



# The Individual Youth-related Factors Influencing the Extent of Youth Engagement in Development Interventions in Western Kenya

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## **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses the factors affecting how much the youth are engaged in development programmes. Despite development interventions that the government and its partners have embarked on to promote youth development in Kenya, there is room for improvement in youth engagement. The study utilized a pragmatism research philosophy, incorporating qualitative and quantitative research methods within a mixed-methods research framework and concurrent triangulation research design. Using simple random sampling procedure, 329 youths were selected for the quantitative component, while 18 participants were selected purposively for the qualitative

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component. Quantitative data was collected through the survey method using interviewer-administered questionnaires, while qualitative data was gathered through key informant and in-depth interviews. Quantitative data were analysed statistically, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. Results show the highest proportion of respondents (41.7%) had low extent of engagement in development interventions. Individual youth factors such as the level of education ( $p=.0120$ ), age cohort ( $p=.027$ ), and locality ( $p=.010$ ), and level of independence ( $p=.05$ ) influenced the extent of youth engagement in development interventions. However, the gender of the youth, marital status, parental economic status, parental occupation and parental/guardians' level of education had no statistically significant relationship with the extent of youth engagement. Tailoring youth development interventions to the unique characteristics of all youths is recommended based on this paper's conclusion that low youth engagement was attributed to individual youth-related factors. Additionally, programme managers should encourage genuine youth involvement in all stages of interventions' development to ensure that they own interventions that target them.

*Keywords: Individual youth-related factors; youth; youth development; youth development intervention; youth engagement.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Youth engagement in development programmes is growing rapidly as an effective approach for enhancing youth development. This is because the approach has been linked to more positive outcomes [1,2,3]. Sociologically, youth denotes the transition between childhood and adulthood [4]. Article 260 of the Kenya Constitution (2010) and the Kenya Youth Development Policy (2019) define *youth* as both males and females in all categories who have attained the age of 18 but have not gone beyond the age of 35 [5,6]. According to [7], youth engagement refers to the meaningful participation and sustained involvement of the youth in activities that have a focus outside themselves.

From the above definition of youth engagement, a clear understanding of meaningful participation is desirable. According to [8] youth participation refers to a process where the youth, as active citizens, take part in, express views on, and have decision-making power about issues that affect them. Meaningful participation refers to the ability of the youth to work independently or on an equal basis with program managers at all stages of program development, including agenda setting, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation [9]. Thus, the involvement of the youth in co-creating interventions that affect them and their communities may also be implied [10]. Besides, meaningful participation creates and encourages positive and engaging experiences [11], and the belief is that participation can empower youths [12]. Genuine youth engagement exists when the youth are informed, consulted, given leadership opportunities, and have a say in making decisions. Thus,

juxtaposed against youth participation, youth engagement corresponds to higher rungs of youth participation where the youth share control and are regarded as co-creators of interventions that target them.

Youth development, on the other hand, is defined as a process that enables youth to progress along pathways to adulthood by providing them with the opportunities, support, programs, and services they need to acquire the social, cognitive, physical, civic, and vocational skills and abilities necessary to become fully functioning adults [13,14,15]. Thus, to be fully prepared for adulthood, youth need not only to be problem-free, but it is also necessary for them to develop other sets of competencies that go beyond academic qualifications and a reduction in problematic behaviour [16,17].

Kenya's 2010 constitution introduced county governments with more decentralized resources and opportunities for youth. As [18] observed, the youth can only contribute to realizing the aspirations of devolution when they are fully involved in designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating interventions that affect them and their communities. A disturbing revelation is that despite the progress made in addressing youth issues, the youth still experience myriad challenges [19,20]. These challenges persist despite specific interventions being in place to fix them.

Even though more research has been done, the focus has been on two categories of youth to comprehend youth engagement in interventions aimed at them: engaged and unengaged [21]. Whereas this method may help understand youth

engagement, it does not interrogate the nature of youth engagement and the factors that may affect the extent, and how it can be initiated, sustained, and moved to greater extents to produce desired youth development outcomes from development interventions. Therefore, this paper examines the nature of youth engagement and the key factors that significantly affect their meaningful and sustained involvement in development interventions.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Theoretical Foundation**

The argument in this paper was guided by the Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory and the Youth Engagement Model (YEM). The PYD theory and the YEM are valuable frameworks for guiding youth-related arguments. Using these ideals, this paper promotes better understanding and supports youth development that enables them to become productive and engaged members of society. Therefore, PYD theory rejects labelling youths as problems to be managed in favour of a viewpoint that treats them as assets that require nurturing [22,23]. Besides, PYD is based on critical principles in explaining the process that culminates in positive youth development. The principles recognize the youths' capacity for development and the need to involve them in ecologies, contexts, and nutrient-rich relationships for their growth [24]. More critical is the need to engage the youth in their development process, where they are treated as essential actors, particularly in engaging programmes. Therefore, PYD hints at what an ideal youth development process should look like, emphasizing youth engagement. While PYD clearly explains the youth development process, it does not clearly define the youth engagement process. Thus, introducing the Youth Engagement Model (YEM) helped explain youth engagement process based on the factors that influence how it is initiated, sustained, and moved to a vital stage, thus culminating into desired positive outcomes [25].

