

# Challenges Facing Group Leaders and Youth Group Projects in Nandi County, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges confronting group leaders and youth group projects in Nandi County, Kenya, with a focus on leadership practices, management strategies, and their impact on project performance. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey design combined with descriptive methods, data were collected from 96 youth group members, 12 officials, and through focus group discussions and interviews. Key findings reveal incompetence in leadership, lack of training, resource allocation issues, and poor communication as primary barriers. The study concludes that effective leadership and management are pivotal to overcoming these challenges and enhancing project sustainability. Recommendations include enhanced training programs, improved funding mechanisms, and policy reforms to support youth initiatives. This research contributes to the understanding of youth empowerment in rural Kenyan contexts.

**Keywords:** Youth groups, leadership challenges, project performance, Nandi County, Kenya

## INTRODUCTION

Youth empowerment through group projects has emerged as a critical strategy for addressing unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion in developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank, 2020). In Kenya, where the youth population (aged 15-34) constitutes over 35% of the total populace, initiatives like the Youth Enterprise Development Fund (YEDF) have been instrumental in fostering entrepreneurship and community development (Government of Kenya, 2013). However, despite these efforts, many youth group projects face significant hurdles, leading to high failure rates and underperformance (Guyo et al., 2015). Nandi County, located in the Rift Valley region, exemplifies these challenges, with its 239 registered youth groups struggling amid limited resources, leadership deficiencies, and external constraints (Youth Status Report, 2014).

The objective of this study is to explore the challenges facing group leaders and youth group projects in Nandi County. Specifically, it aims to identify leadership practices, management strategies, and their effects on project outcomes. This research is grounded in the recognition that effective leadership is essential for group cohesion, resource utilization, and sustainable development (Munroe, 2003). Poor leadership often exacerbates issues such as corruption, misallocation of funds, and lack of member engagement, which are prevalent in Kenyan youth initiatives (Okun'gu, 2012).

The problem statement revolves around the persistent underperformance of youth projects despite government interventions. For instance, while YEDF has disbursed funds to thousands of groups nationwide, evaluations indicate that only a fraction achieve long-term viability (YEDF Status Report, 2011). In Nandi County, factors like geographical dispersion across six sub-counties (Aldai, Chesumei, Emgwen, Mosop, Nandi Hills, and Tinderet) compound these issues, making coordination and oversight difficult (Mangee, 2010). This study addresses gaps in existing literature by providing empirical insights from a rural Kenyan setting, emphasizing the interplay between internal group dynamics and external policy environments.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform policymakers, development practitioners, and youth leaders on strategies for enhancing project efficacy. By paraphrasing and analyzing methodology and findings from primary data, this article offers a refined perspective on youth empowerment. The structure includes a literature review, methodology, findings, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth groups in Kenya serve as platforms for collective action, enabling young people to access resources, skills, and markets that would otherwise be unattainable individually (Government of Kenya, 2007). Leadership within these groups is pivotal, as it influences decision-making, conflict resolution, and goal attainment (Bass & Riggio, 2006). According to Transformational Leadership Theory, effective leaders inspire and motivate followers to achieve extraordinary outcomes, which is particularly relevant for youth projects facing resource scarcity (Burns, 1978).

Challenges in youth group leadership are multifaceted. Incompetence and poor skills often stem from inadequate training, leading to mismanagement and group dissolution (Mburu, 2015). Studies in Kenya highlight that many youth leaders lack formal education in entrepreneurship or governance, resulting in inefficiencies (Guyo et al., 2015). For example, a study on YEDF-funded projects in Nairobi County identified weak leadership structures as a primary barrier, with groups struggling to organize workshops or sustain activities due to disorganized hierarchies (Mburu, 2015).

Resource allocation and expenditure represent another critical challenge. Limited funding from sources like YEDF often leads to disputes over distribution, fostering corruption and mistrust (Okun'gu, 2012). Research in Marsabit County revealed that insufficient capital and delayed disbursements hinder project implementation, echoing findings from Nandi County where groups receive minimal seed money (e.g., KSh 50,000), insufficient for ambitious ventures like greenhouse farming (Guyo et al., 2015).

