Int. j. adv. multidisc. res. stud. 2026; 6(6):1185-1194

Received: 07-10-2026
Accepted: 17-11-2026

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Examining the Effectiveness of the Youth Empowerment Policy in Job Creation: Evidence from Mpongwe District, Zambia

[1] Dr. Kelvin Chibomba, [2] Angela Hagwagwa

[1, 2] Department of School of Business, Information and Communication University, Lusaka, Zambia

Corresponding Author: **Dr. Kelvin Chibomba**

Abstract

Youth unemployment remains a significant development challenge in Zambia, particularly in rural districts where limited access to finance, inadequate skills development, weak market linkages and institutional constraints restrict young people's economic opportunities. Although the Youth Empowerment Policy (YEP) provides interventions intended to promote employment, entrepreneurship and improved livelihoods, its practical effectiveness at the district level requires empirical assessment. This study examined the effectiveness of YEP in job creation among youths in Mpongwe District, focusing on the policy frameworks, employment outcomes, livelihood improvements and implementation limitations. The study adopted a pragmatic paradigm and a descriptive case study design, using a mixed-methods approach. Data were collected from 100 respondents, comprising 80 youths and 20 key informants, through structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and document reviews. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative evidence was analysed thematically. The findings indicated that loans and grants were the most prominent policy intervention (30%), followed by vocational and technical training (25%) and agricultural empowerment initiatives (20%). Loans and grants were also perceived as the most effective intervention for employment generation (32%). However, the overall contribution to enterprise creation was moderate, and 20% of respondents reported no meaningful employment outcome. Although participation was associated with improvements in income stability, food security and social recognition, employment sustainability remained a concern. Delays in fund disbursement, bureaucratic procedures, inadequate collateral, limited programme information and weak monitoring and evaluation constrained implementation. The study concludes that YEP has contributed to selected employment and livelihood outcomes, but its long-term effectiveness requires more accessible financing, integrated skills development, stronger market linkages, inclusive programme delivery and consistent monitoring of beneficiary outcomes.

Keywords: Youth Empowerment Policy, Youth Employment, Job Creation, Youth Entrepreneurship, Livelihood Improvement, Policy Implementation, Mpongwe District

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Youth employment is an essential component of inclusive economic development because it enables young people to participate productively in economic activities, improve household welfare and contribute to national development. Employment opportunities also strengthen economic independence, reduce poverty and support the development of human capital. However, unemployment, underemployment and limited access to decent work continue to constrain the economic potential of young people, particularly in developing countries. These challenges are often more pronounced in rural communities, where limited employment opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, restricted access to financial services and weak market linkages affect the ability of young people to establish and sustain income-generating activities.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2024) [5], approximately three out of four young workers in sub-Saharan Africa lack secure employment. The organisation further observes that youth employment challenges extend beyond unemployment to include informal work, insecure working conditions and limited access to productive economic opportunities. This demonstrates the importance of evaluating youth employment interventions in terms of both the number of opportunities created and the extent to which those opportunities provide sustainable livelihoods.

In Zambia, youth empowerment has remained an important national development priority. Government interventions have sought to address youth unemployment and underemployment through financial assistance, vocational and technical training, entrepreneurship development and other forms of economic support. The National Youth Policy provides a framework for promoting youth participation, empowerment and contribution to national development. The policy also recognises the importance of addressing the circumstances of rural youths, young women and youths with disabilities (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2015) [4].

Recent national employment statistics further demonstrate the importance of this issue. According to the Zambia Statistics Agency (2025) [12], the youth unemployment rate among persons aged 19–34 years was 18.4% in 2024. The rate was higher among female youths, at 20.8%, compared with 16.7% among male youths. These figures demonstrate that youth unemployment remains a significant concern and that employment challenges are not experienced equally across population groups. Consequently, youth empowerment interventions need to be accessible, inclusive and responsive to the different economic circumstances of young people.

Mpongwe District provides an important setting for examining the implementation and effectiveness of youth empowerment interventions. The district has a predominantly rural economic environment in which agriculture, small-scale trading and other income-generating activities provide important livelihood opportunities. However, young people may encounter difficulties accessing start-up capital, productive resources, relevant technical skills, business development support and reliable markets. These constraints can limit their ability to establish viable enterprises, expand existing businesses and generate employment for themselves and others.

Although the Youth Empowerment Policy (YEP) is intended to promote employment opportunities and strengthen the economic participation of young people, the existence of policy provisions does not necessarily guarantee sustainable employment outcomes. Its effectiveness depends on the accessibility of interventions, the adequacy of implementation arrangements and the extent to which supported activities respond to the economic conditions experienced by intended beneficiaries. It is therefore necessary to examine whether the policy's interventions translate into meaningful employment opportunities and improvements in the livelihoods of rural youths.

1.2 Importance of Youth Empowerment and Employment Creation

Youth empowerment is important because young people represent a significant human resource for economic growth, innovation and national development. Providing them with access to financial resources, relevant skills, productive assets and employment opportunities enables them to participate more effectively in economic activities. It also strengthens their capacity to establish businesses, improve household income and contribute to local economic development.

Employment creation is particularly important in rural communities, where formal employment opportunities may be limited. Youth empowerment interventions can provide alternative pathways through entrepreneurship, agricultural production, agro-processing, cooperative activities and small-business development. These opportunities can contribute to household income, food security and economic independence while reducing dependence on limited formal-sector employment.