### **2.2 Empirical Literature**

This section presents a review of relevant literature on the factors influencing the extent of youth involvement in programs targeting them. Below, we will discuss a comprehensive analysis of the literature on the factors that influence the participation of young people in programs. The review focuses on individual youth-related factors linked to youth engagement.

#### **2.2.1 The influence of level of education on the extent of youth engagement**

Educational attainment of an individual youth could be instrumental in determining the extent of engagement in youth development interventions. Research has established that educational attainment is linked to youth engagement in a number of development programs [26]. For instance, higher education level has also been proved to be an important means that can enable the youth to take advantage of most of the available opportunities at their disposal [27]. Likewise, research has also showed that educated youths are better empowered to engage in youth development interventions particularly those that require specialized training [28,29,30]. On the contrary, previous research has also revealed that an increase in education level reduced the chances of youth engagement in agricultural programs, that is, more educated youth were unlikely to be engaged in agriculture and that agriculture was dominated by youth with lower level of education [31,32,33]. While these findings were limited to agricultural activities, it was crucial to determine whether education level among youth could influence their engagement across programmes in different sectors.

#### **2.2.2 Gender influence on the extent youth engagement**

Since males and females have different roles and responsibilities, gender may affect how much the youth are involved in development interventions. Despite the strides that have been made on gender issues, the concept of gender is still misunderstood as "women issues" even in areas where men are equally vulnerable [34]. A role is understood as an anticipated behaviour linked with a status while gender role refers to approved behaviour, attitudes and values that are considered appropriate for one's gender status and is determined by social norms [35]. Social norms govern people's behaviour in different situations and at the same time determine the responsibilities and privileges one may have in a given status.

Previous research has shown that gender roles prevent young women from actively participating in the production and sale of livestock [36]. In addition, young women and girls were unlikely to own land and livestock and, if they do, they can only do so through their husbands or fathers with limited control over their use. Similarly, [37] found that gender differences influenced the adoption of new beekeeping techniques. In addition, [38]

discovered that young women's participation in sweet potato production was hindered by limited access to land because the land tenure system favoured men. Besides, young women were less likely to be involved in horticulture cultivation than their male counterparts [39]. Therefore, the gender of the youth can likely affect how they are involved activities that target their needs. It was hence critical to understand how gender responsibilities and roles influence the extent of youth engagement, particularly in youth development programmes.

### **2.2.3 The influence of age on the extent of youth engagement**

The age of the youth is likely to affect the nature of their engagement in development interventions. Youth are defined differently depending on the organization or country, with the use of age category being the most common method. However, whichever way is adopted, differences still exist among youth [40]. There are youth in lower age ranges who are highly likely to have different needs compared with their counterparts in older age ranges [40]. Youth in the upper age category have more problem-solving skills than younger ones, leading to increased engagement in development interventions [41]. Similarly, available evidence has revealed that the youth in lower age range and those in the upper age range tend to have different commitments towards activities they are engaged in [42,43].

Moreover, youth in the upper age ranges are more likely to be engaged in multiple development programmes as opposed to the youth in the lower age cohorts, given the fact that those in the higher age ranges have increased self-consciousness, self-dependent and with better understanding of the importance of the initiatives that concern them for their personal and group gain [28,30]. However, these findings were contrary with the findings by [37] who found out that youth in lower age cohort were more likely to adopt new techniques in agriculture compared with their counterparts in higher age cohorts. The argument given by [37] was that as people grow old, they tend to become more conservative and, as such, are reluctant to adopt new methods of solving problems in society. Whereas this may be the case with those already in adulthood, it would be essential to establish if the same trend exists among the youth.

### **2.2.4 The role of family background on extent of youth engagement**

Research has shown that parental level of education, income and occupation play a vital role in the development of their children [44]. Family acts as a foundation through which the future of children is built given that the resources and opportunities that families make available for their children set them in various developmental trajectories [45]. As [46] observed, the youth who come from cohesive families have the potential to build high self-esteem which is a fundamental element in determining how they interact with the rest of the community members. Youth who have developed confidence in themselves, are likely to influence issues that affect them [46]. However, to develop this confidence, the youth require initial support from their families and the quality of support received is determined by individual family background. In other findings, youth from family backgrounds with highly educated parents are likely to develop better human capital, resilience, motivation and independent thinking skills which make them have positive development [47]. This difference could be the explanation for high retention rate and achievement of children from rich families which later on affect the level of their engagement in youth development interventions.

In summary, despite numerous studies being conducted, particularly with younger students in educational settings, there remained an ample opportunity for enhancing the understanding of out-of-school youths. A literature review has shown that most of these studies have been conducted in Western nations, primarily high-income countries. Consequently, conducting additional research in African contexts with a youth bulge was essential to produce localized evidence that could inform future youth engagement efforts. These challenges have raised questions about the nature of youth engagement and whether particular individual youth-related factors could likely influence the extent of youth engagement in development interventions.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a pragmatism research philosophy. According to [48], pragmatism adopts an ontological position suggesting no single 'correct' ontological understanding of the social world exists. Instead, there are multiple understandings of reality, each with some truth. As a result, pragmatism holds an epistemological

position often adopted in mixed methods research that aims to avoid the debates on positivism and interpretivism. It emphasizes practicality and prioritizes the research questions at hand. Thus, adopting this approach guaranteed the use of the most appropriate research methods to achieve the intended goal ultimately. From a philosophical standpoint, there is a well-established connection between mixed-methods research and pragmatism [49]. This link is premised on the fact that pragmatic paradigm provides a framework for designing and conducting mixed-methods research [50] and the freedom to combine quantitative and qualitative strands, which permit using quantitative and qualitative data to analyse the problem under investigation comprehensively [51].

