

The Influence of Skill-Sets Offered at Kenya's NITA Training Centers on Youth Employability: A Study of NGAAF Youth Employability Program in Homa Bay and Kisumu Counties, Kenya

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Abstract:- Of the 73 million jobs created between 2000 and 2012 in Africa, only 16 million went to the youth. As the demographic youth bulge problem worsens and employment opportunities for this cohort remain stagnant, youth unemployment becomes a serious threat to African countries as well to the global peace and security. Kenya's population is largely youthful, and like the trends in Africa, more youths have post-secondary education with hundreds graduating from all post-secondary levels every year; implying the need for employment skills based on market demands. This study interrogates the influence of skill-sets offered at through the NGAAF sponsorship on youth employability asked on Homa Bay and Kisumu Counties – which were the pioneer implementers of this empowerment program – the study employs mixed methods design to collect and analyze data from across concerned stakeholders of the program – primarily from the program beneficiaries. Quantitative data was analyzed through SPSS via descriptive statistics and qualitative through thematic content analysis procedures.. Corroboration of survey and qualitative analyses revealed that out of the 15 skill sets offered, Quick-Service Oriented Skills (QSOS) demonstrated higher employability rates compared to High Demanding Technical Skills Courses (HTSCs). Post-training, participants in sectors like hospitality, beauty therapy, and salon-related trades exhibited favorable employment rates. Practical training and industry relevance emerged as key factors contributing to successful transitions into employment. The study highlights the importance of continuous support and bursaries for sustained engagement in training. Recommendations include prioritizing practical, industry-oriented training, aligning courses with market demand, fostering collaboration among stakeholders, and emphasizing proactive engagement among youth. Overall, by embracing these recommendations, the NGAAF program and relevant actors can effectively address youth unemployment and enhance economic prospects in Kenya.

Keywords:- Kenya, NGAAF, Youth employability, and Youth Empowerment.

I. INTRODUCTION

The job market's expansion in Africa has not kept pace with the escalating number of young individuals seeking employment opportunities (Lin, 2012; Jimeno, & Rodriguez-Palenzuela, 2003; Government of Kenya (GoK), 2018; Kithaka, 2015; Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development (K4D), 2018; The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), 2013; Udarl, 2004; UNICEF, 2012). Although Africa generated 73 million jobs between 2000 and 2008, only 16 million of these positions, or 21.9%, were accessible to the youth demographic (International Labour Office (ILO), 2008). As a result, a substantial portion of the continent's young population faces unemployment or engages in precarious and informal work arrangements, often yielding minimal productivity and earnings (African Development Bank (AfDB) *et al.*, 2012; Dale, 1991).

In Africa, youth employability is recognized as a critical component of efforts to mitigate underdevelopment, promote human rights, and counter the potential rise of radical extremism among the continent's vulnerable youth population. The International Labour Organization (ILO) underscores Africa's unique concern for youth employability due to its youthful demographic composition, with 20% falling within the 15 to 24 age group and constituting 54% of the total labor force (ILO, 2021). This challenge will escalate by 2050, with one in every four working-age individuals worldwide hailing from Africa.

Against this backdrop, African governments and researchers share the responsibility of equipping out-of-school youth, regardless of their current skill levels, with the necessary abilities to engage in lawful economic activities, achieve self-sufficiency, and contribute to the realization of the Africa Agenda 2063. The study at hand aligns with this trajectory by assessing an innovative program implemented by NGAAF (National Government Affirmative Action Fund), which, alongside its affirmative action efforts, introduced youth employability programs from 2017 to 2022. Despite the considerable potential benefits of such innovative programs for both Kenyan youth and the government, there remains a gap in understanding the degree to which these initiatives fulfill their intended objectives.

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The National Government Affirmative Action Fund (NGAAF) operates as a semi-autonomous government agency (SAGA) within the Ministry of Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs, falling under the State Department of Gender Affairs in Kenya. Established through Legal Notice No.24 of the Public Finance Management Act, 2012, and published on 13th February 2015, NGAAF operates under the governance of the Public Finance Management Act, 2012 (National Government Affirmative Action Fund) Regulations 2016. Functioning as a pivotal initiative of the Government of Kenya (GoK), NGAAF is designed to facilitate the realization of the socio-economic objectives articulated in the Kenya Vision 2030. Its primary aim is to uplift vulnerable groups, including women, youth, Persons with Disabilities, needy children, and the elderly, by enhancing their access to financial resources for socio-economic empowerment. This involves the promotion of enterprise, value addition, and the reduction of poverty and inequality across the nation. In the framework of County Governance in Kenya, NGAAF operates under the stewardship of the County Women Representatives (CWR), with each representative overseeing the NGAAF initiatives within their respective counties.

The emphasis on youth within the population has guided the focus of many NGAAF programs, tailoring initiatives to address the unique needs of this youthful demographic. Nevertheless, the execution of these programs varies, with different designs and funding structures in different counties. To assess the impact of these publicly funded programs, especially in relation to enhancing youth employability—an underlying goal in both Kisumu and Homa Bay counties—there is a need for empirical investigation. This study takes on a comparative approach, examining two similar NGAAF programs implemented divergently in Kisumu and Homa Bay counties of Kenya.

