



STRENGTHENING YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

A Deeper Look into the
Youth-to-Youth Methodology

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Acknowledgement

We sincerely acknowledge the invaluable support of Civil Society in Development (CISU), the Danish Red Cross Youth, and the Danish Red Cross in making the Youth Social Economic Empowerment Project (YSEEP) a reality. As Mombasa continues to grapple with the pressures of rapid urbanization, youth in Likoni and Kisauni face immense challenges, including high unemployment, poverty, and limited access to opportunities for personal and economic growth. Through your generous funding and partnership, YSEEP has provided a lifeline for many of these young people; empowering them with skills, confidence, and a supportive peer network. By promoting youth-led approaches and strengthening local advocacy, this initiative is not only equipping young people with tools for economic resilience but also nurturing agents of change within their own communities. We acknowledge all Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) staff and volunteers in the targeted program county that have with passion, contributing to advancing the social and economic empowerment of youth in Kenya's informal urban settlements.



Section 1: Background

Kenya's second largest city, Mombasa, is experiencing rapid growth in population and urbanization, which has put extensive pressure on resources and services such as education, health facilities, water supply, housing, and jobs. With a population of 32,487 in Kisauni and 21,639 in Likoni, and projections indicating that the population will have grown by 25% in 2029, the challenges are only expected to grow.

Two-thirds of the people living in Likoni and Kisauni are youth below the age of 35 who live on less than 2 USD per day and depend on casual employment to meet their daily needs. Youth in Mombasa are disproportionately affected by the high levels of poverty and unemployment as 80% of the unemployed are below the age of 35. The high levels of poverty and challenging living conditions push many youths into criminal activities and prostitution in search of income.

Additionally, Youth entrepreneurship is often seen by both the government and development partners as one of the solutions to unemployment. However, nearly half of all micro-enterprises in Kenya shut down within their first year. This is often because young people lack networks, access to capital, and the financial and management skills needed to run a sustainable business. Beyond financial struggles, many youths in urban informal settlements also face low self-esteem, limited social support, and a lack of mentors or relatable role models to guide them through life and work challenges.

Because of these complex issues, there is growing interest in approaches that empower young people from within their own communities. Peer-led, or youth-to-youth, methods have shown promise in helping young people connect, gain skills, and build confidence, while also giving them tools to create positive social and economic change in their lives and communities.

The Youth Social Economic Empowerment Project (YSEEP) aims to address the challenges faced by young people in Likoni and Kisauni. The project is funded by Civil Society in Development (CISU) and implemented by the Kenya Red Cross Society and the Danish Red Cross Youth through the Danish Red Cross. It seeks to bring positive change for youth living in urban informal settlements of Likoni and Kisauni by strengthening their social and economic empowerment. Beyond building young people's skills, confidence, and knowledge, the project also includes an advocacy component to help youth raise their voices on issues affecting them and influence policies and decisions in their communities.

Purpose and Objectives

To influence other youth empowerment actors on the effectiveness of youth-youth methodology in influencing change and allowing ownership and explore opportunities for scale up in Youth Programming.

Scope

This case study focuses on two core objectives of the Youth Social Economic Empowerment Project, implemented in the informal urban settlements of Likoni and Kisauni, Mombasa County. It documents the application and outcomes of youth-to-youth methodologies in line with the following project objectives:

- **Immediate Objective 1:** To assess how youth in Kisauni and Likoni have gained relevant life skills and knowledge to strengthen their personal and social capacity, while also initiating or accessing economic empowerment opportunities.
- **Immediate Objective 3:** To examine how the Kenya Red Cross Society (KRCS) has enhanced its institutional capacity in designing, implementing, and scaling youth programs that apply peer-led (youth-to-youth) methodologies effectively.

Case Study Development Process

This case study documentation was conducted as part of a larger mid-term evaluation for the Youth Social Economic Empowerment Project. The activity used a mixed-methods approach to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Data collection involved a desk review of project documents, relevant literature, and other resources related to the project. Primary data sources included Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with government officials, project staff, youth champions, and community leaders, as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with youth participants, community stakeholders. Quantitative data were collected through a survey administered to respondents drawn from project target communities. Data triangulation across these sources and methods was applied to enhance the credibility and depth of the findings. This integrated approach provided a comprehensive understanding of both systemic and individual-level factors influencing youth socioeconomic empowerment during the project period. The collected information was used to draft the case study, which was subsequently reviewed and validated by the project team before finalization.

