

# Empowering Youth Through Skills Development for Sustainable Livelihoods in Gokwe: Case Study of Nyamuroro Vocational Training Centre (VTC).

Chomunorwa Rusakaniko<sup>1\*</sup>, Taruona Douglas<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Development Studies, Zimbabwe Open University, P.O. Box, 1210 Masvingo Regional Campus, Zimbabwe

<sup>2</sup>Department of Banking and Finance, Zimbabwe Open University, P.O. Box, 1210, Masvingo Regional Campus, Zimbabwe

\*Corresponding Author

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## ABSTRACT

In this empirical qualitative case study, we discussed the contribution of skills development to sustainable livelihoods among the youth in rural Zimbabwe, focusing on Nyamuroro Vocational Training Centre [VTC] in Gokwe. In a region grappling with high unemployment, poverty, and limited formal educational access, vocational training has emerged as a strategic response to youth marginalization and economic vulnerability. The study is couched in Amartya Sen's Capability Approach and supported by Martha Nussbaum Human Development framework. It explores how practical skills training in areas such as agriculture, carpentry, welding, garment construction, and mechanics enhances youth agency and expands their livelihood options. The research is guided by the qualitative methodology, where semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions were used to solicit data from 15 participants including trainees, instructors, graduates and community leaders. The empirical paper responded to the research questions: How do Nyamuroro VTC programmes enhance skills for Sustainable livelihoods in Gokwe and also what impact do Nyamuroro VTC programmes have on graduates and communities. The major findings reveals that vocational training enhances youth capabilities and self-reliance, lack of capital and tools hinders business starts-ups. In light of the findings, the study underscores that, while vocational training at Nyamuroro Vocational Centre provides essential skills for sustainable livelihoods, its full potential is constrained by limited access to capital, inadequate infrastructure and weak institutional support. Conclusively, vocational education in rural Zimbabwe functions not only as skills transmission instead as a capability-expanding intervention mediated by socio-economic conversion factors.

**Keywords:** Empowerment, Youth, Skills Development, Sustainable Livelihoods, Vocational Technical Education, Nyamuroro VTC, Gokwe, Zimbabwe

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Skills development has emerged as a crucial tool for addressing poverty, youth unemployment and fostering sustainable livelihoods, especially on the African continent. In the context of Zimbabwe, vocational training centres have become important in equipping young people with practical and market relevant skills. Nyamuroro Vocational Training Centre in Gokwe, Midlands Province, Zimbabwe has emerged as a significant centre designed to bridge the gap between education and employability. This study investigates the role of skills development in transforming the economic agency and social well-being of the rural youth in Gokwe.

Various studies have been conducted on skills development of youth through vocational technical education. Mufanechiya et al (2024) studied the challenges that undermined implementation of Technical Vocational Education (TVE) and they noted historical injustices of technical subjects as compared to academic subjects embedded in the colonial educational framework and they concluded their work by recommending the

reevaluation of technical subjects as they are crucial in linking education and employability. Nawaz et al (2024) also studied on youth development skills and employability and argued that, there is a positive relationship between vocational education and employability, graduates were easily employed and were in a position to start their own business and concluded that, there is need to hire technical experts to impart skills to the youths. UNUWIDER (2021) in the study of technical and vocational education graduates in Mozambique noted that, technical and vocational education are key in addressing youth unemployment and labour market related challenges and concluded their work by calling for a new policy framework to improve transition from the school environment to work place of the graduates of technical and vocational education in Mozambique. Ikutai and Asu-Nandi (2015) studied the youth empowerment using technical vocational education in Nigeria and they stated that youth need skills in areas such as agriculture, business, engineering and construction works, financial planning to enable business starts up and concluded their work by noting that there is need for workshops and education campaigns for sensitization of communities on the importance of vocational and technical education. Obi and Ojo (2024) studied on how vocational and technical skill development are implemented among youths and adults in Nigeria and they noted that, areas such as plumbing, tiling and automotive repair were effective in empowering the youths and adults in Nigeria and Information Communication technology (ICT) and marketing were less effective in empowering the youths. Obi and Ojo (2024) concluded that, government should emphasize vocational and technical education as a pathway to promote ICT and Agro sectors. While the above studies have made contribution to the study of skills development through vocational and technical education, none of the studies have focused on a particular vocational technical centre and its impact in a community. The uniqueness of this study is that it focused on remote and marginalized rural settings of Gokwe. In light of the above, the aim of the study is to discuss the various skills development of Nyamuroro Vocational Technical Centre and its impact on community development through the activities and influence of their graduates.