In this endeavor, the study aimed to uncover both shared and distinct opportunities and challenges encountered in these counties, shedding light on the degree to which the programs have effectively enhanced youth employability. By delving into the nature of courses and skill sets sponsored by the programs, the study illuminated the alignment of supported courses with industry demands. This exploration not only underscored the pertinence of the training provided but also revealed differences and commonalities in terms of prioritized courses and employment outcomes within each county. Notably, a disconnection often exists between the skills imparted by educational institutions and the skills required by employers. Programs such as NGAAF, established to bridge this gap, will be assessed in terms of their efficacy in addressing this challenge.

Given its comparative nature, this study was poised to identify policy gaps that may exist between the counties and offered recommendations that could enhance future NGAAF and similar youth empowerment initiatives. By dissecting the nuances of these two parallel programs, the study contributed valuable insights into programmatic design, effectiveness, and alignment with industry needs. Ultimately, these findings can guide evidence-based policy improvements and programmatic refinements for more impactful youth-oriented initiatives.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Unemployment in the context of Youth Demographics*

Unemployment signifies the state of joblessness and the pursuit of employment opportunities. An individual is categorized as unemployed if they have reached the minimum employment age (e.g., 15 years), and during a specified week, were "without work," "available for work," and actively searching for employment (ILO, 1982). This definition indicates that individuals who are not working but are available for employment, yet do not actively search for work due to various reasons, cannot be labeled as unemployed. Instead, they might be referred to as discouraged workers. Furthermore, a person who is already fully employed but seeks additional work with another employer can be termed as engaging in "moonlighting" (Baah-Boateng et al., 2013; Jimeno & Rodriguez-Palenzuela, 2003). However, the applicability of the job-seeking-based definition of unemployment has raised concerns, particularly within the context of African countries (Dale, 1991). This definition is viewed as insufficient in characterizing labor markets in low-income nations (Cling et al., 2007; Fares et al., 2006; World Bank, 2006). In Africa, numerous jobless individuals may be available for work but might not actively seek employment due to reasons such as the perceived absence of job opportunities or seasonal fluctuations in employment, contributing to a significant discouraged worker phenomenon (Baah-Boateng, 2015; World Bank (2014) *Youth Employment in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Available at: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2014/01/18829981/youth-employment-sub-saharan-africa-vol-1-2-overview> (accessed 8 February 2016).).

During periods of economic downturns and associated unemployment challenges, the demographic group most adversely affected tends to be the youth. Curtain (2001) defines youth as individuals in a distinct life cycle stage between childhood and adulthood. In demographic analysis, the Commonwealth extends the definition of youth to encompass ages 15–29, differing from the African Youth Charter's definition of youth as those aged 18–35 (African Union (AU) Commission, 2006). In terms of policy, Ghana, Kenya, and Tanzania adopt the African Union's definition of youth as 15–35 years, whereas Nigeria employs a range of 12–30 years. South Africa's National Youth Policy classifies youth as falling within the 14–35 years category (Mkandawire, 2000).

B. *Youth Employment Profile in Homa Bay and Kisumu Counties*

Homa Bay County, as outlined in its Integrated Development Plan for 2018-2022, grapples with a significant youth population, constituting nearly half of its total population (Homa Bay County Government, 2018). Recognizing this demographic composition, the county underscores the need to establish avenues for youth employment (Government of Kenya (GoK), 2018). The county's Integrated Development Plan acknowledges the youth as a pivotal demographic, accounting for 49.1 percent of the total population. With a high dependency ratio of 107, the plan asserts the necessity for increased investments in

education, health, and employment opportunities to harness the demographic dividend. Despite this, over 73% of the population (excluding students) remains unemployed, predominantly among the youthful populace, leading to engagement in subsistence agriculture.

Similarly, Kisumu County's Integrated Development Plan estimates a total population of 1,358,837, with youths aged 15 to 34 accounting for around 39% of this figure. As such, both counties view youth empowerment as a top priority due to the burgeoning youth population, which poses a threat to realizing the demographic dividend and overall development. Addressing youth unemployment emerges as a pressing concern for both counties.

C. The Youth and Youth Empowerment Programs Research

This study adopts the Kenyan definition of youth, categorizing individuals between the ages of 18 and 34 as such (Government of Kenya, 2010). However, it's important to note that the definition of youth isn't uniform and varies across actors, development programs, and regions. The United Nations defines youth as those aged 15 to 24, emphasizing their vulnerability and susceptibility to various challenges, including health risks. In the African context, the African Youth Charter designates youth as individuals between 15 and 35, although interpretations of youth vary among African nations. For instance, Kenya's constitution defines youth as those aged 18 to 34. The diverse definitions reflect contextual considerations and the specific objectives of empowerment programs.