Section 2: Description of the Youth Actions and Mobilisation

Identification and Capacity Building of Peer Facilitators

The foundation of the Y2Y model began with the identification and training of 40 Peer Facilitators (20 from Kisauni and 20 from Likoni). These were young people selected based on their leadership potential, community presence, and ability to relate to other youth. In October 2024, they underwent an intensive training led by Danish Red Cross Youth, focusing on Life Skills and basic conflict management. The trained peer facilitators were then deployed to roll out life skills sessions targeting other youth within their communities. The project aimed to reach 2,200 youth organized into 100 youth groups across the two sub-counties.

Stakeholder Engagement and Youth Group Formation

Simultaneously, the selection of youth groups was guided by strategic engagement with key government partners—including the State Department and County Department of Youth Affairs. These departments facilitated linkage with local youth champions—trusted and well-connected individuals with community credibility—each responsible for mobilizing youth in designated areas of Kisauni and Likoni. This collaborative approach ensured broad geographic coverage, inclusion of marginalized youth, and strong community ownership.

Orientation and Safe Space Creation

Once mobilized, youth groups were oriented on the purpose, values, and expectations of the programme. Sessions were structured to foster a sense of safety, inclusion, and identity among group members. Life Skills training was delivered through modules on knowing and living with oneself, with others, and within the broader community. Peer facilitators applied participatory methodologies including group work, role plays, storytelling (e.g., Rosie and the Giraffe), mini-lectures, and plenary discussions to encourage openness and engagement.

Localized and Adaptive Delivery of Sessions

A defining feature of the model was its adaptability. Peer facilitators used local language and culturally relevant examples to enhance relatability and ensure comprehension. To accommodate the schedules of working youth, sessions were conducted over weekends and during hours agreed upon by each group. This flexibility ensured minimal disruption to participants' daily lives and reinforced voluntary participation. The peer-to-peer model enhanced trust and openness, as facilitators—being peers themselves—were better positioned to understand, empathize with, and respond to the realities of their fellow youth.

Structured Mentorship and Peer Learning: Buddy - Buddy System

To support the effectiveness of newly trained peer facilitators, a structured mentorship model was introduced linking them with experienced counterparts from the CISU 1.0 project in Mukuru, Nairobi. Through this buddy-buddy system, each Mombasa facilitator was paired with a Mukuru peer for sustained peer-to-peer learning. The partnerships included monthly virtual check-ins and quarterly in-person exchange visits. Mukuru facilitators shared proven techniques in session delivery, youth mobilization, and youth group management, while Mombasa facilitators offered contextual innovations suited to the coastal environment.

Ongoing Monitoring and Technical Support

Project staff from the Kenya Red Cross Society – Youth Department and Danish Red Cross provided continuous technical support to the peer facilitators and youth groups. This included periodic check-ins, feedback forums, and capacity-strengthening workshops to ensure fidelity to the Y2Y methodology and respond to emerging challenges.

Together, these steps created a robust, community-driven model for youth development that went beyond traditional, top-down programming. By integrating peer-led facilitation, decentralized delivery of life skills training, and strong linkages with community structures, the YSEE project effectively addressed both social and structural factors affecting young people's well-being and opportunities. This multi-dimensional approach proved particularly relevant in Mombasa's diverse urban context, where youth often face overlapping challenges of unemployment, social exclusion, and vulnerability to negative coping mechanisms such as drug

and substance abuse.

Primary beneficiaries of this intervention were out of school youth aged 18–35 years in Kisauni and Likoni sub-counties.

Key stakeholders: Government of Kenya (both National and County levels), Danish Red Cross, Kenya Red Cross Society, Danish Red Cross Youth, State Department of Youth Affairs, County Department of Youth Affairs, local youth champions, and community-based organizations. These actors collaborated to deliver coordinated interventions, train peer facilitators, support youth group formation, and promote sustainable, youth-led solutions for social and economic empowerment.

Section 3: Results and Outcomes

Improved Personal and Social Competencies Among Youth

The Youth-to-Youth (Y2Y) methodology has significantly strengthened the personal and social capacities of young people in Kisauni and Likoni. Through peer-led sessions focused on life skills, youth have developed greater self-awareness, emotional regulation, conflict resolution skills, and confidence.

