

EVALUATION OF THE IMPACT OF INTEGRATED SKILLS OUT-REACH PROGRAMME (ISOP) IN RURAL COMMUNITIES OF ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Integrated skills outreach (ISOP) was a programme launched with the aim of empowering youth with technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills so that they can be gainfully employed and take part in national economy. The programme was implemented in all provinces in Zimbabwe. In Midlands Province, Gweru Polytechnic trained eighty (80) youths from Shurugwi district in various trades under Intergraded Outreach Programme. This study sought to assess the impact of training youths in the district. A methodological triangulation approach to research was carried out to assess the impact of the programme. Purposively sampled community leaders and youths were interviewed in order to generate data to assess how the youth and the community benefited from the programme. Questionnaires were distributed to twenty (20) randomly sampled ISO graduates who were equipped with technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills through the (ISOP) programme. Observations were carried out in the communities to assess the projects carried out by youths in the communities. Focus group discussions with members of Shurugwi rural community were held to assess the community views on the programme. The Results showed that skills acquired from the programme helped the youths be actively involved in income generating projects. However, because of unavailability of market for their products and resources for their projects, the youths moved to urban centres where resources and demand for their products are available. The study recommended that the youths should be assisted to acquire requisite resources to carry out projects in their home areas in order to curb rural urban migration.

Keywords: Technical and Vocational Skills, Entrepreneurial, Integrated skills outreach programme.

INTRODUCTION

Integrated Skills Outreach Programme was an effort by the Zimbabwean government to facilitate participation of the youths in the mainstream of the economy. The programme aimed to assist youths to acquire technical and entrepreneurial skills to start viable enterprises within their environments and communities, (Ministry Youth Development Indigenisation and Empowerment 2013). The programme tried to address the economic empowerment needs of the youths through skills development and employment creation. This would help to solve unemployment challenges at the same time promoting productive youth engagement in the economy. Furthermore, the programme provided a second chance for the youth who would have lacked opportunities to acquire technical education and training and help them to realise their potentials and prepare them for the world of work. Integrated skills outreach programme empowered unemployed youths to acquire skills so that they could be self-employed and start income generating projects that can improve their life and that of their communities, (*The Chronicle 4 July 2013*). Gweru Polytechnic conducted short courses in several trades in which youth were exposed to both practical and theory lessons.

Integrated skills outreach programme treasures every aspect of an individual and believes that individuals differ in talents and are gifted in some way. If their talents are enhanced through training, the individuals can play a crucial part in developing the economy of the country. From 2010 to 2013 an Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP) was carried out in Midlands Province with the help of funding from Care International. The aim of the programme was to enrich and empower youths. In rural Shururgwi community, youths were trained in various trades which include welding and Fabrication, horticulture, Cookery, Dressmaking, Candle Making, Motor Mechanic, Carpentry, Interior Decor and Embroidery, Brick and Block Laying and Hairdressing.

Murinda (2014) reports that youths aged between 15-34 years constitutes 56% of the economically active Zimbabwean population. What is worrisome is that, although they are in the majority, they are the hardest hit by unemployment. According to the 2012 Population Census data, they constitute 86% of the unemployed population of Zimbabwe. The major reason for failing to get employment is lack of skills (Mambo 2010). Lack of skills limit the contribution that the youths can make towards the economic development and this can lead to their economic and social marginalisation (Surbrahmanyam 2013). ILO (2010) also suggests that Zimbabwe's economy has a low job creation capacity to absorb the large number of youths entering the job market. Unemployed youths face the risk of engaging in illicit activities which are a source of a number of social problems in society.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many youths in rural areas face unemployment challenge and poverty (De Paul Ikounga 2015). In rural communities in Midlands, some unemployed youths were equipped with several skills under the Integrated Skills out-reach Programme ISOP programme. This study intended to take stock of the impact of the integrated skills outreach programme. Assessment of the programme is important because it gives feedback to the sponsors of the programme and it establishes whether the programme is worthwhile.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guide by the following questions:

1. Did the rural youth and communities in Midlands benefit from the integrated Skills outreach programme?
2. How successful was the Integrated Skills Outreach Programme in Midlands?
3. What can be done to ensure successful implementation of integrated skills outreach programme?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Zimbabwe's population structure has a youth bulge crisis. Majority of the youths are unemployed. Introduction of Integrated Skills Outreach Programme (ISOP) was a way of containing the effects of the bulge. An assessment of the programme is therefore necessary in order to establish whether it is worthwhile programme and assess how it can best be sustained. It is hoped that the findings would informing the Ministry of Youth, Development Indigenisation and Empowerment on the need for labour market policies and programmes that have impact on youths' access to jobs and prepare youths to the world of work. It informs the ministry and other stakeholders of successes and challenges of the programme. Success of the programme would ensure continued support of the programme and failure

would prompt corrective measures. The study also informs policy makers and development partners on the employment outcomes and earnings associated with skills development, (Adams 2007). Findings from the study also provide lessons for other rural communities in the country and present a good image of technical and vocational education which is often considered as “second class education”.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A situational analysis carried by Mambo (2010) shows that Zimbabwe has faced a number of challenges which include hyper- inflation, deindustrialisation, loss of jobs poverty and low productive capacity. Formal employment has declined and many jobs have been informalised. Deindustrialisation has sent many people from formal employment and this has increased the number of unemployed people. The problem has been exacerbated by more than 200 000 students who are released in the labour market by secondary schools, polytechnics and universities every year. This makes unemployment the greatest challenge in Zimbabwe. One of the priorities of the country’s Medium Term Policy (MTP) is to create employment, create jobs and to reorganise technical and vocational education. Integrated Skills outreach programme was a positive response to unemployment challenges faced by the country

Surbrahmanyam (2014) assessed the effects of technical and vocational education in Finland. In her findings she established that technical training could help to tackle unemployment. The Finns embarked on a vocational tracking programme over a decade and this contributed to lower youth unemployment rates. Surbrahmanyam however, bemoans the growing mismatch between supply and demand of skills in developing countries. Integrated skills outreach programme has the potential to equip youths with skills which are relevant to their communities. These domestic skills can help them to tap locally available resources for economic development. If successfully implemented, the programme can help to reduce youth unemployment rate, poverty and rural urban migration by youths.

Zimbabwe’s population has a youth bulge crisis. Youth bulge refers to the excess in young adult population, (Heinsohn 2003). In a well functioning society, this group can add vigour and productivity to society, (Fuller 2004). On the other hand, the social group can lead to a number of social problems in society if not well engaged. If society is ill-equipped and lacks policies to deal with it, the “bulge” has alarming implications to society. The International Feature (2002) reports that Zimbabwe has the largest youths bulge. The integrated skills outreach programme can be a panacea to the effects of the youths bulge problem in Zimbabwe.

Analysing how youth unemployment can be tackled in the Maghreb, Surbrahmanyam (2011) also identified the youth bulge problem in the Maghreb states. There were a large number of unemployed youths in the states. She argues that the youths bulge could present a window of opportunity for economic growth and poverty eradication. A young population can be a resource that can be a driver for economic development. If not gainfully employed they can be a liability that can undermine growth prospects, (Agbor, Taiwo and Smith 2012). Surbrahmanyam (2011) asserts that providing education and training to develop human capital creates high value-added jobs which utilises technical and vocational skills. The nations can enjoy enormous demographic dividends from the youth bulge if youths are equipped with skills. Surbrahmanyam’s recommendations reflect the ideas behind the

introduction of ISOP. If the youths are equipped with technical and Vocational skills, Zimbabwe can enjoy a lot of economic dividends when the youths put the skills into practice. Technical, Vocational, Education and Training (TVET) fosters youth employment and helps to address employability challenges in Africa (De Paul Ikounga 2015). It prepares the young to be job creators than job seekers. In Zimbabwe, where deindustrialisation has forced many people out of formal employment, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) play a vital role in equipping youth for self employment and job creation. It prepares youths to take appropriate economic roles in society. It is a key driver for job growth for the youths and hub for human resource for the nation.

The African Union (AU) (2007) document on TVET states that that TEVT is important for national development for it promotes skills acquisition through competency based training. Individuals are capacitated to gain employment, sustainable livelihood and responsible citizenship. It is a vehicle for socio-economic development since it relates to development of infrastructure, trade, technological progress and agriculture. It also ensures employability of trainees

Assessing the dividends from technical and vocational education (TVE), Adams (2007) established that there a number of payoffs from it. It facilitates transition to the world of work. Equal benefits for both men and women are ensured and labour market discrimination is stopped. A strong foundation for pursuit for further technical and vocational can also be set. It leads to respect of labour and connects youths to jobs thereby improving their earnings prospects. Technical and vocational education and training can also result in immediate employment. The programme can be a payoff, for the youths would be able to use technical and vocational skills they acquire to create employment than to look for employment.