Previous studies have primarily explored youth empowerment through the lens of government policies and interventions. Programs such as the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF), Constituency Development Fund (CDF), Kenya Youth Employment Opportunity Program (KYEOP), and others have been analyzed. For instance, a study by Otiende, Mose & Juma (2020) investigated the impact of the Youth and Empowerment Development Fund (YEDF) on Nairobi's youths. Their findings indicated that YEDF facilitated access to capital, entrepreneurship opportunities, and self-employment, thereby reducing unemployment. Similar studies have explored YEDF's as well as other youth-oriented programs' impact on skills acquisition (Were, 2020; UNICEF, 2012; Ochieng', 2014; Irungu & Kamau, 2015; Knowledge, Evidence and Learning for Development (K4D). 2018; Cherutich, 2016)... Notably, there's a dearth of research on NGAAF programs and their policy implications. This study aims to address this gap by assessing the transformative impact of NGAAF-sponsored technical training on youth employability in Homa Bay and Kisumu Counties, with very less known as yet on the impact of the skills supported that lead to relative employability from county to county. This study aimed to fill this gap by investigating comparative impact of skill-sets trained on the two selected counties.

A review by Knowledge Evidence and Learning for Development (K4D) (2020) highlighted key trends in youth empowerment programs, including the positive outcomes of combining life-skills training, vocational training, and internships. However, mentorship programs for entrepreneurs

didn't yield substantial benefits in terms of sales or profits. Furthermore, youth-based funds like YEDF faced challenges stemming from inefficacy and corruption. Despite these challenges, cost-benefit analyses suggested that training costs could be offset by improved earnings within a few years post-intervention. Given that NGAAF wasn't included in this analysis, it remains unclear whether these trends apply to NGAAF programs. This study will assess the relevance and effectiveness of NGAAF-sponsored vocational training in enhancing youth employability in both counties.

Additional studies offer insights into specific counties. In Homa Bay, Were (2020) found that participation in community development programs was low among youths, often driven by employment and income considerations. Naomi (2014) studied Kisumu County, discovering that technical, business-oriented, and human resource management training were strongly associated with youth employability. Notably, KYEP participants were more likely to secure employment compared to non-participants. However, few studies have conducted comparative analyses across counties in Kenya's new governance structure. This study aims to bridge this gap by assessing NGAAF's impact on employability through a comparative analysis impact of skill-sets on youth employability in Homa Bay and Kisumu Counties.

Rachuonyo Constituency in Homa Bay County has also witnessed youth empowerment fund challenges. Ochieng' (2014) found that youth empowerment funds, including Uwezo Funds and YEDF, were inadequate and inefficient, leading to negative attitudes among Homa Bay's youth. The efficacy of funding-based empowerment approaches seems to be marred by inefficiency and corruption, a sentiment echoed by K4D. This study seeks to explore the effectiveness of NGAAF's vocational training approach as an alternative to the funding-focused model, offering insights into a potential paradigm shift in youth empowerment strategies. Specifically, study explored the influence of skill-sets supported by NGAAF on youth employability.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study employed a comparative case design. This approach, as outlined by Kothari (2004), suits investigations into similar phenomena with contextual variations. The choice is apt due to the NGAAF youth empowerment programs differing between Homa Bay and Kisumu Counties, specifically in terms of technical skill support and post-training assistance. This design facilitates the exploration of program disparities and challenges across these locations.

The study was conducted in Kisumu and Homa Bay Counties. Homa Bay offers a unique opportunity to examine the NGAAF youth employability program as it was the inaugural county to implement it (NGAAF Report, 2022). Conversely, Kisumu, having initiated the program later and adopting a distinct approach, allows for comparative analysis. Different characteristics in implementation, such as support for only females and offering post-training start-up packages in Homa Bay, make these counties significant cases for exploration.

The target population comprises NGAAF youth program beneficiaries. Homa Bay supported 280 beneficiaries in cohorts one and two, while Kisumu aided 400 females (Office of the NGAAF Homa Bay County, 2022). A sample size of 252 will be chosen using the Yamane formula, with representation from both counties to ensure gender balance. Interviews and qualitative data will complement survey results.

A combination of systematic, random, purposive, and snowball sampling designs was utilized. Systematic random sampling will involve random selection from beneficiary lists. Purposive design helped identify key personnel, such as NGAAF managers and NITA trainers. Snowball sampling enabled flexibility in reaching critical participants not initially mapped. Secondary sources included previous academic works and reports, while primary sources involved surveys and interviews. Quantitative data was gathered through questionnaires, focusing on NGAAF beneficiaries. Qualitative data emerged from key informant interviews with NGAAF managers, NITA trainers, and industry experts.

The mixed-methods approach helped combine qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data was analyzed thematically, utilizing transcriptions of audio-recorded interviews. Quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS, generating descriptive statistics and utilizing confirmatory questions for reliability. Both data types were triangulated for comprehensive discussions. To enhance internal validity, expert surveys were conducted, mapping gaps in literature against practitioners' perceptions. Pre-testing of tools was done for reliability. Triangulation of QUAL and QUANT data ensured consistency in findings.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings entail descriptive statistics and qualitative data triangulated together to undertake a discussion of each indicators used to understand the influence of skill-sets beneficiaries trained in on their employability. The section is the core of the paper as it presents findings of the study. It analyses findings from two angles: intra-county and inter-county comparison of the influence of the program to youth employability in terms the types of skill-sets the programs supported. To achieve this, it starts by identifying the different skill sets the, then the results of training in terms of employment, before it finally looks at which skills led to employment and among beneficiaries from which county.