The concurrent triangulation design was the most appropriate research design for assessing youth engagement in development interventions, as it allowed for corroboration, validation, and faster collection of field data [49,52]. It also permitted the offsetting of one method's weaknesses with the other's strengths and explaining convergence or non-convergence in the findings [53]. The study's primary aim was to analyse six youth development programs that focused on creating employment opportunities and enhancing the beneficiaries' capabilities in Homa Bay County. The programmes were designed to foster the growth of young people through enterprise development and equip them with the necessary skills to contribute to their community's development.

The quantitative strand utilized the survey method, while the qualitative phase involved the use of key informants and in-depth interviews as methods of data collection. Qualitative interviews provided in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, while the survey method allowed more respondents to provide quantitative data. Data collection for the quantitative strand of this study was conducted using interviewer-administered questionnaire, with the primary focus on out-of-school youth, some of whom had lower education levels. While the self-administered questionnaire method could have been suitable for literate and cooperating respondents, the interview-administered questionnaire method was deemed ideal for both the literate and illiterate respondents in this study's quantitative strand.

This study expertly used a simple random sampling technique to select 329 youth

respondents from a sampling frame using a computerized approach. Simple random sampling ensured that every youth had an equal opportunity to be included in the sample, making the results reliable and unbiased. For the qualitative component, nine program managers and five youth beneficiaries were purposefully selected from various development interventions, focusing on program coordinators and youth participants who demonstrated exceptional involvement in program activities. Four opinion leaders were also identified and selected using a strategic snowball sampling method.

Quantitative data were analysed using Chi-Square, frequency tables, and percentages. The chi-Square test of independence was appropriate in examining the relationship between the extent of youth engagement and its associated individual youth-related factors. When the cell counts were below five, the chi-square test of independence was deemed inappropriate, and Fisher's Exact Test was utilized instead. On the other hand, thematic analysis was employed to identify, analyse, and present patterns in the qualitative data. During the interpretation phase, the qualitative findings were merged with the quantitative results to achieve a complete understanding of the problem under investigation.

### **3.1 Measurement of Youth Engagement**

Youth Engagement was measured by computing the youth engagement index using data on the breadth, duration, and intensity of youth engagement. Elements used to generate the index included involvement in multiple activities, time dedicated to program activities, being involved during critical stages of program development, feeling satisfied with their involvement, and duration in the programme. Reliability analysis of the elements used in computing the index scores revealed a Cronbach's alpha of .8, indicating that they were internally consistent. SPSS version 26 automatically calculated each case's mean average score when computing the index. The index scores were classified as low, medium, or high extents of engagement. Of the 329 respondents, 41.7% reported a low extent of engagement in development interventions, 32.2% were moderately engaged, and 26.1% had a high degree of engagement. These statistics indicate that the highest proportion of respondents had low extent of engagement in development interventions.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1 Results

This section presents findings and their implications, as well as a discussion on youth-related factors that influence the extent of youth engagement in development interventions. Specifically, the focus is on individual youth characteristics like age, gender, education level, marital status, family background, locality, and family responsibilities as presented in the subsequent sections.

### 4.2 The Influence of Level of Education on the Extent of Youth Engagement

The study included youths with different levels of education. When the youth were asked to state their highest level of education attained, less than a half of the respondents 43.8% (144) had completed primary school education, 28.9% (95) had completed secondary education, 14.6% (48) had tertiary education (completed diplomas, certificate courses, or artisan courses, 3.6% (12) were university graduates, and 9.1% (30) had not completed primary school education or had no formal education. These statistics showed that most youths (81.8%) had secondary education and below, while a small proportion (18.2%) had tertiary or university education as shown in Table 1.

Although it was anticipated that the youth would have attained higher levels of education, the low levels of education among the respondents could be attributed to the fact that the target population consisted of out-of-school youth and only a few graduates. This target population excluded a significant proportion of youth enrolled in higher education institutions at the time of this study. Given the importance of education, particularly in the execution of programme activities that require technical know-how, a low level of education among the respondents could explain the overall low youth engagement in development programmes.

To establish the relationship between the level of education and the extent of youth engagement, a chi-square test of independence was conducted, and it revealed a statistically significant relationship between the level of education and the extent of youth engagement,  $\chi^2(8, N = 329) = 14.497, p = .012$ . This finding implies that the youth with higher levels of education were more likely to report higher extent of engagement compared with their counterparts with lower levels of education. Therefore, the youth with lower education levels or with no formal education could have missed out on some activities due the failure to meet some of the eligibility requirements.

