

TREYL Project
**YOUTH-LED
REGENERATIVE
AGRICULTURE**

**Practical
ACTION**



KEY LEARNING

INTRODUCTION

The Transforming Rural Economies and Youth Livelihoods (TREYL) programme is implementing a mentorship model as a strategic way to contribute to systemic change by strengthening knowledge and information systems on agroecology

It also seeks to change the perceptions of young men and women regarding agribusiness as a source of livelihood and build more inclusive market systems.

Through the mentorship model, young men and women learn from each other, build business relationships, and engage in positive competition in maximizing income through agribusiness.

The approach is low cost, self-sustaining, and can reach more people within a short period of time.

BACKGROUND

In Kenya, it is estimated that 64 per cent of unemployed people are youth (18 – 35 years), with the majority moving away from the agricultural sector to fast-growing non-agricultural sectors in urban areas.

This migration has a further impact on the lives of young people and families as moving to urban centres has not translated into employment opportunities and even those with employment are left at considerable risk of falling further into poverty.

In Kisumu, for example, there are an estimated 150,000 unemployed youth. A further 77 per cent of employed young people are in 'vulnerable employment', mostly in the agricultural sector. This includes those working on family farms or enterprises and those who are informally self-employed, who are unlikely to have formal

work arrangements, decent working conditions, security of income, or any form of representation.

Such vulnerable employment is characterized by inadequate earnings, low productivity, a lack of social protection, and difficult work conditions.

Rural economies in the Lake Victoria Basin are failing to provide opportunities for economic growth and development, especially for young people, and are holding them back from advancing out of poverty.

The knowledge, skills, energy, and potential of East Africa's youth is not being harnessed and neither the local agricultural sector nor rural young people are realising their full potential.

This has further led to a decline in the number of young people engaged in agriculture and agribusiness; there is disillusion amongst them that agribusiness is not a viable livelihood opportunity for them.

The project learnt that the youth lacked the confidence and knowledge to run agri-enterprises, which were failing



MENTORS AND MENTEES ESTABLISH A BUSINESS RELATIONSHIP

either as agents, customers, or product suppliers, creating a bilateral 'business ecosystem'

The project learnt that the youth lacked the confidence and knowledge to run agri-enterprises, which were failing. They were not keeping proper records, and hence did not know if they were making profits or not, the cost of production was high due to inadequate knowledge on how to run the enterprises, and when products were taken to market, they sold at very poor prices due to lack of market information.

Such issues necessitated the youth to abandon agri-enterprises and migrate to urban centres where they earned quick money from unskilled labour in the construction industry.

According to The gender and youth vulnerability assessment conducted in 2019, the leading challenges faced by young people in regenerative agriculture included lack of confidence in participating in agriculture, lack of knowledge and skills in agribusiness, limited access to finance, and limited access to land, among others.

The TREYL project sought to bridge this gap through capacity building on small business management as well as Business Development Services (BDS).

The project implemented individualized and group mentorship and coaching to strengthen business management skills and address emerging business challenges, improved access to finance through

the establishment of youth savings and loaning associations (YSLAs), and provided linkages with financial institutions etc. to further support access to finance.

As a result, project monitoring revealed that record keeping improved, income increased, and the young entrepreneurs were able to sustain their enterprises.



Beryl Opiyo ventured into peanut butter processing

KEY LEARNING POINTS

THE MENTORSHIP MODEL

Key learning point (KLP)1 – strong partnership and collaboration selection:

Involving various stakeholders in the mentor-selection process, such as government, private agents, and community gatekeepers, ensures a well-rounded and suitable mentorship team.

The project utilized the preselected members of market interest groups to engage in the selection process; it is important to utilize existing platforms formed through the project for wider purposes.

This collaborative approach enhances the programme's credibility and effectiveness. The approach also resulted in mentors who are knowledgeable, motivated, and respected within their communities.