A. Skill-sets supported Under NGAAF Youth Training Program

The analysis starts by investigating the types of skill-sets supported under NGAAF to develop an understanding of the variations across the two counties and set the stage of further analysis. The study findings indicate that 15 skill-sets were supported by NGAAF in both Homa Bay and Kisumu Counties. As the table below shows, 20 (6.6%) trained in auto engineering, which involved skills such as panel beating, motor vehicle electrical, painting, among others. 4 (1.3%) studied Computer repair and ICT related trades. 19 (6.3%) beneficiaries were enrolled in electrical wireman and installation, 14 (4.6%) specialized in welding, 24 (7.9%) in plumbing, 2(0.7%) in masonry, 2 (0.7%) in cleaning, 51 (16.8%) in hospitality, 10 (3.3%) in boiler technology, 28(9.2%) dress-making, 22 (7.3%) screen printing, 28 (9.2%) salon and related trades, 1(.03%) in plant mechanics, 65 (21.5%) beauty therapy and finally 13(4.3%) fabric design.

Table 3: Skill-sets supported Under NGAAF Youth Training Program

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Auto Engineering	20	6.6	6.6	6.6
Computer Repair and ICT	4	1.3	1.3	7.9
Electrical wireman/Installation	19	6.3	6.3	14.2
Welding	14	4.6	4.6	18.8
Plumbing	24	7.9	7.9	26.7
Masonry	2	.7	.7	27.4
Cleaning	2	.7	.7	28.1
Valid Hospitality	51	16.8	16.8	44.9
Boiler Technology	10	3.3	3.3	48.2
Dress-Making	28	9.2	9.2	57.4
Screen Printing	22	7.3	7.3	64.7
Salon and Related Trades	28	9.2	9.2	73.9
Plant Mechanics	1	.3	.3	74.3
Beauty Therapy	65	21.5	21.5	95.7
Fabric Design	13	4.3	4.3	100.0
Total	303	100.0	100.0	

Source: Mboha (2023).

This shows that a list of courses were at the disposal of the beneficiaries to choose from depending on their capacity. However, when interviews with a key informant revealed that courses to be supported depended on the cost of each cost, hence there need to sometimes regulate how many could choose which course.

Most of the courses they learnt were good. However, sometimes we had to intervene on what courses they could choose just so that we could cut costs according to our sizes. So yet they had the opportunity to choose but we could intervene also so that that whatever they choose we are able to pay fees for [Key Informant Interview, 14th January 2023).

B. Employment Status in the post-Training

To understand the influence of the program on youth employability the study sought to examine the employment status of the beneficiaries after training. Before enrolment in to the different skill-sets offered at NITA centers through the support of NGAAF, participants' status of employment was very low, with 88.78% being not employed at all. However, at the end of the training, as at the time of this research, this state of affairs had really changed with those employed even surpassing those who were not. As the figure below shows, those who perceived themselves as employed based on the skills they gained through the program were 54.31% while those who had not go employment due the skills acquired were 45.87%.

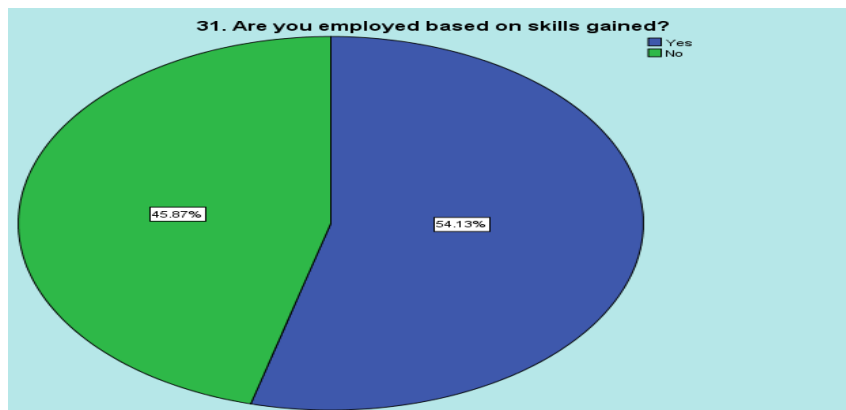


Fig. 6: Employment Status in the post-Training

Source: Mboha (2023).

This shows that the skills-sets offered generally led to employability of the youths, through acquisition of industry-oriented skills needed for survival into the market. However, this perspective was not the only perspective for the increase in the employment status of the participants of the NGAAF program. Different quarters emphasized different reasons but that the skills-sets were appropriate for placement in industry was a common perspective. The asserted for example that:

We are different from the other TVETs and much different from other institutions offering similar courses we offer. We are focused at the student and at the industry. Theory is only at most 10% the rest is practical skills here and at the place of attachment. This prepares our graduates for the industry – even placing them ahead of those from other institutions [Key Informant Interview with NGAAF Officer, 12th Dec 2022].

On the NGAAF officials emphasized that the students were able to acquire employable skills because not only did they learn of the practical and relevant skills, but that they were able to get continuous bursaries and could stay in schools throughout the sessions. One asserted in this line, thus:

We were very committed with our support and we were prompt in making the payment for fees and accommodation throughout the session. This way we were able to give the students a chance to stay in

school and get the most out of the skill-sets they specialized in [Key Informant interview, Feb 20th 2023].