Cultural dynamics within groups also play a role. Negative cultures, such as favoritism or lack of accountability, can undermine performance (Cairns, 2000). In Kenyan contexts, patriarchal norms may exclude female youth from leadership, exacerbating gender disparities (Bialostocka, 2018). Poor communication further compounds these issues, as it impedes information flow and collaboration (Silverman, 1993).

A review of Kenyan literature underscores systemic challenges. The National Youth Council report on youth employment policies notes inadequate resources as a cross-cutting issue, limiting program reach (National Youth Council, 2025). In Limuru Sub-County, determinants of youth participation include access to education and funding, with low involvement linked to bureaucratic hurdles (Determinants of Youth Participation, 2022).

In Bahari Constituency, inadequate entrepreneurial training due to staff shortages was identified as a key impediment (Mangee, 2010). This aligns with broader findings that youth enterprises fail due to skill gaps in financial management and innovation (Mburu, 2021). Ouma et al. (2002) in Kisumu West District emphasized financial constraints, while a reflection on Kenyan youth challenges highlights discrimination and policy inconsistencies (Bialostocka, 2018).

Globally, similar patterns emerge. In sub-Saharan Africa, youth bulges create employment pressures, with group projects offering solutions but facing leadership voids (World Bank, 2020). Engaging youth through empowerment and education is advocated, yet implementation lags due to governance issues (Full Article: Engaging the Youth in Kenya, 2012).

While existing studies address funding and training, few focus on rural counties like Nandi, where geographical and cultural factors intensify challenges. This study bridges this gap by examining leadership-specific issues through mixed methods, contributing to theories on group dynamics and sustainable development.

## METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the research approach employed to investigate challenges in youth group leadership and project performance in Nandi County. Methodology, as defined by Cohen et al. (2007), encompasses systematic procedures for data gathering to comprehend social phenomena. Similarly, Creswell (2005) views it as strategies for inquiry into real-world problems. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design, suitable for analyzing a population at a single point in time (Kothari, 2004). This design was complemented by descriptive survey elements to portray accurate profiles of situations and attitudes (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

The research was conducted in Nandi County, comprising six sub-counties: Aldai, Chesumei, Emgwen, Mosop, Nandi Hills, and Tinderet. Purposeful sampling guided the selection, allowing in-depth understanding of the context (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998). The target population included all members of 239 registered youth groups, approximating 2,868 youths (assuming 12 members per group), plus officials from the Ministry of Youth Affairs, YEDF committees, Social Development Assistants, and Constituency Development Officers (Youth Status Report, 2014; Mugenda & Mugenda, 2004).

Sample size was determined using Yamane's (1969) formula:  $n = N / (1 + N e^2)$ , where  $N$  is the population (2,868) and  $e$  is the error margin (0.01), yielding  $n = 96$ . For representativeness, 24 youth groups (10.04% of 239) were selected via simple random sampling, with four members per group (Oso, 2009; Kothari, 2004). Twelve officials were purposively sampled. Proportionate allocation using Bowley's formula ensured balanced representation across sub-counties (Nzelibe, 2001).

Data collection utilized mixed methods: questionnaires (96 distributed, all returned), interviews with key informants, and focus group discussions (FGDs) with 4-10 participants per session (Leedy & Ormond, 2001; Neuman, 1997). Questionnaires featured Likert-scale items for quantitative data and open-ended questions for qualitative insights (Burns, 1999). Interviews provided depth through face-to-face interactions (Silverman, 1993), while FGDs facilitated narrative exploration (Mishler, 2006). Secondary data from libraries, journals, and policy documents supplemented primary sources (Ministry of State for Youth Affairs Strategic Plan, 2007-2012; YEDF Strategy, 2013-2023).

Data were collected between November 19, 2014, and February 3, 2015, with prior appointments. Analysis involved editing for completeness, coding, and using SPSS for descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) and qualitative content analysis (Cooper & Schneider, 2008). Validity was ensured through pilot testing in Uasin Gishu County and supervisor consultations (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2004). Reliability was confirmed via clear item construction and piloting.