According to the ILO (2024) [5], youth-targeted active labour market programmes can improve employment and earnings, particularly when interventions address the specific barriers experienced by disadvantaged young people. The organisation also highlights the value of combining skills development and entrepreneurship support with other complementary interventions. This suggests that effective youth empowerment requires more than financial assistance; it also requires appropriate training, mentorship, market access and institutional support.

In the context of Mpongwe District, youth empowerment is important because it can strengthen the participation of young people in local economic activities, particularly agriculture and small-scale enterprise development. Access to financial assistance and relevant technical skills can enable young people to initiate productive activities, expand existing businesses and create employment opportunities for others. The effectiveness of these interventions should therefore be assessed in relation to their contribution to employment creation, enterprise sustainability and improvements in household livelihoods.

1.3 Strategic Significance of the Youth Empowerment Policy

The strategic significance of YEP lies in its potential to translate national youth development priorities into practical interventions that address unemployment, underemployment and economic exclusion. In Zambia, the National Youth Policy provides an important framework for promoting youth participation and empowerment, while national development priorities emphasise employment creation, skills development, entrepreneurship and inclusive economic growth (Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2015; Ministry of Finance and National Planning, 2022) [4, 7].

The policy approach is important because youth employment challenges are multidimensional and cannot be addressed through a single intervention. Financial empowerment can provide the resources required to establish or expand enterprises, while vocational and technical training can improve the practical competencies needed to participate in productive activities. Entrepreneurship development, mentorship and cooperative initiatives can further strengthen the ability of young people to manage businesses and access economic opportunities.

The ILO (2024) [5] emphasises that employment interventions combining different forms of support can produce better labour-market outcomes than isolated interventions. This reinforces the importance of coordinating financial assistance, skills development and entrepreneurship support with the actual demands of local economies. In rural districts such as Mpongwe, strategic implementation should also recognise the contribution of agriculture, agricultural value chains and small-scale enterprises to employment and livelihood improvement.

Furthermore, effective implementation requires clear beneficiary-selection procedures, accessible programme information, timely disbursement of funds and appropriate monitoring arrangements. These measures are necessary to ensure that interventions reach their intended beneficiaries

and generate measurable outcomes. The strategic value of YEP should therefore be assessed not only through the availability of empowerment programmes but also through their ability to create sustainable employment and improve the economic circumstances of young people.

1.4 Existing Problems

Despite the importance of youth empowerment interventions, several challenges continue to affect their implementation and effectiveness. Young people may experience difficulties accessing financial assistance because of limited collateral, complex application procedures, inadequate information and delays in the disbursement of funds. Such challenges can prevent beneficiaries from establishing businesses or implementing their proposed income-generating activities at the appropriate time.

Inadequate business management skills, limited mentorship and weak market linkages may also affect the sustainability of enterprises supported through empowerment programmes. Financial assistance alone may not be sufficient to maintain a business where beneficiaries lack the technical knowledge, managerial capacity and market opportunities required for continued operation. This is particularly important in rural communities, where infrastructure limitations and restricted access to commercial networks can increase the operational challenges facing small enterprises.

Another concern relates to unequal access to empowerment opportunities. Female youths, young people living in remote communities and those with limited educational opportunities may experience additional barriers when seeking financial assistance, training and other forms of institutional support. The Zambia Statistics Agency's (2025) [12] finding that female youth unemployment was higher than male youth unemployment in 2024 reinforces the need for inclusive interventions that respond to differences in employment experiences.

The findings of the present study also identified practical implementation concerns in Mpongwe District. Delays in fund disbursement and bureaucratic procedures emerged as prominent challenges, while limited access to collateral, inadequate programme information and weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation further constrained implementation. The study also found that, although some beneficiaries established or expanded businesses and reported improvements in their livelihoods, employment sustainability remained a concern. These findings indicate that the availability of empowerment interventions does not automatically translate into consistent and lasting employment outcomes.

Consequently, there is a need to examine the extent to which YEP addresses these challenges and whether its implementation arrangements are sufficiently responsive to the economic circumstances of young people in Mpongwe District.

1.5 Research Gap

Existing literature recognises youth empowerment as an important strategy for addressing unemployment, promoting entrepreneurship and improving livelihoods. International evidence, including the ILO's (2024) [5] assessment of youth employment trends, highlights the importance of skills development, entrepreneurship support and access to decent work. Similarly, Zambia's National Youth Policy and Eighth National Development Plan establish national priorities for youth participation, economic empowerment and employment creation.

However, broad national and international policy discussions do not necessarily explain how youth empowerment interventions operate within particular rural districts. The effectiveness of such interventions may differ according to local economic conditions, access to financial services, institutional capacity, infrastructure and the availability of markets. Consequently, national-level policy commitments need to be examined alongside the experiences of intended beneficiaries at the local level.

The literature reviewed for this study also indicates a need for more context-specific evidence on the relationship between youth empowerment interventions, actual employment creation and improvements in livelihoods. In particular, it is important to establish whether financial assistance, vocational training, agricultural empowerment and other interventions enable young people to establish sustainable enterprises and improve their economic circumstances. Attention must also be given to the administrative, financial and institutional constraints that may limit programme effectiveness.

