

Labour definitions in Kenya exclude several occupations outside the formal sector, leading to the exaggeration of unemployment among primary school leavers. There is, however evidence that many of such youth are engaged in various productive activities and some of them are self-employed. The purpose of the study was to investigate the efforts being made by the rural primary school leavers to become self-employed, and their implications for the school curriculum. On the basis of findings, suggestions would be made for possible improvement of the curriculum.

The basic hypothesis is that contrary to the popular view, many rural primary school leavers are venturing into self-employment in various occupations in the informal sector, profitably utilizing much of their school acquired skills.

The investigation was carried out, in Suna East and West locations of South Nyanza district. By means of questionnaires, observation and interview schedules, the necessary data were collected from a sample of self-employed primary school leavers and all the primary schools in the area.

It was found that several primary school leavers are self-employed and they cover a wide range of occupations in the sector. They make a fairly dependable income which compares very favourably with the income with those in the formal wage employment. Most of them practice occupational pluralism; and this boosts their income considerably. They generally take a long time to become self-employed. During this transition period they try with various activities, meanwhile they acquire the specific occupational skills and solicit enough capital to enable them to set up their own enterprises. Being the main source of capital and support for the skill acquisition; the family and relatives contribute significantly to the occupational success of the self-employed primary school leavers. On the other hand, heavy familial responsibility has reduced their capacity to save and re-invest their income.

The acquisition of the specific occupational skills is not a serious problem in the rural self-employment. The rural informal sector has highly developed internal mechanism, for the training and most of the self-employed primary school leavers had acquired their specific occupational skills there, through apprenticeship and other forms of attachment. In fact those who acquire skills formally, find it difficult to fit in and operate within the informal sector. Other factors particularly capital and market were found to be the real issues in the self-employment among the primary school leavers.

It was found that the self-employed primary school leavers apply a great deal of schools acquired general skills in their respective occupations. This is an indication that primary education be it only academic, is of great value for the informal sector employment. There was, however, enough evidence to show that most of the self-employed leave school without a good grasp of these basic skills, a condition which considerably limits their performance at work.

Due to various social and economic constraints the schools were found to be very inadequate in performing their primary role of equipping students with the basic general skills that they definitely need for further training and for any form of employment. Their effort to orientate the world of work around the school was found to be very insignificant. For adequate preparation of

students for various occupations in the informal sector, there was found to be an urgent need to improve learning facilities in the rural primary schools.

Any attempt to introduce specific occupational skills training in primary schools should be preceded by a proper understanding of the complex nature of the informal sector. Secondly it is important to consider the existing conditions in the primary schools and the capability of the schools to provide such education. Primary schools in the rural areas have enough difficulty in providing general education, without also becoming deeply involved in vocational training.

Obstacles to self-employment of primary school leavers cannot be removed by curricular changes proposed here or the current move to vocationalize the curriculum alone. There is also an urgent need to reinforce these with a corresponding improvement of the informal sector and rural economy as a whole, to a level where they can generate useful employment opportunities for primary school leavers.