UNIVERSITY OF LUSAKA

FACTORS HINDERING GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS FROM REDUCING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT: A CASE OF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT UNDER THE CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT FUND IN KAZIMOLWA WARD

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND TECHNOLOGY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LUSAKA IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR OFARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES.

BY

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Declaration

I Mclean Namwinga Hereby declare that the study conducted on exploring Factors Hindering Government interventions and that all the sources used or quoted were acknowledged by means of complete references, this dissertation is a result of my own work, and has never been submitted to this University and any other University and any work borrowed from other sources have been acknowledged.

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Dedication

This Research work is dedicated to God Almighty for giving me sufficient strength, grace and endurance. I extend my dedication to my daughter, friends and family for financial and academic support rendered to me during this journey, Without God, none of this would have been possible.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all those who contributed to the successful completion of this research. First and for almost, I thank Almighty God for His Grace and strength throughout this academic journey.

My profound appreciation goes to my Supervisor, for his invaluable guidance, constructive feedback, and unwavering support during the research process. His scholarly insights greatly enriched this work.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to the department of development studies, University of Lusaka, for the academic foundation and resources provided throughout my studies. special thanks to the Head of Department and all lecturers for their mentorship.

I am deeply indebted to the respondents in Kazimolwa ward, the youths, CDF committee members, government officials, and community leaders who generously shared their time, experiences and insights without their cooperation, this study would not have been possible.

I also acknowledge the authors and scholars whose works I have cited, and all institutions that provided secondary data and literature. Any errors or omissions remain my sole responsibility.

Abstract

The study focused on the factors hindering the effectiveness of the CDF Youth Empowerment Programme in reducing youth unemployment in Kazimolwa Ward in Mbala District, Zambia. The study objectives were to assess the effectiveness of the Constituency Development Fund in implementing youth empowerment designed to reduce Unemployment, identify factors affecting the effective implementation of Youth Empowerment initiative under the Constituency Development and strategies to enhance the effectiveness of Constituency Development Fund to reduce youth unemployment in Kazimolwa Ward, Mbala district. Using a descriptive case study design, the study employed mixed methods, including questionnaires administered to 72 youth, in-depth interviews with 20 key informants, focus group discussions, and document review. Data were analysed thematically and through descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that the CDF's implementation in Kazimolwa Ward is hampered by multiple factors: limited awareness among youth, bureaucratic application processes, perceptions of unfair and politicised beneficiary selection, gender biases, and inadequate post-disbursement support. Beneficiaries reported insufficient capital, lack of business skills training, poor market access, and absence of mentorship and monitoring. These challenges collectively undermine the programme's potential to foster sustainable youth entrepreneurship and employment. The study concludes that the CDF, in its current form, functions as a fragmented financial disbursement mechanism rather than a holistic empowerment programme. To enhance its effectiveness, there is a need for integrated interventions that combine simplified procedures, transparent governance, capacity building, mentorship, and market linkages. The study recommends administrative reforms, capacity training for CDF committees, gender-sensitive approaches, and the establishment of a supportive ecosystem for youth enterprises. This research contributes to the discourse on decentralised development and youth empowerment in Zambia, offering evidence-based insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and local authorities to redesign and implement more effective youth-centred interventions. From the findings recommendations were, that the government to simplify the CDF application process by developing standardised, pictogram-assisted forms and local-language guides to make them accessible to youth with varying literacy levels. Further institutionalise absolute transparency by publicly displaying selection criteria, scoring mechanisms, and final beneficiary lists with justifications at prominent community centres.

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List of Acronyms

AfDB	–	African Development Bank
CDF	–	Constituency Development Fund
FGD	–	Focus Group Discussion
GRZ	–	Government of the Republic of Zambia
IDI	–	In-Depth Interview
ILO	–	International Labour Organization
LGAZ	–	Local Government Association of Zambia
M&E	–	Monitoring and Evaluation
SPSS	–	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UNDP	–	United Nations Development Programme
UN	–	United Nations
ZamStats	–	Zambia Statistics Agency

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Overview

Youth unemployment remains one of the most pressing socioeconomic challenges confronting developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where population growth continues to outpace job creation. In Zambia, this issue is compounded by structural limitations in the economy, dependence on the informal sector, and inadequate industrial diversification. Despite multiple policy interventions, including the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), youth unemployment remains persistently high. The CDF was designed as a decentralization tool to foster community-led development and economic empowerment. However, in practice, challenges related to implementation, accountability, and resource management have constrained its effectiveness. This study investigated factors hindering the success of youth empowerment initiatives under the CDF in reducing unemployment in Kazimolwa Ward in Mbala district, thereby contributing to evidence-based local governance and policy reform.

1.2 Background of the Study

Globally, youth unemployment has emerged as a significant development challenge undermining economic stability and social cohesion. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), youth are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults, with the global youth unemployment rate standing at approximately 13%. This problem transcends income levels and national boundaries, affecting both developed and developing economies. The structural mismatch between education systems and labor market needs has been identified as a major contributing factor (OECD, 2020). Consequently, youth unemployment has become a central policy issue within the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly under Goal 8, which seeks to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all (United Nations, 2015).

In sub-Saharan Africa, the challenge of youth unemployment is particularly acute due to rapid demographic expansion and limited absorptive capacity of formal labor markets (Filmer & Fox, 2014). Each year, millions of young people enter the labor market with little prospect of formal employment, resulting in widespread underemployment and poverty (Baah-Boateng, 2016). The African Development Bank (AfDB, 2016) estimates that more than 10 million young Africans enter the job market annually, yet only a fraction secure formal jobs. Structural economic constraints, including weak industrial bases, low technology adoption, and limited private sector growth, have further exacerbated the problem. Consequently, youth unemployment in Africa is both a developmental and a security concern, as it fuels social instability and migration pressures (African Union, 2020).

In Zambia, youth unemployment has persisted despite numerous policy interventions and national development strategies. The Zambia Statistics Agency (ZamStats, 2022) reported that youth unemployment stands at approximately 17.6%, significantly higher than adult unemployment. The causes are multifaceted, including limited access to credit, inadequate entrepreneurial support, and skills mismatches between education and industry demands (Nyirenda and Chileshe, 2021). The Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) has sought to address this challenge through policies such as the Seventh National Development Plan (7NDP), which emphasizes youth empowerment and job creation (GRZ, 2017). Despite these commitments, implementation gaps and weak institutional coordination continue to hinder meaningful progress toward reducing unemployment among the youth population.

The Zambian government's National Youth Policy (Ministry of Youth, Sport and Arts, 2019) recognizes youth as a critical asset in national development. It emphasizes entrepreneurship, innovation, and skills training as pathways to self-employment and economic inclusion. However, youth unemployment persists due to inadequate institutional support and limited access to productive resources (Chisanga & Chansa, 2019). The policy framework advocates for decentralized implementation through local governance structures, including the use of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) as a vehicle for youth empowerment. In principle, this approach aligns with global best practices in decentralization and community-driven development, yet the expected outcomes remain largely unrealized in several rural constituencies, including those in Northern Province (Simukonda, 2021).

The CDF, introduced in Zambia in 1995 and reformed under the CDF Act No. 11 of 2018, aims to devolve financial resources to constituencies to support local development priorities (GRZ, 2018). It is anchored in the principle of participatory governance, enabling communities to identify and implement projects that directly address local needs. Among its core objectives is to promote youth empowerment through grants, skills development, and entrepreneurship support (Bwalya, 2018). However, despite these objectives, implementation challenges have emerged, including delays in fund disbursement, lack of technical oversight, and political interference. These factors have led to suboptimal utilization of the CDF, diminishing its capacity to deliver sustainable economic outcomes (ZIPAR, 2022).

Empirical studies have indicated that the effectiveness of decentralized development funds depends heavily on administrative efficiency, transparency, and local participation (Smoke, 2015). In the Zambian context, bureaucratic inefficiencies, limited community engagement, and weak monitoring mechanisms have constrained the performance of the CDF (Simukonda, 2021). For instance, project selection often lacks inclusivity, and youth groups face difficulties accessing funds due to procedural complexity and inadequate guidance (Sakala & Chileshe, 2021). As a result, youth empowerment outcomes have remained minimal, with many beneficiaries failing to translate grants or training into sustainable livelihoods. These systemic weaknesses underscore the need for a critical assessment of the factors impeding CDF's effectiveness in addressing youth unemployment.

Kazimolwa Ward, located in Mbala District, Northern Province, reflects these national trends. The ward is predominantly rural, with limited access to formal employment and a reliance on subsistence agriculture (Mbala District Council, 2022). Youth in the area face multiple challenges, including low literacy levels, poor access to markets, and limited exposure to entrepreneurship opportunities. Although CDF allocations have been made available for youth empowerment projects, anecdotal evidence suggests that the intended objectives are not being achieved. High unemployment rates, coupled with rising social issues such as substance abuse and early marriage, indicate that current interventions may not be effectively addressing the root causes of youth marginalization (Simukonda, 2020).

The decentralization of resources through the CDF theoretically enhances accountability and local ownership of development initiatives (Chinsinga, 2017). However, in practice, local-level political dynamics and capacity gaps often distort implementation outcomes. Studies from Malawi and Kenya have shown that local development funds can be politicized, undermining equitable resource allocation (Mushi, 2020; Mwangi, 2019). In Zambia, similar patterns have emerged, where CDF committees are often influenced by political interests rather than community priorities (Bwalya, 2018). Such tendencies erode public confidence and limit the inclusivity of youth empowerment programs. Consequently, young people in rural wards like Kazimolwa are left disillusioned, perceiving empowerment initiatives as inaccessible or biased.

Economic theory provides further insight into the structural persistence of youth unemployment. The insider–outsider theory (Lindbeck & Snower, 1988) posits that labor market segmentation favours incumbent workers, marginalizing new entrants such as youth. Similarly, efficiency wage theory (Shapiro & Stiglitz, 1984) suggests that employers may pay higher wages to retain productivity, thereby discouraging recruitment of inexperienced youth. These theoretical frameworks highlight the systemic nature of youth unemployment, which cannot be resolved solely through financial injections like the CDF. Instead, comprehensive approaches integrating skills development, mentorship, and market linkages are necessary to create meaningful employment pathways (Pissarides, 2000).

From a development perspective, youth empowerment represents both a process and an outcome. Zimmerman (2000) conceptualizes empowerment as enhancing individuals' control over their lives and their capacity to act on issues that affect them. In the economic context, empowerment involves providing youth with access to resources, skills, and opportunities that enable productive participation in society. However, in Zambia, this process has been hindered by inadequate coordination between government institutions and weak integration of empowerment programs with broader economic policies (Sakala & Chileshe, 2021). Consequently, despite the expansion of CDF allocations, the anticipated transformative impact on youth livelihoods remains limited.

The World Bank (2020) emphasizes that effective youth employment interventions require a multi-sectoral approach integrating education, entrepreneurship, and social protection. Isolated initiatives, such as one-off grants, often fail to produce sustainable outcomes without complementary support systems. In Kazimolwa Ward, youth empowerment under the CDF tends to emphasize short-term financial assistance rather than holistic capacity building. This approach overlooks structural barriers, including inadequate mentorship, limited access to technology, and lack of follow-up mechanisms (ZIPAR, 2022). Consequently, many beneficiaries struggle to sustain their enterprises, resulting in a cycle of dependency and disillusionment among the youth population.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite Zambia's policy emphasis on decentralization and youth empowerment, unemployment among young people remains persistently high (Simukonda, 2021). The CDF, restructured to support youth entrepreneurship and skill development, was intended to stimulate local employment creation. However, empirical observations suggest that its implementation has not yielded the expected outcomes in Kazimolwa Ward (Simukonda, 2021). As a result, most beneficiaries fail to sustain their businesses beyond the initial grant period, thereby perpetuating the unemployment crisis. This disconnect raises critical questions about the efficiency and effectiveness of youth empowerment initiatives under the CDF framework.

According to ZIPAR (2022), administrative delays, complex application processes, and inadequate dissemination of information often deter eligible youth from participating in CDF programs. Moreover, socio-cultural constraints—such as limited community support for youth entrepreneurship and gender disparities—further reduce program inclusivity. These issues point to underlying governance and design flaws within the CDF mechanism. Consequently, without addressing these structural and contextual limitations, the fund's potential to generate meaningful employment will remain unrealized, thereby undermining the broader objectives of national youth empowerment and economic development.

Evidence from similar decentralization schemes in other African countries underscores the importance of institutional accountability and local participation (Chinsinga, 2017; Mwangi, 2019). That could be achieved through monitoring, coordination between stakeholders, and presence of performance evaluation frameworks to have project sustainability. Youth groups often receive inadequate technical guidance, leading to mismanagement of resources and failed ventures. Furthermore, political impartiality in fund distribution promotes equity and transparency (Bwalya, 2018). Such would win public trust in the CDF and discourage broader youth engagement. Therefore, identifying and addressing these hindrances is essential to optimizing the CDF as a tool for reducing youth unemployment.

Given the strategic role of youth in Zambia's demographic and economic transformation, failure to effectively empower this segment poses significant developmental risks. Persistent unemployment not only wastes human capital but also exacerbates social problems such as poverty, crime, and substance abuse (Simukonda, 2020). The situation in Kazimolwa Ward exemplifies these challenges, where limited employment prospects have intensified social vulnerability among young people. That study thus sought to explore the underlying factors that constrain the CDF's capacity to deliver sustainable youth employment outcomes. By doing so, it aimed to generate insights that can inform policy reform and enhance the impact of decentralization-driven empowerment initiatives.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1.4.1 General Objective

The general objective was to investigate factors that hindered government interventions from effectively reducing youth unemployment in Kazimolwa ward in Mbala district.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following objectives were to:

a) Assess the effectiveness of the Constituency Development Fund in implementing youth empowerment designed to reduce Unemployment in Kazimolwa Ward, Mbala district.

b) Identify factors affecting the effective implementation of Youth Empowerment initiative under the Constituency Development Fund in Kazimolwa ward, Mbala district.

c) Identify strategies to enhance the effectiveness of Constituency Development Fund to reduce youth unemployment in Kazimolwa Ward, Mbala district.

1.5 Research Questions

a) How effective was the Constituency Development Fund in implementing youth empowerment designed to reduce Unemployment in Kazimolwa Ward, Mbala district?

b) What factors affected the implementation of Youth Empowerment initiative under the Constituency Development Fund in Kazimolwa ward, Mbala district?

c) What strategies were there to enhance the effectiveness of Constituency Development Fund to reducing youth unemployment in Kazimolwa Ward Mbala district?

