

# Policy Brief



## IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF SERVICE IN YOUTH POLYTECHNICS: A DEMAND-LED APPROACH TO SKILLS PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

### 1. Introduction

Among the objectives of the education sector policy in Kenya is the realization of a Kenyan workforce that is well trained and specialized to international standards; to stimulate employment; and contribute to improved productivity, competitiveness and prosperity of individuals. Kenya, which aspires to become a middle income economy by the year 2030, can only realize an innovative economy through technological innovation. Skills acquired through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) are essential in preparing students for a multiplicity of positions in the industry and the informal sector.

Kenya's focus under Technical and Vocational Education and Training is on providing skills that meet the needs of the workplace as well as self employment. The goal of the TVET Sub Sector is to provide relevant and adequate skills and competencies in strategic disciplines for spurring industrial and economic development. The Kenya TVET Policy, which has a target of gross enrolment rate of 30% by the year 2030, places emphasis on enhancing access to Tertiary Education.

Youth Polytechnics have been identified as the means to provide technical skills for industrial and economic development consistent with the aspirations of Kenya Vision 2030. As part of commitment to ensuring that technical and vocational training is implemented in the Counties, the government has committed to the establishment of polytechnics in the devolved units in response to the growing demand of technical skills which is key to the realization of the Vision 2030.

The question of quality education and training in youth polytechnics is important and requires urgent attention. It is therefore important to determine the quality of education and training services being offered in youth polytechnics in assessing the effectiveness of these institutions in providing quality vocational education and training services.

## 2. Relevance of skills development to Kenya: Path Way to Career Progression

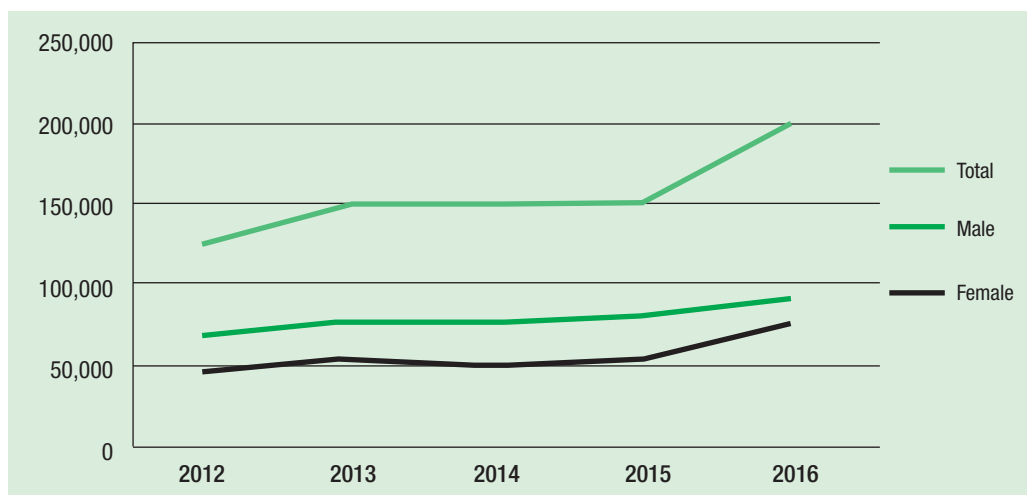
Youth unemployment in Kenya remains a challenge despite years of policy interventions meant to lower unemployment levels in the country. According to the Ministry of Youths' Affairs (MYA), only 25% of young people completing formal education and training were absorbed in the National labor force (MYA, 2006). The unemployment challenge is compounded by slow or declining macroeconomic growth, rapid population increase and skills mismatch.

One of the factors singled out for youth unemployment in Kenya is insufficient vocational and professional skills and an increasing skills mismatch. The youth require technical and vocational skills to enable them to advance to better-paying jobs and empower them tap to entrepreneurial opportunities. In today's dynamic global economy, where the labour market is demanding and skills for specific occupations are constantly evolving, it is necessary to combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills that match the needs and demands of the job market.

