DIGITAL SKILLS FOR BETTER YOUTH LIVELIHOODS IN KISUMU, KENYA

The pandemic (COVID-19) catalyzed an already accelerating rate of digital transformation, where the old way of life such as grocery shopping and work changed irreversibly. More than ever before, **digital skills needed to embrace the transformation are critical to maintaining jobs and securing in-demand technology-dependent careers, as well as being essential to the survival of businesses.** While this change has produced many benefits like greater flexibility for workers and removing geography as a barrier to hiring new talent, it has also resulted in the **widening of an already-large digital skills gap.** This is a problem that affects digital skills globally (UNCTAD, 2021). Kisumu likewise has been affected by the push to a digital-focused world. **80% of youth in Kisumu lack digital skills (KNEOMA, 2019)**, meaning that youth who are already facing high unemployment rates are at greater risk of not accessing employment due to lack of these skills. On the flip side, the push to a digital world also means that youth have new income opportunities through new types of digital work, should they have the skills. This inspired Nyalenda Breadpower, to conduct research so as to better understand the relevant digital skills youth need to secure work opportunities in Kisumu.
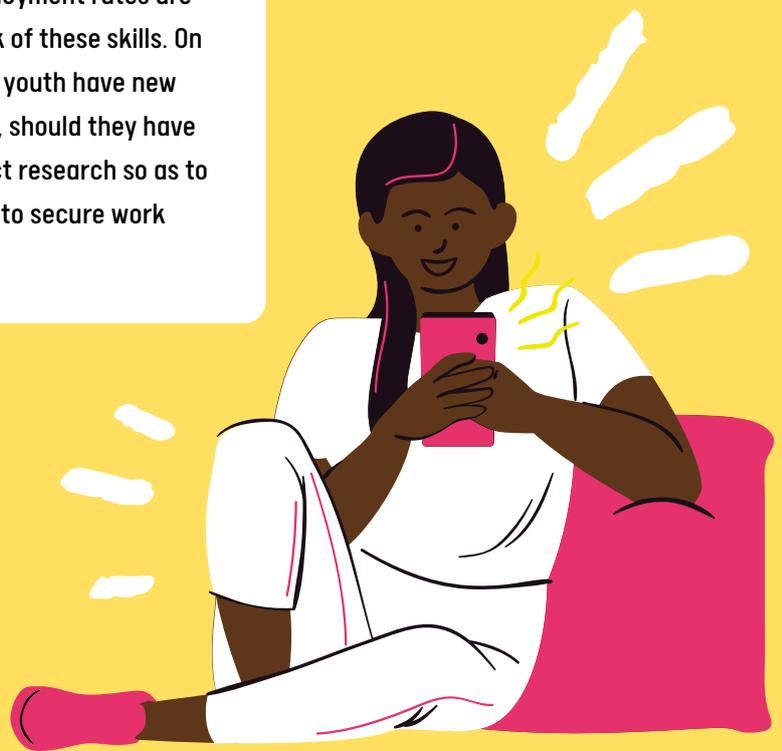
Low Supply and High Demand for Digital Skills

70% of youth respondents lacked digital skills required by employers. Youth with digital skills possess mostly entry-level digital skills such as computer packages, while employers were looking for more advanced skills. More specifically, 50% of employer respondents were looking for youth with programming skills, graphic design skills, web design and digital data analysis.

Digital Divide in Kisumu

Access to digital infrastructure and skills vary based on socio-economic status. 60% of youth in urban areas have access to digital infrastructure, whereas 40% of youth in marginalized areas have access to the same infrastructure. Of the 70% youth respondents who lacked digital skills required by employers, 55% were female respondents and 15% were male respondents.

Soft Skills Valued by Employers as much as Digital Skills

60% of employers indicated that they look for soft skills that include empathy, critical thinking and team work when making new hires. 30% of our respondent employers state that some graduates who have the technical skills but didn't display good communication skills in that they could not express themselves during interviews lost out on job opportunities.

"Most of those graduates we interviewed cannot express themselves with good communication, making them loose the opportunities though they have the skills required by the firm".

Cost of ICT Education Widening the Digital Disparity Gap

Despite ICT education having high potential for decent employment opportunities for the youth, the cost of ICT education is expensive, making it especially difficult for young people from marginalized areas to access the skills.

"...we don't get much opportunity here in slum areas to get advanced skills such as programming skills compared to those who are in the well served areas because they can afford getting the skills easily."

Recommendations

- The County government through the Education and ICT department should **make use of community spaces such as community halls in under-resourced communities by equipping them to become hubs for advanced digital skills training** for the marginalized youth and consequently improve their chances for economic opportunities.

- Youth Led and Youth Serving Organizations running local hubs that train the basic entry level digital skills (computer packages) should **widen their training to incorporate advanced digital skills in their programs which are more marketable as identified through this research.**

- Youth Led and Youth Serving Organizations should **work with the County government under the Education and information and communication technologies (ICT) department to create awareness on advanced digital skills opportunities** and how youths can enroll in such training.

- **Soft skills such as empathy and communication should be incorporated in youth digital skills programs** supported by non-profits, the private sector and public sector alike given the high premium placed on these skills by employers.

Methodology: this product is the result of a mixed methods research, conducted by Nyalenda Bread Power, that involved 310 participants from Kisumu Kenya. Research respondents comprised youth from Kisumu Central, Kisumu County government officials from the Education and ICT department, Persons with disabilities and technical and vocational training working group. The data was collected through the following mechanisms:

- 254 Surveys
- Focus Groups with 36 participants
- 20 Key Informant Interviews

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