KLP2 – targeted recruitment:

The initial approach of targeting large youth groups for recruitment proved to be less effective as many of these groups lacked clear enterprise focus and effective leadership.

This highlights the importance of targeting individuals who are already engaged in agribusiness activities as they are more likely to benefit from and contribute effectively to the mentorship model.

KLP3 – localized mentoring:

Recruiting mentors and mentees from the same localities allowed for better accessibility and closer relationships between mentors and mentees. This localized approach fosters stronger connections as mentors understand the unique challenges and opportunities of their mentees' communities.

KLP4 – incentive alignment:

The concept of mentors serving as village-level aggregators who supply local enterprises/off-takers creates a mutually beneficial ecosystem for the supply and demand of goods and services. This alignment of incentives encourages collaboration and cooperation among all actors, contributing to the overall success of the model.

KLP5 – holistic approach:

The mentorship model takes a holistic approach by considering not only the technical aspects of agribusiness but also the social and economic factors influencing its success. This comprehensive approach addresses challenges beyond technical skills and helps both mentors and mentees develop a well-rounded understanding of their enterprises.

KLP6 – sustainability and longevity:

The mentorship model promotes sustainable agribusiness practices by providing guidance, knowledge transfer, and ongoing support for business exposure and growth (through showcases at agricultural shows and incubation and acceleration activities for youth-led enterprises).

This can lead to the development of more resilient and successful agribusiness ventures among the youth, contributing to the long-term economic growth of local communities.

TARGET GROUPS

KLP7 – inclusivity is vital:

Targeting marginalized actors within value chains is crucial, but being inclusive beyond initially prioritized value chains leads to a more diverse and representative group of participants.

To widen the engagement of young people, the project expanded beyond the three initially selected value chains to boost participation and opportunity of more vulnerable young women and men. This ensures that a wider range of agribusinesses can benefit from mentorship and support.

KLP8 – interest and commitment matter:

Selecting participants based on their genuine interests and commitment to agribusiness, rather than just their current involvement in a value chain, is a strong predictor of success. This approach increases the likelihood of sustained efforts and long-term impact. This is evident from the reduced direct engagement of participants by the project but with sustained business activities between mentors and mentees.

PARTICIPATION AND TRAINING

KLP9 – motivation alignment:

Providing monetary incentives, such as cash reimbursements for travel and meals, can motivate participants to attend meetings. However, if these incentives become the primary motivation for participation, it might lead to participants focusing solely on attending meetings rather than on their actual enterprises.

The project addressed this issue by reducing the frequency of meetings as well as travel time (having meetings closer to home) whilst ensuring young people had sufficient time on their farms to practice the skills learnt. Ensuring that participants are genuinely motivated by the project's goals and outcomes, rather than just financial incentives, is essential for a sustainable impact.

KLP10 – building trust and ownership:

Participants are more likely to adopt new practices and strategies if they feel a sense of ownership over the process. Involving them in decision-making, valuing their input, and building trust are integral

to fostering a collaborative and effective learning environment. A particular success was to share and discuss new technologies used by young farmers: this created an engaging and committed learning environment.

KLP11 – needs-based training:

One-size-fits-all training approach might not yield the desired results. Blanket training that is not tailored to the specific needs of participants can lead to low adoption rates. Identifying the specific challenges and requirements of individual farmers and providing targeted training accordingly can significantly improve the transfer of knowledge to practical implementation.

In particular, it is useful to conduct a needs assessment prior to training and segregate participants by on-farm and off-farm economic activities; this helps to identify individuals' specific needs and helps to identify activities that can contribute to a more holistic farm-management approach (e.g. off-farm employees trained on waste management).

KLP12 – monitoring and evaluation:

Regular monitoring and evaluation of participants' progress are important to track the effectiveness of training and participation. Collecting data on the application of knowledge gained from training and assessing its impact on participants' enterprises can inform continuous improvement of project strategies. Close monitoring is essential for adaptation and addressing specific gaps that arise as young people put their knowledge into practice.

