

**Assessment Of How a Devolved Function of Running Youth Polytechnics Is Being Realized in Vihiga County, Kenya**

By

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**Abstract**

The running of Youth (Village) Polytechnics is one of devolved functions to County Government's level, in line with the Constitution of Kenya 2010. According to part 2, section 9 of the 4 schedules of the constitution, among the functions and powers of the County are: Pre-primary education, village polytechnics, home-craft centers and child-care facilities. There are increasing concerns over underdeveloped vocational training centers in Vihiga County, and their incompetence to provide quality education (Luvisia, et al, 2019). It is not clear why these institutions are underperforming under the watch of Vihiga County Government. It is not quite clear whether the Central government is playing its role of facilitating the county governments to undertake well this devolved function as per the constitution. Article 187(2) (a) and (b) states that, if a function or power is transferred from a government at one level to a government at the other level, arrangements shall be put in place to ensure that the resources necessary for the performance of the function or exercise of the power are transferred and constitutional responsibility for the performance of the function or exercise of the power shall remain with the government to which it is assigned by the Fourth Schedule. Does Vihiga County have the capacity to handle this devolved function? Is the Central Government playing its role of resource allocation to this effect? These, among other questions are the concern of this study. This study is therefore designed to find out how Youth Polytechnics in Vihiga County are faring on in terms of: student enrolment, resource allocation, physical facilities and the status of teaching staff - its qualification and adequacy. The study will employ Descriptive Research Design and will be grounded on Institutional Theory. It will use questionnaires interview schedules and document analysis guide to collect the relevant data. Its respondents will include, students, Teachers and Heads of Youth Polytechnics, the County Executive Committee (CEC) member in Charge of Education in Vihiga County, the Chief Officer (CO) in Charge of Education in the county and an Officer in charge of Youth Polytechnics in Vihiga County. Quantitative Data will be analyzed using Descriptive Statistics while Qualitative Data will be analyzed Thematically. Analyzed Quantitative Data will be presented in Frequency Tables and Percentages. Qualitative Data will be presented under different Themes by Narrations.

**Key Words:** Devolution, Devolved Functions, Youth Polytechnics, Resource Allocation, Quality Education

**Assessment of how A Devolved Function of Running Vocational Training Centers is Being Realized in Vihiga County, Kenya**

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**Introduction and Background to the Study**

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Kenya dates back to early 1900s when the native industrial training depot was started in Nairobi by the missionaries (Elimu Insight, 2016 as quoted by Mboya, 2022). Youth polytechnics were established in Kenya after a conference organized by the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) in 1966 (UNESCO, 2010).

Currently, Youth Polytechnics, which are referred to as Vocational Training Centers (VTCs) fall under middle level colleges popularly known as Technical, Vocational Education and Technology (TVET) Colleges. TVET colleges are of different categories with different names, depending on nature and level of training they offer. The TVET Act of 2013 revised in 2014 has grouped TVET colleges in four main categories: (a) Vocational Centers that offer courses up to Artisan Certificate; (b) Technical and Vocational Colleges that offer programmes up to Diploma level; (c) Technical Trainer Colleges which offer up to Higher Diploma level; and (d) National Polytechnics which offer Higher Diplomas. Higher Diploma is an equivalent of a Bachelor's Degree offered at university level. Further, Article 26 (1) (e) of TVET Act (2013) gives room for the government through the relevant Ministry to come up with other categories of TVET, when and as it becomes necessary.

Technical and vocational education and training is not only advantageous in being flexible, but is also seen to offer some hope to academically less able students who are not able to advance through the school system (Sifuna, 2020). In this context therefore, Vocational Training Centers in Kenya are basic education institutions intended to offer primary school leavers opportunities to acquire quality skills and knowledge to make them employable while at the same time, providing avenues and paths for attaining higher education through technical and vocational education system (Kamau, 2013). Vocational and technical education and training are important for a country's sustainable human capital and economic development (Onsomu et al., 2009). According to the Constitution of Kenya 2010, the running of Village Polytechnics (VTCs) is one of devolved functions to County Governments (Republic of Kenya, 2010).