The present study addresses this gap through an examination of YEP in Mpongwe District. It considers the policy frameworks intended to facilitate employment creation, the effectiveness of the interventions, their relationship with livelihood improvement and the limitations affecting implementation. In doing so, the study provides district-level evidence that can inform the improvement of youth empowerment programmes and contribute to discussions on rural employment and economic development in Zambia.

1.6 Study Objective

The main objective of the study was to examine the effectiveness of the Youth Empowerment Policy in job creation among youths in Mpongwe District, Zambia.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Examine the types of frameworks embedded in the Youth Empowerment Policy for facilitating job creation.
2. Assess the effectiveness of the Youth Empowerment Policy in creating employment opportunities for youths.
3. Ascertain the relationship between the Youth Empowerment Policy and the improvement of youth livelihoods.
4. Identify the limitations affecting the successful implementation of the Youth Empowerment Policy.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews the conceptual, empirical and theoretical literature relevant to youth empowerment, employment creation and livelihood improvement. It examines how youth empowerment interventions are expected to improve access to economic opportunities, the evidence on the effectiveness of employment programmes, and the institutional factors that influence policy implementation. The discussion provides a basis for assessing the effectiveness of youth empowerment interventions among young people in Mpongwe District, Zambia.

2.1 Conceptual Discussion

2.1.1 Youth Empowerment and Employment Creation

Youth empowerment refers to the process of strengthening young people's capacity to access resources, acquire relevant skills, participate in economic activities and make decisions that influence their social and economic circumstances. In the context of employment creation, empowerment extends beyond the provision of financial assistance. It encompasses vocational and technical training, entrepreneurship development, mentorship, access to productive resources and the establishment of an enabling environment in which young people can develop sustainable economic activities.

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2024) [5], youth employment interventions should address the different barriers young people encounter when entering and remaining in the labour market. These barriers include limited work experience, inadequate employability skills, restricted access to finance and insufficient employment opportunities. Effective interventions therefore require a combination of skills development, entrepreneurship support, employment services and measures that improve access to decent and sustainable work. The ILO's assessment further indicates that youth-targeted active labour market programmes can improve employment and earnings outcomes, particularly when interventions are appropriately designed and responsive to the circumstances of their intended beneficiaries (Puerto *et al*., 2024) [10].

Financial assistance can provide young people with the initial capital required to establish or expand businesses. However, access to finance alone may not guarantee successful enterprise development. Beneficiaries also require business management knowledge, appropriate technology, market information, mentorship and continued institutional support. Youth empowerment should consequently be understood as a comprehensive process that combines access to resources with the capabilities required to use those resources productively.

In rural communities, agricultural empowerment and cooperative development provide additional opportunities for employment creation. Young people may participate in agricultural production, agro-processing, distribution and marketing, as well as other income-generating activities linked to rural economies. Nevertheless, the sustainability of these opportunities depends on access to productive assets, suitable infrastructure, reliable markets, technical knowledge and adequate financial resources. This is particularly relevant to Mpongwe District, where agricultural activities provide an important context for examining the economic opportunities available to rural youths.

2.1.2 Effectiveness of Youth Empowerment Interventions

The effectiveness of youth empowerment interventions should be assessed through the outcomes they produce rather than solely through the number of programmes established, funds disbursed or beneficiaries registered. Relevant indicators include the establishment of new businesses, expansion of existing enterprises, employment opportunities created, job retention, improvements in income and the sustainability of supported economic activities.

According to Puerto *et al*. (2024) [10], evidence from evaluations of youth-focused active labour market programmes demonstrates that appropriately designed interventions can improve employment and earnings prospects. However, the results differ according to programme design, implementation arrangements, labour-market conditions and the characteristics of beneficiaries. Their findings reinforce the importance of combining interventions such as skills development, entrepreneurship support and employment services rather than relying on a single approach to address youth unemployment.

The ILO (2024) [5] similarly identifies skills training and entrepreneurship support as important components of youth employment strategies. The report highlights the need for interventions that respond to the particular circumstances of young people, especially those experiencing greater disadvantages in accessing employment. This suggests that the effectiveness of empowerment programmes depends partly on whether the support provided corresponds with the economic opportunities and practical needs of intended beneficiaries.

Employment sustainability is another important measure of programme effectiveness. A policy may facilitate the establishment of a business or create an initial employment opportunity without ensuring that the activity remains operational over time. Enterprises may experience difficulties arising from inadequate capital, weak management, limited market access and changing economic conditions. Continued mentorship, business development support, appropriate capitalisation and institutional follow-up are therefore important in determining whether initial employment gains translate into sustainable economic outcomes.

2.1.3 Youth Empowerment and Livelihood Improvement

Livelihood improvement extends beyond securing employment or increasing individual income. It includes the ability of individuals and households to access productive resources, meet basic needs, maintain economic security and respond to financial and social difficulties. Youth empowerment interventions may therefore contribute to improved livelihoods through increased income, enterprise ownership, household welfare, economic independence and greater participation in household and community decision-making.

Kabeer (1999) [6] explains empowerment through the relationship between resources, agency and achievements. Resources represent the material, human and social conditions that enable individuals to pursue their goals. Agency concerns their ability to define and act upon those goals, while achievements refer to the outcomes they realise. Applied to youth employment, this framework suggests that access to loans, training and productive resources should be examined alongside the ability of beneficiaries to use these opportunities to improve their economic circumstances.