## **Problem Statement**

Youth unemployment remains one of the most vexing question and pressing development challenge to Zimbabwe, especially in rural district of Gokwe in the Midlands Province. Despite the establishment of Nyamuroro Vocational Training Centre (VTC) in 1992 and its continued existence, a considerable number of the youths continue to encounter limited economic opportunities, underemployment, and poverty. While skills development is globally appreciated as a vehicle of enhancing employability and sustainable livelihoods (ILO, 2022), its efficacy in rural Zimbabwe remains inconsistent and poorly documented. Many vocational training graduates struggle to translate acquired skills into viable income-generating activities due to systemic issues such as lack of startup capital, limited market access and weak entrepreneurial ecosystems (Hlungwani & Masuku, 2021).

Furthermore, existing literature often fails to localize findings within rural contexts, where structural barriers such as infrastructure gaps, gender inequality, and socio-cultural expectations, that undermine the potential impact of vocational training. In Gokwe, the relevance, quality and accessibility of skills training at Nyamuroro VTC are often questioned, with reference of attending to the unique needs of youth in farming and marginalized communities. This research study is captivated by the critical gap: the lack of contextualized evidence on whether and how vocational skills development leads to sustainable livelihoods among the rural youth in Gokwe. The study seeks to assess the efficacy of skills training programmes, explore the socio-economic challenges faced by graduates, and identify strategies for enhancing the development impact of vocational education. Without this understanding, efforts to use skills development as a tool for poverty reduction and youth empowerment in rural Zimbabwe risk falling short of their potential.

## **Theoretical Framing**

The Capability Approach of Sen (1999) and complemented by Nussbaum (2000, 2011) is the theory guiding this research study. The theory was developed by Armatya Sen (1999) through his work, Development as freedom.

The first argument of capabilities was debated in the work entitled, Commodities and Capabilities (Sen, 1985 cited in Gasper, 2023). The theory noted that, development is measured in terms of what people can be and do to live fulfilled lives. The Capability Approach (CA) had several assumptions. Firstly, freedom is predicated as

the avenue to development (Mukwambo,2025). Vocational and technical education should afford youth the choice and freedom to pursue the lives they value. Secondly, CA emphasized that human agency and participation are critical to sustainable development (Bonvin & Laruffa, 2024). The agency is critical in providing youth opportunity to participate effectively or constrain their activities in community economic activities. Thirdly, CA is shaped by conversion factors in the contextual realities (Sakata, 2021). It is important to note that, in this study, it is not only access to vocational technical education that matters most, but the presence of best infrastructure and resources allocation that enhance the skills, knowledge and experience of the youth. The fourth assumption of CA noted that, quality of life is measured in capabilities, not the presence of resources (Bartolomei, 2022). This is relevant to the research study because the youths need to be measured not on exams marks but on capabilities they can deliver. The Capabilities theory of Sen (1999) supported by Nussbaum (2000, 2011) are key in addressing the main problem of the paper. They do so in the following ways, skills training, expands the real opportunities to live the life they value, youths being educated it offers them capabilities, engaging in productive work, provides youths control over economic choices in life.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Recently, Sibanda and Mhongera ((2025) studied the livelihoods strategies for adolescent girls in Zimbabwe. The study noted that, the girls who exited the institutional child care facilities survived through assistances from adopted parents, support from husbands and other organizations that provided them with financial assistance and social capital and it was noted that, youth girls are not able to support themselves financially (Sibanda & Mhongera, 2025). The study recommended that, there is need to improve family and caring organizations for youth, reduction of the dependency syndrome among the youth, as well as addressing the marginalization of the youth in the main stream economy and creating employment opportunities (Sibanda & Mhongera, 2025).

Another work focused on youth empowerment for sustainable development in Jigawa state of Nigeria and its findings noted market and skills gaps that, include the absence of provision stores, lack of modern fashion and fabrics technology, no modern hair saloons, absence of fruits and vegetables markets, as well as poor phone repairs and livestock business in Jigawa state (Abba & Zubair, 2024). The study also noted challenges encountered in the youth empowerment programmes in Jigawa state which included inadequate financial support, lack of political will as well as cut throat competition affected business operations of the youth in the state (Ahmed et al, 2025). The study concluded by noting that empowerment programmes should improve the existing market and skills gap, good business skills to ensure accountability, transparency and continuity as well as supervision of beneficiaries of empowerment programmes so as to guarantee efficient use of financial injection, tools availed and other consumables (Ahmed et al, 2025).

In a study of youth empowerment programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa several issues were noted. Betcho (2014) noted that youths are a critical pillar in the economic development of Africa, incorporation of the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in youth programmes, focus must put emphasis on skills capacitation and talent identification rather than general education, governments in Africa to avail more economic activities for youth empowerment. The study concluded that, education remains key in unlocking the potential of African youths and the continent need to tap in economic opportunities to trigger African development.