The NGAAF trainers emphasized the level of student commitment and determination during training, as well as the pro-activeness of the student as regards his relationship with the trainers and those in industry to acquire any needed introductions necessary to start from in terms of placement after training. Several trainers agreed with this perspective as a key reason why other students were employment after training while others did not. A trainer argued that:

From what I know, employment is not straightforward after training. It gets back to whether the student was determined and had self-determination. Those whom I knew and who were disciplined and were committed, those whom were increased in industry and even requested us to introduce them while almost completing their courses, I know they are doing very well and are employed formerly or informally [Key Informant Interview at Mawego Technical Institute, 23rd January 2023].

The students or the beneficiaries of the program had almost similar reasons for the successful absorption into the job market and the lack of absorption to nearly half of them. One student former trainee at NGAAF Homa Bay, agreed

with this common assertion made by those who were employed at the time of the study as follows:

It is not a must to get jobs after training. All of us got the skills and taught by the same teachers and did our exams 90% of which was practical with only 10% being theory part. But some were serious and were doing it as their only way out of unemployment. But others were not serious, and missing classes, not attending practical –I think they were the well-off students who just came to buy

time. Only my serious classmates are employed I can tell you [employed Plumbing student supported by NGAAF Homa Bay, during an open-ended Survey, 25th April 2023].

The assertion by the student on practical versus theory coincide with the findings of this study on the mode of offering the courses beneficiaries did. The study as evidence in the figure below that in deed most part of courses were offered on practical basis, further increasing beneficiaries chances of entry into job market.



Fig. 7: The Mode of Training at NITA

Source: Mboha (2023).

➤ *Type of Employment Gained in the Post-training*

To understand the nature of employment post-training, the study unraveled the types of employment beneficiaries were involved in. The study established that while more beneficiaries were employed than those who were not already employed at the time of study. The study established that the type of employment varied. As the figure below shows, majority of those employed were in irregular employment based on demand (26.07%). 19.14% were employed in a relevant organization, while 5.28% were in regular self-employment. Of those who were in irregular employment based on demand, 20% were from Homa Bay County while 6% from Kisumu County. This was explained during the interviews with most beneficiaries explaining that they were given tools and this enabled them to start their own hustles or be useful in relevant sites wherever their services were demanded for. On the other hand of those who were in regular relevant organization, 14% were from Kisumu with only 5% from Homa Bay hence more Kisumu beneficiaries were in the

formal sector. This is again by the fact that in Kisumu County, tools of trade though not provided, the beneficiaries were linked directly to industries in beauty, hospitality and clothing, whereby most could do their industrial attachments and later be recruited on formal basis. The state in Homa Bay sits very well with the self-employment theory which argues that the most important value for solid education is that it equips learners with skills that gives them a head-start in the job market. Hence beneficiaries from Homa Bay were able to start their own self-employment without waiting for employment. On the other hand, the finding from Kisumu sits well with the social partners model of youth empowerment, and shows cases the power of social partners working together to unlock the industry doors and mitigate youth employability. Through the links between NGAAF Kisumu and industry actors, they were able to forge relationships which were useful for the employment of the graduating girls after training.

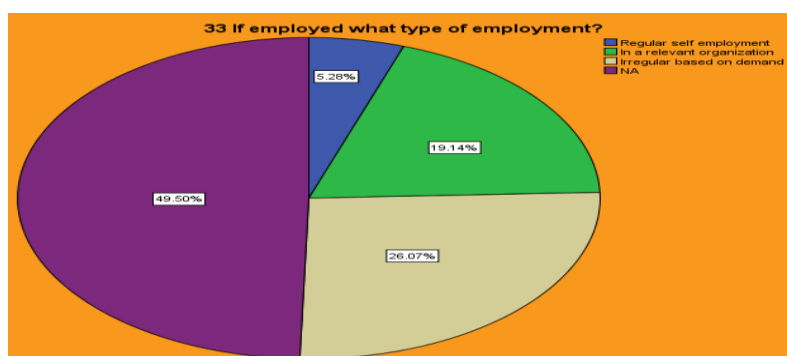


Fig. 8: Type of Employment Gained after Training

Source: Mboha (2023).

Therefore, the foregoing triangulation with survey and qualitative findings on the status of employment of program beneficiaries in the post-training reveal that the dynamics of employability is rather nuanced than what statistics themselves reveal. This is even clearer when different skill-sets trained in are cross-tabulated per county per employment status after training, as discussed in the next section.

C. The Relationship between Skills Trained in and Employability

The essence of the NGAAF support for the youth was to help them acquire skills that could make them employable or employ themselves. This study examined whether all the skills on which the beneficiaries were supported led to their employment on equal basis or whether there were variations generally, intra-county and/or inter-county. The table below shows general variations in terms of courses trained in and employability of the graduates.

As the table 3 shows, it is clear that quick-service oriented skills-sets (QSOS) when trained in are likely to lead to employment compared to more technical vocational courses. For example, 35 out of 52 of those who did

hospitality were employed in various ways – formal or informal - after training (which translates to 67% employability rates). The same trend is observed with salon and related courses where 23 out of 28 of the students who did the course reported to have been employed after acquiring the skills (this is 82% employability rate). Even a more interesting case was those who did beauty therapy who all had the opportunity to transition into the job market (100% employability rate). Masonry and cleaning too exhibited the 100% transition yet only 2 students did the two courses.