In the context of globalization, TVET systems face many challenges in developing skills required for improving productivity and global economic competitiveness (Onsomu et al., 2009). In many developed countries, TVET is supported by a strong legal and institutional framework. For example, the famous dual system of VET in Germany is anchored in a law enacted in 1969. In addition, VET rests on four Acts of Parliament: Vocational Training Act, Employment Promotion Act, Coordination Training Regulations, and Federal Government Planning and Research Act (Hippach-Schneider *et al.*, 2007).

In China there is a two tier TVET system, central and provincial. Each province has its own autonomous jurisdiction. Both the central and local tiers have regulations and decisions concerning the structure, instructions, administration, school teachers and teaching materials

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among others, of technical and vocational education and the placement of graduates (Zuguang and Zida, 1996).

In Malaysia Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is one of the critical drivers in the transformation of Malaysia's education system and contributes towards economic growth. It works to develop and equip individuals with current technical skills based on industry demand (Chye, et al, 2021).

In sub-Saharan Africa, there are many obstacles facing TVET sector (Wanjohi et al, 2019). Besides being small, the TVET sector in most Sub-Saharan countries is characterized by a significant lack of practical relevance and responsiveness to labour market needs, insufficient infrastructure and equipment and extremely low throughputs. (Eicker et al, 2016) A major challenge is posed by the quality in teaching. With lecturer training mainly taking place at universities, only a few lecturers combine pedagogical competencies with technical qualifications and industry experience. Although many developing countries have committed resources to TVET and have made substantial progress, Tom and Norton (2016) have listed nine challenges that are facing TVET Colleges in these countries:

1. TVET does not respond to the demands of the market and the needs of industry;
2. TVET does not promote the priorities of the government especially its economic policy;
3. Most developing countries put less value to TVET than universities or college tertiary education;
4. Resources for TVET are very limited;
5. Lack of transfer across streams in the education system;
6. Poverty is still a deterrent;
7. Weak participation from other stakeholders;
8. Lack of industrial experience for many TVET teachers; and
9. Lack of motivation for students to invest in TVET education.

The above is very true in reference to Kenyan situation, as shown by many studies conducted in this area. For instance, Luvisia et al (2019) found that Youth from poor family backgrounds still find it hard to access the available youth polytechnics. Ombaba (2012) observes that in Kenya, there is lack of relevance in skills taught that match with occupational and social realities present in today's economy. Most youth polytechnics in Kenya are ill prepared for training, as their physical facilities are run down and equipment are inadequate, absolute or not working (Kamau, 2013). There is also a scarcity of professional and qualified teachers for the teaching of vocational subjects in Youth Polytechnics in Kenya (Agufana & Ndavula, 2018). Youth Polytechnics are yet to operate as centers of choice rather than as centers of 'last resort' (MoE, 2009 as quoted by UNESCO, 2010). The unpredictable and dynamic business environment has led to continuous shift in demand for improved skills and labor and therefore necessitating restructuring training programs to respond to the industry needs (Republic of Kenya, 2013 as quoted by Mboya, 2022).

This background necessitated the conducting of this study to find out how Technical and Vocational colleges were realizing their intended objectives. This being one of the devolved functions, the study was set to assess how it was being realized in Vihiga County.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The running of Village Polytechnics (VTCs) is one of devolved functions to County Government's level, in line with the Constitution of Kenya 2010. According to part 2, section 9 of the 4<sup>th</sup> schedule of the constitution, among the functions and powers of the County are: Pre-primary education, village polytechnics, home-craft centers and child-care facilities. There are increasing concerns over underdeveloped vocational training centers in Vihiga County, and their incompetence to provide quality education (Luvisia, et al, 2019). Article 187 (2)(a) of the constitution of Kenya- 2010 states that, "If a function or power is transferred from a government at one level to a government at the other level, arrangements shall be put in place to ensure that the resources necessary for the performance of the function or exercise of the power are transferred." Is the central government facilitating adequately the county government of Vihiga to run its Vocational Training Centers? Do students in Vihiga County have the motivation to invest in TVET education and view Youth Polytechnics as centers of choice rather than as centers of 'last resort' (MoE, 2009 as quoted by UNESCO, 2010)? These questions among others prompted the conducting of this study.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Objectives of this study were to find out:

1. Enrolment situation in VTCs in Vihiga County;
2. Whether central government was allocating Vihiga County adequate resource for VTCs and if there were other sources of funds for this purpose;
3. The status of physical facilities in VTCs in Vihiga County; and
4. The status of teaching staff in terms of its adequacy and qualification.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by Institutional Theory founded by John Meyer and Brian Rowan (1970). According to Sage Reference Encyclopedia, Institutional Theory is an approach to understanding management practices as a product of social rather than economic pressures. This theory postulates that the adoption and retention of many organizational practices are often more dependent on social pressures for conformity and legitimacy rather than on technical pressures for economic performance. Thus, the theory considers the process by which structure including rules, norms, and routines become established as authoritative guidelines (Scott, 2004). The theory provides an explanation of mechanisms through which organizations seek to align perceptions of their practices and characteristics with social and cultural values (Wood, 1998).

In the context of this study, VTCs are seen to be important institutions at grassroots level, since they aim at providing basic skills in vocational and technical education which are important components for a country's sustainable human capital and economic development. Youth Polytechnics offer short courses that are skill oriented that are required at grass-root level such as: carpentry; masonry, metal-works; Plumbing and Pipe Fitting; Food and Beverage/Food Processing Technology; tailoring; among others whose job opportunities are readily available in country side where these institutions (VTCs) are located. Thus the Vocational Training Centers as institutions gets entrenched in the community they are situated and become part and parcel of that community since they depend on each other for existence and operation.

## **Methods and Materials**

### **Research Design, Research Sample and Research Instruments**

The study used descriptive survey design to collect data from respondents, analyze and present data. Some respondents were purposively sampled, while others were obtained through simple random sampling. Respondents included: The Officer in charge of Youth Polytechnics at the County Level, Principals of Youth Polytechnics in Vihiga County, Teachers/Instructors and students.

Questionnaires, interview schedules, observations and document analysis guides were the main research instruments that were used to collect the necessary data for this study. Center Managers, Trainers and trainees filled questionnaires; while the County Director in charge of TVET and TVET Sub-County Officers were interviewed by the researcher.

### **Review of Related Literature**

In Kenya, the Directorate of Vocational Education and Training (DVET) is responsible for promoting access, equity, relevance and quality training in Vocational Training Centers (VTCs). This involves development of National Policy on VTCs, implementing and reviewing VET curricular, construction, rehabilitation, equipping and expansion of VTCs in collaboration with the County Governments as well as capacity building of human resource (Republic of Kenya, 2018). However, challenges are still enormous.

Many studies have been conducted on VTCs in Kenya. Findings and recommendations of these studies have revolved around five major issues:

- (i) Inadequate financing of Vocational training;
- (ii) Lack of enough qualified trainers/instructors;
- (iii) Lack of or ill-equipped physical facilities;
- (iv) Low esteem among trainers as a result of stigmatization or looking down upon Vocational Training making it appear unpopular- a last resort venture;
- (v) Gender disparities among trainees; among other related issues.

Some of the studies that have been conducted in Kenya in this case are here reviewed:

A study conducted by Luyali et al (2015) on ‘Enrolment Trends in Youth Polytechnics in West Pokot County, Kenya’ found that: Youth Polytechnics operate without a clear curriculum; Youth Polytechnics are characterized by dismal rates of participation and gross inequalities in terms of gender; due to lack of adequate and relevant materials as well as insufficient and poorly trained staff, the quality of training was below expected levels; and that funding remained the most outstanding disincentive in implementation of Youth Polytechnic’s curriculum.

Ngumbao (2012) conducted a study on ‘Factors Influencing Youth Enrolment Levels in Public Youth Polytechnics in Mombasa County, Kenya’. The study found out that economic status, socio-cultural factors and quality of education are factors influencing youth enrolment levels in Public Youth Polytechnics in Mombasa County.

A study by Agufana and Ndavula (2011) on ‘Challenges Affecting the Effective Implementation of Vocational Education Programme in Youth Polytechnics in Kenya’ found that: there was a dearth (scarcity) of professional and qualified teachers for the teaching of

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vocational subjects; inadequate infrastructure and equipment in schools; insufficient instructional materials and books in schools; and that the polytechnics were generally poorly financed.