FINANCING

KLP13 – daily cash needs:

the preference for non-agricultural enterprises such as boda bodas (motorcycle taxis) and cyber cafes was driven by the requirement for daily income. This underscores the significance of addressing the liquidity needs of small enterprises, especially in agriculture where cash flows might

be less frequent; for example, chickens can take up to eight months and tomatoes can take up to three months to be ready for market.

The project encouraged participants to grow African leafy vegetables, which take 35 days to be ready for market, thereby increasing the frequency of earning income.

This highlights the importance of encouraging farmers to venture into agri-enterprises that have the potential to generate frequent income; this may also include off-farm agri-enterprises, which will address the financial needs of young entrepreneurs and sustain agri-based enterprises.

KLP14 – role of YSLAs:

YSLAs were recognized as a way to provide small, regular amounts of cash to enterprises. However, as enterprises grew, their financial needs outpaced what YSLAs could offer, hence the need for institutions that could provide high-value loans that have friendly terms such as the *Youth Enterprise Development Fund*.

Organizations intending to implement similar youth-based projects should consider YSLAs for short-term loans, which also provide start-up capital; linkages to mainstream financial institutions (FIs) should also start when YSLAs are

formed to prepare the groups and individuals within the groups for long-term financing as the youth-owned enterprises continue to expand.

KLP15 – partnerships with FIs:

The project realized that establishing partnerships with FIs, especially affirmative action funds, could offer access to larger amounts of financing that are youth friendly (i.e. have flexible payment options, low interest, and do not need assets as collateral).

However, this approach takes time to materialize. The lesson here is that engagement with FIs should start at the very onset of a project in order to develop tailored financial products.

KLP16 – balancing growth and investment:

The project initially assumed that increased income from agribusinesses would lead to reinvestment and expansion within the agricultural sector. However, the reality of daily cash needs influenced young entrepreneurs to prioritize non-agricultural businesses.

It is important to note that agricultural enterprises remain the main source of high income, which may take time to earn but once earned is useful in setting up capital-intensive enterprises. This emphasizes the challenge of balancing growth with the immediate financial needs of entrepreneurs.

SCALING YOUTH-LED RURAL ENTERPRISES

KLP17 – strategic focus for MIGs:

Market Interest Groups (MIGs) can be effective tools for addressing specific challenges within market systems. They allow participants with similar interests and influence to collaborate and find solutions.

While MIGs were formed to address specific market challenges, their strategic focus should extend beyond immediate activities such as



The 15-member Ong'amo YSLA shared out Ksh. 35,000 (USD 240) in December 2022

knowledge transfer to a small group of actors with the aim of addressing systemic issues.

To achieve systemic change, MIGs should work towards creating lasting solutions that impact the entire market system.

KLP18 – dependency vs. ownership:

The challenge of MIGs depending on external funding rather than committing their own resources highlights the importance of fostering ownership and self-sustainability within these groups. Resource mobilization and financial commitment mechanisms should be established during the early stages of forming such groups for long-term systemic change; this could involve identifying market actors willing to commit resources to support market-based initiatives.

KLP19 – collaboration and trust-building:

MIGs facilitated improved collaboration and trust among market actors who previously operated in isolation. This 'soft' change is foundational for further market systems development and resilience. The benefits of improved collaboration, communication, and trust among market actors should not be underestimated. These foundational changes provide a basis for more substantial market transformation.

KLP20 – facilitative role of organizations:

Practical Action's role as a facilitator has been crucial in the development of MIGs. Organizations supporting MIGs should continue to play this role, helping MIGs transition from dependency to self-driven initiatives. The facilitator role may continue beyond the life of a project; a suitable market actor should be identified and prepared to take up this role before the end of a project.

KLP21 – the importance of vision and consistency:

The clear and consistent vision held by MIGs has contributed to commitment and effort among

members. A strong shared vision can help guide MIG activities and drive their impact.