Moreover, another work focused on the mainstreaming of the Youth Policy in Zimbabwe. The study findings noted that, youths are neglected in youth policy formulation, its crafting as well as implementation modalities, inadequate collaboration among implementers ,corruption ,insufficient funding hampered youth policy implementation (Hlungwani & Masuku, 2021). In its analysis the study noted challenges faced by youths in rural areas such as inadequate resources as well as policy manipulation by politicians (Hlungwani & Masuku, 2021). The study concluded that, there is need for policies that are embedded in rural realities faced by youths not the prescriptions of policy makers, youths to partake in every stage of policy formulation, design and implementation and multi stakeholder approach is key in any policy implementation ( Hlungwani & Masuku, 2021).

Yingi (2023) also studied the youth bulge in Africa as a key opportunity for peace building through youth empowerment programmes with, particular reference to Zimbabwe. In its findings, the study noted challenges faced by youths empowerment programmes in Zimbabwe such as absence of political commitment to youth

empowerment, policy manipulation for political goals and under representation of youth in the mainstream of policy implementation and the study concluded that without credible youth engagement in the development process the desire for sustainable peace and development in Zimbabwe and Africa remains a pipe dream (Yingi, 2023).

Chigudu (2025) in the study of empowering African Youth for sustainable peace, assessed the role of entrepreneurship and vocational training initiatives on African youths empowerment and durable peace building. The findings of the study noted that, Vocational programmes managed by Young Africa Skills 2 Live Project and Don Bosco Tech Africa have increased social unity, financial stability and career prospects, decreased youths likelihood of being swayed by extremists ideologies, vocational and business skills helped youths to cope with economic challenges (Chigudu, 2025). Despite some positives registered by Vocational institutes, youth challenges such as gender disparities, inadequate financial support and the detachment between vocational training and industrial expectations is still the norm across Africa (Chigudu, 2025). The study concluded by recommending youths to access vocational skills training, entrepreneurial projects to be gender sensitive, enhancement of Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) as well as mainstreaming of conflict resolution learning in youths empowerment programmes.

A study was also carried out on navigating challenges and taking advantage of opportunities for implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Africa, with particular reference to Zimbabwe. The study noted in its findings the critical factors for African youth development, among them, they include intersection of socio- economic dynamics, synergy between political and environmental factors in directing SDGs delivery in Africa, abundance of natural resources in Africa, availability of young youth population, digital progress as well as multilateral partnership (Katsidzira , 2025). The study noted that in Zimbabwe, the SDGs progress is hindered by funding shortages, political turmoil, inadequate infrastructure and climate –related challenges (Katsidzira, 2025). The study concluded by reinforcing the idea of global collaborations, good governance as well as equitable development approaches are instrumental in shaping sustainable growth and Vison 2030 in Zimbabwe (Katsidzira, 2025).

In addition, a study was carried out in Uganda, focusing on pathways and business models for sustainable youth employment in agriculture. The study noted that key employment opportunities lie in primary agriculture, agricultural services, market development, value addition, agro-input supply and eco-friendly entrepreneurship (Kansiime et al, 2025). The study’s findings noted that, youths in Uganda benefited through an entrepreneurial spirit, reliable cash flow, access to land, capital and credit and the adoption of innovative agricultural practices, technology and digital literacy (Kansiime et al, 2025).

## METHODOLOGY

The research paper is guided by the constructivist paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and that participants’ lived experiences are critical to understanding developmental processes. It is a qualitative empirical case study design which focused on Nyamuroro Vocational Training Centre in Gokwe District, Midlands Province, Zimbabwe. The qualitative approach enables an in depth, contextually embedded exploration of how vocational training influences sustainable livelihood outcomes within a specific rural setting. In this paper semi-structured interview questions were administered to 15 participants that include the trainees, graduates, community members and trainers at Nyamuroro Vocational Technical Centre (NVTC). The participants were selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used owing to its strength in targeting research participants with in-depth understanding of the empowerment of youths through skills development (Memon et al, 2025). The research question guiding this research study is as follows:

How do Nyamuroro VTC programmes impart skills for sustainable livelihoods and empowerment in Gokwe?

The paradigm employed in this research study is constructivist and as a result the interviews and focus groups discussion were used to gather data. In-depth interviews were chosen to illuminate the study because of its ability to probe deeper into significant issues under study (Buys et al, 2022). The study also observed confidentiality, anonymity as well as protecting or avoiding harmful to research participants.

