

Peer-to-peer learning

between Tana River and Isiolo Counties on the creation of Youth Innovation and Empowerment Centres (YIEC)



Results & Summary

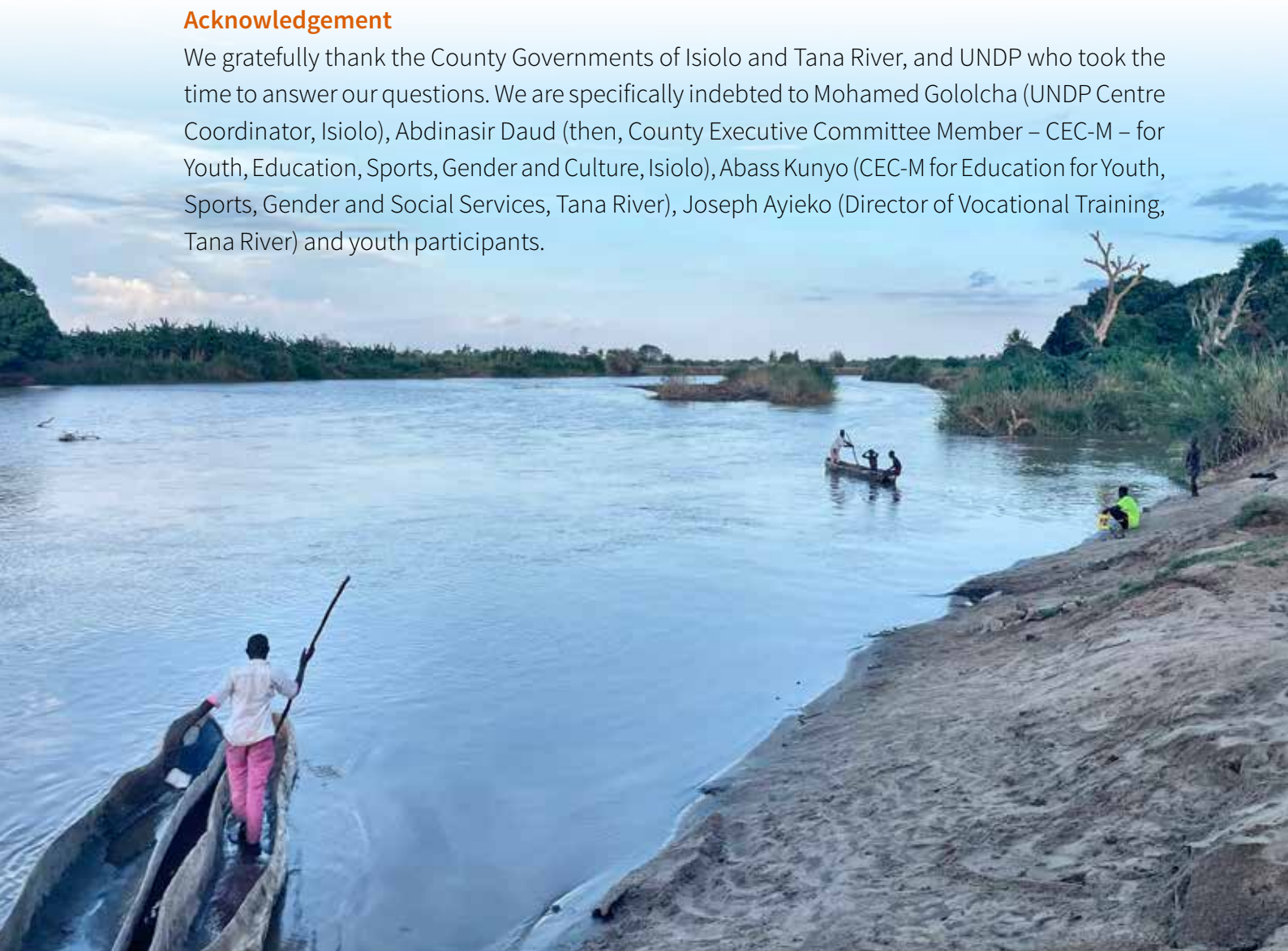
Tana River County, Kenya established a youth innovation and empowerment centre (YIEC), in March 2022, after learning of a YIEC in Isiolo County. The Tana River YIEC, which aims to respond to youth unemployment and idleness, has trained over 1 800 youth in various programmes allowing them to gain critical employment competencies and skills as well as use the space for recreation. The opening of the YIEC was also accompanied by the drafting of a County Youth Inclusion Policy that is emblematic of the County's inclusion of youth voice and representation in decision-making.