In sharp contrast the traditional courses did not really lead to employability looking at the students who did them relative to those who did QSOS. For example only 4 out of 20 of those who did auto engineering got employed after training (this is just 20% employability rate), while high demanding technical skills courses (HTSC) such as computer and related, electrical installation and related, boiler technology, screen printing, and plant mechanics led to 0% employability (keeping all other factors constant) as none of the graduates reported to have got employment.

Table 3: Skill-sets supported Under NGAAF Youth Training Program

	Frequency	Employed	Not Employed	Total
Auto Engineering	20	4(1.3%)	16(5.3%)	6.6
Computer Repair and ICT	4	0(0%)	4(1.3%)	1.3
Electrical wireman/Installation	19	0(0%)	19(6.3%)	6.3
Welding	14	4(1.3%)	10(3.3%)	4.6
Plumbing	24	4(1.3%)	20(6.6%)	7.9
Masonry	2	2(0.7%)	0(0%)	.7
Cleaning	2	2(0.7%)	0(0%)	.7
Hospitality	51	35(11.6%)	16(5.2%)	16.8
Boiler Technology	10	0(0%)	10(3.3%)	3.3
Dress-Making	28	12(4%)	16(5.2%)	9.2
Screen Printing	22	0(0%)	22(7.3%)	7.3
Salon and Related Trades	28	23(7.4%)	5(1.8%)	9.2
Plant Mechanics	1	0(0%)	1(0.3%)	.3
Beauty Therapy	65	65(21.5%)	0(0%)	21.5
Fabric Design	13	13(4.3%)	0(0%)	4.3
Total	303	164(54.13%)	139(44.87%)	100.0

Source: Mboha (2023).

When the researcher went ahead to investigate the experiences of the students who did HTSC and to share the experiences in the post-training, different job-market demand of these courses had their own ways of determining whether a beneficiary would transition into the job market. For example, a boiler technology graduate argued:

.....It is very difficult to get employment with the boiler course because those who are employed are those who learnt it by heart (did not attend any classes but learnt through seeing what was done in the companies they work). When you come with grade 3, or 1, you are seen as a threat and no one want to employ you [NGAAF beneficiary and former Cohort 2 boiler technology..... graduate

supported by Homa Bay narrates his story during a key informant interview, 4 May 2023].

It is imperative that the extent to which skill-sets supported by the NGAAF program lead to employability of the youths, depend on job-market demand for the skills. According to USAID (2022) *Workforce Development Study*, the demand for skills in the market vary between developed and developing countries. In the developing countries, the service industry is more demanding giving an opportunity for those with skills in booming service industries such as hospitality, beauty and aesthetics industries, high chances of employment compared to those with skills required in the technical sectors. The study findings therefore sit in congruence with the conventional trends in the job market.

This is critical for policy makers on youth empowerment and related policies, because these findings point on the need to change tact and view the empowerment programs available to the youths in terms of realities of the market. Unfortunately, previous studies such as that by Were (2020) find that government programs on empowerment fail because the youths are not empowered enough to participate in community projects, further raising the question, of the design and planning of such projects that do not have tangible impacts on the youths.

The NGAAF policy intervention that sees empowerment as the sustainable development of the capacities of the youths to partake of the job market demands is such an innovative way to empower the youths, but considerations need be made on what courses are to be supported, if the aim is truly to enhance and create a pool of employable youths. This approach should be taken up by other government youth empowerment policy implementers. Previous studies show that non-market based interventions for the youths do not portend long-term empowerment because their designs are not pro-sustainable empowerment. A study by Ochieng' (2014) show that the youth empowerment through such interventions such as the Youth Empowerment Funds failed to usher in sustainable empowerment to the youths due to its confusion at design with no focus on skills enhancement, but giving moneys which youths – individually or a group are unable to appropriate accordingly.

A key informant at the NGAAF national level expressed this view and praised Homa Bay and Kisumu Counties for adopting an employability-oriented approach through skills-enhancement. The informant argued that:

.....The programs implemented by Homa Bay and Kisumu Counties are very sustainable. They have put NGAAF to another level of empowerment, because the manner of implementation of their empowerment approach means that the impact on youth employment will be here to stay, ever forever. This is a different approach from other forms of empowerment such as the money-giving/grant/loaning-oriented programs which are very unsustainable and impacts of which cannot be felt.... [Key informant, NGAAF National office, 8th June 2023].

D. Skills trained on by County by Employability

To understand whether different courses or skill-sets trained on by the NGAAF beneficiaries had different significance in terms of enhancing the employability of the beneficiaries, the study undertook a cross-tabulation of the questions on skill-sets, county of residence and the question on whether one was employed or not. This analysis revealed expands the general analysis summarized in table three above by revealing intra-county and inter-county differences as shown in the modified/simplified cross-tab in table 4 below.