**Table 1. Percentage of responses measuring association between education level and the extent of youth engagement**

Education Level Completed		Extent of Youth Engagement			
		Low	Medium	High	Total
No formal education	Frequency	18	9	3	30 (9.1%)
	%	60.0%	30.0%	10.0%	100.0%
Primary	Frequency	61	53	30	144 (43.8%)
	%	42.4%	36.8%	20.8%	100.0%
Secondary	Frequency	36	25	34	95 (28.9%)
	%	37.9%	26.3%	35.8%	100.0%
Tertiary	Frequency	20	16	12	48 (14.6%)
	%	41.7%	33.3%	25.0%	100.0%
University degree	Frequency	2	3	7	12 (3.6%)
	%	16.7%	25.0%	58.3%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>		<b>137</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>329</b>
		<b>41.7%</b>	<b>32.2%</b>	<b>26.1%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Qualitative results also revealed consistent findings indicating that the level of education of youths played a critical role in determining the extent of youth engagement in development interventions, given its potential to shape youths' characters and their worldview. Besides, more educated youth were believed to interact freely with their colleagues and easily incorporated into programme activities. More finding further indicated that the youth with lower or no education frequently encountered a language barrier, mainly when trainers unintentionally used the English language during training or general communication, especially on social media. Additionally, less-educated youths often took longer to embrace new technologies. Interestingly, some highly-educated youths neglected to share leadership positions and opportunities with their less-educated colleagues. They offered to do everything for their less-educated colleagues, such as applying for support from programmes and attending meetings, workshops, and training, thus compromising their engagement. As one of the programme managers remarked:

*Level of education has some influence because we use English inadvertently in our training. We may not consider much... We go into a meeting, and you may need to remember and start addressing the youth in English. But we try very hard to be as user-friendly as possible and sometimes speak the local language. But most of the time, some are generally disadvantaged. Those with a bit low education level take long in applying and adopting some of these new technologies. So, the level of education contributes to the overall output (KII-A02, Homa Bay, 2022).*

Weighing in on the dominance by more educated youth, one of the programme officers in one of the interventions also observed that:

*Education level can affect youth engagement in some way. For instance, in a group, we may have a few individuals who are more educated than others. We have learned that they want to stay in power and do not want to step down. In most cases, they always want to stay at the top and "babysit" the others. They do almost everything for them to prevent them from knowing how things are running (KII-F01, Homa Bay, 2022).*

### 4.3 Gender Influence on the Extent of Youth Engagement

The study recruited both male and female youth. Of the 329 respondents, more than a half (55.6%) were female, while the rest were male. Generally, most programme participants were young women living in rural areas who took advantage of the available programmes, even though some were specifically aimed at women. The female youths in this study were primarily unemployed. They stayed home while their male counterparts pursued employment opportunities such as casual work, office work, fishing, and the boda-boda business, among other jobs, which took them away from their homes. As a result, women were more likely to benefit from these programmes. Although male youths were equally engaged, it was found that some male youths were not as successful in their business enterprises as their female counterparts and defaulted on their loans. This failure explains why some male youths who were beneficiaries of the programmes were not available for interviews.

To further understand the relationship between gender of the youth and their extents of engagement, a chi-square test of independence was conducted between gender and the extent of youth engagement in development interventions. The result shows that there was no statistically significant relationship between gender of the youth and the extent of youth engagement in development interventions,  $\chi^2(2, N=329) = 1.119$ ,  $p = .571$ . This finding indicates that male and female youths were more likely to experience similar patterns of engagement. This assertion is supported by the pattern, and nearly similar numbers of both male and female youths in each extent of engagement as shown in Table 2.

Additionally, when probed to expound on how they thought being male or female influenced their involvement in development interventions, the highest number female youths reported that gender roles and responsibilities influenced their engagement in the programmes they were participants. They said that roles like caring for children, household chores, and other activities confined them within the home environment, thus limiting their access and sustained involvement in programme activities. Others pointed out conflicting programme activities and family duties, though some stated that the activities involved were familiar to them. Unemployment and the desire to provide basic needs to the family, strenuous programme activities, being

good managers of business enterprises, gender discrimination, harassment, and their spouses' involvement in all decision-making could also influence the nature of female youths' engagement in development interventions.

On the other hand, when asked a similar question, a small proportion of male youths said that the need to support their families influenced the nature of their involvement, as having other jobs made them spend less time on programme activities. Others stated that programme activities like digging trenches and fish ponds, unblocking blocked culverts, and constructing poultry houses, among other activities, required masculine power, and they were the ones who could do them. However, some male youths complained that sometimes they were overworked because of their physical strength, primarily when they were assigned responsibilities with their female counterparts. Still, other male youths believed that they were more flexible and had more resources to participate in programme activities than their female colleagues.

Moreover, female youths in agriculture also had limited access to land and finances. Inadequate access to land is a common practice in the study area where fathers tend to pass on land to their sons while neglecting their daughters. This bias in allocating land resources could disadvantage female youths who are unable to buy their land, thus negatively influencing their extent of engagement, particularly in the implementation of agricultural programme activities. For instance, a senior programme officer observed that:

*The female gender is in some way disadvantaged compared to the male gender because, for example, we find that the female gender has lower access to productive resources, such as land, and that almost all land belongs to males. Fathers pass on their land to males or their sons, but ladies do not inherit land except in isolated cases. Moreover, access to finance, you realize that many of these young people if you take a male and a female on access to finance, you find that male youths are more likely to go for that finance, leave alone getting it, going for it, looking for it. In an event where ladies are married, when they get loans—I mean, when they get money—they give it to their husbands so that they can plan together. So, the female is*

*somehow disadvantaged (KIIA02, Homa Bay, 2022).*

#### **4.4 The Influence of Respondents' Age Category on the Extent of Youth Engagement**

Considering that this study covered the entire age range for the youth, that is, 18 to 35 years, it was apparent that there would exist differences exhibited by junior and senior youths. Results show that 66.9% (220) of the youth were in the senior category, while 33.1% (109) were in the junior category. The higher number of senior youths was due to the focus on out-of-school youth and those who graduated from higher education institutions. Some programmes often recruit youth above 24 years, believing that most youths at this age have completed college and university education and are beginning to settle down. Some youths had also been in programmes for longer, which may have contributed to the higher proportion of senior youth.