KLP22 – overcoming competitive mindsets:

The transition from competitive mindsets to collaborative behaviours within the finance MIG highlights the potential for overcoming market barriers and creating a more conducive environment for all stakeholders.

KLP23 – focus on scale and sustainability:

For lasting impact, MIG strategies should be adaptable and scalable. Efforts should be made to ensure that successful interventions can be replicated and expanded to benefit a larger portion of market actors.

Examples of scalable interventions implemented by MIGs include the formation of farmer cooperatives to address market and production challenges in the poultry market system.

ACHIEVING SCALE

KLP24 – private-sector participation:

Expanding private-sector engagement by including larger local companies and those from outside the area can bring in more resources, expertise, and opportunities for scaling up. This can only happen if companies are aware of the value and benefits that will be realized if they participate; this needs to be outlined in the early stages of engagement. Influential private-sector players can contribute to growth and expansion.

KLP25 – focus on profitable sectors:

Focusing on specific sectors, such as the poultry sector, which is attractive to youth can provide a clear target for growth and development, allowing stakeholders to align their efforts around a common goal.

KLP26 – the importance of targeted involvement:

The success of a project or initiative such as the MIGs depends on involving the right stakeholders. While lower-level staff and smaller businesses were instrumental in initiating the project, targeting individuals and entities with greater influence and resources is crucial for achieving significant scale.

KLP27 – balancing immediate interests with long-term goals:

While involving market actors with immediate interests can help kick-start a project, there are challenges in ensuring that their focus doesn't become overly self-centred. Balancing these interests with a broader vision for long-term impact and growth is essential.

SUSTAINABILITY OF MIGS

KLP28 – Multidimensional sustainability focus:

The sustainability of MIGs involves more than just their continuation. It encompasses the prolonged existence of the MIGs themselves, the sustainability of activities and structures they establish, and the involvement of various stakeholders. When collectively considered, these aspects ensure a holistic approach to sustainability.

KLP29 – transition from subsidies:

Gradually reducing subsidies forces MIGs to become self-reliant. This is a practical strategy that encourages MIGs to assess their financial sustainability and explore ways to generate resources internally.

KLP30 – focused consolidation:

Concentrating efforts on consolidating existing initiatives rather than introducing new ones

recognizes that building upon what is already established can lead to a more sustainable impact. This approach reduces resource fragmentation and enhances the effectiveness of ongoing efforts.

KLP31 – exit strategies for non-sustainable cases:

Having exit strategies in place for MIGs that are unlikely to sustain themselves acknowledges the reality that not all initiatives will succeed in becoming fully independent. These strategies can ensure that the progress made isn't lost and that there's a managed transition.

KLP32 – long-term impact over immediate continuation:

While the aim is for MIGs to continue, it's recognized that the impact of the changes introduced by MIGs can be long-lasting even if the MIGs themselves don't continue in the exact same form. This highlights the importance of looking beyond short-term outcomes.

KLP33 – empowerment of market actors:

In terms of empowerment, market actors were taken through a rigorous participatory process of understanding the roles of other market actors and how they are connected, visualizing the market system and understanding how different components work to enable the system to function, jointly analysing issues in the market system, and finding solutions that work for all of them as well as tapping into opportunities available.

This resulted in trust-building and collaboration towards making the market system inclusive. The success of MIG sustainability relies on the empowerment of market actors to take ownership of the changes and drive further improvements. This empowerment fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility.



Kennedy Ojwang, 34, and his wife Jecinta Ogone, attended a TREYL-facilitated training on agroecology. The couple adopted hydroponics fodder, vermiculture and termite trapping which have reduced production costs and boosted profits

USING REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

KLP34 – certification and standards are vital:

Project participants have developed a variety of organic products, including farm inputs, but they are not able to commercially produce them due to a lack of standards, and customers are not convinced of the effectiveness of such products without certification.