Technical and vocational Training has had limited impact on gender patterns of employment, (Adams, 2007). Women have been cited as showing interest in white collar courses like secretarial beauty care and clerical studies while men are interested in blue-collar fields like building, motor mechanics and carpentry. Women are not keen in taking courses which are traditionally-male dominated. As a result, they face challenges in getting self-employment. There is need to encourage women to enter into previously male dominated fields.

Integrated skills outreach programme was an effort to reach the unemployed youths in the rural area. A question which one can ask is; does training for job work for the unemployed? In job training review of the unemployed by Mearger and Evans (1996), it was discovered that labour market training and retaining of the unemployed did not yield expected results. Not all those trained could get employment. Betcherman, Olivas and Dar (2004) carried out a similar study in advanced developing and transitional economies and observed that the programme had positive impact on future employment and earning of the participants. A cost benefit analysis showed that there were positive employment benefits which could sufficiently offset training costs.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a pragmatic research approach in which qualitative and quantitative research paradigms were exploited. A case study of implementation of ISOP programme in Shurugwi rural community was carried out. Twenty purposively sampled ISOP graduates responded to a questionnaire. The sampling technique sought to select information rich participants who could provide in-depth information about the programme (Patton, 1990).

In-depth interviews were held with other ten beneficiaries of the programme. Five village heads and community members were also interviewed to elicit information on the challenges and benefits of the programme. An observation check list was used to assess the benefits and challenges of the programme. Multiple methods were used in order to secure an in-depth understanding of the study. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that this adds rigour, breath, complex, richness and depth in enquiry.

FINDINGS

Impact of The Programme

A number of benefits were accrued from the programme. Sixty (60) percent of the youths moved in urban centres where they are earning a living through self employment. Observation shows that most of the youth who were trained in welding and fabrication are working by the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises at Mutapa Industrial Centre in Gweru urban. Metal fabrication is a value added process that involves construction of structures from raw materials. They use sheet metal to design and construct tins, poultry feeding troughs and other structures. Most of their products find ready market in high and low density suburbs in Gweru and Shurugwi Urban centres. Graduates also made window frames and door frames which are on demand in construction industry. A few established workshops Shurugwi town and Chachacha Growth Point where they are self employed as welders. Similarly, graduates in Brick and Block laying, Hairdressing, Dressmaking, Interior Deco and Embroidery and Carpentry moved to urban centres to carry out their trades. They could not establish their projects in rural areas because the income of consumers and demand for their products in the rural area was very low. As a result, most of the graduates of ISOP programme prefer to work in towns where their products had high market and fetched high prices.

Trainees in horticulture faced challenges in implementing what they learnt through ISOP programme. They did not have capital to purchase inputs for crop production. These included seeds fertilisers, pesticides, equipment and facilities to ensure temperature and humidity control. The life-blood of vegetable production is water. Interviewed horticulture graduates complained of unavailability of sustainable sources of water for irrigation. Soil, which is a fundamental resource base for agricultural production in the district, is of poor quality. Horticultural products are perishable and require proper storage equipment and quick transportation to market. The youths bemoaned of transport challenges. As a result those who trained in horticulture sought employment in peri-urban farms. One interviewed graduate of the ISOP programme made the following reflection

“It is very difficult to implement horticulture here. We don’t have inputs; there is no transport and market for horticultural product. Most of us have to seek employment in farms to earn a living. My wish was to be self-employed”

This remark illustrates the graduate’s expectations were not met. They wanted to be self employed but factors beyond their control forced them to leave their home area to seek employment in farms.

VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS ON THE SUCCESS OF ISOP PROGRAMME

Ninety (90) percent of the youths who were trained attested that they benefitted from the programme in that the skills they acquired enabled them to get a stable source of income to

sustain their lives. Interviewed community members attested that the programme helped some youths in the rural community to earn a living through self-help projects. Some community members made the following remarks on the programme.

“The training equipped some youth skills to earn a living. They can no longer take part in illicit activities like taking drug, and participate in crimes crimes. Most of them used to spend time in townships or loiter in the villages looking for home brewed bear. At least they can earn some money to look after their families.”

“Youths are now able to fend for themselves. The programme was good. It will be good if all the youth receive the same training “

Remarks from community members illustrate that the community significantly benefited from the integrated skills out-reach programme. The programme averted the chances of the youths in the community to engage in illicit activities. It helped to alleviate poverty by engaging some youths in productive activities.