1.6 significant of the Study

The significance of studying the factors hindering government interventions aimed at reducing youth unemployment in Kazimolwa Ward, Mbala District, lies in its potential to inform policy adjustments and improve outcomes. - Identifying specific challenges faced by the youth in Kazimolwa Ward, allowing for targeted interventions. Evaluating the effectiveness of current government programs and initiatives. Providing insights for policymakers to develop more effective strategies for youth employment. Enhancing economic growth and development in Mbala District through reduced unemployment.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study focussed on factors that hindered government interventions from effectively reducing youth unemployment in Kazimolwa ward in Mbala district. The study targeted youth beneficiaries of CDF as government intervention using qualitative research methods to gather data on the experiences and perspectives of the residents.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study were characteristics of qualitative design or methodology which impacted or influenced the normal flow of the study which restricted the conclusion of the study (Meredith et al, 2003) in dissertation carried out by Chritine, (2017:7). In that case, the potential limitations or weaknesses identified for the study included a small sample size, which reduced generalisation, and limited time spent in the field (Creswell, 2014). Since the research, confined to a case of Mbala District, findings may not be generalised to all the local councils in Zambia. Within the study's data collection techniques, possible limitations included participants' potentially inaccurate responses to the questionnaire and interviews as well as potential reflexivity in seeking to provide responses that would be acceptable to the interviewer (Creswell, 2014).

1.9 Definition of key terms

Implementation-putting a plan on how to spend constituency development fund

Constituency-an area in Mbala whose voters elect a representative to legislative body

Decentralization- authority given to local people to make decision how to spend constituency development fund

Kazimolwa- name of a ward in Mbala District

Mbala – a district in Northern part of Zambia

Empowerment- financing- youth groups in Mbala

Intervention- measures put in place by the government to mitigate youth unemployment

Youth-any persons aged 15-35 years

1.10 Organization of the Study

The study was organized into six chapters, each addressing key aspects of the research

Chapter One: Introduction - This chapter provides the overall introduction to the study, including the background, problem statement, research objectives, and significance of the study. It sets the context for the research and outlines the purpose and scope of the investigation.

Chapter Two: Literature Review - This chapter reviews relevant literature to explore previous research, theories, and policies related to the study.

Chapter Three: Methodology - This chapter outlines the research methods employed in the study, including the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. It provides justification for the selected methods and addresses ethical considerations.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation- The chapter outline data collection, presentation of results and discussion of the findings of the study

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendation- This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study. The chapter shall also make appropriate recommendations arising from the study. The research sought to find out on the experiences of male victims of gender-based violence

1.11 summary

This chapter introduces the persistent challenge of youth unemployment in Zambia, focusing on the effectiveness of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in Kazimolwa Ward. Despite CDF's decentralized design to empower youth through grants and skills training, unemployment remains high. The study identifies critical gaps in implementation, accountability, and local governance that hinder the programme's success. It outlines specific objectives to assess CDF's implementation extent, identify associated challenges, and gather views on improvement strategies. By investigating administrative, socio-cultural, and economic barriers, the research aims to provide evidence-based insights for policy reform and enhanced youth empowerment, ultimately contributing to more effective local governance and sustainable employment solutions.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Overview

This chapter reviews existing literature relevant to the study's focus: the factors hindering government interventions, specifically the Constituency Development Fund (CDF), from reducing youth unemployment. The review is structured to first explore the conceptual underpinnings of youth empowerment and decentralized development funding. It then critically examines the implementation of CDF-like programs globally and within Zambia, before analyzing the specific barriers to their success, such as administrative bottlenecks, socio-cultural factors, and skills mismatches. The chapter also presents a revised conceptual and theoretical framework to ground the study and concludes by identifying the research gap this study aims to fill.

2.1 Empirical review

This review examines empirical and scholarly work on CDF and similar localised empowerment funds, focusing on their effectiveness in reducing youth unemployment at global, African, and Zambian levels**.**

2.2 Implementation of Youth Empowerment under CDF

Youth unemployment continues to be a critical development challenge globally, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where young people face limited access to formal employment. Governments and development partners have experimented with various interventions to empower youth economically and reduce unemployment, including decentralized funding mechanisms such as Constituency Development Funds (CDFs). CDFs are public funds allocated directly to local constituencies to implement community-driven development projects, including youth empowerment programmes.

However, the implementation of youth empowerment under CDF programs has emerged as a pivotal concern in contemporary development discourse, reflecting both the promise and complexity of translating policy frameworks into measurable socio-economic outcomes. Scholars such as Cardoso and Souza (2017) argue that effective Constituency Development Fund in implementing youth empowerment designed to reduce Unemployment program requires deliberate alignment between educational content and the evolving demands of the labour market. In line with forgone, a study was done by Plan international revealed that financial literacy training provided young people with the capability to finance their futures and be aware of the difference between needs and wants. The ultimate goal for empowering the youth's on financial literacy was to disrupt the progression of economic poverty by empowering the youth with practical skills that could help them understand entrepreneurship, at the same time giving them a sense of hope and interest in participating in self-employment as effective career options (Plan International Report, 2012). The report revealed that groups which had adopted the financial literacy trainings involving monetary savings influenced the fight against youth unemployment, by supporting young people to participate more effectively in market opportunities and also through lessening these challenges to entrepreneurship. The Study concluded that Youth entrepreneurship and savings were approaches that share common methodologies and goals thus, incorporating financial education and activities help youth make good financial decisions (Plan International Report, 2012).

Elsewhere in Brazil, their analysis of vocational empowerment schemes revealed that government interventions through youth empowerment designed with market-oriented training modules substantially improved youth employability, especially when coupled with private-sector partnerships. This underscores that the success of youth empowerment initiatives is less dependent on resource volume and more on strategic coherence between design, delivery, and contextual relevance.

Complementing this argument, Heckman, Humphries, and Kautz (2010) in the United States provide compelling empirical evidence that comprehensive implementation models—those integrating formal education, technical skill acquisition, and psychosocial mentorship—outperform narrowly focused programs. Their longitudinal study revealed that youth who benefited from such multi-dimensional interventions demonstrated not only higher employment rates but also greater resilience in maintaining long-term job stability. This holistic approach validates the notion that youth empowerment requires a continuum of support rather than episodic engagement.

Globally, implementation frameworks that emphasize adaptability and participatory approaches have been found to yield superior outcomes. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019), implementation of youth empowerment programs that engage beneficiaries in planning and monitoring processes enhance ownership and sustainability. This participatory ethos ensures that interventions are grounded in local realities rather than externally imposed models. Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021) underscores that capacity-building initiatives must integrate both hard and soft skills, including digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and civic engagement, to prepare youth for dynamic socio-economic landscapes.

African perspectives further illuminate the nuances of implementation in resource-constrained settings. A study by Muriithi (2018) on Kenya's Youth Enterprise Development Fund found that despite strong policy intent, weak coordination among implementing agencies often diluted program impact. Funyula Constituency Case: Mang'eni (2010) investigated determinants of youth participation in CDF projects, noting that demographic, economic, knowledge, and political factors shaped youth involvement. Although youths were present in project management committees, representation in key decision structures was low, indicating tokenistic participation rather than leadership roles. Mbulo (2015) also documented that youth participation was very low, with many youths unaware of CDF objectives. Participants were often relegated to physically demanding manual tasks (e.g., road construction) rather than entrepreneurial or job creating initiatives, highlighting a disconnect between CDF program design and youth employment needs.

The study emphasized that inter-ministerial collaboration, coupled with robust monitoring systems, was essential to avert duplication and ensure accountability. Likewise, Adegboyega (2020) noted that in Nigeria, successful implementation of youth empowerment programs was contingent upon consistent funding flows, local government engagement, and a clear framework for evaluating outcomes.

In Southern Africa, evidence from Zimbabwe and South Africa illustrates that decentralization enhances program responsiveness when accompanied by strong institutional capacity (Mutema, 2021). Decentralized youth schemes that empower local councils to manage funds have demonstrated increased adaptability to community needs. However, Mutema cautions that decentralization without capacity-building risks entrenching inefficiency and local elite capture, thereby undermining the very empowerment objectives such programs seek to advance.

In the Zambian context, the implementation of youth empowerment programs such as the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) and the Youth Empowerment Fund (YEF) has been the subject of critical scrutiny. Siankosa (2020) highlights that although these programs are well-intentioned, their execution often suffers from protracted delays in fund disbursement, which disrupts project cycles and diminishes youth confidence in government-led initiatives. This administrative inertia reflects a broader governance challenge wherein bureaucratic inefficiencies dilute the transformative potential of empowerment programs.

Similarly, the Zambia Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (ZEGEMAP, 2019) observed that inadequate transparency and weak accountability frameworks have eroded public trust in the CDF mechanism. The report documented cases where funds allocated for youth projects were either misappropriated or diverted to unrelated expenditures, exposing systemic governance weaknesses. Such institutional failures not only constrain project outcomes but also perpetuate youth disenfranchisement, thereby undermining national development aspirations.

A related study by Kunda and Lungu (2021) found that implementation inefficiencies are exacerbated by limited stakeholder participation at the grassroots level. In many constituencies, youth groups reported that project selection processes were dominated by political actors rather than community consensus. This politicization of empowerment initiatives results in skewed resource allocation, where projects serve political visibility rather than developmental merit. The authors recommend institutional reforms that embed participatory budgeting mechanisms to foster inclusivity and accountability.

Another dimension of implementation challenges in Zambia pertains to capacity deficits among implementing agencies. According to Banda and Mumba (2022), many district-level youth offices lack adequately trained personnel to manage program cycles—from proposal evaluation to project monitoring. The absence of technical expertise not only delays project appraisal but also compromises the quality of outputs. Effective implementation thus necessitates sustained investment in institutional capacity development and professionalization of youth service delivery structures.

Moreover, donor-funded initiatives have highlighted the benefits of integrating technology into youth program implementation. A World Bank (2020) evaluation of the “Skills for Youth Employment” project in Zambia revealed that digital monitoring platforms significantly improved transparency and accountability by enabling real-time tracking of disbursements and outcomes. Such technological innovations reduce opportunities for corruption and enhance data-driven decision-making, ensuring that interventions remain responsive and evidence-based.

However, despite these innovations, the sustainability of empowerment programs remains a persistent concern. Nambala and Chanda (2023) argue that most Zambian youth projects lack post-implementation support mechanisms, leading to high attrition rates among beneficiaries once initial funding ceases. Without structured mentorship, market linkages, and continuous skills upgrading, many youth enterprises collapse prematurely. This highlights the necessity for program designs that incorporate long-term sustainability frameworks rather than one-off funding cycles.

Furthermore, the role of community ownership in implementation cannot be overstated. Chileshe (2019) found that programs embedded in community-based structures—such as cooperatives and youth clubs—tend to demonstrate higher survival rates than those externally driven by government agencies. This is because local ownership fosters a sense of accountability, collective responsibility, and social cohesion, which are essential ingredients for sustaining empowerment outcomes over time.

From a policy perspective, the integration of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems within implementation processes is indispensable. According to the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2020), the absence of coherent M&E frameworks in youth programs across

Sub-Saharan Africa has impeded learning and adaptive management. In Zambia, most empowerment initiatives lack systematic feedback loops to assess performance and adjust strategies accordingly. Establishing robust M&E systems would not only strengthen transparency but also ensure continuous improvement in implementation efficiency.

Recent policy reforms under Zambia's decentralization agenda have attempted to address some of these shortcomings. The Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Arts (2024) introduced new guidelines mandating participatory project selection and digital reporting mechanisms for all CDF-supported youth initiatives. Preliminary observations suggest improved coordination between local councils and youth beneficiaries, though challenges in capacity and resource distribution persist. These reforms represent a positive step toward institutionalizing accountability and participatory governance within the youth empowerment ecosystem.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of youth empowerment programs in Zambia and beyond depends on the convergence of four critical elements: coherent policy design, institutional capacity, participatory governance, and sustainable financing. International experience demonstrates that where these elements are harmonized, empowerment programs have the potential to transform not only individual livelihoods but also community development trajectories (UNDP, 2022). Thus, the focus of future research and policy should shift toward refining implementation mechanisms that balance efficiency, equity, and sustainability to realize the full promise of youth empowerment.

2.3 Factors affecting youth empowerment programmes (CDF)

The implementation of youth empowerment programs across developing and developed contexts continues to face a constellation of interrelated challenges, encompassing structural, contextual, and demographic dimensions. Scholars have emphasized that these challenges are not merely operational but also systemic, reflecting deep-seated governance, policy, and socio-economic constraints. In Zambia, for example, Siankosa (2020) and the Zambia Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (2019) highlight persistent administrative weaknesses such as limited financial transparency, inadequate accountability mechanisms, and bureaucratic inefficiencies in accessing funds. These structural obstacles not only delay project execution but also foster frustration among youth beneficiaries, who perceive empowerment schemes as politicized or inaccessible.

At the structural level, weak institutional frameworks remain a recurrent bottleneck to successful youth empowerment implementation. The African Development Bank (AfDB, 2020) observes that fragmented governance structures—characterized by overlapping mandates among ministries—create confusion in program coordination. This fragmentation results in duplication of efforts, poor monitoring, and an absence of a unified vision for youth development. Without clearly delineated institutional responsibilities, even well-funded programs risk administrative paralysis and diminished impact. A qualitative study conducted in Mansa and Samfya districts highlighted several factors impeding youth access to CDF loans and grants. These included limited financial literacy, inadequate awareness of application procedures, scarcity of forms, and poor capacity in proposal development—the culmination of which disproportionately affects disadvantaged youth seeking economic resources (JCTR and FSD Zambia, 2025).

Financial mismanagement and irregular fund disbursements constitute another critical impediment. According to ZEGEMAP (2019), significant portions of allocated youth funds in Zambia are often delayed or diverted, undermining the timely execution of projects. This lack of fiscal discipline contributes to public distrust and discourages youth participation. Similar findings are echoed by the World Bank (2020), which reports that weak auditing systems and political interference in resource allocation lead to inefficiencies and corruption, compromising the credibility of empowerment initiatives.

Beyond structural deficiencies, contextual misalignment between program design and local realities poses a formidable barrier. Mdee et al. (2019), in their examination of Tanzanian youth schemes, argue that the tendency to impose uniform models across diverse communities' neglects local socio-economic and cultural dynamics. Such top-down approaches frequently fail to resonate with community priorities or the lived experiences of young people. In Australia, Lewis et al. (2014) reached comparable conclusions, noting that localized adaptation grounded in participatory planning enhances program relevance, ownership, and sustainability.

In Zambia, this issue is particularly salient given the country's socio-economic heterogeneity. Rural youth, who constitute the majority of the young population, face challenges that differ substantially from their urban counterparts. As Chigunta (2017) observes, many empowerment programs are urban-biased, emphasizing entrepreneurship or technical training that presupposes access to markets, technology, and infrastructure conditions rarely available in rural areas. Consequently, rural youth remain marginalized from the benefits of empowerment policies, perpetuating regional disparities.

Another critical shortcoming lies in the homogenization of "youth" as a single demographic category. By failing to recognize diversity within the youth population, policymakers often overlook the differentiated needs of young women, school dropouts, and youths with disabilities. As Mutema (2021) contends, this homogenization obscures structural inequalities, resulting in interventions that unintentionally reproduce gender and social hierarchies. For instance, women's participation in empowerment programs remains disproportionately low due to entrenched cultural norms, limited access to productive resources, and caregiving responsibilities.