The relationship between empowerment and livelihood improvement is particularly important in rural settings, where limited employment opportunities may constrain household income and economic security. Access to productive resources and enterprise support can strengthen young people's capacity to participate in local economic activities. However, the extent of improvement depends on whether the opportunities created are accessible, productive and sustainable.

2.2 Empirical Studies

International evidence demonstrates that youth employment interventions can produce positive labour-market outcomes when they address the practical barriers young people face.

The ILO (2024) [5], in its Global Employment Trends for Youth 2024 report, observes that employment challenges extend beyond unemployment to include insecure work, informality and limited access to decent employment. The report also identifies skills development and entrepreneurship support as important elements of effective youth employment strategies. These findings suggest that the assessment of youth empowerment policies should consider both the creation and the quality of employment opportunities.

A related systematic review by Puerto *et al*. (2024) [10], published jointly by the ILO and the World Bank, examined evaluations of 220 youth-focused active labour market programmes conducted across different countries. The review found that such programmes can improve employment and earnings outcomes, with particularly positive results in low- and middle-income countries. It also demonstrated that programme outcomes vary according to intervention design and beneficiary circumstances. This evidence supports the need to examine whether financial assistance, training and entrepreneurship support are appropriately combined and implemented within specific local contexts.

Research conducted in Zambia also provides useful insights into the relationship between youth empowerment and livelihoods. Chilefwe (2022) [2], in a study of rural youth aquaculture entrepreneurs in Kasempa District, examined the contribution of youth development fund activities to young people's livelihoods. The study provides a relevant rural perspective on the role of empowerment initiatives in supporting productive activities and self-employment. Its geographical and sectoral focus, however, differs from the present study, which examines youth empowerment and employment creation within the broader economic context of Mpongwe District.

Gough, Chigunta and Langevang (2016) [3] examined employment insecurity among young people in an urban low-income settlement in Lusaka, Zambia. Their study highlighted the precarious circumstances in which young people seek to secure livelihoods and the different practices they adopt to make a living. Although the research focused on urban employment experiences rather than the implementation of a district-level empowerment policy, it demonstrates the importance of considering employment quality, security and the wider economic circumstances affecting young people.

Research on rural youth transitions in Zambia and Senegal further indicates that young people's employment opportunities are influenced by institutional conditions and access to resources. The study by Langevang and colleagues (2023) highlights the importance of land, capital, knowledge and broader institutional arrangements in shaping rural youth employment transitions. This perspective is relevant to Mpongwe because interventions aimed at creating employment in rural communities must account for the productive resources and structural conditions that influence young people's participation in economic activities.

The reviewed empirical evidence establishes that youth empowerment interventions can contribute to employment and livelihood improvement. Nevertheless, their outcomes depend on the relevance of programme support, institutional capacity, access to productive resources and the economic conditions within which beneficiaries operate. The present study builds on this evidence by examining the reported experiences of youths and key informants in Mpongwe District.

In the Mpongwe study, the reported findings indicate that financial assistance, agricultural empowerment and vocational or entrepreneurship training were among the principal forms of support associated with youth empowerment. The findings also point to the establishment and expansion of businesses, employment-related outcomes and improvements in aspects of household welfare. However, the reported experiences suggest that these outcomes were not uniform or necessarily sustainable. Delays in the disbursement of funds, administrative procedures, inadequate follow-up, limited training and unequal access to programme opportunities emerged as important implementation concerns. These findings reinforce the need to assess policy effectiveness in terms of both the economic outcomes achieved and the institutional conditions influencing those outcomes. The numerical results should be interpreted in accordance with the final verified sample denominators and statistical tables.

2.3 Theoretical Foundation

This study draws on Empowerment Theory and Public Policy Implementation Theory. These perspectives provide complementary explanations of how youth empowerment interventions may influence individual economic agency and how institutional arrangements affect the achievement of policy objectives.

2.3.1 Empowerment Theory

Empowerment Theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals acquire greater control over decisions and circumstances affecting their lives. Zimmerman (2000) [13] explains empowerment as a process involving individual capabilities, participation and the development of control over personal and community affairs. The theory recognises that empowerment is influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by the social and institutional environments within which individuals operate.

In this study, Empowerment Theory provides a basis for examining whether youth empowerment interventions strengthen young people's capacity to participate in economic activities, establish businesses, access productive resources and make decisions concerning their livelihoods. Financial assistance, vocational training, mentorship and entrepreneurship support are considered potential resources through which young people may improve their economic agency.

Kabeer's (1999) [6] resources, agency and achievements framework further strengthens this perspective. It provides an analytical basis for distinguishing between the support made available to beneficiaries, their ability to use that support and the outcomes they achieve. Accordingly, the effectiveness of youth empowerment interventions should not be judged exclusively by the resources distributed. Attention must also be given to whether beneficiaries can translate those resources into employment, sustainable enterprises and improved living conditions.

The theory is relevant to the present study because it supports an examination of the relationship between access to empowerment opportunities and reported livelihood outcomes among youths in Mpongwe District.

