Technology is now widely regarded as an essential component of any national development policy. The youth polytechnics in Kenya are institutions that have the potential to create, develop, use and transfer technology and are therefore potentially, important components of the technological development picture, especially of the rural areas in which they are mostly situated. As such, the government has seen rural development through the transfer of their technology to the rural communities.

The aim of this study was to find out whether the youth polytechnics were fulfilling that rural development role by disseminating technology to the rural communities. First trying to establish whether technology was being transferred from the polytechnic to the community in terms of goods and services secondly, by trying to establish whether the youth polytechnic was acting as a supplier of skilled manpower in terms of graduates to the local community did this.

Since the Youth Polytechnics were founded largely on self-help, the community development approach was found to be appropriate for analysis and was used as a theoretical basis for the study. The approach enabled the development of a model to assist in understanding first, the participation and interaction of the community and the government in the programme and secondly, the process of dissemination of technology from the polytechnic to the community.

The findings of this study seemed to indicate that Ng’iya Youth Polytechnic was not fulfilling its role in rural development to any significant degree. First, the rate of transfer of goods and services was very low. Secondly, the transfer of technology as characterized by graduate’s location in the community for employment was found to be nil.

The Youth Polytechnic nevertheless seems to have a high potential of contributing to rural development. To realize this potential, several interventions are necessary.

First, it was found that community participation that has apparently declined over the years needs to be revived through greater local recruitment and possibly, a restructuring of the composition of the management committee.

Secondly, in spite of the fact that the technologies in the polytechnic were relevant to the needs of the community, the rate of their transfer was poor, seemingly due to their inappropriateness with respect to price and quality. The findings of this study suggest that a part of this problem could be solved through training. Thirdly, the strengthening of the Centre for Research Training, an important government input into the programme would seem imperative. The development of new technologies and training of more instructors among its other responsibilities, are essential inputs into realizing the potential of Youth Polytechnics to disseminate technology and contribute to rural development.

Finally, it would seem that the structure of opportunity in the rural areas is highly defective for youth polytechnic graduates. The results seem to be a situation where youth polytechnics are acting as institutions, which train manpower for, urban rather than rural development. This would point to a need a restructure the economy so that more attractive opportunities exist in the rural areas.
As a case study, the extent to which these results can be generalized to all youth polytechnics is limited. However, it is hoped that with the approach used, some of the lessons learned from this study will be useful in other situations as well and not just in Ng'iya.