INFLUENCE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING ON PERFORMANCE OF YOUTH SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES IN MAARA SUB-COUNTY, THARAKA-NITHI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) provide social and economic advantages to youths who are unable to find salaried employment in the formal sector. The SMEs are widely recognized as major sources of employment, poverty alleviation and economic development. The Government of Kenya has initiated several policies to stimulate growth in small business ownership and entrepreneurship. Such policy initiatives include: the session paper number 2 of 2005, poverty reduction strategy paper of 1999-2015 and MSE Bill of 2006. The Ministry of Youth Affairs established Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) in 2007 as a source of capital for youth-registered groups to start and grow their businesses. However, many youth-owned enterprises face numerous challenges with low productivity, stagnation in growth and high failure rate. Subsequently, entrepreneurship education and training is increasingly becoming recognized as a critical element to tackle global unemployment challenges by involving the youths in business ownership and entrepreneurship. This study determined the influence of entrepreneurship training on sustainability and performance of youth-owned enterprises in Maara sub-county. Descriptive research survey design was applied on a population of 230 registered youth-owned SMEs enterprises with 147 enterprises taken as the sample using stratified random sampling method. Youths who attended entrepreneurship training performed better in their businesses. Thus entrepreneurship training was important and critical to the survival and performance of youth-owned enterprises. Thus, provision of YEDF should go hand in hand with entrepreneurship training.

Key words: Sustainability, Business growth/survival, Youth employment, Youth Enterprise Development Fund, Entrepreneurship training.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in contributing to job creation and output growth is now widely accepted in both developed and developing countries. Small and Medium Enterprises are regarded as the backbone of the economy (Welter & Smallbone, 2011). Entrepreneurship on the other hand is also widely recognized as a major player in the economic and social development, with the entrepreneurs as prime movers of this development. The term entrepreneurs and small business owners though sometimes used interchangeably are somehow different. Entrepreneurs are persons with certain behavioural characteristics, while entrepreneurship is what entrepreneurs do in the process of coming up with a business venture. Entrepreneurship research defines entrepreneurs as individuals who discover, evaluate and exploit profitable opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Entrepreneurs are innovators, risk takers and persistent in the pursuit of their business objectives, as opposed to non-entrepreneurs or merely business owners.

There is no single criterion for classifying business enterprises as small or medium-scale globally. In a study carried out by International labour Organization (2005), over 50 definitions were identified in 75 different countries. However, literature shows that in defining small-scale business, reference is usually made to some quantifiable aspects such as: number of people employed by the enterprises, investment outlay, the annual turnover (sales) and the asset value of the enterprise or a combination of these aspects. SMEs has a number of benefits and one of its significant benefits is that they contribute to the creation of self-employment among those youth operating businesses and jobs to those who are employed in those enterprises amidst high level of unemployment.

Youth unemployment has always been a major concern in Kenya given the fact that only 2.1 million people work in the formal sector, while 9.3 million are self-employed, according to the Kenya Ministry of Labour estimates. According to International Labour Organization (ILO) (2013) Global Employment Trends for youth, global rate of unemployment among the youths aged 15-24 is 12.4% up from 12.3% in 2011 and the rate is expected to rise to 12.6% in 2013 with estimated 73.4million young people out of work. According to the report, the world is facing the worst ever youth unemployment rate, piling renewed pressure to take targeted actions to resolve the crisis for the generations at risk. The ILO is, therefore, calling on both the government and social partners to take urgent action on youth unemployment. Some of the suggestions that have been put forward include the macro-economic policies, employability skills, labour market policies and youth entrepreneurship training.

Since the beginning of the 1990s, small and medium-sized enterprises have remained one of the main avenues for building a vibrant and competitive private sector in many countries. Support for the SME sector has also become an increasingly important part of the industrial policy of the European Union (EU) over the past 10 years. The SMEs sector has been a central pillar for the creation of the world's most dynamic and competitive European economy. According to data from the European observatory (ENSR, 2005), each SME employs up to 100 people and accounted for 68 million jobs in the European Union in 2005. In Botswana, small and medium enterprises employ majority of the youths and women, with youths accounting for 49%. In a bid to improve the youth-owned small and medium enterprises the government of Botswana created credit schemes youth development fund to provide credit to youth-owned SMEs at affordable interest and also provide capacity building (Friedman, 2009).