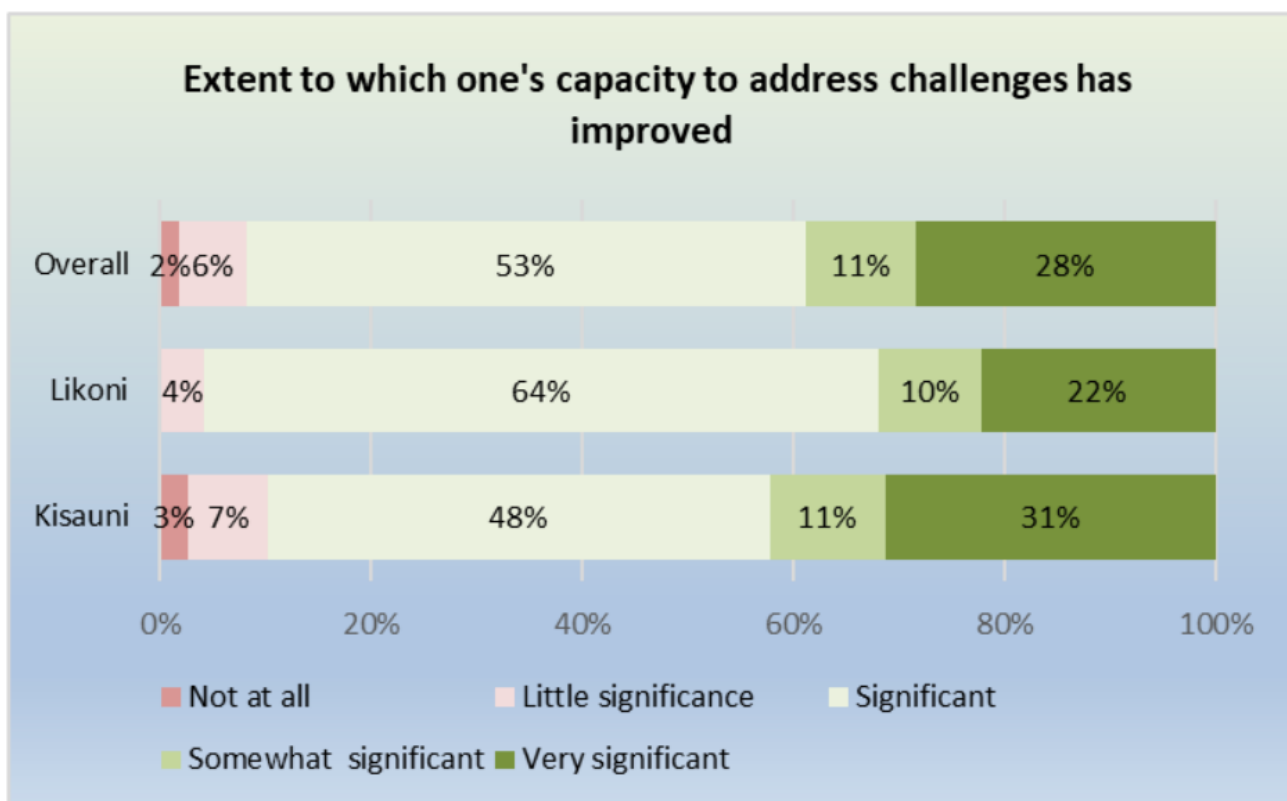


Figure 1-Graph showing the extent to which capacities to address challenges has improved

A midterm project review revealed that 53% of youth within the groups reported significant improvements in their ability to address personal challenges. Participants demonstrated enhanced skills in conflict resolution, emotional regulation, self-confidence, and community engagement. During the evaluation, it was evident that the analogies used had a significant impact, as youth found them relatable and easy to recall. The analogies helped them internalize important lessons on self-awareness, stress management, resilience, and effective communication. Another major success factor was the involvement of youth champions, who had previously worked with the youth groups and played a critical role in mobilization.

Their understanding of community dynamics and strong connections with participants facilitated effective outreach and engagement. This approach not only strengthened community ownership but also empowered the youth to take an active role in their personal and social development

In their own words:

I was afraid before, but after the lesson on expanding my comfort zone, I can now go out and communicate with others, which I couldn't do before.

Visionary CBO, Female Participant

As the group leader, all responsibilities would have been on me alone, but after the sessions, members are now embracing teamwork.

Visionary CBO, Chairperson

Enhanced Mental Health Awareness and Emotional Well-being

Beyond life skills, the project has made a notable impact on youth mental health and emotional resilience. The peer-led environment allowed participants to speak openly about personal struggles without fear of judgment or stigma. Youth shared how analogies and storytelling—such as the story of Rosie and the giraffe—helped them internalize lessons on stress management, resilience, and positive coping strategies. Several youth who previously relied on unhealthy coping mechanisms, like alcohol, reported adopting healthier alternatives such as seeking advice or engaging in meaningful conversations with peers.

