

Tana River sets up a Youth Empowerment Centre to equip youth with knowledge and skills to make a meaningful contribution to the economy

County:	Isiolo		
Sector/s:	Youth	Sub-sector/Theme:	Youth Empowerment
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Target Audience:	County governments, socio-economic, youth and gender sector partners		
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Introduction (Context and challenge)

Tana River County has an area coverage of 38,437 km² with a population of 315,743 people, 75 % of which is below the age of 35. A large percentage of its population is either unemployed or under-employed.

Problem statement

Youth unemployment in Tana River County is aggravated by low involvement in business, fisheries and agriculture, low literacy levels and inappropriate skills to utilise the existing opportunities. The County through its County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) (2018–2022) prioritized the development of a youth empowerment policy/strategy and the establishment of a centre for innovation and youth empowerment to enhance the capacity of the youth to engage in community development. The County proposed the development of a model vocational training

Centre that will build innovative skills among youth to address food insecurity in the County, support rehabilitation of irrigation schemes, and improve mechanisms for the provision of farming, including the application of inputs, among other interventions to improve livelihoods. However, an understanding of the needs of young people and the skills that should inform this intervention was not done.

The existing Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) in Tana River were not optimally utilized. Many of them run at less than full potential. The problem of inadequate utilization of VTCs and the inability of the VTC graduates to utilize the skills acquired to earn a livelihood was a challenge attributable to the negative attitude of youth in the County towards VTCs and the lack of role models to provide mentorship, among other reasons. It is against this background that the County sought to change the narrative by opting to establish a centre for innovation and youth empowerment.

Implementation of the practice (*Solution Path*)

The County Government through the initiative of H.E. Governor Dhadho, lobbied for partners to assist in the establishment of the Centre, a priority project in his manifesto. At the inception stage, Governor Dhadho engaged with the Kenya School of Government (KSG), Ministry of ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Kenya Film Classification Board (KFCB), Frontier Counties Development Council (FCDC), Huawei, Horn of Africa Youth Network, and National Youth Council, among others.

A series of sensitization meetings and workshops were conducted to seek acceptance and ownership of the programme, which led to the formation of a County Youth Innovation and Empowerment Steering Committee comprising representatives from youth, persons with disability (PWDs), gender, agriculture, trade, commerce and industry, vocational training and development partners.

Through this committee, 50 youths were trained on the values of the programme and the importance of youth leadership and later made ambassadors to train more youth at ward levels. 32 youths trained on community peace and cohesion were later supported with motorcycles and assigned the responsibility of promoting peace and

cohesion in the Tana Delta (the region frequently experiencing community conflicts). The Hola Vocational Training Centre was identified as an ideal site for the establishment of a youth empowerment centre, and on 8th August 2021, a team of 30 selected youth representatives from 15 wards visited Isiolo Youth Innovation Centre for benchmarking where a lot of information sharing was done which later culminated into partnership linkage.

On 23rd March 2022, the Tana River Centre for Youth Innovation and Empowerment was launched under the leadership of H.E. the Governor, Major Dhadho Godana Gadhae in collaboration with development partners and local stakeholders who declared the Centre officially operational.

The Centre management structure

The Centre is managed by the Board of Governors (BOG) selected through a nomination panel as per Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) guidelines. The nominated board is confirmed by the County Executive Committee Member (CECM) in charge of Education. This board is responsible for strategic decision-making on matters affecting the Centre. The Centre Manager is the CEO of the Centre assisted by a Deputy Manager and a team of staff employed by the County, deployed and assigned roles.

Centre programmes

The current programmes being implemented are:

1. Technical and vocational training programme: This is a TVET programme where youth acquire various technical skills and are awarded recognized certificates after course completion. This programme had been in existence before the establishment of the Centre.
2. Essential computer literacy courses: this programme is offered to youth and any other person willing to acquire computer application skills.
3. Climate-smart agriculture farming: The Centre has a hydroponic farm demonstration Centre where youth farmers learn modern climate-smart agriculture.

4. Entrepreneurship training: youth are trained in entrepreneurship skills and the acquired competence is meant to help them establish businesses.
5. Ajira digital training: youth are trained on how to secure online jobs and link with the world market.
6. Capacity building and training.
7. Hospitality and catering services

In addition, the Centre has plans to expand its programme to include recreation sports and development, coaching, mentorship and counselling, creative arts and development, and a business incubation unit.

Key partners in implementation and collaborations

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	This is one of the key development partners. The partner has supported programmes like funding the Centre in youth training, equipping and supporting the community in peace initiatives. Over 500 youth have benefited from the training support.
Kenya School of Government (KSG)	Helped in facilitating training, and lobbying for partnerships and linkages.
Miyonga Co.	Training youth in smart agriculture — over 150 youth were trained under their support.
Ajira Digital	Content writing, digital marketing and transcription among other skills tailored for the online workplace; trained over 65 youth
Huawei	Trained youth on computer application skills. Over 35 youths supported this training.
National Youth Council	Participated in training the youth and assisted in the drafting of the County Youth Policy. Over 50 youths were involved.
GIZ	Through the Go Blue economy, the organization was able to train 600 youth in go blue skill training to be absorbed in marine-related jobs.

Groots and nature Kenya	Construction and Establishment of hydroponic farm structure
Isiolo Youth Innovation Centre	Partnered in sharing the exchange of innovative ideas and experiences.
Sports Academy	Assisted in promoting sports programmes in Tana River.