Results from cross-tabulation show that within lower age category (18-26 years), 50.8% of the respondents had low extent of engagement while 37.3% had medium extent, and 11.9% scored high extent of engagement. On the other hand, 39.6% the youth in the upper age category had low extent of engagement, 31.1% had medium engagement while 29.3% had high extent of engagement. Between the age cohorts, of most respondents (91.9%) who reported high extent of engagement were senior youths. These findings showed that there were more junior youth who reported lower extent of engagement compared to senior youths.

A chi-square test of independence revealed statistically significant relationship between age cohort and the extent of youth engagement in development interventions,  $\chi^2 (2, N=329) = 7.205$ ,  $p = .027$ . This finding further indicates that youths in upper age category were more likely to have higher extents of engagement compared to their counterparts in lower age category. In comparison, there was higher proportion of junior youths in low extent of engagement compared to their senior colleagues.

More findings further suggested that age of respondents influenced their involvement. It emerged that junior youth were less devoted to programme activities because most of them were still receiving support from their parents or

guardians. As a result, they felt comfortable and were reluctant to dedicate their time and resources into the available opportunities. On the contrary, senior youth were more aggressive and focused since they relied on these programme activities for their livelihood. It also emerged that some programmes were particularly recruiting the youth who were out of school and had become of age. For instance, one of the youth leaders remarked during qualitative interviews that:

*Actually “they” (programmes) usually recruit from 25 years because they don’t include the youth in collage. So...the reason why we try to engage 25 is that they are done with education. Most of the time they are done with their degrees in college, have set their agenda in life and have the capacity to work. But engaging students is hard because in one season he/she is in, the following month he/she is in school. So, if “we” (programme) plan that this month is about training in budgeting, next month is about planning, the other month is about writing proposal, so you find you have done budgeting and during planning one is not there, maybe one is only in when schools are closed that is when he/she is available and when we were doing all these she/he was not in. So, that is the reason why we recruit those with above 24 years so that when doing all these trainings they are there full time (IDIA01, Homa Bay, 2022).*

The above notwithstanding, junior youth were also recommended to be the best suited for particular activities that senior youth may not execute with the expected vigour. For instance, roadshows may require youths in their twenties. One youthful programme staff noted that:

*Sometimes we normally go as per that age bracket (18-35 years) but sometimes we consider below 35years. I talked about dramaturgy groups, some people cannot do that when approaching 35 year, that is why we prefer those who are in their 20s (KIIG01, Homa Bay, 2022).*

Largely, the accounts from the qualitative component of this study and the survey results suggest that senior youth were more likely to have high extents of engagement in development interventions compared to their junior counterparts. Senior youths were described as assertive, focused, committed, and responsible. The fact that the majority of them had family

responsibilities made them even more dedicated to programme activities. Most of these programme activities were also described as major sources of livelihood, which further emphasized the reason behind their commitments.

#### **4.5 Youth Family background on Extent of Youth Engagement**

This section discusses the youths’ parental economic status, type of family, parental occupation, and education level of parents/guardians to illustrate how the youths’ family backgrounds influence the extent of their engagement in development programmes. The findings regarding parental economic status reveal that more than a half (53.2%) of the youths reported that their parents were middle income earners, while less than a half (46.8%) were low-income earners. These statistics show that all the respondents were from families categorized as medium-income earners and below.

A chi-square test of independence between the youth parental economic status and the extent of engagement revealed that there was no statistically significant association between the variables,  $\chi^2 (2, N=329) = 4.878, p = .087$ . This result shows that parental income status did not have significant influence on the extent of youth engagement. More respondents who considered their parents to be low-income earners turned out to report higher extents of engagement compared to their counterparts who considered their parents to be middle income earners. Furthermore, most of the respondents were already independent and had very limited ties with their parents. As such, parental economic status had negligible influence on the youth engagement in some of the development interventions.

Considering the type of family where the youth grew up, a large proportion of respondents 60.0% (197) reported that they grew up with both parents, single mothers 17.4% (57), orphaned 12.8% (42), single mother/father deceased 6.1% (20), single fathers 3.4% (11), 0.3% (one) was abandoned, and one was missing type of family. Further analysis shows that compared to the youth who grew up with their parents, those who grew up without both parents were more inclined to report higher extent of engagement, particularly the youth who grew up with single mothers or those who were orphaned.

Nearly all youths (95.5%) who grew up without both parents reported that they had family responsibilities, compared to 89.8% of the those who grew up with both parents. The level of responsibility could influence youth engagement in different ways. There were the youth who were driven by the number of responsibilities they had, while others were being constrained by other responsibilities which limited their engagement. Actually, youth who had family responsibilities had added commitments that affected their levels of engagement in programme activities. Because of additional family obligations, such youth were unable to be actively engaged in development initiatives. Some of them were even forced to utilize part of their investment for personal or family expenses rather than business expansion.