A lot of women in the area are housewives, so I encouraged them to be confident in trying new things and not to give up when things don't go as planned.

Chairlady, Madina Youth Group

Increased Community Engagement and Leadership

Participation in youth groups has empowered young people to play more active roles in their communities. Many youth reported a newfound sense of responsibility and purpose, taking initiative in community activities, supporting peers, and even guiding others to make better life choices. A notable outcome has been the adaptation of rolling labour practices within youth groups. Inspired by traditional communal systems, youth now collaborate on tasks such as small business ventures, community clean-ups, or income-generating activities on a rotational basis. This approach has strengthened social bonds, promoted teamwork, and provided practical experience in cooperation and mutual support.

Strengthened Youth-Local Leadership Relations

A significant shift has occurred in how youth engage with local leaders. Before the project, many young people felt intimidated or disconnected from formal leadership structures. Following their involvement in youth groups and training, they now feel more confident to approach local leaders, voice their concerns, and participate in community dialogue. A Key Informant Interview with the local chief highlighted this transformation, noting that youth now engage more proactively with authorities and contribute constructively to community issues.

Positive Changes in Attitudes and Life Outlook

There has been a profound change in attitudes among youth who previously lacked motivation or had negative perceptions about their future. Many now approach challenges with optimism and a willingness to learn. This shift has driven them to pursue education, vocational training, and other personal development opportunities. Youth report feeling more hopeful, resilient, and determined to shape better futures for themselves and their communities.

Broader Community Impact

The ripple effects of the youth groups extend beyond individual participants. Communities have observed greater unity, reduced conflicts, and increased collaboration among youth. Parents and community leaders have noted improvements in young people's behaviour, engagement, and leadership. The involvement of youth champions has been critical in ensuring that these changes are sustained, as their deep community connections have fostered strong ownership of the project's outcomes.

The Y2Y approach has not only built personal skills among youth but has also fostered resilience, collective action, and hope. It stands as a scalable, context-adapted model for youth empowerment and community development in both urban and peri-urban settings.



Section 4: Measuring Success and Impact

The success of the Youth-to-Youth (Y2Y) intervention was measured through both quantitative and qualitative approaches, capturing changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, and community engagement among both youth group members and peer facilitators.