Gender-specific challenges further compound implementation failures. Banda and Mumba (2022) found that despite increased rhetoric around gender inclusivity, few youth programs in Zambia integrate gender-responsive budgeting or targeted training modules. This omission leads to a systematic exclusion of young women from entrepreneurial and technical opportunities, reinforcing their economic dependency. Addressing gender gaps thus requires not only equitable access to funds but also deliberate institutional reforms to promote inclusion at every stage of program design and delivery.

Another prominent challenge relates to inadequate capacity among implementing institutions and local stakeholders. Kunda and Lungu (2021) observed that many district councils and youth officers in Zambia lack the technical expertise to evaluate project proposals or monitor implementation effectively. The absence of training in project management, financial analysis, and data collection severely limits program oversight. This capacity gap often results in poor project selection, minimal accountability, and limited learning from past experiences.

Political interference and patronage politics also undermine program credibility and outcomes. Studies by Chileshe (2019) and Nambala and Chanda (2023) reveal that political actors frequently influence beneficiary selection processes, prioritizing loyalty over merit. This politicization not only alienates non-aligned youth but also distorts the developmental objectives of empowerment schemes. As a result, empowerment programs risk becoming instruments of political appeasement rather than sustainable development interventions.

The absence of reliable monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems constitutes a further structural weakness. The UNDP (2022) notes that many youth programs in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Zambia, lack coherent frameworks for tracking outcomes and learning from implementation challenges. Without robust M&E, policymakers operate in a data vacuum, unable to identify what works and why. Consequently, failed interventions are often recycled without modification, wasting scarce public resources.

Socio-economic constraints also play a defining role in limiting the reach of empowerment programs. High unemployment rates, limited industrial absorption capacity, and persistent poverty diminish the practical opportunities available to trained youths. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2019) points out that even when empowerment initiatives equip youth with skills, the absence of job openings or access to credit prevents them from translating those skills into livelihoods. This mismatch between training and opportunity underscores the need for broader macroeconomic reforms to complement youth programming.

Cultural attitudes and social norms represent additional contextual barriers. In some Zambian communities, traditional hierarchies discourage youth participation in decision-making processes, thereby constraining empowerment outcomes. As observed by Chanda (2021), elders' dominance in community leadership structures often limits young people's agency, reducing their ability to influence local development priorities. Transforming these cultural dynamics requires sustained civic education and intergenerational dialogue that promotes inclusivity and mutual respect.

Technological exclusion has also emerged as a contemporary challenge. Although digitalization has revolutionized access to information and finance, many youths especially in rural areas remain digitally marginalized. The World Bank (2020) reports that digital illiteracy and poor internet connectivity impede participation in e-learning and online entrepreneurship programs. Addressing this digital divide is essential if empowerment programs are to remain relevant in an increasingly digital economy.

Furthermore, the sustainability of youth programs remains a recurring concern. Nambala and Chanda (2023) note that most projects are short-term and donor-driven, with limited mechanisms for post-program support. Once funding ceases, beneficiaries often struggle to sustain their enterprises due to inadequate market linkages, mentorship, and follow-up support. This lack of continuity undermines long-term empowerment, reducing interventions to temporary relief measures rather than transformative initiatives.

In summary, the challenges confronting youth empowerment programs are multi-dimensional, spanning governance inefficiencies, contextual misalignment, social exclusion, and capacity deficits. Overcoming these obstacles requires a paradigm shift from short-term project orientation to systemic institutional reform. As UNDP (2021) emphasizes, sustainable youth empowerment can only emerge from an integrated strategy that aligns governance, economic policy, and social inclusion. Zambia's ongoing efforts to reform its youth programs must therefore prioritize transparency, local adaptation, gender equity, and evidence-based monitoring to transform the demographic potential of its young population into a genuine driver of national development.

2.4 Strategies to enhance youth empowerment under CDF

Empirical research across global and regional contexts consistently underscores the importance of adopting integrated and multidimensional strategies to enhance the effectiveness of youth empowerment programs. The growing consensus among scholars is that fragmented or single-focus interventions fail to produce sustainable outcomes, whereas holistic approaches generate long-term socio-economic transformation. Frenette and Green (2015) in Canada demonstrated that youth employment programs integrating theoretical education, vocational training, and structured apprenticeships significantly improved employability and wage growth compared to stand-alone educational interventions. This integrated model builds both human and social capital, facilitating not only skill acquisition but also labor market integration through mentorship and professional networks.

In South Africa, Mlatsheni (2016) reinforced this finding through an analysis of the Expanded Public Works Programme, revealing that initiatives coupling classroom instruction with on-the-job training created more resilient employment trajectories. The practical exposure afforded by work placements bridged the gap between academic knowledge and workplace realities. Similarly, Oluwatayo (2018) in Nigeria emphasized that the synthesis of cognitive, technical, and entrepreneurial skills within youth development programs fosters adaptive capacity, equipping participants to navigate shifting labor market conditions and self-employment opportunities.

A second core strategy that emerges prominently in the literature is multi-stakeholder collaboration. Onsomu et al. (2015) found that public–private partnerships (PPPs) in Kenya's youth empowerment initiatives substantially enhanced relevance, quality, and sustainability. Involving the private sector in program design ensures that curricula align with labor market demands and emerging technologies, reducing the mismatch between skills supplied and those required by employers. These collaborations also mobilize additional financial and technical resources, expanding program reach and efficiency beyond what government alone can achieve.

International experience further suggests that such partnerships should extend beyond the private sector to encompass civil society, academia, and local communities. Baah-Boateng (2015) in Ghana observed that collaboration between technical colleges, community-based organizations, and industry consortia enriched program content while facilitating smoother transitions into employment. Likewise, Panda (2018) in India demonstrated that local participation in curriculum co-creation improved the cultural appropriateness and gender sensitivity of empowerment programs, ensuring broader inclusivity.

The literature also highlights the significance of integrating entrepreneurship education and innovation into youth empowerment initiatives. In contexts where formal employment opportunities are limited, entrepreneurship serves as a viable avenue for economic participation. Studies by Chigunta (2017) and UNDP (2022) indicate that embedding entrepreneurship modules within training programs alongside financial literacy and access to microfinance—enhances self-reliance and stimulates local enterprise development. These entrepreneurial pathways not only generate income but also contribute to community resilience by fostering localized economic ecosystems.

In Zambia, efforts to enhance program effectiveness increasingly reflect these integrated strategies. The Ministry of Youth, Sport, and Arts (2024) recently revised its CDF guidelines to prioritize vocational training centers and entrepreneurship hubs that combine technical instruction with business incubation services. Early evidence from selected pilot districts shows improved completion rates and better transition outcomes for participants, indicating that structural integration enhances program coherence and impact.

A further strategy emphasized in both global and Zambian literature is capacity building for implementers and local institutions. Banda and Mumba (2022) argue that technical and managerial competence among local administrators is a precondition for effective program delivery. Training implementing officers in project management, financial accountability, and participatory monitoring has been shown to improve efficiency and reduce misuse of funds. Without strengthening institutional capacity, even the most well-designed programs are likely to falter at the operational level.

Closely related to capacity enhancement is the institutionalization of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks. According to the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2020), systematic data collection and evidence-based assessment are indispensable for adaptive program management. In Zambia, the absence of real-time M&E mechanisms has historically hindered accountability and learning. The World Bank (2020) recommends digital tracking systems for program implementation, which have proven effective in reducing leakages and increasing transparency. Data-driven feedback loops enable policymakers to refine interventions in response to emerging challenges, thereby enhancing sustainability.

Youth participation and ownership constitute another cornerstone of effective implementation. As noted by Muriithi (2018) in Kenya, when youth are involved in planning, decision-making, and evaluation processes, programs tend to yield higher retention and satisfaction rates. Participatory approaches transform youth from passive recipients into active stakeholders, reinforcing the principles of empowerment and democratic engagement. In Zambia, integrating youth representatives into local development committees under the CDF framework could deepen accountability and ensure that projects genuinely reflect youth priorities.

Moreover, the literature underscores the importance of contextual adaptation in enhancing program impact. Mdee et al. (2019) stress that empowerment initiatives must be grounded in the socio-economic realities of their target populations. For example, programs designed for urban youth may prioritize digital entrepreneurship and service-oriented trades, while those targeting rural youth should emphasize agribusiness, climate-smart farming, and cooperative models. Chileshe (2019) found that community-based programs tailored to local livelihoods achieved greater acceptance and sustainability because they aligned with existing knowledge systems and resource bases.

Gender mainstreaming is also a vital strategy for maximizing effectiveness. Banda and Mumba (2022) and UNDP (2021) recommend incorporating gender-responsive budgeting, mentorship for young women, and safeguards against gender-based discrimination. Empowering female youth has multiplier effects on community development, as it enhances household welfare, child education, and social cohesion. Targeted interventions—such as women's agricultural cooperatives or digital skills programs—address structural barriers and ensure equitable participation in empowerment opportunities.

Financial sustainability mechanisms are equally critical. Adegboyega (2020) proposes revolving funds, savings groups, and linkages to microfinance institutions as effective tools for ensuring continuity beyond the lifespan of donor funding. In Zambia, integrating empowerment programs with financial inclusion strategies such as mobile banking and savings cooperatives could mitigate the challenge of limited access to capital for youth entrepreneurs. This approach aligns with the broader national vision for financial inclusion and poverty reduction.

Technological innovation also presents new opportunities for enhancing youth program effectiveness. The World Bank (2020) notes that digital platforms facilitate online training, mentorship, and market access, reducing geographic barriers and transaction costs. In Zambia, adopting digital solutions within empowerment initiatives could enhance transparency, foster peer learning, and improve scalability. Mobile-based monitoring tools and e-learning portals can democratize access to information and skills, particularly in underserved rural areas.

Finally, building strong policy coherence and coordination mechanisms is indispensable for long-term success. As AfDB (2020) and UNDP (2022) emphasize, effective youth empowerment requires alignment among education, labor, agriculture, and finance ministries to avoid fragmentation. Zambia's National Youth Policy (2023) aims to operationalize this coherence by harmonizing interventions under a unified national framework. However, sustained political will and inter-ministerial collaboration remain crucial for translating policy integration into tangible outcomes.

In summary, enhancing the effectiveness of youth empowerment programs demands a multidimensional strategy that integrates education, training, entrepreneurship, and inclusive governance. The literature strongly advocates for participatory design, institutional capacity strengthening, gender mainstreaming, technological innovation, and robust M&E frameworks as mutually reinforcing levers of impact. When implemented collectively and contextually, these strategies can transform youth empowerment from fragmented interventions into a cohesive, sustainable driver of socio-economic development in Zambia and beyond.

2.5 Research Gap

A comprehensive analysis of the existing literature reveals a significant and underexplored niche, particularly concerning the Zambian CDF. While previous research provides valuable macro-level insights and general program evaluations (Simukonda, 2021; ZIPAR, 2022; Mwanza, 2019), there is a conspicuous absence of fine-grained, micro-level analysis conducted at the ward level. This gap means the unique, ground-level dynamics specifically the intricate interplay between local administrative structures, deeply rooted socio-cultural norms, and immediate economic conditions that collectively determine the success or failure of the CDF Youth Empowerment scheme in a specific, localized context remain poorly understood and largely un investigated.

Furthermore, prevailing studies often treat the youth demographic as a monolithic entity, a limitation critically noted by Chigunta (2017). This overlooks the profound heterogeneity within the youth population and fails to investigate how challenges and opportunities are experienced differently by various subgroups, such as young women, those with differing educational attainments, or youth with varying social capital. Therefore, this study is designed to fill these identified gaps by conducting a ward-specific micro-analysis of Kazimolwa to determine the precise extent of implementation, establish the specific, context-driven challenges, and obtain nuanced views on enhancement strategies that are equitable and responsive to the diverse needs of all youth in the ward.

2.6 Theoretical Framework

a) Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) provides a foundational economic lens, conceptualising education, skills, and health as productive investments analogous to physical capital. The core proposition is that labour markets reward productivity, which is enhanced through deliberate investment in human capabilities (Becker, 1964). This creates a direct link between individual skill acquisition and employability, suggesting that disparities in employment and income largely reflect differential access to and quality of education and training. The theory operates on the assumption of rational choice, where individuals undertake such investments expecting future economic returns to outweigh present costs.

Applying this lens to youth unemployment in Zambia reveals a fundamental structural mismatch. The theory highlights that a large youth population does not automatically translate into a productive workforce if the necessary human capital is underdeveloped (Baah-Boateng, 2016). In the context of the CDF, Human Capital Theory critically interrogates the programme's design logic. It questions whether financial capital disbursement alone, without concurrent and substantial investment in market-relevant skills development, can possibly yield sustainable employment outcomes, as the theory posits that productivity stems from capability, not cash alone.

Consequently, the theory directs analytical focus toward the content of the CDF's empowerment package. It raises critical questions about the presence, quality, and relevance of any integrated training components. Where such human capital development is absent or cursory, the theory predicts poor returns on the financial investment, as beneficiaries lack the enhanced productivity required to compete in the labour market or sustain an enterprise. This explains high business failure rates despite initial funding, framing the issue as a deficiency in the programme's theory of change regarding capability building.

While Human Capital Theory focuses on individual-level attributes, Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) expands the analysis to the encompassing structural environment. This sociological framework posits that organisations and programmes are deeply embedded in a matrix of formal rules (laws, policies) and informal norms (cultures, traditions) that powerfully shape their behaviour and outcomes. Success and survival depend significantly on achieving legitimacy being perceived as appropriate within their institutional environment rather than on technical efficiency alone.

b) Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory is particularly adept at explaining implementation failure and resistance to change. It introduces concepts like isomorphism, where organisations mimic successful others to gain legitimacy, and path dependency, where historical practices constrain future options (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). For the CDF, this theory shifts attention from the individual beneficiary to the governance structures, political economies, and cultural settings in which the programme operates. It suggests that the fund’s performance is inextricably linked to the quality of local governance and prevailing social norms.

