Abstract

The youth today face an increasingly pressurized and complicated world where youth unemployment and its direct consequences such as poverty, crime, prostitution, drug abuse among others, remain as some of the youth’s critical development challenges. The need of empowering the youth to participate in their own development initiatives is important. It was on this basis that the Government of Kenya introduced YEDF in 2006 to foster positive youth development. The purpose of YEDF was to empower the youth by providing them with financial resources and training to ensure that they are engaged in meaningful business activities and also increase their economic opportunities and participation in nation building. This study sought to examine the contribution of Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) on empowerment of the youth aged between 18 to 35 years in Kangundo Constituency. The study assessed this by considering the activities that the youth were engaged in before and after receiving the YEDF loans. The study argued that provision of the loans to the youth and training has improved their economic and social status through the income generating activities the youths engaged in. The research was conducted in Kangundo Constituency where there were 58 youth groups funded by YEDF between 2007 to 2012. The study used descriptive research design and random sampling was used to select 100 youth from 29 sampled youth groups. Interviews and questionnaires were used to collect data from the respondents. Data was analyzed by use of SPSS and presented in form of tables. The study presented its findings by discussing specific activities (unemployed, tree planting/vegetable planting, animal rearing, petty traders and untrained teachers) and trends of improvement among the youth. This study also discussed the extent to which loans provided by Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) have empowered the youth in Kangundo Constituency. It argued that empowerment took place in two main forms; group and individual empowerment. This empowerment is what the YEDF loans set out to achieve initially through the seed money product. The study concluded that the provision of YEDF loans led to empowerment of the youth and that training given to the youth further enhanced the chances of youth empowerment after receiving the loans. The study recommended that; a) For an increase in the amount of money given to the youth to enable them venture into diverse activities and for sustainability of their income generating activities. b) Subsequent loans should be given to the youths as requested by them either as individuals or as groups. c) Continuous training be conducted for the youth to ensure sustainability of their businesses and for more improvement in their lives to empower them further. The study recommended for further research to: 1) Examine the viability of YEDF as a tool for tackling youth unemployment in Kenya 2) A comparative study between group funding and individual funding method of financing youth businesses by YEDF 3) Factors influencing uptake of Youth Enterprise Development Fund loans.