Ethical considerations included permissions from NACOSTI and county authorities, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Ranking of Leadership and Management Challenges

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which specific challenges hindered their group's performance. Table 1 presents the ranked challenges based on mean scores.

Table 1 Perceived Challenges Facing Group Leadership and Project Performance (N=96)

Challenge	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Rank
Incompetence/Poor Leadership Skills	3.22	0.873	1
Lack of Training & Development	3.19	1.145	2

Allocation/Expenditure of Resources	3.11	0.679	3
Culture Developed by Group Members	3.10	0.968	4
Number of Members in the Group	2.99	1.047	5
Poor Communication	2.70	1.067	6

\*Scale: 1=Very Low Extent, 2=Low Extent, 3=Great Extent, 4=Very Great Extent\*

As shown, **incompetence and poor leadership skills** emerged as the most severe challenge ( $M=3.22$ ). This finding underscores that merely holding a leadership position does not equate to having the requisite skills for strategic planning, motivation, or conflict management. Qualitative data expanded on this, with one key informant noting, “Several youth groups desperately need strong, reliable and genuine group leaders because most of those currently in positions are self-absorbed and operate with misplaced priorities” (Key Informant Interview). This aligns with Munroe’s (2003) assertion that character and skill are non-negotiable for effective leadership, as poor character ultimately “hurts people and performance.”

Closely ranked was the **lack of training and development** ( $M=3.19$ ). Groups reported minimal formal training in entrepreneurship, financial management, or leadership itself after registration. This creates a cycle where willing leaders lack the tools to be effective. As one youth member stated in an FGD, “We elect our leaders from among us, but none of us has been to business school. We are learning through costly mistakes” (FGD Participant 1). This deficiency points to a critical gap in the post-registration support ecosystem provided by facilitating institutions.

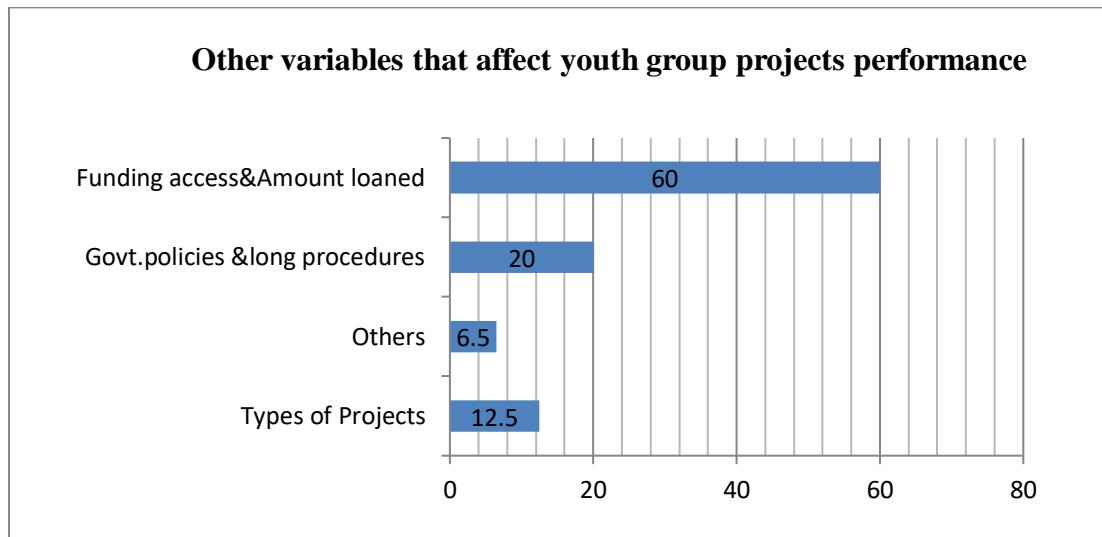
**Resource allocation and expenditure** was the third major challenge ( $M=3.11$ ). While external funding was often cited as insufficient, the internal management of available funds was a more acute problem. Disputes over budgeting, procurement, and financial transparency were common. A youth member lamented, “The funding loans are not enough... but what is more frustrating is not understanding how the little we have is being spent” (Questionnaire Open-ended Response). This highlights a dual problem: inadequate capital injection and weak internal financial governance, corroborating concerns raised by Godfrey (2002) on the importance of sound governance structures.