In recognition of the important role played by youth-owned SMEs, the government of Kenya has over time initiated several policies and programmes aimed at stimulating growth in this sector. Such initiatives include the Economic Recovery Strategy (2003) for wealth and employment creation, Session Paper No. 2 of 2005 on the development of Small and Medium Enterprises for wealth and employment creation (Republic of Kenya, 2005), Youth Enterprise Development Fund of 2007, 'Kazi Kwa Vijana' (Jobs for the Youth) in 2009 and Uwezo Youth Fund in 2013, among others. While these interventions have been initiated, the rate of unemployment remains high with many young people reluctant to engage in small business ownership and those starting small enterprises show dismal performance as indicated by longevity, slow growth rate and high failure rate. According to Kenya National Bureau Statistics (KNBS) (2007) about 60% of the SMEs fail within a few months of operation. Entrepreneurship education and training is however, increasingly becoming recognized as an important element in the broader effort in tackling the Kenyan youth unemployment challenge by involving the young people in small business ownership. Kourilsky and Esfandiani (1997) argue that economic growth heavily relies on entrepreneurship training and education and can open major access to prosperity. It enables one to acquire skills and a management focus in relation to innovativeness, pro-activeness and risk-taking, which have been recognized as the most important factors for business growth and profitability. Ireland *et al*., (2003) observed that entrepreneurial skills such as ability to identify business opportunity, innovation and business management acquired during the entrepreneurship training are central to a firm's survival and profitability.

Youth employment issues are a major concern for many counries because they have negative effects on the welfare of young people and may also adversely affect economic performance and social stability (World Bank, 2012). Addressing youth employment issues is, therefore, a major concern and the promotion of youth-owned SMEs is fundamental to the achievement of United Nations Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target 1, which focuses on eradicating extreme poverty for all people. Unemployment among the youth and poor performance among the youth-owned SMEs is one of the major causes of poverty. Among the interventions in dealing with youth unemployment is support for small business start-up, access to credit and market among other incentives. While entrepreneurship training has demonstrated positive impact for rural entrepreneurs in Uganda and Columbia with effects on business performance (World Bank, 2012) little is known about the influence of entrepreneurship training on the performance of youth-owned SMEs in Maara Sub-County, Kenya.

Maara Sub-County has a total population of 107,125, out of which 35,238 are aged between 15 and 34 years, representing approximately 32.9% of the total population (KNBS, 2010). The Sub-County is characterized by high potential of both agricultural and non-agricultural activities, as well as multiple small and medium businesses. Data from the Sub-County youth office indicates that the youth-owned enterprises are in both the informal sectors like farming, kiosk, building and construction sectors, and formal sectors like legal, medical and business consultancy sectors. While business performance is poor, the level of youth unemployment, according to ILO (2013) report is increasing at an alarming rate of 12.6%. It is against this background that this paper sought to study the influence of entrepreneurship training on performance of youth-owned SMEs in Maara Sub-County of Tharaka-Nithi County.

Statement of the Problem

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) sector plays an important role in employment creation as well as poverty alleviation in Kenya and youth-owned SMEs play a critical role. In recognition of this important role, the government of Kenya has initiated several policy initiatives and other programmes to promote youth-owned enterprises. However, despite the various interventions by the government and private sector to boost the performance of SME sector, the youth-owned SMEs have not been performing as expected (Wanjohi, 2010). The poor performance by the SMEs is likely to contribute to the unemployment crisis facing the youths with negative consequences on the economy. Studies carried out earlier have identified factors such as competition, negative perception, lack of capital and access to market as influencing SMEs performance, but with no specific focus on the role of entrepreneurship training on the performance of youth-owned SMEs in Maara Sub-County. This is despite entrepreneurship training being recognized as an important element in dealing with unemployment and helping improve small business performance. It is in view of this scenario that this paper sought to establish the influence of entrepreneurship training on the performance of youth-owned SMEs in Maara Sub-County of Tharaka-Nithi County in Kenya.

Objective

The objective of the study was to establish the influence of entrepreneurship training on the performance of youth-owned Small and Medium Enterprises in Maara Sub-County.

Hypotheses

H_{O1}: Entrepreneurship training and performance of youth-owned SMEs are not associated.

H_{O2}: The number of topics covered in the training and performance of youth-owned SMEs are not associated.