2.3.2 Public Policy Implementation Theory

Public Policy Implementation Theory explains the processes

through which government policy objectives are translated into practical programmes and outcomes. Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) [9] demonstrate that policy implementation can be affected by administrative complexity, coordination difficulties and the number of decisions required to move an intervention from formulation to execution. Their work highlights the possibility that policies with clearly stated objectives may experience difficulties when implementation involves multiple institutions and administrative processes.

Sabatier and Mazmanian (1980) [11] similarly emphasise the importance of clear policy objectives, appropriate implementation structures, adequate resources and favourable external conditions in achieving intended policy outcomes. Their framework suggests that successful implementation depends on the relationship between policy design and the institutional capacity available to carry out the proposed interventions.

In the context of youth empowerment, this theory provides a basis for examining how administrative procedures, funding arrangements, institutional coordination, monitoring mechanisms and beneficiary selection influence programme delivery. Delays in fund disbursement, complex application requirements, inadequate institutional support and weaknesses in monitoring may prevent intended beneficiaries from accessing opportunities or sustaining supported enterprises.

The theory is particularly relevant to the Mpongwe study because it enables the examination of the institutional constraints affecting the implementation of youth empowerment interventions. It also provides a basis for understanding why the existence of a policy or funding programme does not necessarily guarantee the achievement of its employment objectives.

Taken together, Empowerment Theory and Public Policy Implementation Theory provide complementary analytical perspectives. The former focuses on the capacity of young people to access and use opportunities to improve their livelihoods, while the latter examines the institutional conditions that determine whether those opportunities are effectively delivered. Their combined application supports a broader assessment of youth empowerment in Mpongwe District.

2.4 Research Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that youth empowerment, entrepreneurship development and skills training are important components of strategies aimed at addressing youth unemployment. International evidence identifies positive employment and earnings outcomes from appropriately designed interventions, while studies conducted in Zambia highlight the influence of employment insecurity, access to productive resources and institutional conditions on young people's livelihood opportunities.

However, the available evidence does not fully explain how youth empowerment interventions operate within the specific economic and institutional circumstances of Mpongwe District. Existing studies have examined related issues in other geographical settings and economic sectors, but their findings cannot automatically be generalised to the experiences of youths in Mpongwe. There remains a need for district-specific evidence on the types of empowerment support available, the extent to which such support contributes to employment creation, and its relationship with improvements in young people's livelihoods.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the implementation and perceived effectiveness of youth empowerment interventions in Mpongwe District. It considers the frameworks through which support is provided, employment-related outcomes, reported livelihood improvements and the institutional and social constraints affecting programme implementation. In doing so, the study contributes context-specific evidence to the discussion on youth empowerment and employment creation in rural Zambia.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Approach

The study adopted a pragmatic research paradigm and a mixed-methods approach, using a descriptive case study design. The case study design was appropriate because the investigation focused on understanding the implementation and perceived effectiveness of YEP within a specific geographical and socio-economic setting. The mixed-methods approach enabled the collection of quantitative information from youth respondents and qualitative insights from key informants.

3.2 Scope of the Study

The study was geographically confined to Mpongwe District, Copperbelt Province, Zambia. It focused on the effectiveness of YEP in job creation, specifically examining the policy frameworks for employment generation, the effectiveness of interventions, the relationship between policy participation and livelihood improvement, and implementation limitations. The target population comprised male and female youths aged 18–35 years, consistent with the age definition adopted in Zambia's National Youth Policy (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development, 2015) [8]. The study considered the period 2015–2024 and used a descriptive case study approach involving questionnaires, key informant interviews and document reviews.

3.3 Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures

The study involved 100 respondents, comprising 80 youths and 20 key informants. The youth respondents provided information on their awareness of YEP, access to programme interventions, employment experiences and livelihood outcomes. The key informants included government officers, local authority officials and community leaders who provided information on programme implementation and institutional challenges.

The study used stratified random sampling to select youth respondents and purposive sampling to identify key informants. This combination enabled the collection of information from young people with direct or relevant experiences of empowerment interventions and stakeholders familiar with programme implementation.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires gathered quantitative information on respondents' demographic characteristics, awareness of YEP, access to financing, skills development, employment outcomes, livelihood changes and implementation challenges. Interviews with key informants provided additional insights into institutional processes, programme delivery, beneficiary experiences and

constraints affecting policy implementation.

Document review was also used to obtain relevant information from policy documents, reports and other materials related to youth empowerment and employment. The use of multiple data sources supported triangulation and provided a broader understanding of the research problem.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, particularly frequencies and percentages, and processed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative information obtained from interviews was analysed thematically. The analysis involved identifying recurring issues, organising responses into relevant themes and interpreting the findings in relation to the study objectives.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence enabled the study to compare numerical patterns with explanations provided by key informants and other participants.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The study recognised the importance of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality and the protection of respondents' information. Participants were informed about the academic purpose of the research and their right to withdraw from participation. The study also sought to ensure that information collected was used responsibly and that respondents were not exposed to unnecessary harm.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings are presented according to the four research objectives. The quantitative results are based on the 100 respondents reported in the dissertation, while qualitative evidence is used to provide further interpretation of the findings.

4.1 Frameworks Embedded in the Youth Empowerment Policy for Job Creation

The first objective examined the frameworks embedded in YEP for promoting job creation among youths in Mpongwe District. The findings identified five major intervention areas: Loans and grants, vocational and technical training, agricultural empowerment, business start-up and innovation support, and cooperative development.