This note presents the context, the problem(s) that the peers sought to solve, how the Counties went about this, lessons learnt, and preliminary results of this intervention.

Acknowledgement

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Background

Kenyan youth (defined as persons aged between 15 and 34) face a myriad of challenges as highlighted by the Kenya Youth Development Policy (2019). These include persistent unemployment, underemployment, and vulnerable employment, whose patterns vary at sub-national levels. Youth unemployment is estimated at 12.1% (KNBS, 2019) and youth underemployment in 2015-2016 is estimated at 27.8%, while 84% of employed youth work in the informal sector, characterised by low productivity, inadequate earnings, and difficult working conditions (MoICT, 2019).

Challenges faced by both Counties regarding youth

Tana River and Isiolo Counties, both of which are classified as Arid and Semi-Arid Land (ASAL),¹ face particularly severe challenges regarding their youth. Interviews and secondary research highlight:

- **A “youth bulge”**, representing 25% of the population in Tana River and 29% in Isiolo (CGI, 2018: p.9). This is not matched by economic opportunities, as illustrated by high poverty rates (70% in Isiolo and 62.2% in Tana River) and unemployment.
- **High dropout rates**, with fewer than 30% of pupils graduating from primary to secondary school, and fewer than 5% of those (in Tana River) continuing to tertiary education. This is exacerbated by inadequate institutions of higher learning (e.g., in Isiolo).
- **Substance abuse** linked to mira (also known as khat) and kette (a by-product of heroin).
- **Child labour** is also a challenge faced by both Counties.
- **Radicalisation and violent extremism** that, while limited in scope, pose a danger.
- **Lack of skilled labour**, which requires qualified professionals such as teachers, engineers, doctors, plumbers, and many County staff to come from outside Tana River.
- **Regressive cultural practices**, such as female genital mutilation (particularly among pastoralists), early/forced marriages by ages 15 to 20, and high rates of teenage pregnancy.
- **Low participation** of youth in County governance processes.
- **Droughts**, resulting in conflict (e.g., cattle rustling) among pastoralist communities due to pressure on natural resources.

1. ASAL Counties occupy over 80% of Kenya's landmass and are home to 36% of its population. These Counties, characterised by varying degrees of aridity, face climatic conditions that have had devastating effects on the environment and livelihood of communities.

In addition to their common problems, Tana River County has its own particularities. The County comprises three sub-Counties and 15 wards, with a low population density principally settled along the Tana river. Some wards are more than 100 km from Hola, the capital, creating a challenge for the County Government in terms of ensuring youth participation from all wards in YIEC activities. Further, the County's 66.3% illiteracy rate ranks as the worst in inter-County comparisons (CGTR, 2018: p.25). Finally, ongoing tensions between farming communities (i.e., Pokomo) and pastoralists (i.e., Cushites) have led to periodic inter-community violence, impacting the provision of public services.

P2P learning between Tana River and Isiolo Counties

Tana River County learned about Isiolo's YIEC through the media.² Subsequently, Tana River approached the Kenya School of Government (KSG), sparking a conversation with Isiolo. Given the similar challenges both Counties face, Tana River decided that Isiolo was the most appropriate place to learn about this youth intervention before proceeding. A three-day benchmarking trip to Isiolo County was undertaken by Tana River officials in August 2021, which focused on the management of the centre, its programmes, level of sustainability, and management of costs.