Luvisia et al (2019) assessed the Effectiveness of County Governments in the Development of Vocational Training Centers in Vihiga County. The study found that the County Government: did not have any other strategy to funding apart from giving of bursaries to needy students and in essence the bursary was not adequate, which led to trainees' dropout and inability of managers to run the Vocational Training centers efficiently and effectively; had good strategies for improving enrolment in the Vocational Training Centers which included giving bursary to needy students, marketing/campaign during political rallies and sponsored graduation ceremonies; did not adequately support the Vocational Training Centers to acquire teaching and learning materials making instructors to have challenges in training the students; and had made efforts to employ instructors on permanent and pensionable terms but they were not adequate basing on the staff needs assessment report including those on contract and on Board of Management.

Ngugi and Muthima (2017) wrote a paper on 'Female Participation in Technical, Vocational Education and Training Institutions (TVET) Subsector: The Kenya Experience'. The paper observed that despite the progress made over the last decade in enhancing access, equity, retention, quality, completion rates and gender parity in education and training in Kenya, the Technical, Vocational, and Education Training (TVET) subsector continues to experience low female enrolment in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) based courses.

Andiema and Manasi's study (2021) on 'Female Students Participation in Technical Vocational Education and Training in West Pokot County found out that: the distribution of students in all public VTCs in West Pokot County favoured the male gender over female students; courses offered in VTCs tend to attract more male students compared to female ones; the distribution of the teaching workforce in VTCs was male-dominated and therefore, female students did not have role models to look up to; and majority of girls who were unable to proceed to secondary and tertiary education were not aware of the opportunities available in VTCs in the county.

The study concluded that social-cultural factors, lack of role models and poverty were some of the barriers affecting female students' participation in vocational education and training. Further, the study recommended that: more work should be done by all stakeholders to ensure that courses offered in VTCs are attractive to female students, social, cultural and physical barriers which prevent female students from enrolling and completing vocational training in West Pokot County should be removed.

Kamau (2013) studied the 'Challenges Affecting the Technical and Vocational Education Training Youth Polytechnics in Kiambu County'. The study found that the polytechnics faced limited budget; most of the tools and equipment were outdated and the ones which were broken down were never repaired.

Kiguta (2017) looked at the 'Factors Influencing Implementation of Youth Vocational Training Centers Projects by County Governments in Kenya, A Case of Isiolo County Government'. The study found out that: there were delays in funding the implementation of vocational training projects which highly influenced the completion of projects; and politics highly influenced the implementation of vocational training centers projects.

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Maina (2017) assessed ‘Factors Influencing Performance Youth Training Centers in Kenya: A Case of Machakos County’. The study found that: proper stakeholder involvement impacts change in projects; the projects did not achieve their objectives due to poor decision making; and adequate funding positively influenced the performance of youth polytechnics in Machakos County.

A study by Oloo (2014) was on, ‘Influence of Government Funding on Skill Development in Public Youth Polytechnics in Samia Sub County, Kenya’. Some of the findings of this study were: the government had put more efforts to enhance skill development among the youth in the Youth Polytechnics; the trades that were being offered in the Youth Polytechnics were aimed at imparting employable skills among these youth trainees so that they could earn a living, be self-reliant and contribute to national development; Youth Polytechnic had received tuition funds, modern tools and equipment, qualified instructors and facilities (twin workshops); funding was inadequate; majority of trainees came from very poor backgrounds and therefore they strained to pay fees; due to vulnerability, some trainees drop out of the program.

Murgor (2013) made a comparison of Technical and Vocational acquired skills differences based on gender in TVET institutions, Uasin Gishu County. The study found out that: male students had significantly and highly acquired interpersonal skills, Information Communication Technical (ICT) skills, Critical analysis, ability to use numerical data and management skills than female; male students had also acquired critical thinking skills two times higher than that of female students; female students had significant and highly acquired skills in ability to work in a team, organizational skills and academic qualifications than male.

Mutori (2015) assessed the quality of programmes and training in Youth Polytechnics in Kenya and found out that: there was shortage of instructors in the Youth Polytechnics; no standardization in academic programmes had been undertaken across the country; trainees’ enrolment was diminishing; and quality of training, physical facilities and human resource was wanting.