Table 4: Skill-sets trained in by County by Employment Status after training

Skills-sets	County	Frequency	Employed	Not Employed	Total
Auto Engineering	Kisumu	4	0	4(1.3%)	4(1.3%)
	Homabay	16	4(1.3%)	12(3.9%)	16(5.3%)
Computer Repair and ICT	Kisumu	4	0	4(1.3%)	4(1.3%)
	Homabay	0	0	0	0
Electrical wireman/Installation	Kisumu	4	0	0	4(1.3%)
	Homabay	15	0	0	15(5%)
Welding	Kisumu	4	0	0	4(1.3%)
	Homabay	10	4(1.3%)	6(2%)	10 (3.3%)
Plumbing	Kisumu	4	4(1.3%)	0	4(1.3%)
	Homabay	20	0	20(6.6%)	20(6.6%)
Masonry	Kisumu	0	0	0	0
	Homabay	2	2(0.7)	0	2(07%)
Cleaning	Kisumu	0	0	0	0
	Homabay	2	2(0.7)	0	2(07%)
Hospitality	Kisumu	35	35(11.6%)	0	35(11.6%)
	Homabay	16	0	16 (5.2%)	16(5.2%)
Boiler Technology	Kisumu	4	0	4(1.3%)	4(1.3%)
	Homabay	6	0	6(2%)	6(2%)
Dress-Making	Kisumu	12	12(3.9%)	0	12(3.9%)
	Homabay	16	0	16 (5.2%)	16 (5.2%)
Screen Printing	Kisumu	0	0	0	0
	Homabay	22	0	0	22(7.3%)
Salon and Related Trades	Homabay	12	6 (2%)	0	10(3.3%)
	Kisumu	21	17 (5.4%)	0	17(5.4%)
Plant Mechanics	Kisumu	0	0	0	0
	Homabay	1	0	1(0.3%)	1(0.3%)
Beauty Therapy	Kisumu	56	56(18.6%)	0	56(18.6%)
	Homabay	9	9(2.9%)	0	6(2.9%)

Fabric Design	Kisumu	0	0	0	0
	Homabay	13	13(4.3%)	0	13(4.3%)
Total			164(54.13%)	139(44.87%)	303 (100%)

Source: Mboha (2023).

As table 4 above summarizes, across the 15 different skill-sets offered at NITA through NGAAF support it is clear that some skill-sets have a positive relationship with employability (possibility of getting a job after training) while others have no change on trainees employment status at the end of the training. For example, in Kisumu, none of the four students who completed a course in auto engineering was employed at the time of this study (up to July 2023) while the 16 students who did the course in Homa Bay, only 4 (1.3%) had secured a chance to work and put their skills into productive work. Concerning computer repair and ICT courses, none of the 4 who did it from Kisumu had secured employment. For electrical installation none was employed at time of study in both counties. For welding, out of the 14 who did the course (4 Kisumu and 10 from Homa Bay) none of the Kisumu participants were employed while only 4 from Homa Bay were employed.

For the plumbing students/graduates, everyone (4) who did the course under NGAAF Kisumu was employed while all (20) of the Homa Bay beneficiaries had not got any employment opportunities. On masonry, the two (0.7% of the total sample) students who did the course both from Homa Bay and Kisumu based on the sample size were employed. Cleaning as a skill-set was similar to masonry. Hospitality had a total of 51 students. Of the 35 who did the course from Kisumu, all were employed while all (16) those who did the same course in Homa Bay reported to have not got any employment. None of the students who did boiler technology from both counties were employed, the same was the cases worth dress-making where all (12) who did the course in Kisumu were employed while 16 (5.2%) of the graduates of the same course from Homa Bay had not got employment. Screen printing was only done by students from Homa Bay – based on the study participants – and none of them were employed as at the time of the study. 6 (2%) of the 12 people who did salon and related courses from Kisumu were employed while 17 (5.4%) of the 21 who did the course in Homa Bay were also employed and the rest not employed. Only 1 student graduated with a grade in plant mechanics and

was only from Homa Bay and had not got any employment. Beauty therapy on the other hand was done by 65 students and all were employed 56(18% from Kisumu) and 9(2.9%) from Homa Bay. Fabric design was done by 13 (4.3%) all from Homa Bay County and all were employed.

From these findings, four revelations are crystal clear. First just a handful of Kisumu County beneficiaries did the HTSCs compared to QSOSs. For example only 4 out of 20 did auto engineering; only 4 out of 21 did computer repair and ICT related courses, only 4 out of 14 did welding, only 4 out of 24 did plumbing, none did masonry and cleaning, only 4 out of 10 did boiler technology, none did screen printing, plant mechanics and fabric design. This finding can be corroborated by the finding on the gender perspectives on the skill-sets pursued by the beneficiaries. When asked how they perceived the courses they did, it was clear that courses were gendered with female and male participants doing HDSCs categorizing such courses as meant for men while female and male participants that did QSOSs thinking such courses were meant for females. This engendering of the courses implies that female participants took the root of service – hospitality and beauty related skill-sets because they are traditionally perceived to be for the females and vice versa. The figure 7 below summarizes this observation. It shows that most (74.92%) of the participants had started changing their perspectives on the notion of some courses being males’ and other females’. Equal number thought these courses were still dichotomized between male and female. Since all beneficiaries from Kisumu were females as the County only supported girls in the program, the findings are therefore consistent when they show that most of the project beneficiaries from Kisumu did female-related courses, in the traditional sense of gendered dichotomy of courses. Likewise, most beneficiaries were male from Homa Bay because while the county supported male and female, most were male based on the list of project beneficiaries provided to the researcher for planning and slotting survey and interviews with the beneficiaries.