A Fisher's Exact Test was conducted to determine the association between the respondents' parental occupation and the extent of engagement. Results indicated that there was no statistically significant association between the two variables (two-tailed  $p = .433$ ). However, the youth whose parents were in salaried employment, crop farming, and casual work were more likely to have higher extents of engagement. On the other hand, there was a lower proportion of the respondents whose parents were in crop farming. These findings show that the youth whose parents were in crop farming, for example, were likely to show higher commitment because of the enhanced benefits they may have got from their parents or guardians. The youth perhaps rely on assets like land or agricultural supplies that had been established by their parents. In addition, some of the youth were engaged in these programme activities in order to improve their economic situation due to the low returns and unpredictability that are connected with agriculture and casual work in the research area.

Fisher's Exact Test also revealed that there was no significant association between the youths' guardians' level of education (two-tailed  $p = .180$ ),

mothers' level of education (two-tailed  $p = .732$ ), fathers' level of education (two-tailed  $p = .195$ ), and the extent of the youths' engagement in development interventions. These findings showed that an increase or decrease in education level among the youths' parents or guardians did not influence the extent of youth engagement in development interventions.

To establish the association between the youths' level of independence (autonomy) and the extent of youth engagement in development interventions, a chi-square test of independence was conducted, and it revealed a significant relationship between the level of independence and the extent of youth engagement,  $\chi^2 (2, N=329) = 6.008, p = .050$ . This finding shows that autonomous youth were likelier to report greater engagement than those living under someone. Enhanced engagement from autonomous youths could result from the freedom and responsibilities of being self-determining. While those still living under someone could require permission to attend programme activities, those who were free to make their own decision could be more flexible and available for programme activities.

Results from qualitative strand revealed mixed reactions from participants regarding the influence of the youths' family background on their engagement in development interventions. One of the emerging arguments was that during recruitment into the programmes, there was consideration for all youth without discrimination based on their economic backgrounds. However, in what could be considered a negative influence, most youths from 'wealthy' families were not frequent participants in most activities. If they did participate, they were passive. Therefore, it was entirely a class problem, with the youth from affluent families apprehensive about what others would think of them if they participated in such initiatives. The perception has been that the initiatives are sources of help for the underprivileged in society.

**Table 2. Percentage of responses measuring association between gender and the extent of youth engagement among youths**

Gender	Extent of Engagement			Total
	Low	Medium	High	
Male	57 39.0%	47 32.2%	42 28.8%	146 (44.4%) 100.0%
Female	80 43.7%	59 32.2%	44 24.0 %	183 (55.6%) 100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>137</b> <b>41.7%</b>	<b>106</b> <b>32.2%</b>	<b>86</b> <b>26.1%</b>	<b>329</b> <b>100.0%</b>

Equally, the youth from underprivileged backgrounds were also disadvantaged in some programmes that required them to meet certain conditions to be eligible for recruitment. For instance, some programmes required the youth to have active bank accounts with up-to-date bank statements and the latest group registration certificates, among other logistical issues that needed funds. However, even when this category of youth met such requirements, maintenance was an issue for some. As such, most youths from middle-income families dominated development interventions. In one of the key informant interviews, one youth officer noted that:

*In terms of parental economic background, those who come from stable economic backgrounds rarely join the groups. They rarely go for this funding, not that they don't want it; they want it ... deep down inside, they want it, but because of their status, they feel that if they go for such money, then how would society take them. So, most of the people we have are the middle class, and those in the lower class are now in the groups, but the middle class most of them are funded, but the lower class, most of them, are not funded. The reason is that for the lower class, even the money to register the group becomes an issue, and also the money to renew their certificate becomes an issue, even the money to save is an issue on their side...if they have the requirements, then to sustain those finance issues become an issue to them (KIIF01, Homa Bay, 2022).*

The youths' acquired attitude towards some programme activities could also have a bearing on the nature of youth engagement in development interventions. For instance, youths who grew up in families that practiced peasantry as their main economic activity could not easily be convinced that they could prosper through farming. However, youths from families who thrived in agriculture would likely embrace agriculture-based interventions. Moreover, families enlightened on entrepreneurial undertakings were likely to influence their youth to embrace business enterprise development opportunities. As one senior youth officer noted:

*Family background contributes a lot when it comes to accessing the fund, for instance the youth whose parents are enlightened on issues to do with business and general development. Even the way they reason is*

*different from those who have not gotten that kind of environment (KIIZ01, Homa Bay, 2022).*

Weighing in on the same issue, another programme officer explained that:

*Family background has really contributed much to the agricultural perception itself. Mostly you will find that the ones from poor backgrounds grow out of agriculture. And they cannot confidently say that they have been prosperous in it. We can attribute it to peasantry farming from their parents and discouragement from their family members from doing agriculture as they believe that agriculture cannot make someone prosper. But those from agricultural economic backgrounds are doing it very well and usually embrace it and want to take it to the next level. So, one's background works both ways. To some, it contributes negatively regarding attitudes toward agriculture but positively to others (KIIA01, Homa Bay, 2022).*

In addition, the youth from dysfunctional families were likelier to exhibit maladjustment in the public sphere. Thus, youth from dysfunctional family structures appeared dysfunctional when interacting with others because their experiences could have negatively impacted their perception of the world.