Resource implication

During the establishment of the Centre, the County Government constructed a multipurpose hall at a cost of KSh 2,700,000 and renovated dilapidated buildings at a cost of KSh 7,800,000. Landscaping and construction of the Centre gate were done at a cost of KSh 3,500,000. Development partners equipped the Centre with furniture, computers and other key ICT equipment at an estimated cost of KSh 5,900,000.

The cost of running the Centre had been a major challenge. However, through a little allocation from the County coffers and support from development partners, the Centre can execute its programmes successfully. The Centre generates revenue through levies charged on its conference facilities, catering services and sale of agricultural produce. However, more creativity is required to expand and improve its revenue.

Sustainability

The Tana River Innovation and Youth Empowerment Centre is one of the Governor's key flagship projects. The County's vision is to establish a higher learning and research centre. In this financial year 2022/2023, the County Treasury allocated KSh 72 million for upgrading and equipping the Centre. The upgrading programme will continue for the next five years.

The 2018–2022 CIDP captured the Centre as part of its key development programmes. In addition, the County Executive developed the County Youth Inclusion Bill aimed at helping to reinforce youth rights hence improving space for youth engagement. The Bill was presented to the last County Assembly and is yet to be passed. The Centre is required to sustain itself through the creation of income-generating activities. Plans for additional activities to realize this are underway.

Lobbying for partnership support to help the Centre achieve its growth trajectory shall continue and be strengthened.

Result of the Innovation Centre

1. **Empowered youth in leadership skills:** since its establishment, over 700 youths have benefited from leadership skills training and mentorship by key leaders, among them, H.E. Governor Dhadho.
2. **Job opportunities:** within one and half years of the Empowerment Centre's existence, its impact can already be felt — two youths from the Centre secured elective posts, 45 others secured jobs in the marines through the Go Blue programme, 15 others got County Government jobs, and others established businesses in various fields.
3. **Technical and vocational skills training:** over 270 youths graduated in various certificate courses.
4. **Agribusiness:** 150 youths benefited from smart agriculture training, including hydroponic, mango fruits and aquaculture farming. The farm has acted as a demonstration Centre for various interest groups that visit.
5. **Computer literacy:** through the support of development partners, the Centre trained and awarded computer literacy certificates to over 45 youths free of charge.
6. **Governor's roundtable meetings:** H.E. the Governor has held more than 3 roundtable meetings with groups of youth on mentorship and ideas sharing.
7. **Reduced rate of drug abuse:** Hola Town, in particular Hola Laza, had been a drug den where idle youth were engaged in drug and substance abuse. Since the introduction of the Centre, the number of youths reached and counselled has gone high hence the reduction in drugs and substance abuse.
8. **Development of a youth inclusion policy:** through the support of the National Youth Council, over 50 youths were involved in formulating and developing the Tana River County Youth Policy.
9. **Active participation and inclusivity:** through various trainings, the youth have become well-informed and now actively participate in decision-making forums.

Lessons learnt:

The establishment of the Centre was a result of a concerted effort by stakeholders through technical and financial support towards putting up the Centre, training the youth on leadership and supporting community peace initiatives. The formation of the youth ambassadors' group to inform and train others, the Governor's initiative to have regular roundtable talks with youths and the involvement of local leaders were key towards the successful establishment of the Centre.

The County Government realized that the cost of establishing and running the Centre was high, therefore a need to establish sustainable partnerships. Lobbying to bring on board development partners was the best option. This was done by writing several proposals and having breakfast and dinner meetings with potential development partners.

The declaration of the Empowerment Centre as a central point for all youth programmes in the County has positively resulted in increased youth activities, including engaging in income-generating activities for sustainable livelihood improvement.

Challenges

Involvement of stakeholders: involvement of stakeholders was one of the most difficult experiences. Radical and divergent stakeholder views could sometimes threaten to derail the process. The cost of maintaining members was often higher than the planned budget, hence stretching the allocation.

Centre revenue: Revenue collection by the Centre was always low and could not sustain its operations, therefore, pushing the management to seek external support.

Recommendations

Partnership: It is important to work with willing partners to deliver different programmes at the Youth Centre.

Localize and customize: The relevance of the youth centre should speak to the unique challenges of each County. As a County, do you have sufficient desegregated data about youth preferences? The design of a youth centre is not a one-size-fits-all but requires continuous adjustment to fit the local context.

Legal foothold: The youth centres should have County ownership at the time of inception, or mechanisms should be explored to anchor the Centre within the County structure and also get sustained programme funding.

Youth ownership: The process and the running of the Centre should be youth-owned and youth-led for effective youth engagement and buy-in, which is a key factor in the success of programmes, projects or initiatives related to young people and the community as a whole.

Further reading:

1. Tana River County website <https://www.tanariver.go.ke/>



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



The entrance to the Centre for Innovation and Youth empowerment



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



Youths undergoing youth and leadership skills training



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Maarifa Centre
Sharing Kenya's Devolution Solutions



The hydroponic demonstration farm unit at the Centre



COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS



H.E. Governor Dhadho receiving a donation of ICT equipment from UNDP



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Youths actively participating in an ICT lesson at the Centre for Innovation and Youth Empowerment



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Youths undertaking a vocational training course in fashion design and garment making



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H.E. Governor Dhadho gracing the graduation ceremony of youths who were trained under the Go Blue programme and ready to join marine jobs