Developing clear and comprehensive certification standards for organic products is essential. These standards ensure that consumers can trust the authenticity of organic claims and can differentiate between organic and non-organic products.

KLP35 – consumer awareness drives demand:

Educating consumers about the benefits of organic products can drive demand. When consumers understand the value of organic foods for health and the environment, they are more likely to seek out and purchase these products.

The project continuously demonstrated to market actors the environmental and health benefits of organic farming and organic products through laboratory tests and farm demonstrations that showcased these benefits.

KLP36 – policy support is essential:

Collaborating with policymakers – for example in development/revision of policies on regenerative agriculture – is crucial for creating a supportive environment for organic farming. Advocating for policies that recognize and incentivize organic practices can contribute to the growth of the organic sector.

KLP37 – addressing market discrepancies:

Addressing the discrepancy between the market treatment of organic and conventional products is crucial for rewarding organic producers for their efforts and encouraging a shift towards organic farming. Currently, organic and conventional products are treated equally and do not have price variations; placing extra monetary value on organic products could be one way of addressing this discrepancy.

ADOPTION AND SCALE UP OF REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE TECHNOLOGIES

KLP38 – flexibility and innovation:

It is crucial to thoroughly assess the viability and scalability of a business model before implementation. Practical Action has developed tools that can aid in assessing the viability of business models, such as the business model canvas tool in the PMSD toolkit.

However, it is important to further understand the market dynamics and be prepared for various outcomes. For example, in the case of Vermiculture technology supplied by a local company – *Fanya Bidii*, the viability of the business model was affected due to unexpected supply of products at no cost by farmers.

This demonstrates the necessity of flexibility and innovation when implementing a business model. When *Fanya Bidii Enterprises* faced challenges with the seed worm market, it adapted by introducing vermiculture kits, which turned out to be successful.

This shows that being open to modifying strategies in response to unexpected developments can be essential for sustainability.

KLP39 – local context matters:

Understanding the local context, including community dynamics and available resources, is essential. The technologies that had the highest adoption among the farmers (vermiculture and BSF technology) was influenced by the local community's readiness to adopt and share knowledge as well as availability of the raw materials needed to support the technologies.

KLP40 – community engagement and sharing:

Fanya Bidii Enterprises conducted most of its interventions at the community level. This provided an opportunity for community members to learn about the technology that was being promoted. Since it was a new technology to the locals, they became curious and wanted to try it out, thereby increasing adoption.

Engaging and involving the local community can lead to the spread of knowledge and technology adoption. In the vermiculture case, farmers shared the technology with their fellow farmers, leading to increased adoption. This underscores the importance of peer-to-peer learning and community engagement.

IRRIGATION

KLP41 - collaborative approaches in program delivery:

Understanding the role of partnerships between equipment suppliers and organizations that promote sustainable agriculture is important in facilitating the adoption of solar-driven pumps.

Equipment suppliers acknowledge the high prices of solar-driven pumps and have innovative ways of ensuring farmers can acquire such equipment, such as through installment payment and pay-as-you-use mechanisms, for example.



Laureen Otieno reclaimed her farm from quarrying, making it viable for crop production. She additionally practices agroforestry with a focus on fruit and indigenous trees. As an Agroecology Champion (AEC), her farm is used as a Farmer Field School (FFS) for communities around her, where she receives and trains about 50 farmers weekly

TREYL Project

YOUTH-LED REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE

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Citation: Practical Action (2023) *Youth-led regenerative agriculture: Key learning*, Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing

About Practical Action

We are an international development organization putting ingenious ideas to work so people in poverty can change their world. Our vision is for a world that works better for everyone. We help people find solutions to some of the world's toughest problems, including challenges made worse by catastrophic climate change and persistent gender inequality.

We believe in the power of small to change the big picture. And that together we can take practical action to build futures free from poverty.

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BIG CHANGE
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