**Participants composition: Table 1**

Category	Number	Gender Distribution
Current Trainees	4	2 Male, 2 Female
Graduates(Self employed)	5	3 Male, 2 Female
Instructors/Trainers	4	3 Male, 1 Female
Community Leaders	2	2 Male

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 42 years and included both male and female respondents. The inclusion of multiple participant categories allowed triangulation and reinforced interpretive credibility.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Data were collected through twelve (12) semi-structured in-depth interviews, one (1) focus group discussion comprising three participants, and non-participant field observations of workshops and training sessions. Semistructured interviews were chosen since they allow for flexibility and probing while maintaining alignment with research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The method enabled participants to reflect on their experiences of vocational training, transitions into employment or self-employment, barriers to livelihood conversion, gendered experiences within programmes, and perceived community effect. The focus group discussion enabled interactive dialogue among participants and allowed exploration of shared and divergent experiences (Morgan, 1997). Field observations rendered contextual insight into pedagogical practices, gender participation dynamics, infrastructural conditions, and instructor-learner interactions. Using multiple data sources strengthened methodological triangulation (Patton, 2015). Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were conducted in English and Shona to ensure inclusivity and participant comfort. All interviews were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English where necessary. Translations were crosschecked to ensure semantic accuracy and preservation of contextual meaning.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis arrived at through the six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and suitability for identifying patterned meanings across qualitative datasets. The analysis essentially proceeded through the following stages:

Familiarisation with the data through repeated reading of transcripts and field notes, generation of initial open codes, searching for patterns across codes, reviewing and refining emerging themes, defining and naming themes and producing interpretive analysis linked to the Capability Approach

The iterative process allowed movement between empirical narratives and theoretical interpretation. This approach enhances analytical depth.

**Coding Strategy: Inductive Coding and Deductive Coding**

The study employed a hybrid coding strategy combining inductive and deductive approaches, which enhances both empirical sensitivity and theoretical coherence (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Inductive coding enabled themes to emerge directly from participant narratives. Emergent codes included “hands-on confidence,” “tool shortages,” “market dependence,” “instructor mentorship,” and “gendered expectations.” This ensured that participant voices remained central to the analysis.

Deductive coding was guided by constructs derived from the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011), including:

Capability expansion, agency, conversion factors (personal, social, environmental), functionings and structural constraints.

Codes were subsequently clustered into broader analytical themes which entails:

Employability capability, entrepreneurial capability, social recognition and dignity, gendered access and participation and institutional and infrastructural constraints

This dual coding strategy facilitated theoretical integration while preserving empirical authenticity. Clearly articulated coding procedures enhance transparency and trustworthiness in qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2017).

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

The study applied the trustworthiness criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), this ensures methodological rigour. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources and participant categories (Patton, 2015). The inclusion of trainees, graduates, instructors, and community leaders permitted cross-validation of findings.

### **Member Checking and Transferability**

As a way to confirm interpretive accuracy preliminary thematic summaries were shared with selected participants. Member checking strengthens credibility by validating researcher interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Thick description of the socio-economic context of Gokwe North and the institutional setting was provided to allow readers to assess the applicability of findings to similar rural contexts (Geertz, 1973).

### **Dependability, Confirmability and Reflexivity**

An audit trail documenting coding decisions, theme development, and analytic memos was maintained throughout the research process. This procedural transparency enhances dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers acknowledged their institutional affiliation with Zimbabwe Open University and engaged in reflexive practice to critically assess potential positional bias. Reflexivity is essential in qualitative research to maintain interpretive integrity (Berger, 2015).

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Enhancing Employability and Job Readiness**

The Nyamuroro VTC programmes are key in imparting skills that enhance employability and job readiness. Nyamuroro VTC programmes include motor mechanics, carpentry, building and construction, metal work, agriculture, hotel and catering as well as fashion and fabrics technology. The programmes equips youth with industry –relevant skills that are critical in preparing graduates to meet labour market needs. Kansiime et al, (2025) noted that vocational education is critical in providing pathways for employment opportunities. In support of the above the research participant reported that:

*The less academically qualified have a chance to enroll and get survival skills. Primary and secondary school drop outs are also accommodated. Those of academic excellence also enroll, so it's a one size fits all. The training period is two years and the curriculum is 80% practical and 20% theory to produce work related productive artisans.*

The programmes are inclusive in nature, providing opportunities for individuals with limited academic qualifications, to enrol and acquire essential, market –relevant survival skills. The Vocational Technical education develops job –specific competencies, ensuring graduates are work ready, productive and capable of meeting labour market and industry expectations. Chigudu (2025) noted that Vocational Technical education is key in the empowerment of youths since it enhanced career prospects and business skills imparted to youths assist them to absorb economic crisis shocks. While Hlungwani and Masuku (2021) agreed on the importance of vocational technical education as the vehicle for youth empowerment, they argued that, programmes are

hindered by endemic corruption and inadequate funding. Traditional approaches focus on producing skilled labour (human capital), the above research participant aligns with Sen (1999)'s human capability perspective by prioritizing agency (learners gain usable skills), empowerment (ability to partake in labour market) and social inclusion (access for marginalized groups). In light of the above, vocational technical education model transcends the traditional human capital narrative and should be understood as a developmental and social justice intervention, one that expands freedom, enhances dignity and enables meaningful participation in the labour market.