#### **4.6 Youth Locality and Extent of Engagement**

The study also considered the participants' rural or urban settings to evaluate the youths' involvement in development interventions. Results show that most youths reported living in rural areas (81.2%), while the rest were in urban residents (18.8%). This difference indicates that youth involvement with development programs was more predominant in rural areas than urban areas. This difference can be explained by numerous youth development programmes aimed at the disadvantaged in rural areas. Besides, many youths were involved in agricultural activities, primarily practiced in the rural areas where farming land exists.

To establish the association between respondent's locality and the extent of youth engagement, a chi-square test of independence was conducted, and it revealed that there was a significant association between locality and the extent of youth engagement in development interventions,  $\chi^2 (2, N=329) = 9.204, p = .010$ .

Youths from rural settings tended to have higher extents of engagement compared to their urban counterparts. For instance, cross-tabulation results show that within the youth from the rural area, 38.2% reported that they had low level of engagement compared with 56.5% of the youth from urban areas who had lower extent of engagement. This shows that a higher proportion of the youth who reported low extent of engagement were from the urban settings. On the other hand, out of the youth who reported high extent of engagement, 90.7% were from rural areas compared to 9.3% from urban areas as shown in Table 3.

The implication of the above findings is that the youth from rural area were more likely to have higher extent of engagement. Because most of the programmes targeted rural areas, it could explain why the youth in the rural areas were able to take advantage of the available opportunity. Moreover, some of the programme activities like agriculture, which the majority of the youths were involved in could only be implemented in the rural areas where farm land and space was available in plenty. However, some of the programmes situated in urban areas still attracted the youth who were residents of rural areas but could commute daily to a particular programme catchment area.

#### **4.7 Marital Status on the Extent of Youth Engagement**

This study also determined the influence of the youth marital status on the extent of youth engagement in development interventions. The findings showed that the majority of youth respondents (79.0%) were married, with 17.0% being single and the rest widowed or separated. Most had settled down and had families, with 92.4% having family responsibilities beyond self-care. Most respondents (82.6%) had households with more than four individuals, validating their obligations. These responsibilities pushed some youths to join development programmes, as they could accrue monetary gains.

A Fisher's Exact Test conducted to reveal the association between marital status and the extent of youth engagement, revealed no statistically significant association between marital status and youth engagement (two-tailed  $p = .127$ ). These findings imply that married and unmarried youth were engaged equally in most programmes. Since most of these programmes targeted youth, marital status was not a factor, as

the findings show that both unmarried and married youth showed similar engagement trends.

#### **4.8 Discussion**

This study found that the youth with higher levels of education were more likely to be more engaged than their counterparts with lower levels of education. More educated youth were more inclined to be engaged in programme activities that needed more technical know-how, given their confidence and the ability to grasp things faster, compared to their colleagues with lower levels of education. Additionally, highly-educated youth excelled in businesses due to their understanding of complex aspects like record-keeping, profit and loss computations, and programme terms and conditions. The findings of the current study are consistent with those of [27], who found that higher levels of education enable the youth to unlock various engagement opportunities; and [54] who established that the level of education influenced the nature of activities secured by individual youths. On the other hand, [55-57] found that lower education levels reduce productivity, hindering the adoption of efficient work approaches and technologies. Whereas this study found that more educated youth were more likely to engage in programme activities, studies by [31,32,33] found that higher education levels decreased youth engagement in agricultural programmes. This study also found that individuals with lower levels of education faced disadvantages during training or meetings if they needed to be proficient in English language, which could be used unintentionally.

Results also showed that the extent of youth engagement was significantly influenced by the respondents' age cohort. These findings are consistent with [41,42], who found that senior youths had more commitment to programme activities. Likewise, [57] argued that senior youth aged 27-30 were more likely to embrace social entrepreneurship compared to those in the age group 18-24 years. This study further found that senior youth were more assertive, focused, committed, and responsible and relied on some of the programme's activities for their livelihood. Moreover, the youth in the junior age cohort were also criticized for arrogance, unpleasant dress codes, and lack of seriousness in various programmes. Despite their weaknesses, younger youths were also recommended for activities that senior youth could not execute with the expected vigour, such as road shows.

**Table 3. Percentage response measuring the association between youth locality and the extent of youth engagement**

<b>Locality</b>		<b>Extent of Youth Engagement</b>			
		<b>Low</b>	<b>Medium</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Total</b>
Rural	Frequency	102	87	78	267
	% within Type of your locality	38.2%	32.6%	29.2%	100.0%
	% within Extent of Youth Engagement	74.5%	82.1%	90.7%	81.2%
Urban	Frequency	35	19	8	62
	% within Type of your locality	56.5%	30.6%	12.9%	100.0%
	% within Extent of Youth Engagement	25.5%	17.9%	9.3%	18.8%
<b>Total</b>		137	106	86	329
		41.7%	32.2%	26.1%	100.0%

Results further showed that youths from rural areas reported higher extents of engagement in development interventions their counterparts from urban areas. Nearly all respondents who reported high extent of engagement were from rural areas. This could be linked to the fact that most programmes were targeting rural areas with low-income youth, particularly female youth. This assertion is consistent with [43] who observed that rural communities were more likely to receive community engagement resources, thus increasing their chances of involvement. This study, for instance, found that agricultural programmes were typically confined to rural areas with enough farmland and open space. On the other hand, specific urban initiatives still manage to draw in rural youths who could commute to designated programme catchment zones daily.