Loans and grants were identified as the most prominent framework by 30% of respondents. Vocational and technical training followed at 25%, while agricultural empowerment initiatives accounted for 20%. Business start-up and innovation support represented 15%, and cooperative development accounted for 10%.

The findings demonstrate that financial empowerment was the most visible intervention among the respondents. This suggests that access to financial resources is regarded as an important mechanism for enabling young people to establish or expand income-generating activities. The prominence of vocational training and agricultural empowerment also indicates that respondents recognised the importance of practical skills and productive activities in creating employment opportunities.

However, the findings on policy awareness and responsiveness revealed areas requiring improvement. Radio and other mass media were identified as the first source of information by 35% of respondents, followed by peers at 25%, community leaders at 20%, ministry officials at 10% and other informal channels at 10%. This distribution suggests that formal communication through implementing institutions was less prominent than mass media and informal networks.

Regarding responsiveness to rural youth needs, 15% of respondents rated the policy as very responsive, 35% as moderately responsive, 30% as slightly responsive and 20% as not responsive. The results indicate that although YEP provides relevant interventions, its responsiveness to the circumstances of rural youths remains limited.

The perceived distribution of benefits also raised concerns about inclusiveness. Forty-five per cent of respondents believed that male youths benefited most from YEP interventions, while 20% identified female youths and 10% considered the benefits to be equally distributed across all groups. These findings reflect respondents' perceptions of unequal access and suggest that programme implementation should pay greater attention to the circumstances of young women and other groups who may face barriers to participation.

Overall, the findings indicate that YEP incorporates several relevant frameworks for employment creation. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these frameworks depends on the extent to which they are communicated, coordinated and made accessible to the intended beneficiaries.

4.2 Effectiveness of the Youth Empowerment Policy in Job Creation

The second objective assessed the effectiveness of YEP in creating employment opportunities among youths in Mpongwe District. Loans and grants were perceived as the most effective intervention, accounting for 32% of responses. Agricultural empowerment packages followed at 25%, entrepreneurship and innovation training at 20%, ICT and digital skills programmes at 15%, and cooperative development at 8%.

These findings indicate that financial assistance was regarded as the most direct mechanism for facilitating employment creation. Agricultural empowerment also featured prominently, reflecting the relevance of agriculture to the economic environment of Mpongwe District.

However, the extent to which YEP contributed to the creation of new enterprises varied. Only 10% of respondents reported that the policy contributed to enterprise creation to a very great extent. A further 25% reported a great extent, 35% a moderate extent, 20% a small extent and 10% indicated no contribution. The largest proportion therefore reported a moderate contribution, suggesting that the policy has facilitated enterprise creation but has not consistently produced strong employment outcomes for all beneficiaries.

The findings on mentorship and training further demonstrated varying levels of effectiveness. Twelve per cent of respondents reported a very high impact on their entrepreneurial or professional skills, while 28% reported a high impact. Thirty per cent indicated a moderate impact, 20% a low impact and 10% reported no effect. This distribution suggests that although training and mentorship have benefited some participants, their reach and effectiveness remain uneven.

The employment outcomes reported by respondents provide further evidence of the policy's contribution. Thirty-five per cent indicated that they had established their own businesses, 20% had expanded existing businesses, 15% had

obtained employment in enterprises supported by the policy, and 10% had employed other youths in their ventures. However, 20% reported no meaningful employment outcome.

Employment sustainability emerged as a significant concern. Only 15% of respondents described the jobs created through YEP as very sustainable, while 30% considered them moderately sustainable. A further 35% described them as slightly sustainable, and 20% considered them unsustainable or unavailable. Thus, 55% reported either slight sustainability or unsustainable/unavailable employment outcomes.

The qualitative findings supported these results. A Youth Empowerment Officer observed that some beneficiaries struggled to sustain their businesses because of inadequate follow-up, limited market linkages and insufficient continued mentoring. This indicates that the challenge is not limited to initiating business activities; it also concerns the capacity of beneficiaries to maintain and expand their enterprises.

The findings therefore suggest that YEP has made a moderate contribution to job creation in Mpongwe District. Its interventions have supported business establishment, enterprise expansion and some employment opportunities. However, the limited sustainability of many supported activities indicates that financial assistance should be complemented by business training, mentorship, market access and continuous institutional support.

4.3 Relationship between Youth Empowerment Policy and Improvement of Youth Livelihoods

The third objective examined the relationship between participation in YEP and improvements in youth livelihoods. The findings showed that income stability was the most frequently reported livelihood improvement, accounting for 30% of responses. Increased social recognition followed at 25%, while improved food security accounted for 20%. Better housing and living conditions represented 15%, and improved access to health and education services accounted for 10%.

These findings suggest that the benefits associated with YEP extend beyond employment status to selected aspects of household welfare and social participation. Income stability and food security were particularly important because they reflect the capacity of beneficiaries to meet everyday needs and improve their economic circumstances.

The findings on resilience to economic challenges further demonstrated that livelihood improvements were uneven. Twenty per cent of respondents reported significant improvement in their ability to cope with economic challenges, while 35% reported moderate improvement. A further 25% experienced slight improvement, and 20% reported no improvement. This indicates that although some beneficiaries developed greater capacity to manage economic difficulties, a considerable proportion continued to experience vulnerability.