Another participant a trainer reported that:

*Hands on is the way to go by providing survival skills.*

The research participant noted that empowering youths requires a hands –on approach that equips them with practical survival skills, enabling them to become confident, self-reliant and prepared for real world challenges. In vocational and technical education, a hands-on approach is essential because it provides learners with practical survival and employable skills needed for meaningful work and economic independence. Betcho (2014) noted that in the process of youth empowerment there is need to emphasize skills capacitation and talent identification. Chigudu (2025) noted that vocational skills training is the way to go in youth empowerment but inadequate funding and the gap between vocational training institutes and industrial expectations are hindering youth empowerment initiatives. The research participant views (Sen, 1999)'s Capability Approach by emphasizing that true empowerment comes from practical experience that expands people's real abilities to act, rather than just providing knowledge or resources. Indeed, empowering youth through practical experience is critical in skill building that expands their capabilities and agency, allowing them to trigger potential into meaningful development outcomes.

One of the participants explained that,

*Through the skills training in building and construction skills I was prepared for employment in the community and beyond. The skills gained at the Nyamuroro VTC helped me to build houses for members in our community. Through these constructions I earned generous income and respect in the community*

The research participant acknowledged the importance of the course undertaken at the Nyamuroro VTC and its vitality is shaping his participation in the community livelihoods. Vocational training building and construction equipped the graduates with the practical skills that allow the youth to secure the employment locally or in places where the skills are needed. Abba and Zubair (2024) noted that youth empowerment through skills development is key in unlocking the potential of the youth but acknowledged that, there are barriers such as inadequate funding and lack of political will impedes genuine youth empowerment and livelihoods. Katsidzira (2025) also concurred with the above, by noting down that, Africa is blessed with youthful population that needs digital support to enhance their empowerment. In the above context, acquiring building and construction skills expands the learners' capabilities by enabling meaningful employment, economic independence and social participation (Sen, 1999). In this study on Nyamuroro VTC in Gokwe, building and construction skills extend beyond technical competence and serve to expand learners' capabilities.

The major findings above explicitly suggest that vocational education at Nyamuroro VTC expands youth capabilities in three primary domains- economic capability (income generation and entrepreneurship), social capability (recognition, dignity, and community contribution) and psychological capability (confidence and agency). In light of this vocational education is not purely a human capital framework rather it can be interpreted as a freedom enhancing intervention. Similarly crucial narratives from graduates indicate not only increased proficiency instead enhanced autonomy necessary in shaping livelihood trajectories. This is in tandem with Sen's argument that development should be evaluated in terms of substantive freedoms rather than resource possession alone.

### **Promoting Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment**

Vocational and technical education equips youths with practical experience that is critical to initiate and build

their own enterprises. Nyamuroro Vocational Training Centre (NVTC) provides its graduates with skills, knowledge and experience that promote entrepreneurship and self-employment. Nawaz et al (2024) noted a constructive synergy between vocational technical education and employment prospects and emphasized the need for vocational education specialists to impart skills to VTC trainees.

*Skills given to students have impacted positively as the skills provided are bearing fruits as the services they provide are affordable for the communities and readily available.*

The skills given to students have had a positive impact. It highlights that vocational and technical education is effective because the practical experience students acquire are positively impacting the society. UN-Wider (2021) noted that, vocational technical education very instrumental in addressing unemployment in Mozambique. Ikutai and Asu-Nandi (2015) noted that vocational technical education in Nigeria was very important in the youth empowerment but there is need of sensitization of communities on the value of vocational technical education. The statement aligns with Sen (1999) by revealing that vocational technical education is key in providing youths with skills as capability expansion, increasing economic freedom and agency as well as inclusive and people centered development. In light of the above, vocational and technical education promotes development as freedom by providing skills into tangible opportunities that help the VTC graduates to provide services and improve the well-being of their communities.

One of the trainers in the field of metal work training stated that:

*We encourage trainees (youth) to become job creators by producing their own goods and services and market them independently.*

It highlighted that trainees (youth) are being motivated and supported to be entrepreneurs rather than job seekers. In the vocational and technical education (VTE) field, the statement means that training is intentionally designed to produce self-reliant, entrepreneurial graduates, not just skilled workers for the existing jobs. Chugudu (2025) noted that vocational technical education in Zimbabwe is important in youth empowerment as it provides financial freedom, employment opportunities and business dexterity. Sen (1999), Capability Approach emphasized empowering the youth to develop entrepreneurial skills and create their own employment opportunities. Evidence from this study suggest that vocational education plays a significant role in the empowerment of the youths.