Today, the ability of workers to be innovative requires quality training that is not only market driven but also addresses requirements of present day workplace. In TVET, the quality of education and training is determined by among other things, the quality of course instructors, curricula, learning facilities, and the learning environment. Technical education and training has a key role to play in the achievement of Vision 2030 through creation of a workforce that is ready for both the public and private sector.

The country, is at risk of having inadequate personnel with requisite skills to support its industrialization effort. There is however, increased attention by stakeholders on the role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training in enhancing Kenya's global competitiveness and also creating decent employment. Having a skilled workforce will create an attractive economic environment for investors. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), student enrollment in TVET has increased by 36.9%, from 127,691 in 2012 to 202,556 in 2016. Male enrollment during the period increased by 25%, from 68,386 in 2012 to 91,209 in 2016 whereas female enrollment increased by 38.9% from 45,452 in 2012 to 74,432 in 2016.

Figure 2: TVET Students Enrollment in Kenya



Source: KNBS Economic Survey 2017

### 3. Issues in Technical Vocational Education and Training in Kenya

In the 2017 edition of the Global Talent Competitiveness Index, Kenya is ranked 97th in talent competitiveness out of 118 economies globally. The country is ranked seventh in sub-Saharan Africa, behind Rwanda, Zambia and Namibia. The study, released by a consortium of think tanks, led by the INSEAD Business School for the World, indicates that Kenya is lagging behind the sub-Saharan mean in several key indicators, including vocational and technical skills, retention of skilled talent and opportunities for growth and development of talent.

Whereas the TVET sub-sector in Kenya has witnessed growth, there are still challenges that need to be addressed. These include:- the large number of young people graduating from secondary schools, mismatch between training offered by TVET institutions and the actual skill demands of industry, theory based curriculum delivery in majority of TVET institutions as opposed to a combination of theory and practical lessons, prevalence of supply-end push instead of the desired market-end pull for enrolment in TVET, and poor public perception towards TVET.

Other challenges facing TVET in Kenya include curriculum and structure in the TVET sub sector that are not matched to industry needs as it is supply driven, inadequate equipment in most TVET institutions that are in a state of disrepair and obsolete, inadequate skills amongst trainers who also have limited exposure in industry and modern technology, weak quality assurance mechanism that comes in the form of poor curriculum delivery, lack of standardized certification, weak linkage between TVET institutions hindering mobility of trainers and transfer of credits, and low research capacity of trainers which limits research and innovation.

As the nature of required education, training and skills changes rapidly, TVET institutions including youth polytechnics need better understanding of how to respond to the changing technological capabilities and skill needs of the job market. They are faced with the daunting task of producing graduates who fit the current workplace and the National economy. In turn, if they are to inform and influence core education and training activities, firms and skill planners need to have an enhanced understanding of the will, competencies and capabilities of TVET colleges to respond to the skills demand.

### 4. Survey Findings

The study<sup>1</sup> on Youth Polytechnic Students' Perception of Vocational Training in Nakuru County, was undertaken based on the understanding that even as the County embarks on expanding TVET education, it is essential to recognize that the viability of TVET depends on sustaining high quality education and training, and that quality assurance is essential throughout the TVET sub sector. The study assessed beneficiary perception on quality of service delivery in six polytechnics in the County, with the objective of providing service user's perspective to assist concerned authorities in improving educational services. The assessment concentrated on five dimensions of service delivery with respect to TVET training including Quality and/ Reliability, Competence, Responsiveness, Tangibles and Relevance.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ieakenya.or.ke/publications/research-papers](http://www.ieakenya.or.ke/publications/research-papers)

Response on the kind of services students expect from the institutions included: Electronic teaching and learning; career counseling; opportunity to nurture talent like music and sports; delivery of courses that provide skills required by the market; entrepreneurial skills and other skills relevant for the work environment like communication and interpersonal skills, modern equipment and machines for use in courses being undertaken for instance in engineering and tailoring; teaching and administrative staff who are courteous and responsive to students' needs; and adequate classrooms and workshops that are conducive for learning.