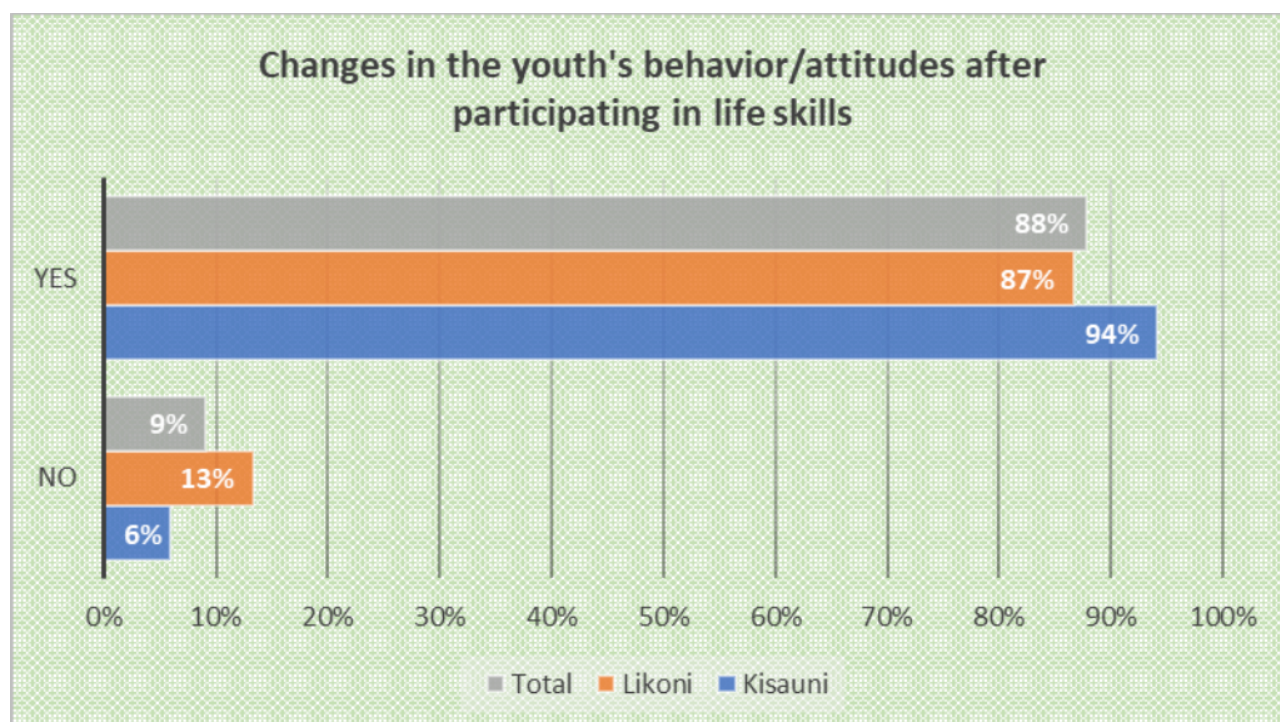


Figure 2-Graph showing the change in behaviour/attitudes

A key indicator of success was the observable change in behavior and attitudes among youth participants. Eighty-eight percent (88%) of peer facilitators reported positive shifts among youth group members following their participation in life skills sessions. These changes included increased confidence, improved communication, better conflict resolution skills, and greater willingness to engage in community initiatives. These outcomes reflect the Y2Y approach's focus on peer relatability and safe spaces, where youth can openly discuss challenges and practice new skills in a supportive environment.

Importantly, the impact of the extended to the peer facilitators themselves. In line with the model's emphasis on empowering youth as agents of change, facilitators reported significant personal growth. Many acquired practical skills through initiatives such as the SPRINT training, which equipped them with business management knowledge, fostering self-reliance and enabling them to explore income-generating opportunities.

Participation as peer facilitators also led to notable improvements in confidence and self-esteem. Initially, some facilitators struggled with public speaking or leading group

discussions. Over time, through repeated practice and peer support, they became more comfortable addressing groups, articulating ideas, and managing dynamic group interactions. This progression demonstrates the Y2Y methodology's effectiveness in building leadership and facilitation skills among young people.

Additionally, the peer facilitators have gained community recognition as trusted members in their communities, and some of them are invited to speak engagements to speak to the In-school youth by the local and religious leaders, highlighting how the approach has elevated their status as trusted youth ambassadors and role models within their communities.



Section 5. Challenges and Mitigation Measures

While the Youth-to-Youth (Y2Y) methodology has demonstrated strong results in fostering peer engagement and empowerment, the Mid-Term Review (MTR) highlighted several challenges alongside mitigation measures implemented to address them. Peer facilitators reported needing clearer guidance and consistent follow-up on rolling out project activities, particularly around group selection and engagement processes. To address this, the project team committed to more structured support and dissemination of work plans and rollout schedules, ensuring facilitators were better prepared.

Another challenge emerged from high expectations among youth groups regarding immediate financial support/ seed funding for their Income generating activities, which led to frustration and dropouts when funding was not given at the onset due to the design of the projects. To mitigate this, the project strengthened communication to manage expectations and introduced business and financial literacy training to help youth understand funding processes and timelines.

Additionally, lack of commitment from some youth groups led to drop-offs, prompting the project team to encourage group registration to formalize structures, build accountability, and enhance eligibility for future opportunities.



Section 6 : Recommendations for Y2Y Programming

The Youth Social and Economic Empowerment Project in Mombasa offers valuable lessons for the wider sector, demonstrating how the Youth-to-Youth (Y2Y) methodology can drive sustainable impact when thoughtfully implemented.