Participants from Tana River in the P2P learning exchange included the County Executive Committee Member (CEC-M) in charge of youth affairs, the County Director of Youth, 15 youth with one from each ward, the YIEC Manager, and the Garsen Youth Officer. The Governor of Tana River visited the YIEC in Isiolo on a separate occasion in September 2021, reaffirming the County's interest in adopting Isiolo's model. On Isiolo's side, the delegation was received by the Minister (CEC-M for youth), the Chief Officer for Youth and Sports, the YIEC Manager, and local youth. For the benchmarking trip, the UNDP linked the Counties and coordinated the visit through its Centre Manager in Isiolo.

On the first day, the UNDP Centre Coordinator made a comprehensive presentation about voluntarism, and the structure, operations and programmes of the YIEC, followed by a Q&A session. Tana River presented their current challenges regarding youth and how they envisaged the centre would help address these. Open discussion about the presentation followed, as did a session on similarities between the Counties. On the second day, Tana River officials visited the YIEC to enquire about the courses, their management and how youth are included in decision-making. Because Isiolo youth manage the YIEC, this provided them an opportunity to exchange experiences. On the third day, participants undertook field visits to five initiatives of the centres' beneficiaries: a bakery, a smart farm that produces poultry, and local produce, bead and clothes markets. This allowed Tana River officials to understand what could potentially be customised and reproduced in their own settings.

2. The Isiolo YIEC was supported by the Kenya School of Government (KSG), the UNDP Kenya Country Office (through the Joint Devolution Programme, a UN Joint Programme), the Northern Frontier Organisation, the Ministry of ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs, the Frontier Counties Development Council, the Horn of Africa Youth Network, and the National Youth Council.

After the trip, a direct relationship was established with Isiolo's Centre Manager (a UNDP employee) allowing them to share information about their experiences via WhatsApp, Zoom, and phone calls to brainstorm ideas and solutions. Exchanges focused on the management structure of the centre in Isiolo and how to ensure representation from the wards.

After the benchmarking trip, some clarifications were sought by the Tana River team. After these exchanges, engagement on a mostly informal basis continued until Tana River launched the centre.

The Tana River team learned that the centre in Isiolo:

- is used as a recreation space (e.g., indoor games)
- develops key skills for youth (e.g., computer literacy, income-generation, agribusiness, hydroponic farming, etc.)
- offers youth psychosocial support
- links students to potential markets and sponsors
- has a steering committee with youth representation from each ward
- uses a bulk SMS platform³ to disseminate information and mobilise youth in all the wards, including for programme registration and feedback

Who does what in Tana River County

The Tana River YIEC is managed through existing structures in the Department of Youth, Sports, Gender & Social Services. KSG provides technical advice and assistance to find donor funding while UNDP supports the County with investment in equipment and activities, and the organisation of stakeholder meetings.

Results of the intervention

Tana River County launched a YIEC in Hola as a scaled-up version of Isiolo's YIEC, building on an existing Vocational Training Centre (VTC), while incorporating the empowerment and recreation aspects. In addition to channelling opportunities, it allows youth to get basic employment competency and skills. Youth can also meet their peers to socialise, play indoor games, engage in activities, and use it as a safe space.

The Tana River YIEC offers the following activities and resources, among others:

- **Hydroponic farming** was the first activity adopted from Isiolo. Finding a permanent water source and locally available hydroponic materials are a priority for the next phase.

3. The platform's name is *Sema Usikike*, meaning "speak and be heard" in Swahili.

- **Training in basic ICT application skills**, in partnership with Huawei for a three-week course.
- **VTC sports activities**, which will be developed further in the future.
- **Hospitality and catering**, which are new activities.
- **Start-up kits for graduating youth**, giving them the tools to start a business, and a WhatsApp group that allows youth to stay in touch after graduation.
- **Boda (motorcycle) repairs.**

As of December 2022, 1 800 youth had benefited from trainings in various programmes.