Interestingly, **poor communication** was ranked lowest ( $M=2.70$ ), though its high standard deviation (1.067) suggests significant variation across groups. For some groups with established social bonds, informal communication sufficed. For others aiming for complex projects, poor formal communication channels hindered coordination. As Cairns (2000) advocates, leadership that fosters open communication is vital for developing individual capabilities and teamwork.

### **External Factors Affecting Performance**

When asked about other variables affecting performance, 60% of respondents cited **access to funding and loan amounts** as the primary external factor (see Figure 1). This aligns with findings by Guyo et al. (2015) and Okun’gu (2012). Delays in disbursement and loan ceilings that were incongruent with project needs (e.g., greenhouse construction) frequently stalled initiatives. A group leader explained, “We were given only 50,000 shillings... our initial plan for a greenhouse stalled for over two months as we tried to raise more money” (FGD Participant 2). Conversely, some officials argued that the core issue was not the money but the quality of ideas and management, indicating a disconnect in perceptions between funders and beneficiaries.

Figure 1 Other Variables Affecting Youth Group Project Performance



About 20% of respondents pointed to **cumbersome government policies and long procedures** as a hindrance, reflecting bureaucratic obstacles in accessing support and necessary approvals.

### The Leadership-Performance Nexus

A chi-square test of independence revealed a statistically significant relationship between members' satisfaction with their group leaders and their rating of the group's overall performance ( $\chi^2 = 26.333$ ,  $p = .004$ ). This robust finding confirms the central hypothesis of the study: leadership quality is a critical determinant of project outcomes in youth groups. Effective leadership, as evidenced in a few successful groups, fostered trust, ensured transparent resource management, and motivated members towards common goals. In contrast, groups with weak leadership were plagued by apathy, suspicion, and failed projects, regardless of having received similar levels of external funding.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the challenges facing leaders of youth group projects in Nandi County, Kenya. The findings conclusively demonstrate that while external factors like insufficient funding are significant, the most pressing impediments to success are internal and human-centric. The triad of **leadership incompetence, lack of targeted training, and poor financial governance** within groups severely constrains their potential. The significant statistical relationship between leadership and performance underscores that investing in the human capital of group leaders is not ancillary but fundamental to the success of youth enterprise funds.

The experiences in Nandi County mirror broader challenges in community-based development, where structural support often overlooks the soft skills and internal governance required to translate resources into sustainable outcomes. The youth groups are more than just conduits for funds; they are complex social systems whose health depends on competent and ethical leadership.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following multi-level recommendations are proposed:

### 1. For County Governments and YEDF Implementers:

- **Mandate Leadership and Management Training:** Develop and institutionalize a compulsory training curriculum for all registered group leaders and treasurers. Training should cover basic leadership principles, participatory management, financial literacy, record-keeping, and conflict resolution. This should be a prerequisite for accessing subsequent rounds of funding.

- **Establish Mentorship Networks:** Link youth groups with successful entrepreneurs, retired business professionals, and local academia to provide ongoing advisory support and mentorship, moving beyond one-off training sessions.
- **Simplify and Decentralize Procedures:** Review and streamline bureaucratic processes for accessing funds and permits to reduce delays and frustrations that demoralize groups.

## 2. For Youth Group Leaders and Members:

- **Promote Transparent Governance:** Institutes formal, transparent procedures for all financial transactions and decision-making, including regular financial reporting to all members and participatory budgeting.
- **Proactively Seek Skills Development:** Groups should not wait for external training but utilize online resources, peer learning from successful groups, and local experts to build their capacity.
- **Careful Leadership Selection:** Move beyond popularity or social standing to elect leaders based on demonstrable integrity, commitment, and willingness to learn, establishing clear role descriptions and accountability mechanisms.

## 3. For Future Research:

- Longitudinal studies are needed to track the impact of leadership training interventions on specific project outcomes over time.
- Further research could explore successful youth group models to develop a "positive deviance" framework of best practices in leadership and management.
- Investigate the role of gender dynamics in youth group leadership and its impact on project performance.

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