One the participants a trainer in Building department noted that:

*The graduates become entrepreneurs in Gokwe Nembudziya and beyond.*

The research participant acknowledged that, the graduates of Nyamuroro VTC are contributing to development in Gokwe and other areas at large. The statement highlighted that, the vocational and technical education empowers young people with practical, marketable skills that promote self-employment. Chinyoka and Mlambo (2021) noted that graduates of Vocational technical education are facing challenges in translating their acquired skills due to inadequate capital, restrictive market access and unsustainable entrepreneurial structures. It has been noted that, youth empowerment is critical policy issue but it is hindered by corruption and inadequate funding, harsh business environment and lack of political will (Abba & Zubair, 2024, Hlungwani & Masuku, 2021). Vocational and technical education aligns with the Capability Approach by demonstrating how education expands individual freedoms and capabilities, enabling graduates to convert insights into entrepreneurship agency, economic participation, and locally driven development. Indeed, the transition of graduates into business activities clearly testified, how technical vocational education enhance agency, choice and economic self-reliant in a constrained rural environment of Gokwe. It is thus pivotal to understand how vocational training interacts with contextual conversion factors. The rate at which the graduates will transition learned skills into productive activities is mediated by personal, social and environmental conversion factors as rightly revealed in the findings. This essentially reinforces the capability approach argument that access to resources (Skills training) does not guarantee achieved functionings (sustainable livelihoods). Conversely, the interaction between institutional provision and structural context determines development outcomes.

## Building Social and Economic Resilience

Vocational and technical education in Gokwe–Nembudziya has greatly enhanced social and economic resilience of the youths. Nyamuroro VTC graduates are proving the ability to adapt and recover from economic challenges such as poverty, climate change, unemployment, while maintaining their source of livelihoods. Socially the youths are demonstrating capacity to cope with social challenges by developing and sustain social capital. Obi and Ojo (2024) concurred that, vocational technical education skills were key in empowering youth development in Nigeria. One of the graduates of Nyamuroro VTC explained that,

*Before I enrolled at Nyamuroro VTC, I had no experience of changing business idea into generating income. The fashion and fabrics technology programme has not only imparted in me how to practice tailoring, but instilled in me business entrepreneurship and management. Now I am in a position to provide uniforms to three local schools in Gokwe –Nembudziya, Ward 13 and employ two students on attachments. I feel secure that my future no longer depend on other people but the skills, knowledge and experience I have learnt at the VTC.*

The research participant noted the importance of Nyamuroro VTC in transforming business ideas into sustainable way of generating incomes. The statement of the research participant highlighted that, VTCs are critical in shaping economic and social resilience of the graduates. The statement reflect Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2011)'s Capability Approach, as the lack of skills before enrolling at Nyamuroro VTC limited the individual's capability to convert business ideas into income, while vocational training expanded their practical skills, agency and economic functioning. Kansime et al (2025) concurred with research participant by supporting eco –friendly entrepreneurship. Chigudu (2025) also reiterated the importance of access to vocational technical skills training and entrepreneurial projects in youth empowerment. Therefore, it can be highlighted that, vocational technical education remain a critical pillar in sustaining livelihoods in Gokwe–Nembudziya.

Another respondent, a graduate of Nyamuroro Vocation Technical Education reported that:

*I used to wake up each morning not knowing how I would survive. Farming alone was not enough. At Nyamuroro VTC, I learned welding and metal fabrication. Today I repair farming tools for neighbors, making scotch carts, door frames and window frames for my clients. Now I can save, plan, and re-invest. It has restored hope and provides a steady flow of income that supports my family even during difficult seasons due to climate change.*

The research participant noted that, practical experience gained from Nyamuroro VTC played a critical role in the life transformation. It can be noted that properly trained graduates of vocational education has greater impact on economic and social resilience in the communities. In relation to the above, Yingi (2023) noted that, vocational technical education is critical in youth empowerment but it is undermined by inadequate youth representation in policy implementation. Hlungwani and Masuku (2021) acknowledged vitality of vocational technical education on the lives of the youths but noted that, the youths need to participate in policy formulation as well as use of multi-stakeholder strategy in policy implementation. The views of the research participant align well with Sen (1999) Capability Approach, where it enhances the capabilities of graduates to transform their lives through skills acquired. The findings suggest that vocational technical education contributes significantly in enriching the lives of its graduates in Gokwe.