Two-way learning: How Isiolo County learned from Tana River

Isiolo County benefitted from the P2P exchange by learning about Tana River’s intervention and observing the close collaboration between the County Government and Tana River youth. Tana River’s CEC-M walked the youth through the steps of setting up the YIEC, whereas obtaining political buy-in has and continues being more difficult in Isiolo. There has been little input from Isiolo’s government apart from contributing space for rent, while in Tana River’s case, the YIEC space is owned by the County. As a result, the process in Isiolo was largely participatory and youth-driven, with centre management careful to ensure representation from all wards (e.g., choosing topics of focus through coffee talks that ranged from education to corruption and elections). This meant that there was no strong legal framework for the establishment of the centre and its long-term sustainability. In the short- to medium-term, UNDP and volunteers stepped in to manage and run the centre, but this limits the extent to which the centre can expand its activities.



Boda (motorcycle repair)



A sewing class in the centre

Tana River formulated a County Youth Inclusion Policy after representative consultations with youth from different wards, which gave them greater voice in running the YIEC and in other County affairs. The policy was formulated in partnership with the National Youth Council (NYC) and UNDP. Isiolo embarked on its youth policy process based on lessons learnt from Tana River, with County officials exchanging regular information and tacit knowledge on this topic. A WhatsApp group between the Counties was established and Isiolo developed a draft youth policy as a result.

Further, since the Tana River YIEC builds on an existing VTC, some courses offered there are certified by the National Industrial Training Authority (skills-based certification obtained through examinations). This practice was adopted in Isiolo, which had previously only offered short courses.

While Tana River County has actively sought partnerships with the private sector to provide employment opportunities for youth, most partners in Isiolo are government organisations. The Biashara fund is a new initiative in Isiolo to provide businesses with access to capital, based on learning from the experience of Tana River's Inuka fund.

Differences between Tana River's and Isiolo's practices

The YIEC reform in Tana River County differs from that in Isiolo in many regards including:

- **Practicalities regarding location** — Tana River County's YIEC is located in the periphery of Hola, the capital, and difficult to access as settlement density is concentrated along the river. The County Government intends to provide living quarters (i.e., hostels) in the YIEC to increase accessibility for students. This service would involve transport for youths from different towns and catering. In Isiolo, the YIEC is in a rental building in the centre of the town, which youth can reach on foot with greater ease. While Isiolo's YIEC has limited space for expansion, the one in Tana River has huge potential given the open land on which it is located.

- **Management of the centre, involvement of County Governments, and viability** — in Tana River, the YIEC is managed by a permanent County employee, while continued management in Isiolo hinges on youth volunteers, the UNDP and other partner organisations.⁴ Further, there is a higher level of County ownership in Tana River, with monetary costs shared among partners to a greater extent than in Isiolo. However, managing youth expectations in Tana River remains a challenge because many constituents want quick results while implementation often takes time due to delayed and inadequate funding.
- **Youth demand for services** — demand for the YIEC is higher in Isiolo than in Tana River, where the process is largely government-driven and youth need to be persuaded of the centre's usefulness. Apart from attending courses, few youth visit the centre spontaneously in Tana River for its recreation aspects. In contrast, the town-centre location of the YIEC in Isiolo makes it more convenient for youth in the city to visit.