Table one below illustrates how the six youth polytechnics in Nakuru county are distributed on the rating of their service delivery on a point scale of (0 – 100) where (0 implies poor and 100 implies excellent).

**Table One: Distribution of institutions (by shares) across the ratings**

Item	Rating				
	Poor	Below Average	Average	Satisfactory	Excellent
Conduciveness of location of institution for learning	---	---	---	50%	50%
Safety of learning environment	---	---	16.6%	16.6%	50%
Adequacy of classrooms and laboratories	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	---	---
Whether workshops in the institution are adequately equipped	33.3%	33.3%	16.6%	16.6%	---
Availability of materials for practical lessons	---	---	16.6%	50%	33.3%
Availability and adequacy of relevant textbooks and resources	33.3%	16.6%	---	33.3%	---
Availability of facilities for Persons with Disability	100%	---	---	---	---
Availability, adequacy and reliability of electricity supply	16.6%	---	---	33.3%	50%
Availability of co-curricular activities	---	---	16.6%	33.3%	50%
Adequacy of instructors for courses offered	16.6%	---	66.6%	---	16.6%
Instructor technical and vocational competencies	---	---	---	---	100%
Guidance and counseling services	---	---	16.6%	16.6%	66.6%
Mechanism for receiving complaints from students	---	---	16.6%	50%	33.3%
Existence of democratically constituted student's union or body	---	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	---
Competitiveness of courses offered	---	---	---	---	100%
Courtesy by staff members	---	---	---	---	100%
Whether students receive individualized attention by teaching staff	---	---	---	---	100%
Ease of contacting and communicating with staff	---	---	---	100%	---
Satisfaction with regards to response of students' inquires	---	---	---	33.3%	66.6%
Satisfaction with regard to staff initiative to attend to student's needs and render services	---	---	---	16.6%	83.3%
Satisfaction with regard to efficiency in addressing students' complaints	---	---	16.6%	33.3%	50%

Satisfaction with regard to quality of teaching	---	---	---	33.3%	66.6%
Satisfaction in regard to quality of facilities and material resources	---	---	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%

Note: Poor (0%-20%), Below Average (21%-40%), Average (41%-60%), Satisfactory (61%-80%), Excellent (81%-100%)

## 5. Recommendations for Policy Consideration

The following measures could help address issues relating to demand and supply of training services in Youth Polytechnics:

### Changing Poor Public Perception on TVET

One of the main challenges contributing to low enrolment in TVET institutions including Youth Polytechnics is poor perception by the public about these institutions. Polytechnics are not viewed as prestigious. In order to increase demand and enrolment in TVET, the Government should develop a communication strategy, including advertisement, to promote skills development and attract more youth to enroll in vocational education and training. Such communication should link learning, earnings and career possibilities. Communication should also target society as a whole with the objective of changing the view on practical “hands-on” activities as menial work. The message around skills acquired through TVET institutions including youth polytechnics should be delivered in schools through orientation and career guidance. Role models who have succeeded after vocational training should be identified and individual case studies and success stories collated for use in demonstrating the value of vocational education.

### Planning and Curriculum Development in the TVET Sub-sector

Policy makers and stakeholders should embrace bottom-up planning for the sub-sector, and undertake regular review of youth polytechnic academic curriculum so as to ensure that it meets the demands, standards and trends of the current job market. Policy makers in partnership with industry players and researchers, should also identify priority courses in which industry needs to develop skills standards, curriculum and training materials. Policy makers should also engage with employers around curriculum design and delivery. Mechanisms such as policy, legislation and institutions should connect employers with the design and delivery of education and training and also connect vocational experiences more directly with employment. Market needs analysis tools should be developed to better inform all key stakeholders of current and future labour market needs.

