it has been discovered that a non-formal TVET programme administered by Young Africa is making a difference through its empowering model. The integral model, which is holistic in nature, used by Young Africa, is not only a unique approach to youth empowerment, but also has some benefits as it touches on several young people's needs. The packaging of technical, soft and entrepreneurial skills in the programme addresses several much-needed socioeconomic needs of young people. The contribution of the programme to the livelihoods of youths is also its important aspect. This aspect should be understood in the context of a declining socioeconomic landscape in Zimbabwe. By training young people through a comprehensive model and availing them start-up capital, the programme has been able to capacitate young citizens. In the process, the seemingly hopeless youth gain a sense of restored hope. The gendered face of the TVET facility has an emancipatory role for girls and young mothers who live in a society that believes that certain disciplines are provinces of men and women who challenge the status quo. Empirical cases of improved livelihoods and some practice diversifications have promoted positive changes in young people. The ability of graduates to influence the communities they live in could be seen as a ripple effect of the broader integral model to youth empowerment. Entrepreneurship and life skills training, for example, have helped graduates to navigate different and difficult socioeconomic terrains. The present study has shown

the nature and operation of the integral youth empowerment model. The positive advantages associated with this approach were revealed. However, there is still need to corroborate these study findings with researches on the experiences of employers with Young Africa graduates. This would help in further determining if the approach is indeed useful as suggested by the findings of this study. It is also important for researchers to conduct a comparative studies contrasting formal public TVET programmes with private, non-formal TVET programmes to have a better understanding of the impact of the Young Africa model.

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