## **Methods and Materials**

### **Research Design, Research Sample and Research Instruments**

The study used descriptive survey design to collect data from respondents, analyze and present data. Some respondents were purposively sampled, while others were obtained through simple random sampling. Respondents included: the TVET County Director; Sub – County Directors in charge of TVET; VTCs Managers, VTCs’ Trainers and Trainees. Questionnaires, interview schedules and document analysis guides were the main research instruments that were used to collect the necessary data for this study. The study used 30% of trainers (19 respondents), 30% (10) of Center Managers and 10% of trainees (500 respondents) as a sample. The sample also included one TVET Director and all the 5 Sub-County Directors in charge of TVET who were purposively sampled. Center Managers, Trainers and trainees filled questionnaires; while the Director and Sub-County Directors were interviewed by the researcher, using semi-structured interview schedules.

Out of a target population of 5,901 people, a sample of 637 respondents was selected, which constituted 1 TVET County Director, all the 5 Sub-County Directors in charge of TVET,

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10 Center Managers, 56 Trainers and 500 trainees. A summary of the target population and the selected sample was as indicated in table 1 below:

**Table 1: Target Population and the Selected Sample**

	County TVET Director	1	--	01
	Sub-County TVET Directors	5	--	05
	Center Managers	34	30	10
	Trainers	187	30	56
	Trainees	5,674	10	567
		<b>5,901</b>		<b>639</b>

Source: Field Survey 2023

### **The Study Area**

The study was conducted in Vihiga County. The county is found in western part of Kenya. It is one of the four counties situated in former Western Province of Kenya. Other three counties are Kakamega, Bungoma and Busia. Vihiga County borders Nandi County to the East, Kisumu County to the South, Siaya County to the West and Kakamega County to the North. There are five Sub-Counties in Vihiga County – Hamisi, Sabatia, Vihiga, Emuhaya and Luanda. Mbale town is the Headquarter of Vihiga County.

According to census of 2019, Vihiga County has a total population of 590,013 people, with a population density of 1,046 people per square kilometer. It has an area of 563.8 square kilometers. Main economic activities in Vihiga County are Subsistence farming, Tea farming, Horticulture and Livestock farming.



**Map of Vihiga County**



## Results and Discussions

### Enrollment Trend

There are over 34 Vocational Training Centers (VTCs) in Vihiga County spread across the five Sub-Counties. They have enrolment capacity of 4500 trainees. On average, each center has an average capacity of 132 trainees. Currently, the enrolment stands at of 5,674 trainees, giving each center an average of 167 trainees. Thus, there is over-enrolment of 1,274 trainees. Some centers have more than the expected number of trainees, whereas others are under-enrolled. This is due to several factors, key among them being physical facilities. Some VTCs are well equipped while others are ill equipped. Table 2 below shows the distribution of VTCs in each of the five Sub – Counties of Vihiga County.

**Table 2: Distribution or VTCs in Vihiga County**

S/No	Sub – County	Number of VTCs
1	Hamisi	12
2	Sabatia	06
3	Vihiga	09
4	Emuhaya	02
5	Luanda	05
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b>

*Source: Field Survey 2023*

The intake, according to official documents has gone up due to public awareness campaign by local politicians, payment of capitation by County Government, and a proposal to start a fund for graduating trainees to venture into self-employment.

### **Financial Resources**

Respondents indicated that currently, National Government does not disburse funds meant for this devolved function (VTCs) separately as it used to do previously. Central Government now days disburses funds to County Governments for all the devolved functions, a fact that makes it difficult to allocate fairly and satisfactorily across all the functions. The funds from central government are meagre and irregularly dispersed, coupled with delays and underfunding.

The County Government is forced to look for funds from different sources for both development and recurrent expenditures. This include putting up new physical facilities; maintaining and upgrading old ones ; paying salaries for trainers; providing Bursaries to needy trainees; among others. The county government also solicits for funds from donors to help in putting up and equipping VTCs' physical facilities such as Workshops.

