

Economic Empowerment and Functional Adult Literacy Programme

Summary:

In spite of substantial economic growth in recent years, poverty and income inequality continue to persist as significant challenges in Kenya, especially in rural areas where these issues are magnified. Considering the job scarcity in the formal business sector and an overall downward trend of employment in family farming, the non-formal sector is pivotal for creating employment and reducing poverty. In this context, the **Kenya Adult Learners' Association (KALA)** plays an important role in promoting micro-enterprises and advancement in the informal business sector as a means of mitigating youth unemployment and high rural poverty in Kenya. The **Economic Empowerment and Functional Adult Literacy Programme** implemented by KALA in various rural areas of the country aims to impart hands-on training to economically empower adults and youth, equipping them with **Functional Literacy skills coupled with entrepreneurship and management training**. This programme empowers the target adult population, comprising primarily **of rural women and youth**, to undertake income generating activities, thereby generating supplementary income and alleviating the burden of households on seasonal professions such as farming.

Objectives and Rationale:

- Improving lives of women and youth through functional literacy by enhancing enrolment of learners in literacy classes;
- Facilitate entrepreneurship and management training for adult learners and facilitators;
- Facilitate networking and exchange programmes amongst target group members for sharing of experiences, best practices and peer learning;
- Initiate a capital savings grant to women and youth groups/learners;
- Provide learning and teaching materials for the literacy classes; and
- Monitor and supervise literacy classes and small businesses

Key Stakeholders:

The programme is implemented by Kenya Adult Learners' Association (KALA) in Kenya, with institutional support from Directorate of Adult and Continuing Education, Kenya and funding support from Church World Service and Pro Literacy Worldwide.

Implementation Strategy:

The Economic Empowerment and Functional Adult Literacy Programme of KALA consists of four key components:

Empowerment of women and youth groups: Focussed on strengthening the ability of rural women and youth through the application of economic and functional skills to actively pursue income generating activities(non-farming) and self-employment (such as running small businesses) to supplement income generated from harvesting. This process of empowerment is continuous and elevates the social position of women at the community level.

Developing the economic literacy skills of women and youth: Adult learners acquire reading, writing and arithmetic skills through the national adult literacy curriculum

developed by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, with supplementary entrepreneurship and management training integrated by KALA. The adult literacy curriculum also considers the broader needs of women, incorporating dynamic themes impacting women such as human rights, environmental sustainability, civic responsibility, health and reproductive education and economic empowerment.

Supplementary kitchen-garden programme: Focussed on improving women's knowledge of agricultural production and food provision which also serves a domestic importance considering women's role of food providers at the household level. Unlike subsistence farming, which cannot always guarantee adequate food supply or income, the kitchen-garden project can mitigate long term issues of poverty and hunger in rural areas.

Health: KALA's adult literacy programme comprises primary health education, including information on HIV/AIDS control, prevention and care, and childcare for women (especially with respect to vulnerable children like orphan) to empower women to provide children with basic health care services. Participating women visit orphans at their hosts' home in the rural community to periodically monitor their health needs.

KALA's literacy programme addresses some of the country's major problems: educational shortcomings, poverty, unemployment and social marginalization by focusing on vulnerable women and youth in rural areas, who have dropped out of primary education or did not finish secondary education, as main target groups.

KALA's Adult literacy programme is **customized to the learning needs of learners** determined through individual or group assessments wherein each learner is required to complete a basic entrance examination consisting of simple literacy and arithmetic tests that identifies his/her current level of understanding, in English, Kiswahili and other languages. Post the successful completion of the programme, the most successful learners are accredited by the national examination body with an official certificate and can progress to secondary education. KALA facilitates this by nominating a sponsor for the most successful adult learner such that he or she can support/contribute to the programme in future, e.g. as a programme facilitator.

The Adult Literacy Programme is administered through both formal and non-formal modalities, however most of the adult education is informal wherein no strict schedule or curriculum is followed and adult learners determine the class schedule based on their availability with teachers acting more as facilitators rather than instructors. Classes occur minimum twice a week, lasting for 2 hours a day up to a maximum of five days per week and the average course duration is about three years. The course involves peer exchanges and networking opportunities among participants, enabling sharing of experiences and knowledge. Only TLM/textbooks developed by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development and other specialized organizations is used which is intended as a means of self-orientation for new participants and not a formal requirement of the course.