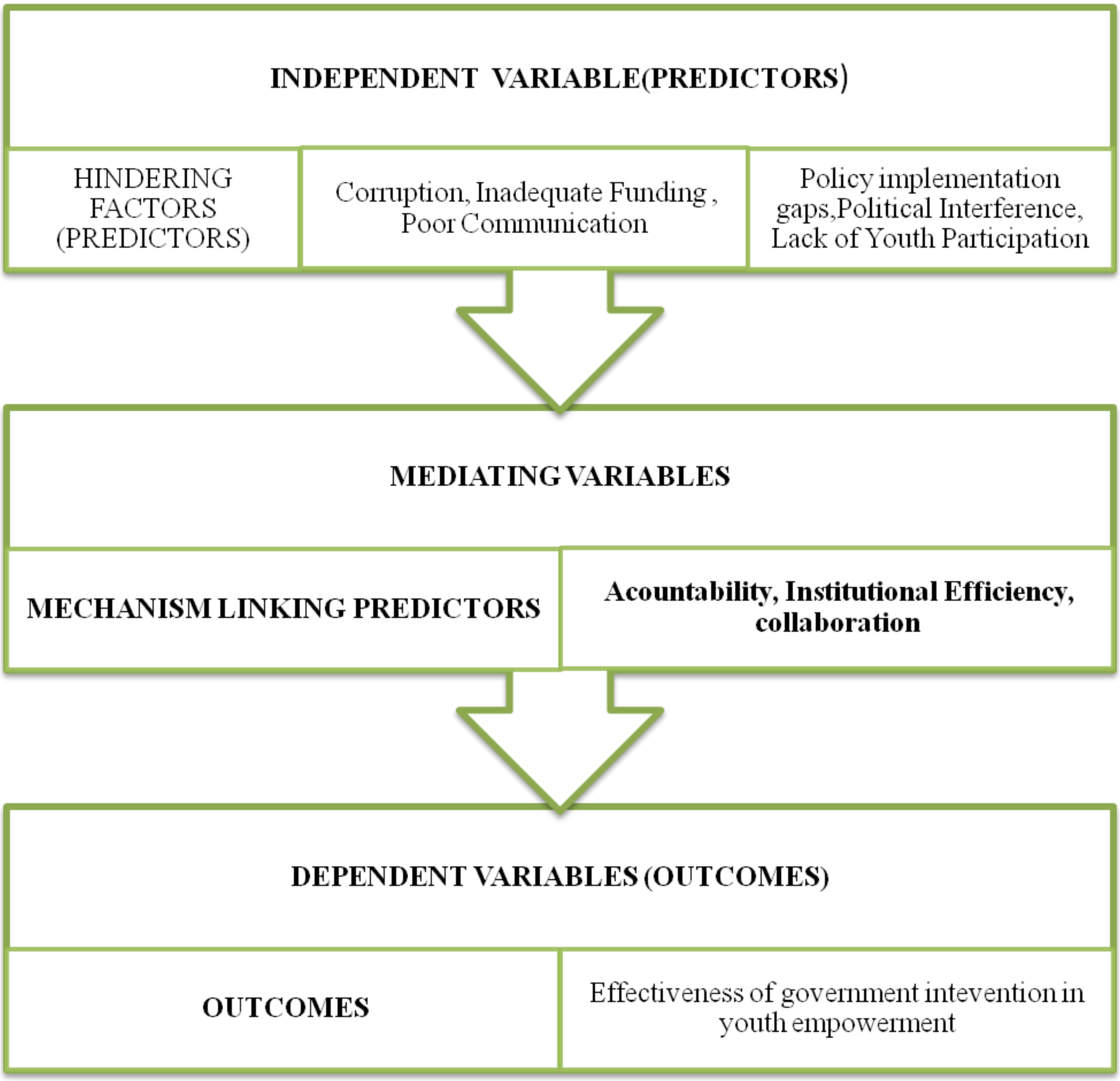
Through this lens, the bureaucratic delays, politicisation of beneficiary selection, and perceptions of unfairness plaguing the CDF are not mere operational glitches but symptoms of institutional dysfunction. The theory helps decode how informal norms of patronage or clientelism can subvert formal procedures for transparent resource allocation. It also explains the slow pace of reform, as institutionalised practices become entrenched and resistant to change, even when new policies are introduced. The legitimacy deficit arising from these issues directly discourages participation, as predicted by the theory.

The integration of these two theories provides a robust, multi-level analytical framework for this study. Human Capital Theory focuses the investigation on the micro-level, assessing whether the CDF adequately builds the skills and capabilities of individual youth to enhance their productivity and employability. It asks if the intervention addresses the right individual-level constraints. Simultaneously, Institutional Theory focuses on the meso- and macro-levels, examining whether the local implementing structures, political dynamics, and community norms support or undermine the programme's fair and effective execution.

Together, they offer a compelling explanation for chronic intervention failure: programmes can falter by inadequately developing human capital *and* by operating within unsupportive or corrupting institutional environments. A singular focus on one level is insufficient. This combined framework allows the study to systematically examine whether the CDF's shortcomings in Kazimolwa Ward stem from flaws in its design (failing to build human capital), its implementation context (dysfunctional institutions), or, most likely, a detrimental interaction of both.

Therefore, this theoretical foundation guides the entire research process, from formulating questions about training adequacy and selection transparency to interpreting findings on administrative bottlenecks and community distrust. It posits that sustainable reduction in youth unemployment requires interventions that simultaneously invest in individual capabilities *and* foster legitimate, accountable institutional structures for delivery. This dual expectation forms the critical benchmark against which the implementation and outcomes of the CDF in Kazimolwa Ward are ultimately assessed.

2.7 Conception framework



Youth empowerment is central to socio-economic development. Governments implement policies, programs, and financial interventions aimed at enhancing youth participation in economic, social, and political spheres. However, various structural, institutional, and socio-economic barriers hinder the effectiveness of these interventions.

This conceptual framework identifies the independent variables (hindering factors), the dependent variable (level of youth empowerment effectiveness), and possible mediating/moderating variables influencing the relationship.

A. Independent Variables (Hindering Factors)

These are the factors limiting the effectiveness of government intervention:

1. Corruption and Mismanagement
2. Lack of transparency
3. Political interference
4. Inadequate Funding
5. Insufficient budget allocation
6. Lack of Youth Participation
7. Political Interference
8. Poor Communication and Awareness

B. Dependent Variable

Effectiveness of Government Intervention in Youth Empowerment, measured by:

1. Employment creation
2. Entrepreneurial development
3. Access to education and training
4. Civic engagement
5. Financial independence of youth

C. Mediating Variables (Mechanism Linking Predictors)

These variables explain how hindering factors affect outcomes:

1. Institutional efficiency
2. Accountability systems
3. Stakeholder collaboration

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Overview

This chapter detailed the methodological framework employed to examine the factors hindering the effectiveness of youth empowerment interventions under the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) in reducing youth unemployment in Kazimolwa Ward. It presented the research design, study area, and defined the study population. Furthermore, the chapter specified the sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and procedures for ensuring data validity and reliability. The data analysis techniques and the ethical considerations that governed the study were also outlined. The systematic approach was designed to ensure the research was rigorous, credible, and capable of yielding insights relevant to policy and practice (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.1 Research Design

The research design describes the research study conducted in order to address the research problem Mandukwini, (2016:41). It provided a blue print or a plan of how the research was conducted by describing the research sites, how the subjects were selected, data collection procedures with the purpose of anticipating the decisions made to maximise reliability and credibility of the findings. The researcher used case study design within exploratory sequential mixed method was selected in order to broadly explore and understand school based management practices and experiences, using more of qualitative research approach than quantitative to collect data (Creswell, 2018). In this investigation, Kazimolwa Ward represented the bounded system where the CDF's youth empowerment component was implemented. This approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the interplay between policy, local governance structures, and community dynamics, offering a rich narrative that quantitative methods alone could not capture (Simons, 2009). The design thus aligned with the study's aim to uncover the underlying mechanisms hindering program effectiveness.

3.2 Research approach

A qualitative research approach was used to explore, understand, and interpret individuals' experiences, meanings, and social contexts. It focused on non-numerical data such as interviews and observations. Qualitative research is particularly useful when investigating complex phenomena that require in-depth understanding rather than measurement (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

3.3 Study Area

The study was conducted in Kazimolwa Ward, located within Mbala District in the Northern Province of Zambia. This area was purposively selected as a critical case due to its embodiment of typical rural socio-economic challenges where youth unemployment remains high despite targeted government interventions like the CDF (Mbala District Council, 2022). The ward's characteristics—an agrarian economy, limited infrastructural development, and relative geographic remoteness—provided a pertinent context for investigating the implementation challenges of decentralised youth empowerment programs. Studying this specific locale offered insights into the practical realities of policy execution in resource-constrained, rural Zambian settings, thereby addressing a gap in micro-level analysis (Chigunta, 2017).

3.4 Study Population

The study population comprised distinct groups with direct experience or institutional knowledge of the CDF's youth empowerment components in Kazimolwa Ward. This included youth aged 18-35, categorised as both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the CDF fund, who were the primary subjects of the empowerment agenda. Secondly, Local CDF Committee Members, who are volunteers responsible for the oversight and implementation at the ward level, were included for their operational insights (GRZ, 2018). Thirdly, Government Officials from the Mbala District Council involved in administering and monitoring the CDF formed another key stratum. Finally, Community Leaders, including ward councillors and traditional authorities, were incorporated as key stakeholders influencing local development processes and community mobilization (Bwalya, 2018).

The inclusion of these four categories ensured a multi-perspective analysis of the research problem. The youth provided firsthand accounts of their experiences with access, participation, and outcomes. The CDF committee members and government officials offered insights into administrative procedures, resource allocation, and implementation challenges from an institutional standpoint. Community leaders contributed an understanding of the socio-political context and traditional governance structures that interface with formal programs. This triangulation of viewpoints from beneficiaries, implementers, and community authorities was crucial for constructing a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the factors hindering the CDF's effectiveness, aligning with the principles of credible qualitative research (Patton, 2015).

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A total sample size of 45 participants was drawn from the defined study population. The breakdown and corresponding sampling techniques were as follows:

Table 1- sample size

Category	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
Youth (CDF Beneficiaries)	15	Purposive Sampling
Youth (Non-Beneficiaries)	15	Stratified Random Sampling
CDF Committee Members	5	Purposive Sampling
Government Officials	5	Purposive Sampling
Community Leaders	5	Purposive Sampling
Total	**45**	

Purposive sampling was strategically used for key informant groups—beneficiaries, committee members, officials, and leaders—to ensure the selection of individuals possessing rich, relevant information and direct experience with the CDF process (Etikan et al., 2016). For non-beneficiary youth, stratified random sampling was employed to enhance representativeness. The stratification was based on age and gender to ensure the sample captured the diversity within the youth population in the ward, mitigating selection bias and allowing for more generalisable inferences about this subgroup (Bryman, 2016)

3.6 Data Collection Methods and Instruments

A mixed-methods approach was employed, prioritising qualitative data for depth and contextual understanding, supplemented by quantitative data for breadth and generalisability (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This convergence design strengthened the study by allowing different data strands to complement each other. Firstly, semi-structured In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) were conducted with 15 key informants (CDF committee members, government officials, community leaders). An interview guide ensured coverage of core themes—implementation process, challenges, and perceived barriers—while allowing flexibility for probing and exploring emergent issues (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Secondly, two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held, each with eight youth participants (one group of beneficiaries and one of non-beneficiaries). FGDs were valuable for generating data through group interaction, revealing shared perceptions, norms, and contested viewpoints regarding the CDF application process and socio-cultural barriers (Morgan, 1997). A discussion guide facilitated these conversations. Thirdly, a short, structured Questionnaire was administered to the 15 non-beneficiary youth to systematically gather baseline demographic data and categorical information on awareness levels and reasons for non-application.

Finally, Document Review was conducted to triangulate and contextualise primary data. Analysed documents included the CDF Act No. 11 of 2018, official CDF guidelines from the Ministry of Local Government, available Mbala District Council CDF implementation reports, and minutes from local CDF committee meetings. This review provided critical insight into the formal policy framework, intended procedures, and official records of activities, against which actual practices and perceptions could be compared (Bowen, 2009).

3.7 Data Quality Control: Validity and Reliability

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the findings, several strategies were implemented across the criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility, analogous to internal validity, was primarily ensured through methodological triangulation—cross-verifying information from interviews, FGDs, questionnaires, and documents. Furthermore, member checking was performed by sharing preliminary summaries of findings with a subset of participants to confirm the accuracy and resonance of the interpretations, thereby enhancing the factual correctness of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Dependability, addressing reliability, was achieved by maintaining a detailed and auditable research protocol that documented all methodological procedures, sampling decisions, and data collection processes. The use of semi-structured guides for interviews and FGDs ensured consistency in core questioning while allowing adaptive probing. Confirmability, relating to objectivity, was pursued through reflexivity; the researcher maintained a reflective journal to explicitly bracket personal biases, assumptions, and preconceptions throughout the research process, ensuring that findings were shaped by the data rather than researcher predisposition (Berger, 2015). These measures collectively fortified the study's rigour.

3.8 Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions followed the systematic steps of thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The process began with repeated familiarisation through transcription and immersive reading of the textual data. Initial codes were then generated to identify salient features. These codes were subsequently collated and organised into potential themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure they coherently represented the dataset. Finally, the themes were clearly defined and named before being woven into the analytical narrative of the report. NVivo software was utilised to aid in the efficient management, coding, and retrieval of the qualitative data.

Quantitative data obtained from the structured questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics. This involved computing frequencies and percentages for all categorical variables, such as demographic characteristics, awareness levels, and reasons for non-application. The analysis was performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, version 26. The results were presented in the form of simple frequency tables, bar charts, and pie charts within Chapter Four to provide a clear, summarised description of the sample profile and key quantitative patterns related to CDF awareness and access (Pallant, 2020). This descriptive analysis provided the foundational quantitative context for the richer qualitative exploration.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in strict adherence to established ethical principles for social science research. Prior to data collection, informed consent was diligently obtained from all participants. This involved a clear verbal and written explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits, emphasising that participation was entirely voluntary (Israel & Hay, 2006). For participants with lower literacy levels, the consent information was read aloud, and verbal consent was witnessed and recorded. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw at any stage without any penalty or negative consequence.

To protect participants, stringent measures for confidentiality and anonymity were upheld. All identifiable information, such as names and specific locations, was removed from the transcripts and final report. Participants were referred to using generic identifiers (e.g., Youth Beneficiary 01, Government Official 02). All physical and digital data were stored securely, with access restricted to the researcher. The principle of non-maleficence was central; the research was designed to minimise any potential harm, including psychological discomfort or social risk, while the principle of beneficence was pursued through the study's aim to generate insights for community and policy improvement (BERA, 2018).

3.10 Summary

This chapter elaborated the methodological blueprint for investigating the hindrances to CDF-led youth empowerment in Kazimolwa Ward. A descriptive case study design was implemented to enable a deep, contextual inquiry. Data were collected from a purposively and randomly selected sample of 45 participants, encompassing youth, officials, and leaders, through interviews, focus groups, questionnaires, and document analysis. A mixed-methods approach ensured comprehensive data coverage. Rigorous steps for ensuring validity, reliability, and ethical compliance were embedded throughout the process. The subsequent chapter presents the findings derived from this methodological framework.