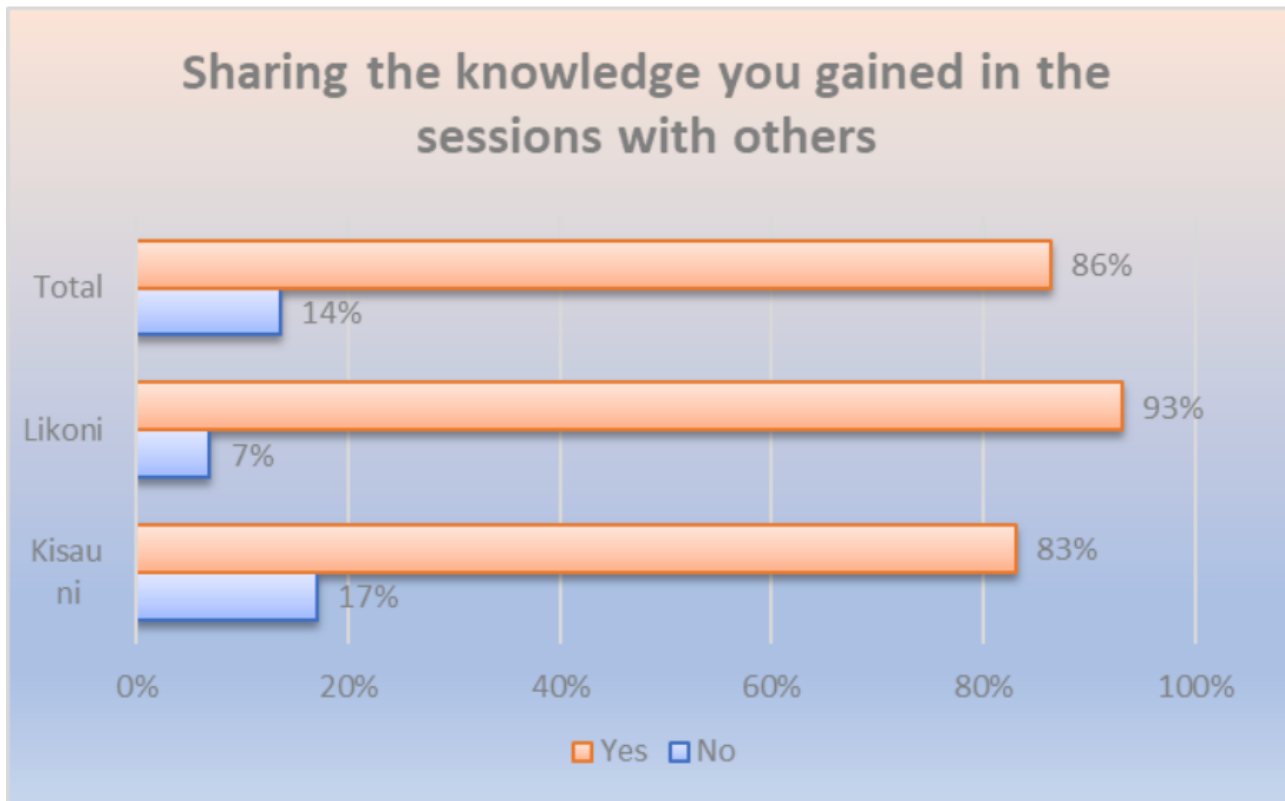


Figure 3-Graph showing the on the rate of cascading skills among the youth

One of the project's key sustainability measures has been fostering a strong knowledge-sharing culture, particularly in life skills. Remarkably, 86% of the 219 youth respondents reported cascading the life skills they gained during sessions. This widespread peer-led dissemination has allowed the project's influence to extend far beyond the target participants. Youth have actively shared their knowledge through peer mentorship, speaking engagements, and youth-led initiatives such as school visits, ensuring that essential life skills also reach younger siblings, friends, and broader community members. This approach has strengthened community resilience and social cohesion, illustrating how peer-driven models can sustain impact over time.

Importantly, the project highlighted that peer-to-peer support is a powerful catalyst for personal and social change. The group-based Y2Y approach provided youth with safe spaces for open dialogue, mutual problem-solving, and collective encouragement. By engaging regularly with peers facing similar socio-economic challenges, participants

overcame isolation, built self-confidence, and accessed both emotional and practical support. This environment fostered trust and relatability, critical for tackling sensitive issues such as mental health, conflict resolution, and self-esteem.

Moreover, the project highlights the importance of integrating economic empowerment into youth initiatives to address structural barriers faced by young people in low-resource urban contexts like Mombasa. While life skills training built personal and social capacities, the incorporation of livelihood-focused interventions—such as the SPRINT model—has equipped youth with business management skills, financial literacy, and pathways to income generation. This dual focus ensures that youth are not only empowered socially and emotionally but are also provided with tangible opportunities to improve their livelihoods and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

From this study, the sector can learn that a comprehensive youth empowerment strategy must combine peer-led learning, adaptive and culturally relevant training approaches, and integrated economic opportunities. Equipping peer facilitators with continuous capacity-building, ensuring flexible delivery to match local realities, and promoting sustainable peer networks are essential to maintaining momentum and impact beyond project lifespans. The success in Mombasa demonstrates that when young people are trusted as agents of change and provided with the right tools and support, they can transform not only their own lives but also the resilience and development of their communities.





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