The teachers/programme facilitators are part time workers, who receive a monthly remuneration of 3000 Kenyan Schilling (approximately US\$ 36) and are specially trained in andragogy by the Directorate of Adult and Continuing Education, in partnership with KALA through a structured training program that last for 3 months. As a mandatory pre-requisite for the training, teachers must possess a certificate of secondary education. Presently, the facilitator/learner ratio is 1 to 40.

The monitoring and evaluation process undertaken by KALA provides learners the opportunity to play an active role in the design and implementation of the literacy programme, and enables KALA to assess the results/outcomes of the programme at mid-

way and at the end of the programme, along with monitoring the literacy levels of learners on a monthly basis through feedback sessions with learners and facilitators.

The impact or effectiveness of the programme on the adult learner's life and on the community as a whole is assessed using a bottom-up approach, which includes, inter alia, performance indicators such as number of adult learners enrolled, the number enrolled who achieved employment, and whether learners feel they have been empowered and involved in decision making process etc. All learners at both the primary and secondary level are mandatorily provided with a formal certificate of achievement once they have successfully completed the course.

Impact:

KALA's Economic Empowerment and Functional Adult Literacy Programme literacy programme reached around **2,500 adult learners annually** and has benefited over **75,000 participants**, especially low-income women and youth in rural communities. The empowerment of women through literacy and income generation activities has offset the marginalization of women in the society by **elevating women's social, economic and political status, and enhancing their engagement and decision-making at household and community level**. This in turn has enabled women to actively pursue and uphold their independent interest/aspirations. Entrepreneurial and self-employment skills have also been instilled among adult learners, who have successfully completed the programme, to supplement household income and micro-enterprises mobilized by learners have been promoted. KALA's interventions have influenced policy makers and administrative stakeholders in the government to put an emphasis on community and gender education, a feat achieved through continuous partnership between the government, the private sector and key development partners. Communities as a whole have also benefited from the community libraries and resource centres set up in support of the project, thus promoting a culture of lifelong learning.

Challenges:

In respect of the high enrolment rates of adult learners, KALA's capacities in terms of funding, material and human resources. Logistical challenges, such as poor road connectivity, and high fuel costs makes it onerous to travel to learning centres for monthly monitoring and evaluation field visits.

Unforeseen weather and climatic changes also hinder the successful implementation of the literacy programme, and especially impacts learners with agricultural businesses. Another challenge is the long distances learners are required to travel to some literacy centres for the classes, deterring their participation. With respect to teachers/programme facilitators, their poor remuneration may lead to motivational constraints, and resource shortages could prevent them from receiving continuous training in adult education and realizing KALA's objectives.

Lessons Learnt:

- Many more adult learners would enrol in the programme due to the commitment of adult learners if the **resources (financial, human, material) were sufficient**.
- Adult illiteracy cannot be combated simply through the three R's approach (Reading, Writing and Arithmetic). **Adding an additional economic aspect to the programme would enhance not only the participation or enrolment rate of adult learners, but also their sustainability throughout the programme and the overall literacy rate of participants, as it provides them with the incentive to 'learn to earn'**. This has positively impacted household relations in rural communities.

- Entrepreneurial training is effective to adult learners as it gives them a **sense of ownership** of the projects they are running and enables them to run their businesses in a profitable manner and better manage their household incomes. It motivates adult learner to participate in decisions regarding the career or business they aspire to build and education they must accordingly strive to receive.
- **Continued motivation and sustainability** of adult learners and facilitators alike can be achieved when they are provided freedom to voice their experiences and ideas uninhibitedly and if they are continuously involved in the design and implementation of the programme.

Replicability and Sustainability:

As is the case with most developing nations, adult education is undeniably an urgent need to counteract illiteracy in Kenya, but the current financial and human resource constraints impede the long-term sustainability and scalability of the programme. However, given the impact of KALA's Economic Empowerment and Functional Adult Literacy Programme programme and commitment of its adult learners, **it can be scaled up across the country if requisite resourcing and financial support is rendered**. Some of the adult learning centres of the programme have achieved a **self-financing model** due to their undertaking in small scale businesses, microenterprises and strong convergence at the community level. Further, increased capacity building/training of sufficient number of teachers/programme facilitators in andragogy science, both in the field and in the classroom, along with some additional motivational incentives will give a further boost to the programme's impact.