Chapter Four: Presentation and Discussion of Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which sought to investigate the factors hindering the effectiveness of the Constituency Development Fund (CDF) Youth Empowerment Programme in reducing youth unemployment in Kazimolwa Ward. The data presented were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 72 youths, complemented by in-depth interviews with 20 key informants comprising CDF committee members, government officials, and community leaders. The presentation is systematically organised according to the study's specific objectives:

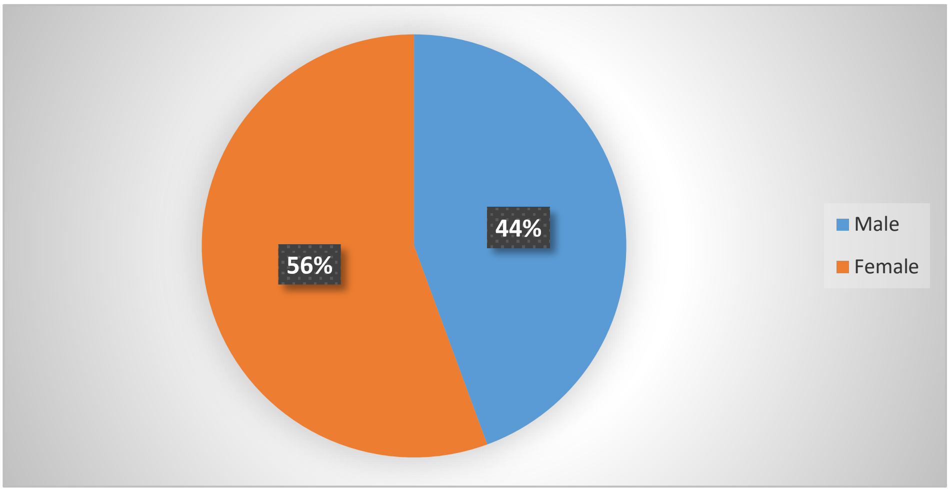
4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Understanding the background of respondents is crucial for contextualising their perspectives and experiences. This section presents the demographic profile such as gender of the respondents, Age the respondents, level of education and employment status etc. who completed the questionnaire.

4.1.1 Gender of the respondents

Understanding the gender of the respondents was important to this study because it helped the researcher assess whether access to participation in, and benefits from the CDF youth empowerment programme differed between males and Females. The gender distribution of the participants is indicated in figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Gender of the respondents



Source, Fieldwork (2025)

As shown in Figure 2, majority of the respondents that participated in the study were female representing 55.6% of the total population that participated in the study. This was followed by males who were only 44.%. This gender distribution is reflective of the study's effort to ensure inclusive participation and mirrors the demographic composition of the ward's youth population.

4.1.2 Age of the respondents

The researcher inquired on the age of the respondents in order to know the age groups that participated in the research. The age distribution of the respondents is indicated in table 2 below.

Table 2: Age of the Respondents

Age Group	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
18 – 24	28	38.9
25 – 30	31	43.1
31 – 35	13	18.1
Total	**72**	**100.0**

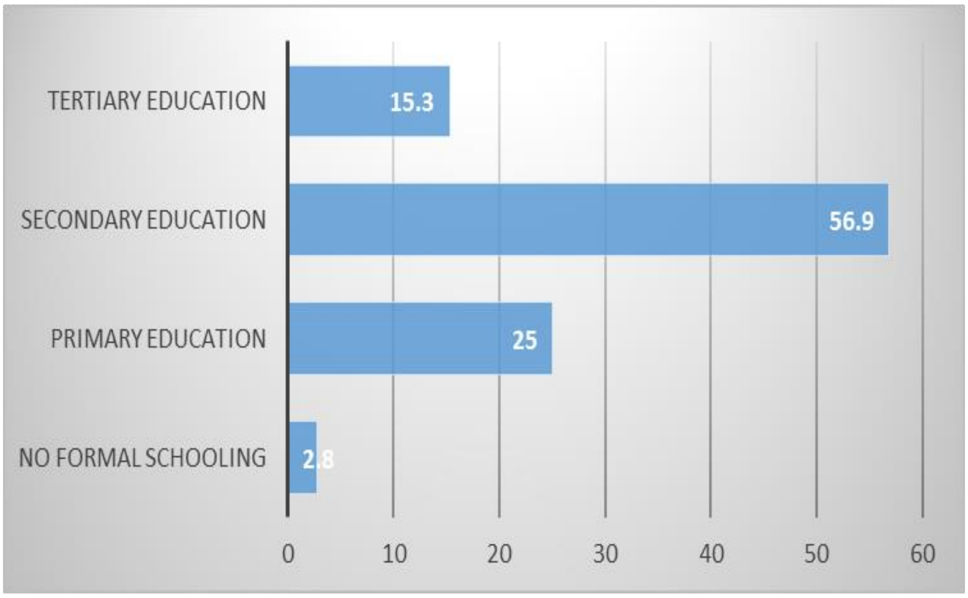
Source, Fieldwork (2025)

Table 2 above shows that the majority of respondents representing 43.1% were aged 25-30. This was followed by 38.9% who were in the age group 18-24. This age profile accurately captures the primary demographic for youth empowerment initiatives, encompassing individuals transitioning from education into the workforce.

4.1.3 Level of education

The researcher inquired on the level of education in order to know and understand differences in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the respondents. The results are shown in figure 3 below.

Figure 3: level of education



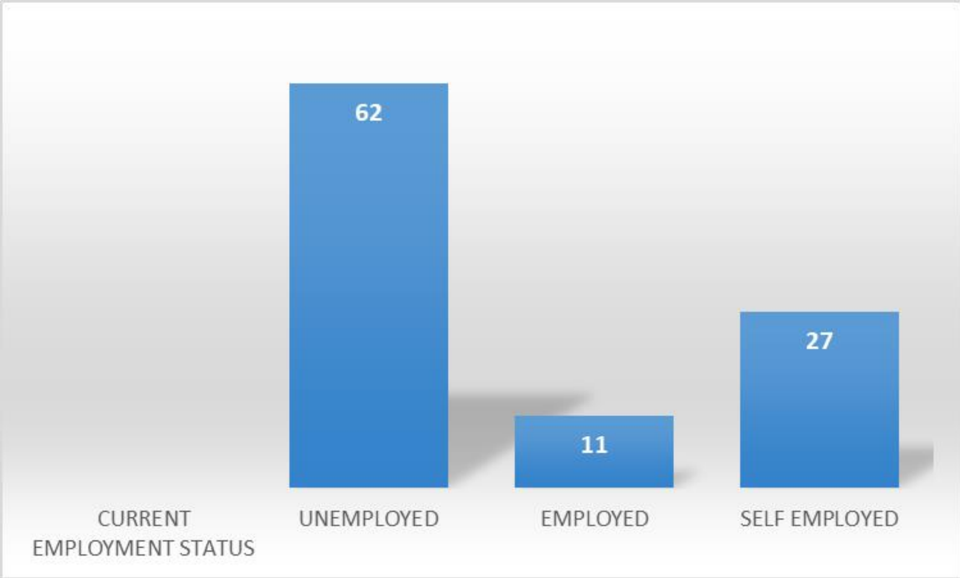
Source, Fieldwork (2025)

A significant majority of respondents 56.9% had attained secondary education as their highest level, while 15.3% had tertiary education and No formal schooling2.8% The respondents Representing 25% had education level of up to primary school. This suggests a baseline of literacy but may also indicate a skills gap for formal employment or sophisticated entrepreneurship.

4.1.4 Current employment status

Employment status was important in this study as it helped the researcher to group youths as employed, unemployed, self-employed or economically active. The results are depicted in figure 4 below

Figure 4: current employment status



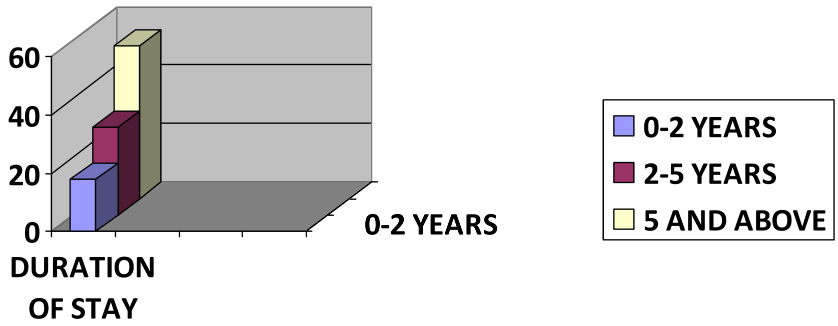
.*Source, Fieldwork (2025)*

The data reveals a severe unemployment crisis, with 62% of youth respondents categorising themselves as unemployed. Only a mere 11% are in formal wage employment, while 27% are self-employed, often in vulnerable informal activities. This stark reality underscores the profound economic challenge in Kazimolwa Ward and frames the CDF not merely as a development programme but as an urgent intervention for livelihood creation. The high unemployment rate establishes the critical context for evaluating

4.1.5 Duration of stay in Kazimolwa

The study inquired on the duration of stay in order to understand respondents level of experience, length of time a person has stayed in that ward. The results from the respondents are shown in figure 5 below.

Figure 5 Duration of study



Source, Fieldwork (2025)

The Duration of stay the Respondents in the study area was categorized into three groups ,less than two years between two and five years and more than five years .The findings indicated that the respondents who had lived in the area for than five years formed the majority, suggesting that most participants were long term residents with the community and the constituency development fund (CDF) programmes .Those who had stayed for two to five years' constituted a moderate proportions ,while respondents with less than two years of residence were the least represented .This distribution implies that the least represented .This distribution implies that the views captured in the study largely reflect experiences and perceptions of residents who have had sufficient time to observe ,engage with or attempt to access –CDF related opportunities within the constituency .

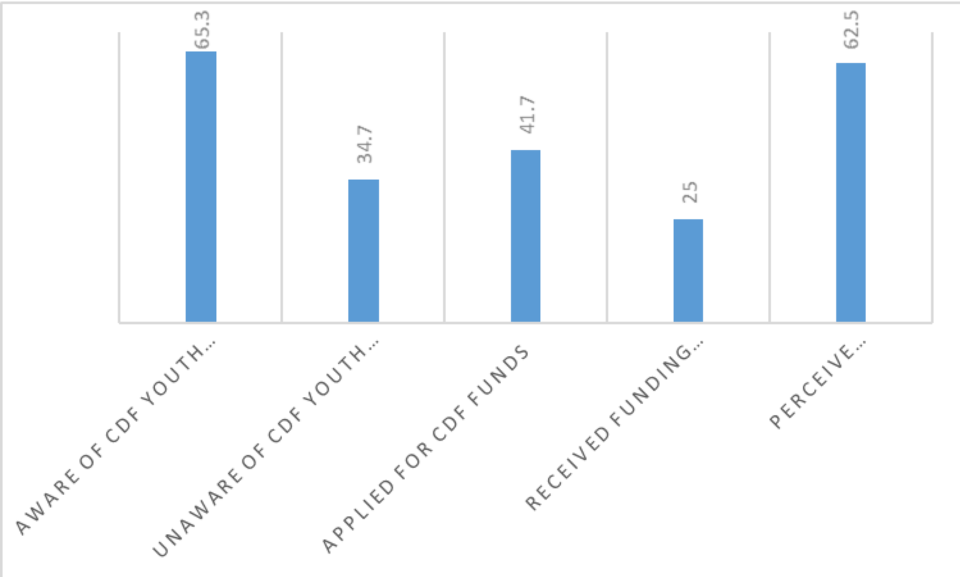
4.2 Extent to which the CDF Youth Empowerment Programme has been implemented in Kazimolwa

This section presents the findings of the study on the extent of implementation of the cdf youth empowerment programme in Kazimolwa ward. The Analysis focuses on respondents Awareness of the programme, sources of information and perceptions regarding the adequacy of information provided. In addition, the findings examine youth s participation in the programme particularly whether they have applied for CDF youth empowerment funds and their views on the overall level of programme implementation within the ward. Collectively these aspects provide insight into how effectively the cdf youth empowerment programme has been implemented and accessed by youths in Kazimolwa ward.

4.2 .1 Awareness of the CDF youth empowerment programme

The researcher inquired on the awareness levels of the youth about the CDF youth empowerment program in order to know whether young people are informed about the program s existence objective s and opportunities. Since Awareness is a prerequisite for participation and utilization of the programme s benefits. The results are as shown in figure 6 below

Figure 6: Awareness of the CDF youth empowerment



Source: Field Survey Data (2025)

Figure 6 above shows the data reveals foundational gaps in programme implementation. A significant 34.7% of youth are entirely unaware of the CDF, indicating a major failure in primary sensitization and communication. Engagement is further limited, with only 41.7% having applied. The most critical metric is the beneficiary rate of 25.0%, demonstrating that the programme's direct resource transfer reaches only a quarter of the target population. Compounding this limited reach, a decisive majority (62.5%) perceive the implementation as poor or non-existent. This combination of low awareness, limited engagement, and negative public perception paints a picture of an intervention struggling with both visibility and credibility.

The pipeline analysis quantifies severe systemic attrition. From the total youth cohort, 34.7% are immediately lost due to lack of awareness. Of the informed group, over a third (36.2%) choose not to apply, deterred by procedural barriers or negative perceptions. The most substantial programmatic attrition occurs at the selection stage, where 40% of applicants are rejected. This funnel effect culminates in a final conversion rate of just 25% from the original target population to funded beneficiaries. Each stage acts as a filter, significantly constricting the programme's reach and highlighting inefficiencies in communication, accessibility, and selection fairness.

The numerical story of limited reach is given texture and explanation by the experiences of participants. The dominant narrative from beneficiaries' frames implementation not as a supportive process, but as a mechanistic and abandoned transaction. As one recipient described, receiving funds was merely the beginning of a predictable struggle: *"We were approved for a poultry project and given some money, but it was only enough to purchase the day-old chicks. There was nothing left for feed, shelter, or vaccinations... When we reached out to the CDF committee for advice or emergency support, we were ignored—no calls were returned, and no one visited. The project was dead within three months. This isn't implementation—it's abandonment"* (Youth Beneficiary 05). This experience of being left without guidance after an insufficient capital injection was frequently cited, revealing a critical design flaw that equates disbursement with completion.

Furthermore, the processes governing access are shrouded in opacity, actively discouraging participation. Information flows erratically through informal networks, leading to confusion and mistrust. A focus group participant noted, *"I heard from my cousin who applied last year, but his information was different from what the Councillor later said"* (FGD Participant, Male). This lack of clear, official communication fosters an environment of speculation. More damaging is the perceived secrecy surrounding beneficiary selection. A community leader observed that the lack of transparent consultation fuels suspicion, stating, *"Often, the final list of beneficiaries is announced without any prior community consultation or visibility into the scoring criteria... This secrecy breeds suspicion of favouritism, tribalism, or political patronage"* (Community Leader 03). This perception of an unfair, politically mediated process directly explains the low application rates and the widespread belief that the initiative is not implemented with integrity.

4.2.2 Ways through which the youths know about the CDF

The researcher inquired about the ways through which youths know about the Youths know about the ways in order to Access the effectiveness of information dissertation channels, such as community meetings, radio social media or local leaders. The Results are shown in figure 7 below.