This study found that gender did not significantly influence youth engagement, but more female youth were involved in most programme activities, particularly in agriculture, trade, and service industries. The insignificant gender influence could be due to gender mainstreaming policies requiring equal treatment for both genders during recruitment in the study area. Programmes were also implemented in rural areas, allowing female youth to take advantage of available opportunities, while male youths accessed opportunities elsewhere. Furthermore, most programmes also provided a wide range of activities, allowing male and female youths to have a diversified selection of options. This approach aimed to address gender disparities and ensure that no one gender was disadvantaged.

This study also found that family background, in terms of parental income, economic status, occupation, and education level all had no statistically significant influence on the extent of

youth engagement in development interventions. For instance, the youth who believed their parents were low-income earners reported greater engagement than their counterparts who believed they were middle-income earners. A large proportion of the youths who took part in this study were already autonomous and had minimal ties to their parents. Perhaps, this could be reason why some youths were unaffected by the economic status of their parents. On the contrary, the youth whose parents were in salaried employment, crop farming, and everyday work were more likely to have better engagement experiences. This enhanced involvement could result from the resources their parents made available to them, especially in agricultural programmes. Besides, working parents were unlikely to require support from their youths, leaving them with more resources to dedicate to the programme activities. Likewise, this youth category had more access to the programmes because of their parents' networks.

These findings are consistent with those by [58] who found that the socioeconomic status of parents had no bearing on the economic outcomes of their children; however, by instilling, through their examples, positive attitude toward work, parents can influence their children's future developmental outcomes. Moreover, [59] established no significant association between parental education and participation in entrepreneurial activities. However, [46] established that children from intact homes were more likely to develop high self-esteem. Likewise, the development of children can be influenced by factors such as parental education, income, and occupation [44]. Furthermore, [45] found that families play a fundamental role in shaping the future of young people by providing them with resources and experiences that guide their developmental paths.

In the light of mixed findings from previous studies, this study's qualitative strand also revealed mixed responses from participants regarding the influence of the youth's family background on their engagement in development interventions. It emerged that all youths were considered during recruitment into programmes, all youths were being considered without discrimination based on their economic background. However, the youth from underprivileged backgrounds were disadvantaged in some programmes that required them to have active bank accounts with up-to-date bank statements and the latest group registration certificates. Moreover, youths from families whose primary economic activity was farming, for instance, needed to be persuaded of the economic worth of farming as a means to success. On the other hand, the youth from agriculturally prosperous families were more inclined to embrace agriculture-based interventions.

The study found no significant link between family background and youth involvement, potentially because the group studied comprised the youth out-of-school. However, it is essential to acknowledge that families significantly shape children's experiences outside their home environment. While it is true that the majority of the participants in this study were senior youth and, as such, had limited ties with their family background, junior youths were likely to be influenced by family background. Therefore, this study argues that although most programmes engaged all youth equally, ties with family background must be selective. Junior youth may need their family more than senior youth to provide them with productive resources, guidance, and even permission to be engaged in programmes.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

This paper discussed individual youth-related factors influencing youth engagement in development interventions. It concludes that individual youth factors like the youth education level, level of independence, age cohort, and locality significantly influenced the extent of youth engagement. The youth with higher levels of education, more independent, those in the senior age cohorts, and those from rural areas were more inclined to report higher engagement in development interventions than their respective counterparts. However, gender, family background, and marital status had no significant

influence on the extent of youth engagement. Male and female youths, for instance, reported similar engagement patterns; however, the qualitative results revealed compelling evidence to suggest that gender roles and responsibilities played a significant role in influencing the extent of youth engagement.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

In order to address the problem of low youth engagement, this study suggests that programmes should make it a priority than it is now to involve the youth in multiple activities in programmes. Increasing the number of relevant activities responsive to the youths' needs could have a compensatory role such that developmental assets lacking in one activity are compensated in another, thus enhancing the breadth of engagement.

This study revealed that individual youth factors, such as age, locality, and level of education, and level of independence significantly influenced their engagement in development interventions. Therefore, it recommends considering these factors when developing interventions to ensure no youths are disadvantaged. Programmes should be designed in a way that reflect the unique characteristics of their beneficiaries—for instance, using a language that is comfortable for all youths, especially during training or when communicating on social media platforms.

This study also found that some female youths struggled to sustain their involvement in development programmes due to conflicting programme and family roles, the need to get parental or spousal permission for married female youths, biological, and childcare responsibilities. To effectively address these issues, programme managers must proactively develop robust mechanisms that facilitate easy access for female youths to training or program activities with their babies and caregivers if possible. Likewise, workshops or briefing sessions could also be helpful in reassuring parents or spouses of the safety and value of allowing the youth, particularly female youths to participate in development interventions.

## **7. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Given that this study targeted the youth-out-of-school who are engaged in selected

development interventions in a single county, it recommends that future inquiries should involve both the engaged and unengaged youth, youth in school, and youth out of school to examine further and compare the nature of their engagement. Conducting a similar study in multiple counties could be significant in understanding the nature of youth engagement nationwide and beyond. The results of a comprehensive study of this nature could greatly influence youth programs at a national level, considering the diverse needs of the youth in different regions.

## CONSENT

As per international standards or university standards, respondents' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

We received ethical approval from the Ethical Review Board at the United States International University in Kenya (REF: USIU-A/IRB/179-2021). The National Council for Science, Technology, and Innovation (NACOSTI-Kenya) permitted us to conduct our research (Ref. No: 825293).

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## COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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