*What makes Nyamuroro VTC different is the way instructors treated us. They viewed us as partners, not just students. They pushed us to be creative, critical thinkers, address problems and start small business enterprises. I have started a metal and welding business at Mtora-Nembudziya Business Centre, with support from one of the local businessman. The demand for our products in our community is rising and we are ready to serve.*

The research participant noted that Nyamuroro VTC transformed their lives tremendously through their training. In short, vocational education at Nyamuroro VTC is transformational, not just instructional. It was noted that for youth empowerment to be economically and socially enhanced there is need for financial support, provision of tools of trade and business skills. Betcho (2014) concurred with the above, and emphasized that vocational education need to promote skills capacitation. However, Hlungwani and Masuku

(2021) noted that empowerment of youths in rural contexts encountered challenges such as inadequate resources and political interferences. The experience reflects Sen (1999)'s Capability Approach, which views education as a process of expanding individuals' capabilities and agency. In light of the above, Nyamuroro VTC's instructional model contributes not only to employability but also to learners' capacity to make meaningful choices and actively shape and participate in the socio-economic trajectories of their communities.

### **Strengthening Community Engagement and Ownership**

Vocational education through Nyamuroro VTC greatly contributed to the strengthening community engagement and ownership of empowerment by the youth in Gokwe. Through supporting youth business initiatives, Nyamuroro VTC contributes to local economic activity and positions young people as agents of community change rather than dependants. One of the respondents, trainer in the department of carpentry noted that,

*Nyamuroro VTC shapes the students's discipline. During training and after completing their studies in two years, the youths are displaying good behavior by shunning drug abuse and substance.*

The research participant acknowledges that, Nyamuroro Vocational technical training Centre (VTC) participates in capacitating students's discipline, not merely focusing on technical skills. Nyamuroro VTC remain critical in producing graduates with good behavior, disciplined and focused citizenry. Yingi (2023) argued that, empowerment of youth is key for economic development in Africa but full participation of the youth in community development is hindered by lack of political commitment and largely with absence of youths in mainstream policy formulation, design and implementation. Katsidzira (2025) focused on youth participation to community strengthening and development through use of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but lack of good governance and poor digital progress is haunting youth empowerment. Nyamuroro Vocational Training Centre is playing a significant role in shaping students discipline and promoting good behavior by enhancing their capabilities, and not just in terms of technical skills, but in personal values, decision making and selfregulation. In light of the above, it has been noted that, Nyamuroro VTC contributed to the socio-economic development of the community of Gokwe by producing responsible citizens.

One of the Community leader explained that,

*Nyamuroro VTC has been critical in Gokwe North through building classrooms and houses for teachers at Nyamuroro Primary school and in the community. They also built the administration block at Denda secondary school and participated in roofing several schools in Gokwe North. This has contributed to infrastructural development and empowerment in Gokwe North District.*

The research participant noted that, Nyamuroro VTC's work has improved infrastructure and empowered the community of Gokwe North. It demonstrated that vocational technical institutions are not only training centres, but critical drivers of community development and solving of local problems. Mukembo et al (2020) noted that vocational technical education enable youth to acquire livelihoods skills and become useful members of their respective communities. Achiro and Mwesigwa (2023) also concurred with the above and noted the positive impact of youth development initiatives on communities in Uganda. Through building classrooms, Nyamuroro VTC directly supports young people's capability to be educated theoretically and in practice and enhances livelihoods and practical skills capabilities (Sen, 1999, Nussbaum, 2011). Indeed, Vocational technical education is critical in community development, infrastructure renewal and empowerment.

Another respondent a traditional leader in Gokwe North reported that,

*The Nyamuroro VTC training has increased community development, unity and social cohesion within surrounding communities through producing builders, carpenters, metal workers, fashion and fabric tailors who are dominating the economic life and livehoods of Gokwe North.*

The statement of the research participant noted that Nyamuroro VTC'S training programmes have positively impacted the community and local economy in Gokwe North. In short the VTC is empowering individuals with skills, strengthening community bonds and boosting the economic and social life of Gokwe North. Vocatioanl and technical education is not just about skills acquisition but an instrument for holistic education. Mathews and Savarimuthu (2019) noted that vocational technical education is critical in improving the socio-

economic life of the communities. Nawaz et al (2024) also noted that vocational education had positive implication on securing better job prospects and improve economic life. Nyamuroro VTC exemplifies Sen (1999) theory by transforming education into real freedoms. The findings crucially revealed institutional embeddedness and community development, Nyamuroro VTC's involvement in constructing school infrastructure and community buildings illustrates institutional social responsibility. This cohesion strengthens social capital, community legitimacy and vital local demand for graduate services. By the same token rural development is facilitated through the activities of the vocational institutions as they can possibly function as localized development hubs rather isolated training providers. Therefore, it can be concluded that proper implementation of vocational technical education is key in transforming the lives of graduates from VTCs as well as developing their communities.