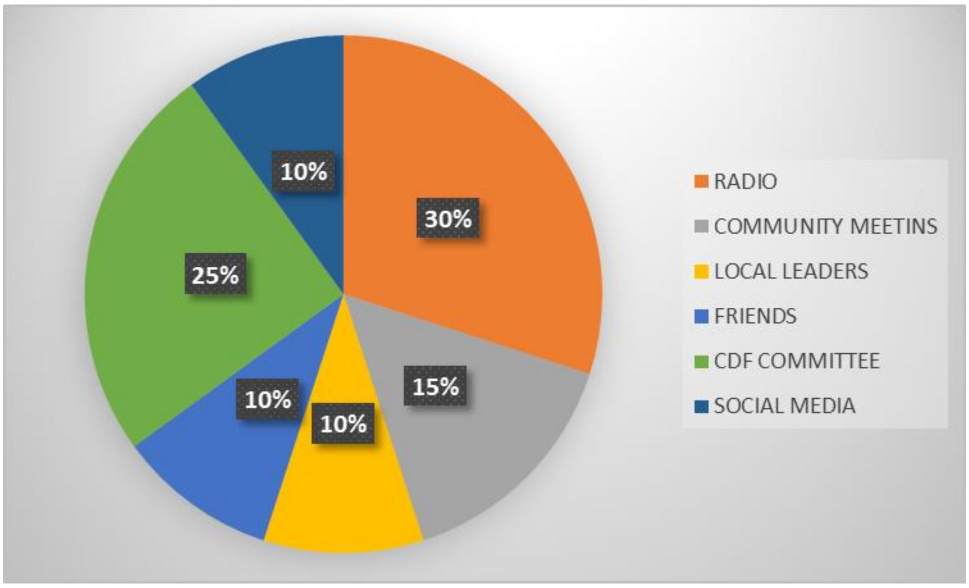


Figure 7

Source, Field work (2025)

Figure 7 above shows study findings indicate that radio is the primary source of information about the constituency development fund (CDF)Among youths accounting for 30%of responses. This highlights the continued importance of radio as an accessible and widely trusted medium for disseminating public information particularly in communities with limited internet access.

Community based channels contributed 15% suggesting that the local gatherings and informed community interactions, play a moderate role in information sharing, local leaders, friends / relatives and social media each accounted for 10% indicating that interpersonal networks and digital platforms are less utilized in CDF related information.

4.2.3 Applied for CDF youth Empowerment Funds

The Researcher inquired about the CDF youth empowerment programme in order to Access whether youths receive sufficient clear and Relevant information about the programme. The results are shown in figure 8 below.

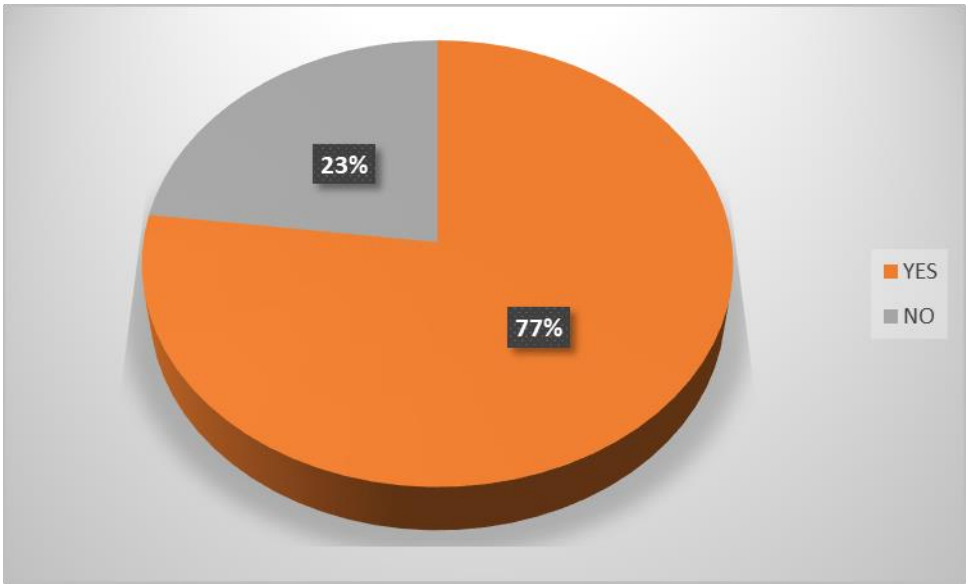


Figure 8

Fieldwork source (2025)

The study found that a majority of the respondents 77% Reported that they had applied for constituency Development fund (CDF),while 23% indicated that they had not applied .However ,the fact that nearly a quarter of the respondents had not applied points to the existence of barriers that may hinder participation ,such as limited information perceived complexity of application process lack of application process ,lack of required documentation or low confidence in fairness of selection process .These findings highlights the needs for targeted sensitisation ,simplification of applicants procedures and enhanced support mechanisms to ensure broader and more inclusive youth participation in the CDF programme.

4.2.4 The Extent of programme implementation

The Researcher in inquired about the extent of the programme implementation in Kazimolwa ward in order to Assess the effectiveness of the programme, to determine whether the CDF youth empowerment programme is being implemented as planned and weather intend activities are actually taking place on the ground.

The results are shown in figure 9 below.

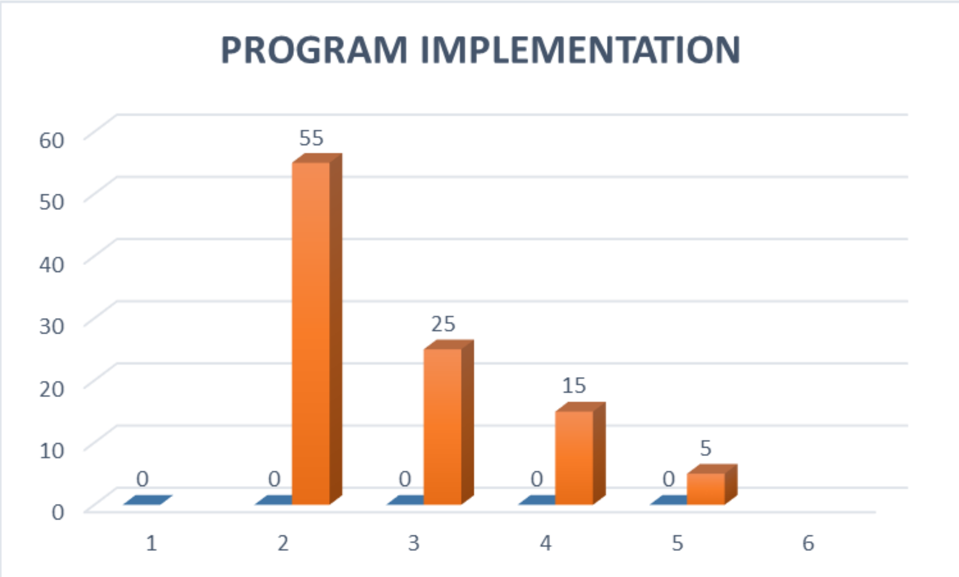


Figure 9

Fieldwork source (2025)

The findings of the study in figure 9, indicate that more than half of the respondents 55% perceived the CDF programme to be implemented to a greater extent in the area .A further 15% reported that the programme was implemented to full extent ,suggesting that a notable proportions of the youths view the CDF as actively operational and delivery intended interventions .However 25 % of the Respondents felt that the programme was implemented to low extent ,while a smaller proportion indicated that it was not implemented at all. These deferring perceptions point to uneven implementation of the programme across the constituency .Where The overall results suggests moderate to strong implementation the presence of respondents who perceived low or no implementation highlights gaps in coverage consistency or visibility of the activities .This underscores the need for improved monitoring equitable ,distribution of projects and enhanced communication to ensure that the benefits of the CDF programme are more widely and consistently experienced by al youths.

4.3 Challenges Associated with the Implementation of the CDF

This section addresses the third objective detailing the multifaceted challenges hindering the programme as reported by both youth and key informants.

This section presents the findings of the study on the challenges affecting government efforts to reduce youth unemployment through the constituency development fund (CDF).The study explores the experiences of the youths when engaging with the CDF youth empowerment programme .It focuses on the challenges faced during the Application process the social factors that limit youth Access to CDF and the difficulties encountered after receiving funding ..The findings also examine youth s views on whether the CDF youth has helped in reducing unemployment overall ,this section highlights the key barriers that affect the effectiveness of the CDF in supporting youth employment.

4.3.1 Challenges Faced During Application (Multiple Responses, N=30 who applied)

The researcher inquired about the challenges faced or observed by youths when trying to Apply for cdf empowerment programme in order to identify barriers within the application processes that limit youths access fund. The results are shown in figure 10 below.

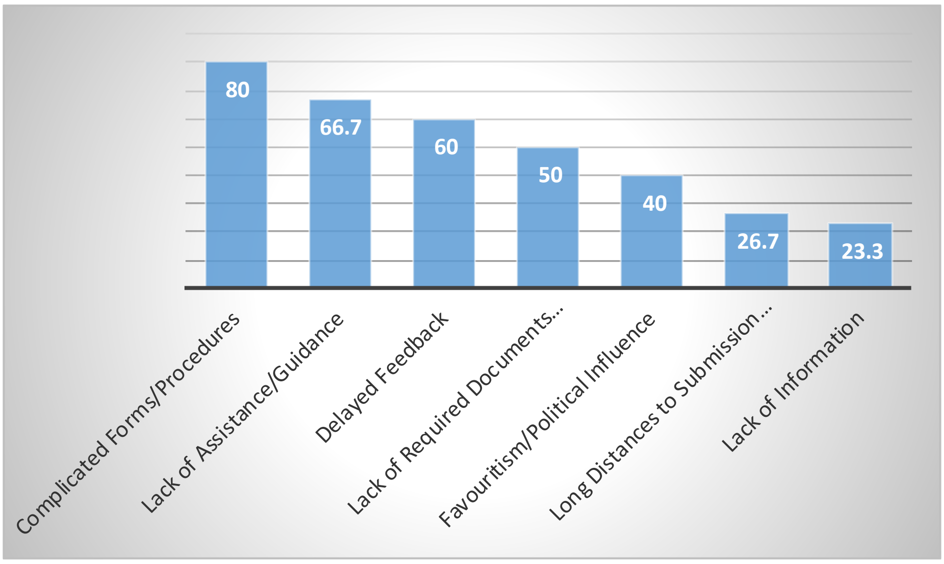


Figure 10

Source, Fieldwork (2025)

As shown in Figure 10, bureaucratic complexity and a lack of support were the most cited hurdles. A staggering 80% found the forms and procedures complicated, and 66.7% cited a lack of assistance.

4.3.2 Table 3: Perceived Fairness of the Selection Process (N=72)

The Researcher inquired about the perceived fairness of the selection in order to Assess Transparency and Accountability in how CDF beneficiaries are selected at the constituency level.

The Results are shown table 3 below

Is the Selection Process Fair?	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Yes	18	25.0
No	41	56.9
Not Sure	13	18.1
Total	**72**	**100.0**

Source, Fieldwork (2025)

Table 3 reveals, the findings indicate that the majority of respondents 56,9% perceived the CDF selection process as unfair, suggesting widespread desertification with how beneficiaries are selected. Only 25% of the Respondents believed that the selection process was fair, while 18.1% Reported being uncertain about the fairness.

Concerns regarding the fairness and transparency of the CDF process, a major quantitative finding, were substantiated by key informants who highlighted systemic issues in governance and administration. A community leader pinpointed the opaque nature of beneficiary selection as a core problem eroding public trust:

"The lack of openness in the selection process is a major concern. Often, the final list of beneficiaries is announced without any prior community consultation or visibility into the

scoring criteria. People see names and ask, 'on what basis was this person chosen over another?' This secrecy breeds suspicion of favouritism, tribalism, or political patronage. For the programme to have legitimacy, the committee must operate in daylight—holding open forums where project proposals are discussed, and selection criteria are clearly communicated and applied in front of the community." (Community Leader 03)

This critique underscores how closed-door decision-making fuels the perceptions of unfairness captured in the survey, actively discouraging applications from those who feel disconnected from patronage networks.

Furthermore, the administrative challenges cited by youth were corroborated by officials who cited structural and capacity constraints. A district-level officer explained:

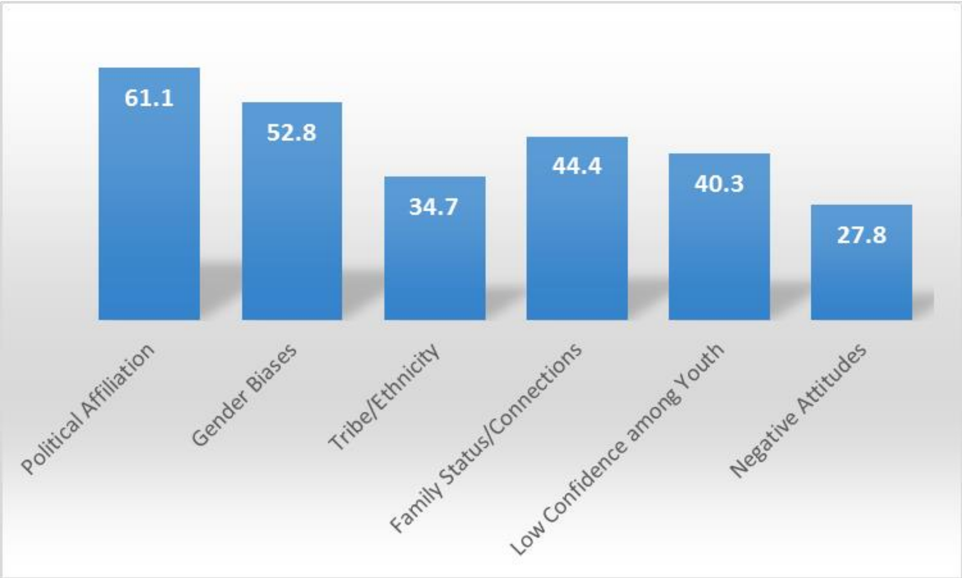
"The operational hurdles are significant. First, there is a critical capacity gap. The CDF committee members are volunteers from the community; while well-intentioned, they often lack the technical expertise to properly appraise a business plan or provide sound entrepreneurial guidance. Second, the entire timeline is frequently compromised by systemic delays. Disbursements from the central treasury are often late, which cascades into delays in launching calls for applications, reviewing proposals, and finally releasing funds. By the time beneficiaries receive money, the market conditions or costs may have changed, setting them up for difficulty." (Government Official 01)

This admission reveals that the bottlenecks experienced by applicants—complicated procedures, delayed feedback, and insufficient guidance—are not merely procedural failures but symptoms of deeper issues: under-resourced implementation structures and unreliable funding flows. Together, these insights from leaders and officials validate the youth respondents' experiences, framing the challenges as institutional and systemic rather than incidental.

4.3.3 Socio-Cultural and Economic Challenges

Figure 11: Social Factors Limiting Youth Access to CDF (Multiple Responses, N=72)

The researcher inquired about the social- cultural and economic challenges in order to identify underlying barriers that limit youths access to aid participation in the programme such as CDF youth empowerment or enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of the programme by aligning interventions with social and economic realities of the target community. The results are shown in figure 11 below.