Success factors for institutional reform in Tana River County

Despite similarities in both settings, Tana River County officials localised and customised the lessons from Isiolo's experience to reflect their unique challenges. Success factors included:

- **High level of political ownership and stewardship** of the reform process by H.E. Godhana Dhadho Gaddae, Governor of Tana River County, who championed establishment of the YIEC, which was included in his election manifesto and in the County Integrated Development Plan (2018-2022). This was accompanied by **a high level of County ownership, vision and funding** for the continuation and expansion of the YIEC.
- **Integration of the YIEC in an existing structure** of the Hola VTC created the opportunity for a one-stop shop for employment, empowerment, and recreation purposes.
- **Voice and representation for Tana River youth** through policy-dialogue forums and consultations, which involved choosing two youth leaders from each ward. There were also NYC youth trainings in policy development and benchmarking of policies in other Counties and a youth roundtable meeting with the Governor. This resulted in the development of a County Youth Inclusion Policy, whose initial draft led to the establishment of youth units in each County department and is awaiting reading by the County Assembly. Narok County is learning from Tana River on this topic. Despite these achievements, convincing youth to participate in the YIEC's activities (outside specific trainings or courses) remains a challenge.
- **Partnerships with KSG and UNDP** to design the centre, and operational partnerships for specific activities.⁵ UNDP plays a key role as intermediary and facilitator by linking different Counties that

4. Kenya Red Cross Society (MoU with KSG is in process), World Food Programme (WFP), Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Isiolo Peacelink, the National AIDS and STIs Control Programme (NASCO), Isiolo Community Empowerment and Environment Development (CEED), Huawei, and the Information and Communication Technology Authority (ICT) Authority

5. Operational partners in Tana River include but are not limited to the Ministry of ICT, Action Aid, WFP, Nawila, the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), CAP Youth Empowerment Institute, Kenya Sports Council, Ajira Digital, and Huawei.

seek to learn about ongoing YIEC-type interventions. It also sponsors benchmarking trips between Counties to inform youth programmes and policies, and supports activities through the UN Joint Devolution Programme. However, continued exchanges after the benchmarking trips are structured bilaterally rather than through long-term P2P learning exchanges.

Other resources for P2P learning about youth innovation and empowerment

- A P2P benchmarking trip took place over three days in April 2022, with Isiolo County representatives travelling to see how the YIEC concept was implemented in Tana River.
- Kajiado and Kilifi Counties expressed interest in Tana River's YIEC, especially regarding a one-stop shop approach integrating the YIEC into an existing VTC.
- Community-based organisations from Narok, Baringo and Nakuru Counties, and the County Governments of Marsabit, Garissa and Turkana expressed interest in Isiolo's YIEC.
- A WhatsApp group for Directors of Youth exists to exchange information on youth issues.
- A delegation from Busia County including their CEC-M, Chief Officer, and youth representatives visited Isiolo's YIEC, following a similar process as Tana River in terms of visit content and logistics. Busia also went on a benchmarking trip to Makueni County, which has an information and communications technology centre run by County staff affiliated with a university, IBM, and others.⁶ These exchanges were facilitated through UNDP.
- A delegation from the Council of Governors visited Isiolo's YIEC in October 2021 to document best practices in its establishment and operationalisation. A policy brief on establishing the YIEC was developed following the visit and has since been adopted by the Council.

References

Documents

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6. One of the strengths of the Makueni model is that there are satellite centers in the wards where they run digital courses. The County has also initiated mass digital literacy programmes.



Effective Institutions Platform

The Effective Institutions Platform (EIP) is an alliance of over 60 countries and organisations that support country-led and evidence-based policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and peer learning on public sector management and institutional reform. The purpose of the EIP is to contribute to the achievement of SDG16 and to advance the aid effectiveness agenda by serving as a global knowledge hub on peer-to-peer (P2P) learning approaches, and alternative and innovative approaches to public sector reform and institutional development.

The Council of Governors (CoG) is a Kenyan intergovernmental relations body established in the context of devolution and the establishment of the 47 County Governments which acts as a forum for sharing information on the performance of Counties in the execution of their functions with the objective of learning and promoting best practice, and where necessary, initiating preventive or corrective action. The Maarifa Centre acts as the knowledge and learning hub of the CoG. It documents and shares best practices emerging from County Governments and facilitates peer learning amongst County Governments on the implementation of their functions.

Effective Institutions Platform 2023

www.effectiveinstitutions.org