Other livelihood outcomes included higher income levels, reported by 30% of respondents; greater employment opportunities, reported by 25%; enhanced self-confidence and decision-making, reported by 20%; improved access to productive resources, reported by 15%; and no positive livelihood outcomes, reported by 10%.

In addition, 60% of respondents reported either a major or moderate positive impact on household welfare. This comprised 20% who reported a major positive impact and 40% who reported a moderate positive impact. Economic independence was identified by 35% of respondents as the most significant long-term livelihood benefit, followed by household security at 25% and entrepreneurship sustainability at 20%.

The qualitative findings also indicated that some beneficiaries experienced increased self-confidence, improved decision-making capacity and greater economic independence. Key informants explained that young people who successfully accessed empowerment funds were able to expand agricultural activities, establish small businesses and diversify their sources of livelihood.

These findings are consistent with the principles of Empowerment Theory, which emphasises the importance of access to resources, individual agency and the ability to make decisions that influence personal and community circumstances (Zimmerman, 2000) [13]. The reported improvements in income, self-confidence and economic independence suggest that YEP participation was associated with positive changes in the economic and social circumstances of some beneficiaries.

However, the study does not establish that YEP alone caused all the reported livelihood improvements. Other factors, including agricultural performance, market conditions, household resources and individual enterprise-management skills, may also have influenced the outcomes. The findings therefore demonstrate a reported association between participation in YEP and selected livelihood improvements rather than a proven causal relationship.

4.4 Limitations Affecting the Implementation of the Youth Empowerment Policy

The fourth objective investigated the limitations affecting YEP implementation in Mpongwe District. Delays in the disbursement of funds were identified as the leading challenge by 30% of respondents. Bureaucratic procedures accounted for 25%, while inadequate training and capacity building, gender bias in programme access, and weak monitoring and evaluation each accounted for 15%.

These findings demonstrate that implementation challenges are both administrative and institutional. Delays in releasing funds may prevent beneficiaries from establishing businesses at the appropriate time, purchasing agricultural inputs or responding to market opportunities. Complex administrative procedures may also discourage eligible youths from completing the application process.

Access to finance was further constrained by the requirement for collateral. Thirty per cent of respondents identified lack of collateral as the principal difficulty in accessing YEP funds. Limited information about application procedures accounted for 25%, high rejection rates for 20%, perceived political favouritism for 15%, and poor follow-up support for 10%.

The findings indicate that the existence of financial empowerment programmes does not automatically guarantee access for all intended beneficiaries. Young people who lack conventional assets or adequate information may experience difficulties in meeting application requirements, even when they have viable business ideas.

Gender and social inclusion also emerged as important concerns. Thirty per cent of respondents considered young women the most disadvantaged group in accessing YEP

programmes. Youths with low educational attainment accounted for 25%, those in remote rural communities for 20%, youths without political networks for 15%, and youths with disabilities for 10%. These findings suggest that access barriers may differ according to gender, education, geographical location and social circumstances.

Monitoring and evaluation was another significant limitation. Forty per cent of respondents considered existing monitoring and evaluation systems weak and ineffective, while 30% described them as moderate but inconsistent. Twenty per cent considered monitoring mechanisms virtually non-existent, and only 10% regarded them as strong and effective.

Weak monitoring may limit the ability of implementing institutions to assess the progress of beneficiaries, identify struggling enterprises and determine whether supported activities are generating sustainable employment. Monitoring arrangements should therefore extend beyond recording the number of youths trained or funded to assessing enterprise survival, employment retention, income stability and beneficiary welfare.

The findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of YEP is constrained by the interaction of administrative delays, bureaucratic procedures, limited access to finance, inadequate information, unequal participation, insufficient capacity building and weak monitoring and evaluation. These limitations help explain why the policy has contributed to business creation and selected livelihood improvements without consistently producing sustainable employment.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

The study examined the effectiveness of the Youth Empowerment Policy in job creation among youths in Mpongwe District, Zambia. The findings demonstrate that YEP provides several interventions intended to promote youth employment and economic empowerment. These include loans and grants, vocational and technical training, agricultural empowerment, business start-up and innovation support, and cooperative development. Loans and grants emerged as the most prominent intervention, followed by vocational and technical training. However, the policy was not considered sufficiently responsive to the needs of all rural youths, and concerns were raised regarding programme awareness and unequal access to available opportunities.

The study further established that YEP has made a moderate contribution to job creation. Some beneficiaries established businesses, expanded existing enterprises, obtained employment and created opportunities for other young people. Nevertheless, the proportion of respondents who reported no meaningful employment outcome and the limited sustainability of many supported activities demonstrate that the policy has not consistently translated initial assistance into stable employment. Financial support therefore needs to be complemented by relevant skills development, entrepreneurship training, mentorship and market access.

Regarding livelihood improvement, participation in YEP was associated with positive changes in income stability, food security, social recognition, self-confidence and economic independence among some beneficiaries. However, these improvements were not uniform. Some respondents continued to experience economic vulnerability and limited improvements in their livelihoods. The descriptive nature of the study means that the findings establish an association between participation in YEP and reported livelihood outcomes rather than proving that the policy alone caused those improvements.