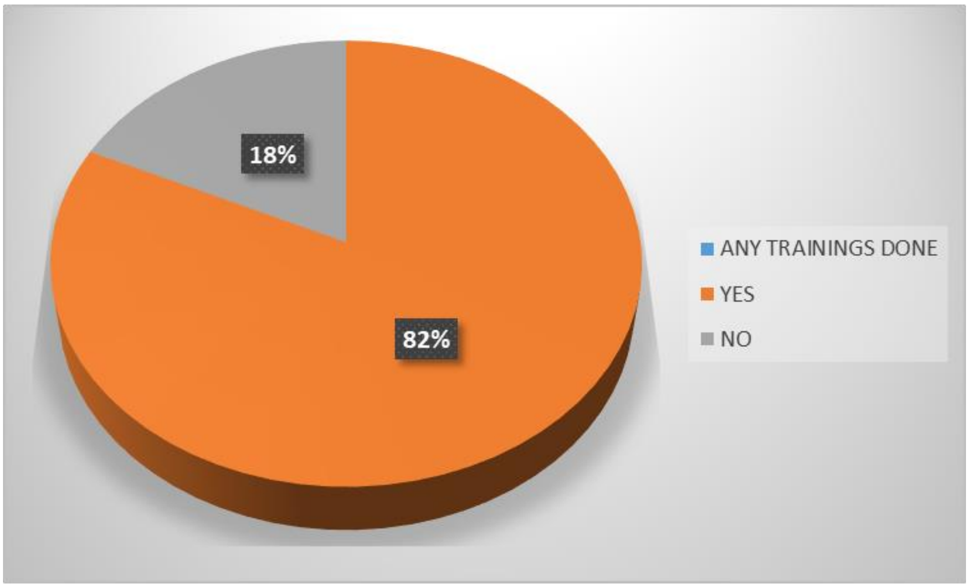
Source, Fieldwork (2025)

The data presented in Figure 12 reveals that access to the CDF is heavily mediated by entrenched social and political dynamics, not just formal eligibility. The perception that Political Affiliation (61.1%) is the primary barrier indicates a widespread belief that patronage, rather than merit, governs beneficiary selection. This is closely followed by Gender Biases (52.8%), highlighting how cultural norms disproportionately hinder young women's participation. These factors of politicization and gender discrimination directly undermine the programme's principles of fairness and equitable opportunity, creating an invisible filter that excludes qualified youth based on identity and social connections rather than entrepreneurial potential.

4.3.3 Access to Training and Capacity Building support for CDF Beneficiaries.

The researcher inquired about Access to training and capacity building support for CDF beneficiaries in order to assess equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively manage, utilize and sustain projects funded through the (CDF). This inquiry helped to determine the extent to which training contributes to improved financial management, projects implementation, accountability and long –term success of CDF – supported limitations, particularly Among youths and community groups.

The Results are shown in figure 12 below



Source: Fieldwork survey (2025)

The study found that a substantial majority of the respondents 85% reported having accessed some form of training and capacity-building support in relation to the constituency development fund (CDF).while 18% indicated that they had not received any such support. This findings suggests that the training and capacity building initiatives are largely available to CDF beneficiaries which may enhance their ability to effectively manage funds ,implement projects and ensure sustainability of youth initiatives .Access to Training is critical as it equips beneficiaries with essential skills in financial management projects planning ,and accountability ,thereby improving overall programme outcome .

However, the presence of a notable minority 18% who did not access any training highlights existing gaps in the reach or inclusiveness of capacity building –support. This may imply uneven distribution of training opportunities limited awareness or logistical barriers affecting some beneficiaries. The findings therefore underscore the need for CDF administration to strengthen and standardize training programme to ensure that all beneficiaries are adequately prepared to utilize the funds effectively which in turn can improve the overall effectiveness and impact of CDF programme.

4.3.5 Table 4: Challenges (Multiple Responses, N=18 funded beneficiaries)

The Researcher inquired about the post funding challenges in order to assess the sustainability of the programme by understanding weather beneficiaries can successfully utilize and manage the funds after disbursement. The results are shown in table 4 below;

Challenge After Funding	**Frequency**	**Percentage of Beneficiaries (%)**
Lack of Follow-up/Monitoring	16	88.9
Lack of Business Skills	14	77.8
Poor Market Access	13	72.2
Insufficient Capital	12	66.7
Economic Difficulties	10	55.6

Source, Fieldwork (2025)

Table 4 above shows the post-disbursement phase reveals the programme's most critical weaknesses. An overwhelming 88.9% of beneficiaries reported a complete lack of follow-up or monitoring from CDF officials after receiving funds. This administrative abandonment was compounded by a fundamental skills deficit, with 77.8% acknowledging they lacked essential business management knowledge. Furthermore, 72.2% struggled with poor market access, indicating that projects were launched without viable commercial linkages. This triad of neglect—no guidance, no training, and no market—transforms the CDF from an empowerment tool into a setup for failure. The high rate of reported insufficient capital (66.7%) further confirms that partial funding, disconnected from a holistic support package, is inadequate to sustain entrepreneurial ventures in a challenging economic environment.

Beyond post-funding challenges, deeply rooted socio-cultural norms create formidable barriers at the point of entry. A young woman’s experience illustrates how gender biases operate within the application process:

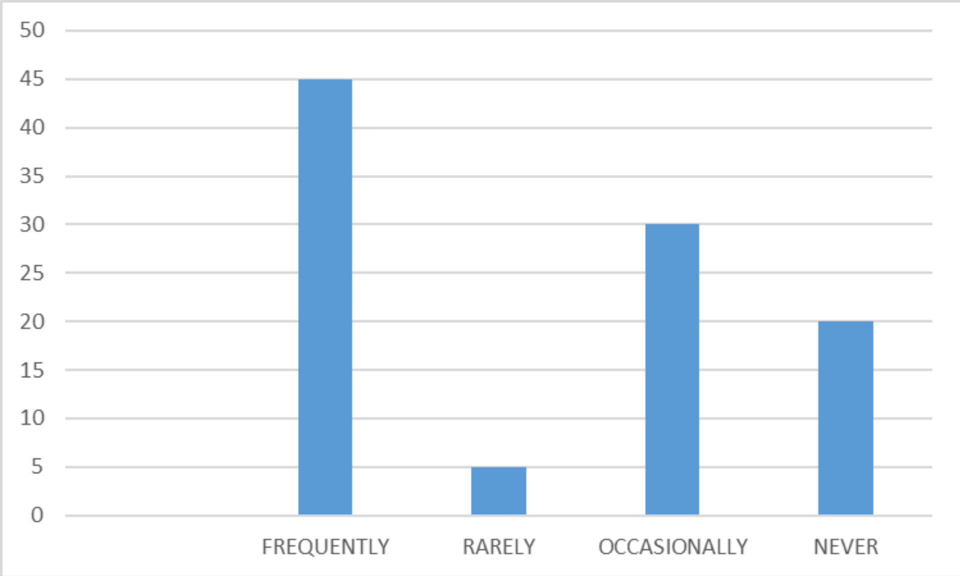
"The process itself is stacked against young women. Even if the business idea is entirely yours, you are often required to have a male relative—a husband, father, or brother—co-sign or endorse your application. Their approval is treated as a necessary guarantee. If you are unmarried, committee members openly question your capability to manage funds responsibly, implying you might misuse the money or that you lack the maturity to run an enterprise. This isn't just a procedure; it's a clear message that they do not trust women with financial autonomy or business acumen. It forces many capable young women to either give up or become dependent on male intermediaries for an opportunity that should be theirs alone." (Youth Non-Beneficiary 12)

This testimony powerfully demonstrates that gender bias is not a peripheral issue but an embedded structural barrier within the CDF's implementation. It actively excludes a significant portion of the youth population, contradicting the programme's inclusive objectives and perpetuating economic disparities based on gender.

4.3.5 Frequency of Monitoring and Supervision of Youth Projects by CDF officials.

The researcher inquired about the frequency of Monitoring and supervision of youth Projects by CDF officials in order to find supports and oversees youth funded projects after disbursement. Regular monitoring is important for ensuring proper use of funds, tracking projects progress, providing technical guidance and identifying challenges early by examining the frequency of supervision the researcher aimed to determine whether inadequate follow-ups contributes to project failure, mismanagement or low sustainability of youth projects and to generate evidence based recommendations for strengthening CDF implementations strengthening CDF implementation and Accountability.

The results from the respondents are displayed in figure 13 below



Source: Fieldwork survey (2025)

The findings indicate that varying levels of monitoring and supervision of youth project CDF officials. According to the respondents 45% reported that CDF officials frequently monitor and supervise youth projects, while 30% indicated that monitoring occurs occasionally, this suggests that a considerable proportion of projects receive some level of regular oversight which is important for ensuring proper fund utilization timely implementation and adherence to project objectives.

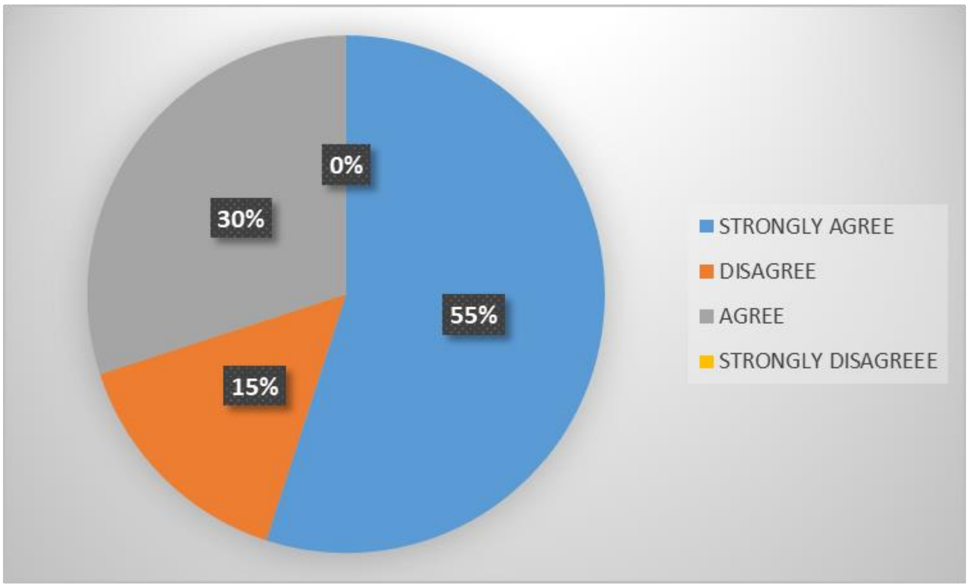
However, the results also show that 20% fall the lowest category of monitoring (as reported in the data) This highlights that a significant number of youth projects experience limited or inadequate supervision.

Insufficient monitoring may expose projects to risks such as mismanagement of funds, delayed implementation or failure to archive intended outcome

4.3.6 Perceived influence of corruption and Favouritism on the effectiveness of constituency Development Fund (CDF).

The researcher inquired about perceived influence of corruption and favouritism on effectiveness of constituency development fund (CDF). in order to understand whether governance and ethical issues hinder the fair allocation and proper utilization of CDF resources. Perceptions of corruptions or favouritism can discourage eligible youths from applying, undermine public trust and lead to unequal access to funding thereby reducing the overall impact of programme.

The results are shown in figure 14 below



Source: Fieldwork survey (2025)

Figure 14 above, shows that the study findings reveal strong perceptions among respondents regarding the influence of corruption and favouritism on the effectiveness of the constituency development fund (CDF). A majority of the respondents 55% strongly Agreed that corruption and favouritism affect the CDF which an additional 30% agreed with this view. This means that 85% of the respondents perceived corruption and favouritism as significant factors influencing the allocation and implementation of CDF resources, such perceptions suggest a high level of concern among beneficiaries and community members about transparency fairness and accountability in the management of the fund.

On the other hand 15% of respondents disagreed that corruption and favouritism influence the CDF which none of the respondents strongly disagreed. The absence of strong disagreement further reinforces the dominance of view that these challenges are present within the CDF system. These findings imply that perceived corruption and favouritism may undermine trust in the fund discourage youth participation and reduce the overall effectiveness of the CDF –supported projects consequently the study highlights the ned for strengthened governance structures transparent selection criteria and robust monitoring mechanism to mitigate corruption and favouritism and enhance confidence in CDF programme.

4.3.7 Perceived Effectiveness of the CDF youth Empowerment Programme in Reducing Youth Unemployment.

The Researcher inquired if CDF youth empowerment has reduced youth Unemployment in order to Access its effectiveness to find out if the programme is achieving its main goal of creating jobs for young people and to see how much the programme has contributed to reducing youth unemployment. The Results from the respondents are displayed in figure 15 below.

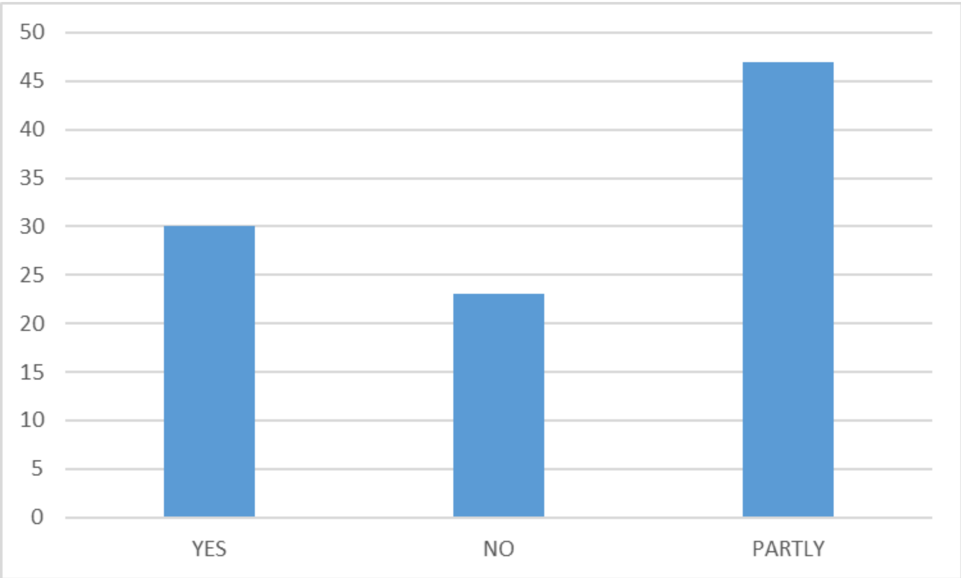


Figure 14 above shows that the study sought to establish the perceived effectiveness of the CDF youth empowerment programme in reducing youth unemployment. The findings Revealed mixed perceptions among the respondents specifically 30% of the respondents indicated that the programme had helped reduce youth unemployment, while 23% reported that it had not been effective meanwhile 47%of the respondents stated that the programme had only partly contributed to reducing unemployment.

