



EMBU COUNTY ESTABLISHES TALENT ACADEMY TO BOOST YOUTH CREATIVITY AND OFFER AN ALTERNATIVE PATHWAY TO EMPLOYMENT

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Introduction (*Context and Challenge*):

The population of Embu County is 608,599 as per the 2019 national census. More than half of this population is comprised of the youth; research by various agencies, including the Kenya Bureau of Statistics and the Embu County Integrated Development plan, suggests that the number of the youth population is slightly above all other age groups, especially in Embu town, which is the administrative county headquarters.

One of the fundamental reasons that Embu town has a huge youthful population is the mushrooming institutions of higher learning. Resultantly, there is a steady rise in the numbers of youths in the creative industry within the county. Previously, many artists and creative industry stakeholders in Embu had to travel to Nairobi and/or other major towns to access services, such as music and video production. This was a monumental



challenge that discouraged talented youths from following their passion and consequently earning from their talents.

The inception of devolved government was a blessing, as the first County Government of Embu had a vision for its youth in the creative industry. There was a critical need to establish a facility that supported talented youth.

Implementation of the practice (*Solution Path*):

To address the gap in the creative industry, the County Government of Embu, through the Department of Youth Empowerment and Sports, sought to establish a Talent Academy mandated with talent identification, tapping, nurturing, developing and placement of creative and sports talents.



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Back in the day, Embu Talent Academy was Embu Sports Club, a recreational facility for the civil servants that collapsed due to mismanagement. It became a youth den for drug abuse and other adversities. In 2013, there was also a plot to grab the Club's land to construct a parking lot for the county assembly. The scheme ignited several demonstrations by the youth, which led to the decision to renovate the Sports Club and use it for talent development; hence, the Embu Talent Academy idea was born.



Youths attending a digital marketing training workshop at the talent academy

Renovation works officially began in 2014 in phases divided into financial years since the project was funded by the County Government. The first phase involved the construction of a hall and the basketball pitch, which was done in the financial year 2014/2015.



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In the year 2015/2016, the second phase of constructing a perimeter wall and landscaping was done, while in 2016/2017, music instruments were purchased.

During the County Government's second term, the first project at the Talent Academy was to fit a music production studio in 2018/2019, and in 2019/2020, technical staff were employed to run the Academy. The construction of the Academy has been progressive,



The Academy's basketball pitch

and the cost used so far can be approximated at 40 million. The bottom line is that the project was undertaken in phases, which has aided in its success.

Embu County Talent Academy is domiciled in the Department of Youth Empowerment and Sports with the mandate of empowering talent and sports.

The Department has played a significant role in planning, designing, overseeing, and evaluating the construction of the Talent Academy, and in the day-to-day operations to date.

The Talent Academy provides space, resources, and an environment that challenges talented youth to develop their talents through innovative approaches. It also provides a venue for all the youth to meet and socialize. The facility includes space for indoor and outdoor sports, recreation, conferencing (to host meetings, trainings, etc.), and a fully furnished music production studio.



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To achieve the objective of empowering many youths, the Department subsidizes charges for chargeable activities like meetings, sports tournaments, trainings and concerts grounds.



A music session going on



A basketball game at the Academy's pitch

Results of the practice (outputs and outcomes)-.



Youths cheering during one of the outdoor events at the Academy

The outputs and outcomes of the talent academy are tangible and contribute positively to society. First, the facility serves approximately 500 youths weekly in different sectors. This is a great milestone finding that one institution offers services to such a large population.

Second, the Academy has supported equality for the creative industry where the less privileged in society can access talent-related services either for free or

at a subsidized fee. Most of the artists served at the Talent Academy are low-income earners or have no income at all and benefit from the subsidized charges for music recording or total payment waiver.



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Third, the Academy has recorded several music tracks and videos for different artists. From March 2020 to December 2021, at least 200 audio tracks by over 50 artists were recorded at the studio. Some of these audios have been converted into music videos. Additionally, the Academy has created networking for artists with radio and TV stations providing music airplay.