The study also established that implementation is constrained by delays in fund disbursement, bureaucratic procedures, limited access to finance, inadequate information, insufficient training, perceived gender inequalities and weak monitoring and evaluation. These challenges reduce the ability of the policy to reach all intended beneficiaries and support sustainable economic activities.

Overall, the study concludes that YEP has demonstrated potential to promote youth employment and improve selected livelihood outcomes in Mpongwe District. However, its long-term effectiveness depends on stronger institutional arrangements, accessible financing, inclusive implementation, relevant skills development, market linkages and consistent monitoring of employment and livelihood outcomes.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations.

First, the government and institutions responsible for implementing YEP should simplify application, approval and fund-disbursement procedures. Applicants should receive timely information about the progress of their applications, and implementing institutions should monitor compliance with established processing timelines. Fund disbursement should also take account of agricultural seasons and other time-sensitive business opportunities, particularly in rural communities.

Second, government and relevant financial institutions should review financing requirements that prevent otherwise eligible youths from accessing empowerment funds. Alternative financing arrangements, including appropriately designed group-based financing, cooperative guarantees and other risk-sharing mechanisms, should be considered for young people who lack conventional collateral. Applicants should also receive practical guidance on preparing business plans, budgets and supporting documentation.

Third, institutions implementing YEP should strengthen the integration of financial assistance, technical training, entrepreneurship education and continuous mentorship. Training should cover business planning, financial management, record keeping, marketing, customer relations and risk management. In Mpongwe District, particular attention should be given to practical skills relevant to agriculture, agro-processing and other viable local economic activities.

Fourth, government institutions, local authorities, private-sector organisations and development partners should establish stronger market linkages for youth-owned enterprises. Support should extend beyond business establishment to include access to suppliers, customers, agricultural value chains, business networks and appropriate digital marketing opportunities. Cooperative development should also be strengthened where collective production, purchasing and marketing can reduce costs and improve bargaining power.

Fifth, implementing institutions should introduce deliberate measures to improve the participation of young women and

other disadvantaged groups in YEP. Particular attention should be given to youths with low educational attainment, those living in remote communities and youths with disabilities. Programme information should be disseminated through community meetings, radio, youth organisations, local leaders and other accessible channels. Beneficiary selection criteria should be clearly communicated and consistently applied to strengthen transparency and public confidence.

Sixth, institutions responsible for YEP should establish a stronger monitoring and evaluation framework to assess beneficiary progress and programme outcomes. Monitoring should extend beyond the number of youths trained or funded to include the number of businesses established, enterprise survival rates, jobs created and retained, changes in income, and improvements in household welfare. Periodic beneficiary assessments should identify implementation difficulties and inform corrective action.

Finally, government departments and local implementing institutions should strengthen communication about YEP eligibility requirements, application procedures, funding opportunities and available support services. Community-based information sessions and accessible communication channels should be expanded, with information provided in appropriate local languages where necessary. These measures would improve awareness and enable more young people to understand and access available empowerment opportunities.

6. Limitations of the Study

The study was confined to Mpongwe District and therefore reflects the experiences and circumstances of youths within that particular geographical and socio-economic setting. Its findings may not be directly generalisable to all districts in Zambia because youth employment conditions, institutional capacity and access to economic opportunities vary across locations.

The study also relied partly on self-reported information from respondents. Consequently, some responses may have been influenced by individual perceptions, recall limitations or differences in participants' understanding of YEP interventions. Furthermore, the descriptive case study design identifies reported patterns and associations but does not establish that YEP alone caused the observed employment and livelihood outcomes.

Despite these limitations, the use of questionnaires, key informant interviews and document reviews provided different perspectives on policy implementation and strengthened the depth of the investigation.

7. References

1. African Union. African Youth Charter. African Union Commission, 2006.
2. Chilefwe D. Impact of youth development fund on the youth livelihoods in Zambia: A case of rural youth aqua-cultural entrepreneurs in Kasempa District [Research report, University of Zambia], 2022.
3. Gough KV, Chigunta F, Langevang T. Expanding the scales and domains of (in) security: Youth employment in urban Zambia. Environment and Planning A. 2016; 48(2).
4. Government of the Republic of Zambia. National Youth Policy. Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development, 2015.
5. International Labour Organization. Global employment trends for youth 2024: Decent work, brighter futures. International Labour Office, 2024.
6. Kabeer N. Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. Development and Change. 1999; 30(3):435-464.
7. Ministry of Finance and National Planning. Eighth National Development Plan 2022–2026. Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2022.
8. Ministry of Youth, Sport and Child Development. National Youth Policy. Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2015.
9. Pressman JL, Wildavsky A. Implementation: How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland. University of California Press, 1973.
10. Puerto S, Stöterau J, Weber M, Curcio C. Active labour market programs improve employment and earnings of young people. International Labour Organization and World Bank, 2024.
11. Sabatier P, Mazmanian D. The implementation of public policy: A framework of analysis. Policy Studies Journal. 1980; 8(4):538-560.
12. Zambia Statistics Agency. 2024 Labour Force Survey report. Government of the Republic of Zambia, 2025.
13. Zimmerman MA. Empowerment theory: Psychological, Organizational and Community Levels of Analysis. In J. Rappaport & E. Seidman (Eds.), Handbook of community psychology, 2000, 43-63.