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The finding that a significant portion of youth in Kazimolwa Ward were unaware of the CDF opportunities aligns with ZIPAR's (2022) national assessment, which identified inadequate information dissemination as a critical flaw in decentralised fund implementation. This communication gap contradicts the participatory ethos of decentralisation theory, which posits that localised governance should enhance community engagement and awareness (Smoke, 2015). The low application rates and high perceived complexity further reflect the bureaucratic bottlenecks highlighted by Simukonda (2021), suggesting that administrative procedures act as exclusionary mechanisms rather than facilitative channels for youth inclusion.

The severe unemployment rate of 62.5% among respondents starkly validates national statistics from ZamStats (2022) and underscores the urgency of effective interventions. This context frames the CDF not merely as a development tool but as a critical socio-economic stabiliser. The predominance of secondary education as the highest attainment level, coupled with high unemployment, lends empirical support to Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which would interpret this as a skills mismatch where educational investment has not translated into labour market productivity due to a disconnect between curricula and economic demands.

The widespread perception of poor programme implementation, reported by 62.5% of respondents, resonates with Bwalya's (2018) observations on the politicisation of CDF processes. This perception is not merely subjective but is substantiated by beneficiaries' accounts of inadequate funding and absent post-disbursement support. These experiences echo the findings of Siankosa (2020), who noted that partial capital injection without complementary support sets beneficiaries up for failure, transforming empowerment into a cycle of frustration and economic loss.

The administrative challenges, particularly the complexity of application forms and lack of assistance, reflect a systemic issue noted across similar programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa. As Mdee et al. (2019) argue, top-down, bureaucratic models often fail to account for the literacy and capacity levels of rural youth. This misalignment creates an accessibility barrier, effectively excluding those most in need and contradicting the inclusivity goals of decentralised development funding as advocated by the African Development Bank (AfDB, 2020).

The crisis of confidence in the selection process, with 56.9% of respondents deeming it unfair, is a critical finding. This aligns with Institutional Theory (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), which emphasises that legitimacy is crucial for organisational success. When processes are perceived as biased towards political affiliation or kinship, the programme loses legitimacy, discouraging participation and undermining its foundational principles of equity and transparency, as previously observed in Kenyan CDF studies by Mwangi (2019).

The identification of political affiliation as the primary social barrier to access (61.1%) corroborates studies on elite capture in local development funds. Chinsinga (2017) and Bwalya (2018) documented similar patterns where resources are diverted to serve political loyalists rather than developmental objectives. This politicisation erodes public trust and distorts resource allocation, ensuring that programmes fail to reach their intended demographic, thereby perpetuating rather than alleviating youth marginalisation.

Gender bias emerged as a significant secondary barrier, affecting 52.8% of responses. This finding supports Mwansa's (2017) analysis of gendered constraints in Zambian development programmes. The requirement for male guarantors and underlying scepticism towards women's entrepreneurial capabilities reflect deep-seated patriarchal norms that restrict economic agency. This contradicts the gender mainstreaming aspirations of Zambia's National Youth Policy (2019) and the empowerment frameworks advocated by Kabeer (1999).

The post-funding challenges starkly highlight the programme's most critical design flaw: the absence of a support ecosystem. The near-universal report of no follow-up (88.9%) validates the "one-off grant" critique levied by ZIPAR (2022). This approach neglects the holistic understanding of empowerment, which Zimmerman (2000) frames as a process requiring sustained support to build agency and control, not merely a financial transaction.

The severe skills deficit reported by 77.8% of beneficiaries directly challenges the Human Capital Theory's assumption that investment yields returns. In this case, the capital investment (CDF grant) is decoupled from the human capital investment (skills training). As Heckman et al. (2010) demonstrated, integrated programmes combining finance with training yield superior outcomes. The CDF's failure to provide this integration explains the high venture failure rate and low impact on unemployment.

Market access problems, cited by 72.2% of beneficiaries, point to a fundamental disconnect between programme design and local economic realities. Chigunta (2017) emphasised that youth entrepreneurship in rural Africa often fails due to a lack of viable markets and valuechain linkages. The CDF's focus on disbursement without facilitating market integration ignores this crucial determinant of enterprise sustainability, rendering even well-managed grants ineffective.

The primary reason for non-application—a belief in unfair selection (66.7%)—is a profound indictment of the programme's governance. This mirrors findings from Muriithi (2018) on Kenya's youth fund, where perceptions of corruption and nepotism deterred eligible applicants. This behavioural response illustrates how poor institutional legitimacy directly suppresses demand for services, creating a vicious cycle of underutilisation and concentrated benefit among a connected few.

The strong demand for process simplification, transparency, and awareness campaigns reflects a grassroots call for the principles of good governance: accountability, participation, and access to information. These align with Smoke's (2015) prescription for effective decentralisation, which requires robust accountability mechanisms and civic engagement to counterbalance devolved authority and prevent local elite capture.

The overwhelming prioritisation of business skills training (83.3%) as needed support underscores the theoretical gap between financial and human capital provision. This demand validates the integrated approach championed by the World Bank (2020), which argues that "soft" skills like financial literacy and business management are prerequisites for converting seed capital into sustainable livelihoods, especially for first-time entrepreneurs.

The call for regular mentorship and monitoring (73.6%) aligns with experiential learning theories and the concept of apprenticeship. Mlatsheni (2016) found that mentorship bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, providing crucial problem-solving support and reducing the isolation young entrepreneurs face. Its absence in the CDF model is a critical omission.

The designated role for local leaders as guarantors of fairness (79.2%) and mobilisers (75.0%) highlights the community's view of leadership as a stewardship function. This aligns with traditional models of African community leadership but conflicts with the reality of political interference. It suggests that restoring the normative role of leaders could be key to rebuilding programme legitimacy, as posited by Institutional Theory.

The cautious optimism about reform (62.5% confident) indicates a residual belief in the programme's potential, despite its failures. This mirrors findings in policy implementation studies where beneficiary faith persists if there is hope for corrective action. However, the 27.8% who are unsure reflect a deep scepticism that will require demonstrable, consistent change to overcome.

The critique of the CDF as an isolated "payment" rather than a "complete package" echoes the multi-sectoral approach advocated by the UNDP (2021). This respondent-derived framework perfectly captures the shift needed from a siloed financial intervention to a holistic youth entrepreneurship ecosystem, integrating training, finance, mentorship, and markets a model proven effective in international best practices.

The capacity gaps highlighted by CDF committee members themselves—a lack of training and unrealistic expectations for complex business plans—reveal a systemic flaw. It reflects what Faguet (2014) describes as the "capacity-decentralisation paradox," where responsibilities are devolved to levels lacking the requisite skills, leading to poor implementation and accountability failures.

Finally, the study's micro-level findings on socio-cultural barriers like gender bias and political patronage enrich the macro-level analyses of ZIPAR (2022) and Simukonda (2021). They provide the granular, contextual detail that explains *why* national policies fail locally, filling the research gap identified in the literature review and demonstrating that effective policy must be informed by such grounded, ward-level realities.

4.6 SUMMARY

This chapter has presented a detailed analysis of the data collected on the implementation, challenges, and improvement strategies for the CDF Youth Empowerment Programme in Kazimolwa Ward. The findings reveal a significant gap between policy intent and ground-level reality. Key issues include limited awareness among a substantial minority, bureaucratic and complex application processes, a widespread perception of unfairness and politicisation in beneficiary selection, and a near-total absence of post-disbursement support leading to project failure. Respondents clearly articulated a path forward, prioritising process simplification, enhanced transparency, and the bundling of financial support with comprehensive training, mentorship, and market linkages. The next chapter will discuss these findings in relation to existing literature and theory, leading to conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Conclusion

This study set out to investigate the factors hindering the CDF Youth Empowerment Programme in Kazimolwa Ward. The first objective sought to determine the extent of implementation. Findings reveal a significant implementation gap, characterised by low community awareness, cumbersome application processes, and a dominant perception of poor execution. The programme's reach is limited, with many youths either unaware of it or discouraged from participating. For the few beneficiaries, implementation effectively terminated upon fund disbursement, lacking the sustained support necessary for project success. Therefore, the programme is partially implemented in a mechanistic, disbursement-focused manner but fails in its broader objective of fostering sustainable youth empowerment.

Regarding the second objective, to establish implementation challenges, the study identified a complex web of administrative, socio-cultural, and economic barriers. Administrative hurdles include bureaucratic complexity, inadequate capacity among committee members, and severe delays. Socio-culturally, the process is plagued by perceptions of political patronage and entrenched gender biases that limit fair access. Economically, the challenges are most acute post-disbursement, encompassing insufficient capital, a crippling lack of business skills and mentorship, and poor market linkages for fledgling enterprises. These factors collectively strangle the potential of funded ventures.

Pursuing the third objective, the study gathered respondents' views on enhancing effectiveness. Youth unanimously called for a paradigm shift from a purely financial model to a holistic support package. Key recommendations include simplifying administrative procedures, ensuring transparent and fair beneficiary selection, and integrating mandatory business training with grant provision. Furthermore, establishing structured mentorship programmes, facilitating market access, and instituting robust monitoring and follow-up mechanisms were emphasised as non-negotiable for sustainability. Local leaders are seen as pivotal in ensuring fairness and mobilising community participation.

In essence, the CDF's ineffectiveness in Kazimolwa Ward is not due to a single cause but a systemic failure. The programme design overlooks the multifaceted nature of entrepreneurship and the complex realities of rural youth. It provides seed capital while ignoring the essential soil of skills, the ongoing nourishment of mentorship, and the necessary sunlight of market access. Without addressing these interconnected elements, the programme cannot germinate sustainable livelihoods or reduce unemployment.

The theoretical implications are clear. Human Capital Theory is partially validated—skills are desperately needed but the study shows that capital provision without simultaneous human capital investment is futile. Institutional Theory is strongly affirmed; the lack of procedural legitimacy and the pervasion of informal norms like patronage critically undermine the formal policy. The insider-outsider dynamic is also evident, as youth remain outside economic networks.

This research confirms that decentralisation is not a panacea. While the CDF devolves resources, it has not effectively devolved capacity, accountability, or participatory governance. Local structures are under-equipped and susceptible to capture, replicating central-level inefficiencies at a smaller scale. Therefore, the potential benefits of localised decision-making are lost, and the programme fails to achieve its intended responsiveness to community needs.

The lived experiences of youth beneficiaries of abandonment after receiving inadequate funds powerfully illustrate the human cost of these systemic failures. It transforms hope into disillusionment and reinforces cycles of poverty. This underscores that youth empowerment is a process, not an event, requiring patient, long-term engagement rather than transactional disbursements.

The study also highlights the critical issue of perception. The widespread belief in unfairness, whether fully accurate or not, is a reality that shapes behaviour, deterring applications and eroding trust. Rebuilding this trust is as important as any technical reform, requiring demonstrable and consistent changes in transparency and equity.

Finally, the research demonstrates the value of micro-level, qualitative inquiry. It uncovers the nuanced social filters gender, political connection, kinship that macro-economic analyses miss. These findings provide the necessary granularity to understand policy failure and design genuinely context-sensitive interventions. The path forward requires integrating financial support with a comprehensive ecosystem of capacity development, market linkage, and accountable governance.

5.2 Recommendations

a) Simplify the CDF application process by developing standardised, pictogram-assisted forms and local-language guides to make them accessible to youth with varying literacy levels.

b) Institutionalise absolute transparency by publicly displaying selection criteria, scoring mechanisms, and final beneficiary lists with justifications at prominent community centres.

5.3 Future Studies

a) An investigation on the impediments to the CDF Youth Empowerment Programme in Kazimolwa Ward

b) A comparative case study across multiple wards with varying socio-political contexts and implementation outcomes is strongly recommended

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RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Title:

Exploring Factors Hindering Government Interventions from Reducing Youth Unemployment in Kazimolwa Ward: A Case of Youth Empowerment under the CDF

Instructions to Respondents:

Your responses are confidential and will be used strictly for academic purposes. Kindly answer all questions honestly. Tick (✓) where appropriate and provide brief explanations where required.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

- . Gender:
  - Male
  - Female

- . Age Group:
  - 18-24

- 25-30
- 31-35

- . Highest Level of Education:
    - No formal schooling
    - Primary
    - Secondary
    - Tertiary

- Current Employment Status:
    - Unemployed
    - Self Employed
    - Employed

5 How long have you lived in Kazimolwa Ward?

- Less than 2 years
- 2-5 years
- More than 5 years

SECTION B: EXTENT TO WHICH THE CDF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMME HAS BEEN IMPLEMENTED

6. Are you aware of the CDF youth empowerment programme?

    - Aware of CDF
    - Unware of CDF

7. How did you learn about the CDF? (Tick all that apply)

    - Radio
    - Community meetings
    - Local Leaders
    - Friends and Relatives
    - Social Media

8. Have you ever applied for CDF youth empowerment funds?

    - Yes
    - No

9.To what extent do you feel the programme is implemented in this ward?

- To greater extent
- Low extent

- Full extent
- Not implemented

SECTION C: CHALLENGES HINDERING GOVERNMENT INTERVENTIONS IN REDUCING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT THROUGH CDF

12. Which challenges did you face (or observe) when trying to apply for CDF? (Tick all that apply)

- Lack of information
- Complicated forms
- Delayed feedback
- Lack of assistance
- Long Distance
- Lack of documents
- Favouritism or Political influence

13.Do you believe the selection process is fair?

- Yes
- No

14.Which social factors limit youth access to CDF? (Tick all that apply)

- Gender biases
- Tribe /ethnicity
- Family status

- Low confidence
- Political affiliation
- Negative attitude

14.What challenges do youth face after receiving funding? (Tick all that apply)

- Lack of Follow-ups
- Poor Markets
- Insufficient capital
- Economic difficulties
- Poor Markets Lack of Business skills
- Other

15.Did you receive any form of training before or after receiving CDF funds?

- Yes
- No

16.What challenges do youth face after receiving funding? (Tick all that apply)

- Lack of Follow-ups
- Poor Markets
- Insufficient capital
- Economic difficulties
- Lack of business skills

17.How often do CDF officials monitor youth projects?

- Frequently
- Occasionally
- Rarely
- Never

17. In your view, has the CDF youth empowerment programme helped reduce unemployment?

- Yes
- No
- Partly

SECTION D: STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING CDF YOUTH EMPOWERMENT TO REDUCE UNEMPLOYMENT

16.What improvements should be made to enhance youth participation (Tick all that apply)

- More Awareness campaigns
- Simplified application Procedures
- Continuous support
- Increased finding allocation
- Improved transparency

- Faster processing
- Stronger monitoring and evaluation

17.What additional support is needed for youth business to survive?

- Market access
- Business skills training
- Start-up equipment
- Financial literacy
- Technical support
- Regular follow-up

18.How confident are you that reforms can improve CDF outcomes?

- Very confident
- Confident
- Unsure
- Not confident

19.In your opinion, what role should local leaders play to strengthen CDF youth empowerment?

- Sensitization
- Fair selection
- Monitoring
- Advocacy
- Other…………………….

20.What recommendations would you propose to improve the CDF youth empowerment programme and make it more effective in reducing unemployment?