### **Fostering Inclusive and Gender Sensitive Development**

Vocational and technical education of Nyamuroro VTC empowers the youth by providing practical skills that enhance economic participation and self-reliance. Gender and sensitive policies pursued by the VTC ensured both boys and girls are given access and equal opportunities to pursue the programmes of their choice. Due to equal opportunities afforded to the youth in Gokwe and beyond, they are in a position to contribute to the economic development and well-being of their communities.

One of the research participants a trainer in the metal work department reported that:

*Fees are affordable for the communities such that the marginalized afford to send their children to train at Nyamuroro VTC.*

The research participant noted that, the cost of training at Nyamuroro VTC is low enough for families in the community, including the marginalized or low-income households. Even those with limited financial resources are able to send their children for vocational training, making vocational education accessible and inclusive. The statement highlights that Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) at Nyamuroro VTC is accessible and inclusive because the fees are affordable and this enhanced wider participation, equity in skills development as well as promotion of human capital. It has been argued that, low cost fees is critical and important in the process of empowering the youth through vocational technical education but their empowerment is hindered by lack of stable and inadequate financial injection (Abba & Zubair, 2024, Chinyoka & Mlambo, 2021). In light of the above, it can be noted that, with affordable fees at VTCs, it has great potential to empower youths from different background perspectives and meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 2030).

Another respondent in the department of fashion and fabrics noted that:

*The institution is locally accessible at low costs, those who can come from their homes every day to train can do so while those in need of accommodation are accommodated in the VTC boarding facilities at affordable fees.*

The research participant noted that, Nyamuroro VTC strongly linked to youth empowerment by increasing access to skills, reduced financial barriers and equal opportunity to all youths. Vocational Technical Education (VTE) is designed to be accessible, affordable, and inclusive so that all young people can benefit from skills training. Hlungwani and Masuku (2021) noted the youth are neglected in mainstream policy formulation and implementation and challenges such as inadequate resources and political interference undermine youth empowerment programmes. The research participant is connected to Sen (1999), Capability Approach by expanding youths capabilities, removing barriers to youth empowerment and by enhancing freedom of choice and above all promoting human development. In the foregoing analysis, the arrangement practiced at Nyamuroro VTC does not merely increase enrolment but expands learner's real freedoms to acquire practical skills, secure employment and pursue self-reliance in a secure environment.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study set out to examine, through an empirical qualitative case study, how vocational education at Nyamuroro Vocational Training Centre (VTC) contributes to sustainable livelihood outcomes among rural

youth in Gokwe North District. Through semi-structured interviews and focused group discussions with trainees, graduates, instructors and community leaders, the findings reveal that vocational training functions as capability expanding intervention rather than merely a technical skills transmission process. Empirically, evidence obtained demonstrate that Nyamuroro VTC enhances youth employability, employability, entrepreneurship, social recognition, and economic resilience. The findings revealed that credible, relevant skills development are critical in empowering the youth with the capacity to raise income, prevent dependency syndrome and practically contribute to the economic development of Gokwe North district and beyond. Indeed, graduates reported increased agency, income diversification, improved self confidence and improved participation in community development initiatives such as infrastructure and service provision. Importantly these outcomes reflect an expansion of substantive freedoms in line with the Capability Approach. On another note, the findings reveal that vocational education does not automatically translate into sustainable livelihoods. Livelihood outcomes are mediated by contextual conversion factors which essentially include access to start-up capital, availability of tools and equipment, infrastructure quality, market access, and gendered social norms. After training completion, graduates with stronger social networks and financial support were able to convert acquired skills into viable enterprises more rapidly than those lacking such enabling conditions. Also, the institutions demonstrate formal gender inclusivity in enrolment and programme access but female graduates continue to encounter differentiated post-training constraints, including limited capital access and social expectations that affect livelihood outcomes. In light of this, the study suggests that inclusive access to training does not automatically guarantee equitable livelihood outcome. The youth who passed through Nyamuroro Vocational Technical Centre revealed improved technical competency in areas such as carpentry, welding, agriculture and motor mechanics, but also enhanced problem solving capabilities, teamwork and business management skills. These skills are essential for critical participation in economic development in rural Zimbabwe. The study therefore concludes that vocational training in rural Zimbabwe can significantly expand youth capabilities, however its transformative potential depends on complementary structural support mechanisms. Most importantly policy interventions should move beyond training provision to include financial inclusion strategies, tool-grant schemes, gender-responsive enterprise support and strengthened market linkages. Therefore, empowering youths through skills development at Nyamuroro Vocational Technical Centre complemented with after training supporting mechanisms has proven to be a viable pathway towards sustainable livelihoods in Gokwe.

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