### Developing Pre-learners

Policy makers, youth polytechnics and the TVET sub sector should recognize prior-learning especially for workers including those in the informal (Jua Kali) sector who would like to improve their skills through training in the youth polytechnics. Programs should be developed to accommodate this category of persons who might not have enrolled earlier due to lack of finances, but who already have some technical knowhow relating to their job and skills that they would like to enhance.

### Improving Learning Facilities in Youth Polytechnics

There is an urgent need to address the poor state of facilities, both equipment and infrastructure, in youth polytechnics to make them conducive to learning. This requires adequate allocation of

finances to these institutions with the objective of improving efficiency and effectiveness in their administration. With more finances, youth polytechnics will be able to purchase new state-of-the-art equipment, maintain existing equipment, develop requisite infrastructure including classrooms and laboratories and maintain facilities in the institutions as well as connect to electricity, telephone lines and internet services. Such changes will enhance learning and provide adequate boarding facilities to meet demand where required.

### Ensuring Quality of Training Services

Quality service at tertiary level of learning is the most important factor for motivating students. There is therefore need to ensure that the quality in services offered to students in TVET institutions is maintained. This requires putting in place deliberate measures to tackle the challenges of quality, knowledge, skills and motivation of vocational teachers and trainers. There is need for continued quality assurance in the Sub Sector and the empowerment of Quality Assurance Officers to carry out their mandate to ensure quality education in the sub- sector including those in the devolved units. Service providers in youth polytechnics should also be given service quality training that promotes friendly and caring services. Better trained instructors are able to deliver high quality education and industry standard training and education. Where possible institutions should partner with relevant industries and invite lecturers from relevant industries for practical exposure. The Government should recruit adequate qualified staff and ensure that all staff receive continuous training and development on course delivery using modern methods, teaching methodologies and practical knowledge among others. The Government should also provide youth polytechnics with adequate, modern and quality materials for practical lessons such as smart boards, projectors, and computers to improve the quality of learning. Emphasis should be placed on assessing quality service in youth polytechnics with the objective of ensuring quality education and fostering students' satisfaction.

### Ensuring Accountability in the Delivery of Services

Stakeholders including the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TVETA), which is the external Quality Assurance Agency of TVET institutions working in partnership with the management of youth polytechnics should ensure accountability in delivery of training services in vocational training facilities. As key stakeholders with the primary responsibility of internal quality assurance of TVET training programs, initiation of development and review of curricula, they should put in place measures such as regular monitoring of service delivery to address the reliability and quality dimensions of service delivery in order to deliver on promises made to service users.

### Increasing Access through Subsidy and Bursaries

The Government should consider subsidizing tuition fees to students enrolling in vocational training facilities to enable them complete their training courses. Students of youth polytechnics should also be considered for bursaries like any other students as a way of encouraging more people to enroll for vocational training courses in TVET institutions. Majority of service users of the Technical Education and Vocational Training institutions do not have the capability of paying fees. The Government at the national and county should therefore increase bursary allocations for the Sub-Sector; this would enable many students from poor households access training in these facilities. The Government should also streamline bursary allocations and check against its politicization. If possible, the funds should not be administered through political offices but should be handled directly by the TVET institutions.

## 6. Conclusion

Service experiences in Youth Polytechnics are outcomes of interactions between learning institutions, related processes, employees and customer satisfaction with service experiences. The quality of service in Youth Polytechnics countrywide needs to be ensured as it is an important factor in motivating students and ensuring that students graduating from these institutions are competitive globally. The important role of assessing service quality in Kenya's higher learning institutions cannot be over emphasized as a pathway to achieving quality education and fostering satisfaction of the consumers of these services. There is need for service providers in Youth Polytechnics to participate in service quality training that aim at promoting quality education and building student satisfaction.

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This document is an output from a project funded by Uraia Trust implemented by Institute of Economic Affairs titled *Promoting Social and Economic Rights through Participatory and Accountable Governance*. The project by IEA is one among others implemented by Civil Society Organization partners in the wider Uraia Trust project titled *Rooting Democracy in Kenya through an Informed Citizenry, Phase II*. This publication has been prepared for general guidance on matters of interest.

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