A fashion show at the Academy

Job creation is another output that can be accounted for. For example, DJ Blaxe, one of the Academy's graduates, hosts a show called *Iwake* every Saturday on KTN through links made by the Academy. Locally, with the skills acquired at the Academy, very many youths are getting jobs in different areas such as videography at weddings, emceeing at dowry negotiation events, etc.

The Academy also offers different skills trainings such as deejaying, dancing, modelling, coaching, and refereeing. For example, film production trainings have benefited 60 participants who have gained skills in scriptwriting, acting, video production, photography and video editing. The Academy hosted a grand cinematography training workshop in partnership with Canon and Kenya Film Commission, where 30 people gained cinematography skills. Graduates from these training programs have produced **five** films that have been showcased both locally and nationally.

For sports; the Talent Academy offers an array of activities, including football, handball, darts, basketball, skating, volleyball, table tennis, and chess. It also offers trainings for



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coaches and referees, with over 50 referees already benefitting from the training programs.

Additionally, youth with different capacities, skills, and talents have pooled together to form groups and community-based organizations (CBO) that are entirely focused on the arts industry. A good example is a youth umbrella CBO known as *Sanaa na Kahawa* that attracts around 400 youths weekly for live performances, talent exchange, networking, youth-related issues and talent development.



Youths modelling African wear

Sanaa na Kahawa is a youth-based CBO that deals with arts. The CBO was established by talented youths from the Talent Academy through the support and patronage of the Academy. The idea behind *Sanaa na Kahawa* was brought to life by Talent Academy staff who saw the need for a program where the artists who are trained or practice at the Academy can be showcasing their talent. As a result, *Sanaa na Kahawa* was brought to life and every Friday artists meet for different live performances and art exhibitions. The event is open to the public, and the audience has grown sporadically, from a mere 15 people to over 400 people every single Friday.

In a nutshell, there are many positive and tangible outcomes associated with the facility for the few years it has existed.

Future expansion plans of the Academy include constructing a swimming pool, more offices and rooms to offer space for trainings, an ICT hub, a cafeteria and a hostel to accommodate talents from different corners of the world. Similarly,



A huge crowd of youths attending a live performance at the Academy



there is a plan to open satellite talent development facilities in all the 20 wards to take services closer to the people.

Lessons learnt:

The biggest achievement for the facility has been the capacity to entrench the culture of acknowledging and appreciating talent as a career or profession within the region. There is a surge in self-belief among the creatives and hope for a brighter future for the talented.

Besides, the facility has eased the burden of travelling long distances to major towns to record, produce, or even acquire creative-related skills. It is extremely expensive to learn film production, for instance, in a private college, whereas the Talent Academy offers that for free.

Also, the fact that the youth can pop in, record their music and go back to their daily hustles is a plus for the industry. Again, the number of creative industry stakeholders has increased in Embu because there is a facility where they can find artists and spot new talent. Several artists groomed at the facility have featured on major TV stations or performed at national arenas.

However, there is still a challenge in helping the artists to monetize their talents by charging for performances and through content distribution since the facility mainly focuses on content creation and production. This is a gap that requires the support of relevant partners, especially private organizations.

Recommendations (Conclusion)

- One of the recommendations is to establish a public-private partnership for such projects to have better success.
- Secondly, there is a need to have a long-term plan for the project and divide it into milestones or phases in order to achieve the outcome.
- There is also a need to establish ways of generating revenue for the facility. Currently, for example, the Academy provides space for conferences and workshops to other governmental departments at a subsidized fee which is paid directly to the Embu County Revenue accounts. The generation of revenue motivates the County Government to allocate a budget for the Talent Academy.
- There is also a dire need for mapping the target population to avoid conflict of interest in service provision.



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Further reading:

A list of references and source documents that give additional information on the best practice for those who may be interested in knowing how the results benefited the population can be provided