Noteworthy from the observations was that, those who were trained moved from the rural areas to growth points and towns where they could get resources and market for their products. This was a departure from the aim of the programme which was to equip the youths with technical and vocational skills so that they can exploit the resources in their community and develop their area. Supporting the reason for migration to urban and peri-urban centres the one of the youths said;

“We stand to lose if we establish our projects in rural areas. There are no resources and market for our products. For this reason we have to move to urban areas where these are available”

The comments illustrate that adequate resources and market for products had been pull factors for rural-urban migration for ISOP graduates. The success of retaining youths in their community hinges on provision of requisite equipment and resources which enable them to tap locally available resources and take part in the development of their community.

VIEWS OF PARTICIPANTS ON WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ENSURE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF ISOP PROGRAMME

In view of the challenges faced in the implementation of the programme, the participants proffered a number of solutions. The table below shows their reflections on what can be done to ensure successful implementation of the programme.

Table 1. GRADUATES’ VIEWS ON WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ENSURE SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF ISOP N=20

	Yes	%	No	%
Rural Electrification should be done in order use electric gadgets which require electricity.	20	100	0	0
Youths should be given starter kits after training in order to successfully implement skills development.	18	90	2	10
Youths should be given soft loans to enhance them start projects.	15	75	5	25
Youths should be equipped with skills which help them to tap the resources in their environment.	12	60	8	40

All the respondents 100% indicated electricity was very important for projects. There was a need to expedite rural electrification programme to ensure availability of electricity in rural areas. Interviewed community leaders also supported the need to for electricity in various parts of the community since most of youth projects require the use of electricity for their projects. Ninety (90) percent of the participants supported the idea of giving youth starter kits. They argued that most youths do not have capital to start projects. The kits would help to kick start their projects and give them opportunity to put into practice the skills they acquired during training. Seventy-five (75) percent of the respondents supported the idea of giving loans to ISOP graduates so that they could start income generating projects. There were mixed opinions on the need to train youth in skills that are relevant in tapping locally available resource. Interviewed youth felt that this would restrict them to their home area for the rest of their lives.

DISCUSSION

The findings reflected that, while the programme helped to create employment for the youths, it also created migration trend of youth from rural area to urban centres. This resulted in depopulation of rural areas and overpopulation in urban centres. It was therefore important to provide facilities which could retain youths in their communities. Rural Electrification Programme should ensure that rural area get electricity since electricity is a major pull factor for youth migration to urban centres.

Noteworthy from the findings was that; equipping youths with skills without giving them equipment to use was improper. There was need to provide them with starter kits which would help them to kick-start income generating projects. Providing financial capital would play an important role in helping youths to start projects. This would help them to be self-employed and effectively put into practice the technical, vocational and entrepreneurship skills they acquired through ISOP programme. In the absence of starter kits and capital most of them had to move to urban centres to look for employment.

CONCLUSION

Integrated Skills outreach Programme can be Zimbabwe's safety valve to solve the problem of youth unemployment epidemic facing the country. The Shurugwi rural community case showed that if youth are equipped with technical and vocational skills, they can live a sustainable live and take part in economic development. If all districts in the country could embark on the programme, a large number of youths would be equipped with employability skills. Polytechnics and Vocational Training Institutions should redouble their efforts in equipping the youths with requisite skills through short courses so that they take appropriate economic roles in society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the above findings and discussion, the study made the following recommendations can be made:

- Zimbabwe's economy is biased towards mining and agriculture. Youth skills development should focus on mineral processing and agriculture. Local resources like water, soil and minerals should be exploited to the full. Dams should be constructed in order to harness water for irrigation. This will ensure farming employment throughout the year for the youths in rural communities. Integrated Skills training should then

focus on equipping the youth with agricultural skills so that they benefit from farming. This ensures employment creation, food security and poverty eradication for Zimbabwe

- Some rural communities endowed with a lot of mineral resources which should benefit the people in the area. Skills Training should focus on existing employment opportunities so that youths can benefit from locally available resources. Youth should be equipped with skills to identify, extract and process minerals so that they can carry out small scale mining activities.
- Equipment play an important role in economic and skills development. They are the media through which skills and economic development take place. Youth should therefore be equipped with requisite and adequate equipment for their trades in order to put into practice the skills they acquired and take part in economic development.
- Entrepreneurship Education should be part of integrated skills outreach programme since. It encourages and supports self employment.
- Further skills development training is needed so that the youths can increase competency and mastery of their trades and end up as journeyman and craftsmen. The skills acquired should be recognised by formal education and accepted for further technical and vocational training.

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