H_{O3}: The duration of training and performance of youth-owned SMEs are not associated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Kenya

Small and Medium Enterprises contribution to the Kenyan economy is widely acknowledged, they cut across all sectors of the economy and provide many employment opportunities and generate widespread economic benefits (GoK, 2005). The National Census Survey of Kenya (2009) revealed that 64% population was engaged in Small and Medium-Enterprises (KNBS, 2010). According to the economic survey of 2003, the SMEs sector accounted for 74.2% of the total persons engaged in employment and contributed up to 18.4% of the Kenya's GDP. Economic Recovery Strategy for wealth and employment creation (2003-2007) recognized the need to establish and maintain a favourable environment for growth and transformation of small businesses into medium-sized enterprises that can have capacity to create more employment opportunities (GOK, 2005).

In Kenya today, businesses employing between 1 to 99 people account for about 48% of all businesses; with a majority of these being managed or owned by young people (25-34 years) (Njonjo, 2010). According to the Government of Kenya (2007), three out of five of these businesses fail within the first three years of operation and those that continue 80% fail before the fifth year. The mortality rate of Small and Medium Enterprises in Africa remains high. In a study of five African countries, Mead (2010) found that most firms started with 1-5 employees and never expanded. Furthermore, less than 1% grew to a size of about 10 employees. In a study of 214 small enterprises in northern Nigeria, Friedman (2009) reported that only 4 had graduated into medium firms within a period of eight years. In a survey carried out in central Kenya by Kinyanjui (2006) of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) of the University of Nairobi, 57% of the SMEs are either stagnated or failing with only 33% showing some level of growth. Some of the factors contributing to the dismal performance included lack of capital, access to market and competition. Amyx (2005) identified negative perception as a significant challenge facing the SMEs.

Influence of Entrepreneurship Training on Performance Youth-Owned SMEs

There is a growing global interest in entrepreneurship education and training (EET) Kuratko (2003). Popularization of EET is in part driven by the mutual self-interest of key stakeholders, including policy makers concerned with job creation. Certain aspects of entrepreneurship can be taught and learned. Education and training systems are, therefore, emerging as a key component of broader discussions about the promotion of entrepreneurship.

Training and entrepreneurial learning has widely been understood as how people acquire knowledge and new behaviour in the process of recognizing and acting on opportunities and of organizing and managing enterprises. Hyness (1996) defined entrepreneurship training as comprising planned and systematic processes, which aim at modifying or developing knowledge or skills that enable an individual to achieve effective performance. It conveys entrepreneurial knowledge and develops focused awareness relating to opportunity, recognition and the creation of new ventures. Entrepreneurship training should be mainly focused on starting a business and subsequent sustainability of the business.

McClelland theory of acquired needs advocates that increasing level of need-achievement in a society through modeling and learning such behaviour stimulates entrepreneurship and economic growth. Levie and Autio (2008) summarize a body of literature that highlights how education provides individuals with the cognitive ability to match potential entrepreneurial opportunities with their respective skills and abilities.

Given that past research results have consistently found SMEs training to result in better company performance, even under different cultural settings such as the Netherlands, Spain, Hungary and China (Mullei, 1999), it is expected that training programmes offered by government agencies and private sector will lead to higher firm performance of youth-owned SMEs. This statement underpins the importance of training and development in the national economic development process. It becomes a significant point of reference especially since most developing countries are responding to many challenges of the industrial development by implementing new programmes, which calls for new expertise and new orientation of work. McMullan and Gillin (1998) argued that entrepreneurship training and education may be one of the few unexploited, cost-effective, micro-economic tools governments have for developing local economies.

Theoretical Framework

Resource-based view theory

Alvarez and Busenitz (2001) argues that access to resources by founders of a business is an important predictor of opportunity based entrepreneurship and new venture growth. Access to resources according to Davidson and Honing (2003) enhances the individual's ability to detect and act upon discovered opportunities. These resources include financial, social and human resources. However, some studies contest this theory as it is demonstrated that most founders of business start with little capital and that financial capital is not significantly related to the probability of being nascent entrepreneurs (Kim, Aldrich and Keister, 2003).

Resource-based view theory argues that firms are able to outperform others if they can develop valuable resources and capabilities which cannot be imitated. Barney (1991) observes that resources are all assets, capabilities, information, knowledge and others controlled by a firm that enables a firm to conceive of and implement strategies that improve efficiency, effectiveness and hence performance. Based on this theory a firm can, therefore, gain from resources it owns, which are either tangible or intangible. Financial resources are tangible, while knowledge and skills acquired through training are intangible resources, which are vital for a firm's good performance. However, what is of great importance is not really what the firm owns, but how it uses the resources it owns.

METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive research design. The design was found necessary because it allowed gathering of information, summarizing, presenting and interpreting in a clear manner. According to Robson (2002), descriptive research design aims at revealing an accurate profile of a person's situation or events. The target population of the study was 230 SMEs owned by youths in Maara Sub-County that were registered by Chogoria Town Council by December 2013. The December 2013 data was the most current and available. The SMEs owners were the primary respondents.

Sampling was done because a complete coverage of the population was not possible and also small unit (sample) offered more detailed information and high degree of accuracy. Stratified sampling technique was applied to obtain representative sample. Kothari (2007) recommended that if a population from which a sample is to be drawn does not constitute a homogeneous group, stratified sampling technique is appropriate. The Youth SMEs registered were then grouped in five clusters according to the geographical areas (wards), which included Chogoria with 51, Mwimbi with 48, Ganga with 44, Muthambi with 45, Mitheru with 42 registered SMEs, giving a total of 230 SMEs. The sample size was obtained using the following equation given by Yamane (1967):

$n=N/[1+N(e)^2]$

where n = Sample size

N = Population

e = Level of significance (5%)

$n = 230/[1 + 230(0.05)^2]$

$n = 146.03 \approx 147$

A sample size of 147 youth SMEs owners was selected from the target population. After deciding on the total sample size, the method of proportion allocation under which the sizes of the samples from the different strata were kept proportional to the sizes of the strata (wards). To get proportional allocation the following formula was used:

$S_{1\text{-}5} = n(N_1/N)$, Where:

n = total sample drawn from the population, 147,

N = total population, 230,

$N_{1\text{-}5}$ = target population from each of the five wards,
$S_{1\text{-}5}$ = the total sample from the 5 wards, representing the stratas.

Kothari (2007) considers proportional allocation as the most efficient and optimal design when the cost of selecting an item is equal for each stratum. A simple random sampling technique was then used to select the samples from each stratum. The questionnaires were used to obtained information from the business owners or their representatives.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to how far a research instrument measures what it is intended to measure or the degree to which the test items measure the traits for which the test is designed (Mugenda and Mugenda, 1999). Kasomo (2007) points out that it is the accuracy of a research instrument. The use of experts in the area of research and colleagues was used in validating the research instruments. This is in line with suggestions by Cohen and Marion (1994) who recommended the use of experts and colleagues.

Reliability is a measure of how consistent the results from a test are. It measures the stability of a research instrument across two or more attempts. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) define reliability as a measure of the degree to which research instruments yield consistent results or data after repeated trials. Pilot study was carried out and the reliability test was performed using data collected by carrying out internal consistency technique that resulted in the Cronbach's alpha values close to 1, signifying the reliability coefficient of each variable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Entrepreneurship Training

Out of the 147 respondents, 64.6% had attended training since the start of their businesses. The respondents had been trained on the following topics: 51% business planning, 25.2% financial management, 36.7% book-keeping, 29.3% customer relation and 32.7% marketing. Table 1 shows the duration of training attended by respondents. From Table 1, 58.4% had attended trainings for less than 1 week, 22.4% attended for 1-2 weeks, 8.0% for 3-4 weeks and 11.2% for more than 4 weeks.

A cross tabulation of attendance of entrepreneurship training and average profit of youth-owned SMEs per month was done (Table 2). Spearman rank correlation was estimated between attendance of entrepreneurship training and average profit gained per month for each respondent. The resulting value was $r^s = 0.52$, indicating a positive correlation between the two variables. To test the null hypothesis of no correlation between the two variables in the population against the alternative of positive correlation, the test statistic $z = r^s\sqrt{(n-1)}$ was used. The result $z = 6.28$ indicated that the positive correlation was statistically significant at higher than 5% level, supporting the conclusion that attendance of entrepreneurship training was associated with higher average profit per month.

The study sought to establish the influence of entrepreneurship training on the performance of youth owned SMEs by asking Likert-like type question to the respondents. The results were as given in the Table 3. Table 4 Likert-like responses were in response to the statement that increasing number of entrepreneurship trainings improves performance of youth-owned SMEs. Since $\chi^2 = 85.26$ the null hypothesis of equal number of responses was rejected at 5% level of significance, meaning that the number of responses were different with more respondents tending to strongly agree or agree with the statement. Since response to the statement that the more the number of topics covered the better the performance of the youth-owned SMEs was $\chi^2= 71.7$, the null hypothesis of equal number of responses was rejected at 5% level of significance meaning that the number of responses were different with more respondents tending to strongly agree or agree with the statement.