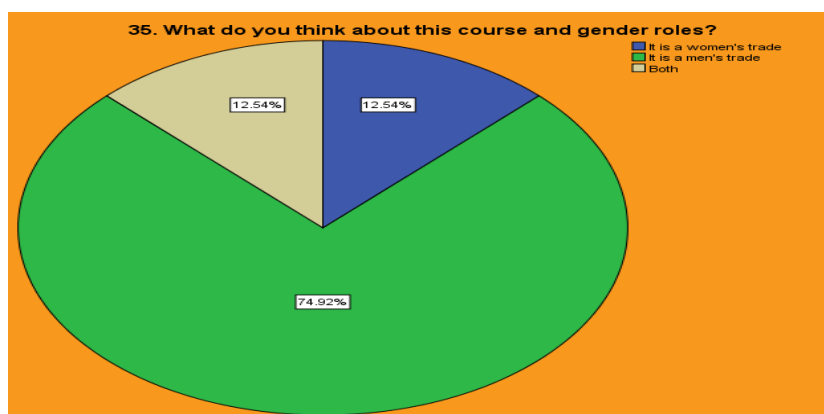


Fig. 9: Gendered Perception on the Skill-sets

Source: Mboha (2023).

The second observation from table 4 is that for Kisumu County beneficiaries, employment was highly likely from those who did graduate with the QSOS courses. For example all (56) those who did beauty therapy had got employment; half (6) of those who did salon and related trades were employed; all (12) those who did dress-making were employed; all (35) that did hospitality were also employed, among others. This further shows that even within the county, there were variances in terms of influence of skill-sets studied and employment after graduation, within Kisumu exhibiting a likelihood for employment for the QSOS courses.

Thirdly, it is observed from the table 4 that concerning inter-county, Kisumu County exhibited more numbers of those employed accounting for the many girls who did QSOSs which made transition from school into the job market easier compared to those from Homa Bay who did HTSCs which likely were not very demanded in the market compared to courses such as in hospitality, dress-making, salon and related courses among others. Lastly, unlike in Kisumu, most project beneficiaries from Homa Bay did the HTSCs and yet employment was not guaranteed and up to this level it is not clear why. This is explored in the following chapter in terms of the impact of the post-training support on employability of the beneficiaries.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This study sheds light on the significant impact of the NGAAF Youth Empowerment Program on enhancing youth employability through skill development. The findings highlight that the program supported a range of skill sets, with Quick-Service Oriented Skills (QSOS) demonstrating higher rates of employability compared to High Demanding Technical Skills Courses (HTSCs). The analysis of employment status post-training reveals that a substantial number of participants transitioned into employment, particularly in sectors that include hospitality, beauty therapy, dress-making, and salon-related trades. These sectors were associated with higher employment rates, possibly due to their alignment with the common service industries in particular urban and city Centres within Nyanza regions of Kenya. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of practical training and industry-focused education, where participants who engaged in practical, hands-on learning experiences were more likely to secure employment. The study also emphasizes the need for ongoing support and continuous bursaries for students, facilitating their sustained engagement in education and training, thus enhancing their employability prospects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **NITA Centers and Training Institutions:** NITA centers should continue to prioritize practical and industry-relevant training methodologies. Offering a balanced curriculum that blends theoretical knowledge with hands-on experience will better prepare youth for the job market. It is crucial to adapt the course offerings based on market demand and emerging trends. Collaboration with industry partners can facilitate apprenticeships, internships, and

industry attachment programs to further bridge the gap between education and employment.

- **Government of Kenya:** The government should consider using the findings of this study to inform policy decisions related to youth empowerment and employment. Greater investment in vocational and technical education, along with support for skill development programs like NGAAF, can help reduce youth unemployment rates. Policy frameworks that foster collaboration between different stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, and private sector employers, should be encouraged.
- **County Governments:** County governments play a pivotal role in tailoring empowerment programs to the specific needs and demands of their local communities. By conducting regular market surveys and assessing industry needs, counties can ensure that the skills imparted align with the employment landscape. Targeted investments in sectors with higher employability potential, such as the service industry, can yield positive outcomes for both youth and the economy.
- **NGAAF:** The NGAAF program should continue its commendable efforts in promoting youth empowerment and employability. The study suggests a focus on facilitating QSOS-based skill sets, given their higher chances of employment. Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and feedback loops can help refine the program's offerings and delivery mechanisms. Exploring partnerships with industry associations and private sector players can lead to increased placement opportunities for program beneficiaries.
- **Youths:** For youths, the study underscores the importance of proactive engagement in their training. Taking courses that align with market demands, demonstrating commitment during training, and actively seeking industry connections can enhance their employability prospects. Additionally, youths should remain adaptable and open to embracing emerging skill requirements, as the job market evolves rapidly.

In summary, this study puts emphasis on aligning training programs with market demands and promoting practical, industry-oriented education. With collaboration among stakeholders and a focus on empowering youths with relevant skills, the NGAAF Youth Empowerment Program, along with concerted efforts from training institutions, government bodies, county administrations, and the youths themselves, can collectively contribute to reducing youth unemployment and fostering economic growth.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

I declare no conflict of interest during the conceptualization, fieldwork, analysis and the writing up of the research findings.

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