Currently, the government is funding VTCs through capitation policy, where amount is disbursed to each VTC depending on the number of trainees enrolled. Trainees meet other expenses like lunch and examination fees. A good number of trainees (80%) claimed that the amount charged for lunch and examination was proving to be a big burden since most of them came from poor background. It was their wish that the Counted Government footed these bills.

### **The status of physical facilities**

Respondents were asked to give their views on adequacy of physical facilities in VTCs in Vihiga County. Their views were as shown in table 3 below:

**Table 3: Respondents’ Views on Adequacy of Physical Facilities in VTCs**

S/ No	Respondents	Adequate		Inadequate	
		<i>f</i>	%	<i>F</i>	%
1	Center Managers	04	40	06	60
2	Trainers	20	35	36	65
3	Trainees	170	30	397	70
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>69</b>

Source: Field Survey 2023

Table 3 above shows that Center Managers (60%), Trainers (65%) and trainees (70%) observed that facilities were inadequate. Overall percentage of respondents (Center Managers, Trainers and Trainees) who felt that the centers had inadequate facilities was 69%. From interviews conducted with other respondents, the County TVET Director conquered that the facilities were inadequate. On their side, three out of five TVET Sub-County Officers (60%) were of the opinion that facilities were on average level and a lot was being done by County Government to increase the facilities. A random spot-check by the researcher showed that some centers had enough facilities while most of them had facilities that were below average capacity wise. The County Government was attempting to improve the facilities in some centers, though there was evidence of financial challenges seen in stalled projects in some Vocational Training Centers across the county.

### **Status of Teaching Staff**

The expected number of trainers was 378. There were only 187 that were available, leaving a shortage of 191 trainers. Since there were 34 centers with an enrolment of 5,674 trainees, this gave an average of 6 trainers per vocational training center instead of an average of 11 trainers per every center, and an average of about 30 trainees per one trainer, instead of an average of 15 trainees per one trainer. Trainers were therefore overworked. This compromised the quality of instruction. Project work and assessment during attachment in the field requires an instructor to have manageable number of trainees. More so, it emerged that some trades or courses lacked substantive trainers, forcing the available trainers to handle them despite the fact that they lacked enough technical expertise in them, since the said courses were not in their area of specialization. There were over 10 courses that were being offered in VTCs in Vihiga County. Logically, it implies that a center that offers all the 11 courses should have at least 11 instructors – one instructor per course. However, not all the courses had their respective instructors in most centers in the county. Below is the list of courses that are offered:

1. Fashion design and Garment Making/Dress Making/Tailoring;
2. Electrical and Electronics Engineering (Power Option)/Electrical Installation/Electrical Wiring;
3. Information and Communication Technology;
4. Hair Dressing and Beauty Therapy;
5. Automotive Engineering/Motor Vehicle Mechanics;
6. Plumbing and Pipe Fitting;
7. Food and Beverage/Food Processing Technology;

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8. Building and Construction Technology/Masonry;
9. Appropriate Carpentry and Joinery;
10. Metal processing Technology/Welding and Fabrication; and
11. Agribusiness.

### **Conclusion**

The VTCs in Vihiga County were encountering inadequate financial and human resources challenges. It was therefore difficult for the VTCs to provide quality training to the youth due to lack of enough facilities such as tools and equipment in workshops. Further, most VTCs lacked enough human resources, especially trainers who could prepare the trainees adequately. The number of trainees was high. The Vocational Training Centers were over enrolled, which overstretched available physical facilities. National Government had stopped providing funds to County Government to handle this devolved function as it used to do previously. The County Government was therefore struggling financially.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made with the aim of improving the way this devolved function of Vocational Training Centers was being handled in Vihiga County:

1. The National Government should provide adequate funds to County Government as per the Constitution of Kenya 2010, to enable the County Government of Vihiga to handle well this devolved function of VTCs.
2. More instructors/Trainers have to be hired by the County Government to alleviate the acute shortage of trainers bedeviling the VTCs and ensure that all courses were handled adequately.
3. More physical facilities such as workshops have to be put up and be well equipped to accommodate the rising numbers of youths enrolling in these centers.
4. County Government should increase bursary allocation and capitation to cover fees items like lunch and examination, since some vulnerable trainees find it difficult to pay on their own.

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