Table 1: Duration of the Training attended by Respondents

Duration of training	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 1 week	73	58.4
1-2 weeks	28	22.4
3-4 weeks	10	8.0
More than 4 weeks	14	11.2
Total	125	100.0

Table 2: Relationship between attendance of entrepreneurship training and average profit of youth owned SMEs per month

		Average profit of youth owned SMEs per month (Ksh. '000')				Total
		< 30	31-50	51-100	> 100	
If respondent had attended entrepreneurship training	Yes	21.1%	13.6%	17.7%	12.2%	64.6%
	No	10.9%	15.6%	4.1%	4.8%	35.4%
Total		47	43	32	25	147
		32.0%	29.2%	21.8%	17.5%	100%

Table 3: Chi-square test for the relationship between entrepreneurship training and performance of youth-owned SMEs

Statements	SA	A	UD	D	SD	χ^2 value
Increasing number of entrepreneurship trainings improves performance of youth owned SMEs	68 30 48.1	42 30 4.8	17 30 5.6	9 30 14.7	11 30 12.0	85.26
The more the number of topics covered the better the performance of the youth owned SMEs	39 30 2.7	66 30 43.2	12 30 10.8	15 30 7.5	15 30 7.5	71.7
The duration of training attended influences the performance of youth owned SMEs	41 30 4.03	39 30 2.7	24 30 1.2	24 30 1.2	19 30 4.03	13.16
Critical χ^2 (with DF = 4 at 5% level of significance) = 9.488						

Table 4: Number of employees during start-up and current employees

	During start-up		Currently	
Employees	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
None	80	54.4	37	25.2
1- 5	36	24.5	56	38.1
6-10	15	10.2	36	24.5
11-15	10	6.8	5	3.4
Above 15	6	4.1	13	8.8
Total	147	100.0	147	100.0

Response to the statement that the duration of training attended influences the performance of youth owned SMEs was χ^2= 13.16 the null hypothesis of equal number of responses was rejected at 5% level of significance meaning that the number of responses were different with more respondents tending to strongly agree or agree with the statement.

Performance of youth-owned small and medium enterprises

Respondents were requested to state the number of employees that they started their businesses with and also the current number of employees that assist them in running their businesses. The responses given were analyzed and presented in Table 5.

Pearson Product-Moment correlation coefficient was used to estimated number of years the business was in operation and average profit gained per month for each respondent. The $r^s = 0.39$, indicating a positive correlation between the two variables.

To test the null hypothesis of no association between the two variables in the population against the alternative of positive association, the test statistic $z = r^s\sqrt{(n-1)}$ was used. The z = 4.71, indicating that the positive association was statistically significant at higher than 5% level. From Table 5, youth-owned SMEs had increased the number of employees since 54.4% of the respondents with no employees during the start-up of their businesses reduced to 25.2%.

The results of the study are in line with those of Kourilsky and Esfandiari (1997), who reported that economic growth heavily relies on entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship training is potentially beneficial and may be possible solution to high unemployment rates and is a recipe for economic prosperity (Goravan and O'Cinneide, 1994).

Table 5: Number of years the business was in operation against average profit per month

		Number of years the business was in operation			
		Less 1 year	1-3 years	Above 3 years	Total
Respondent's average profit per month in the last one year (Ksh'000')	< 30	11.6%	12.9%	7.5%	32.0%
	31-50	10.9%	12.9%	5.4%	29.3%
	51-100	8.8%	12.2%	0.7%	21.8%
	> 100	4.8%	9.5%	2.7%	17.0%
Total		53	70	24	147
		36.1%	47.6%	16.3%	100.0%

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study established that there is relationship between entrepreneurship training and profit gained by the SMEs, thus there is need to promote youth entrepreneurship training effectively. The study also found that although entrepreneurship training is important and beneficial, the content and mode of delivery is critical.

The researcher recommends that special needs of the youths should be considered when government policies on economic activities are being drafted r to realize the full potential of SME sector as an equal employment contributor in the economy. The Government should develop a policy framework to coordinate entrepreneurship education and training activities at all levels.

There is need to adopt learner-centered curriculum at all levels to allow for a link between theory and practice. Before the disbursement of funds to the youth SMEs, it is important for the owner to undergo entrepreneurship training, which should equip the youths with skills and knowledge to identify viable business opportunities, become innovative, acquire some basic marketing and management skills to help run the business profitably.

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