

Title

**EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RISE MALAWI MINISTRIES IN
YOUTH EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY IN MADISI DOWA.**

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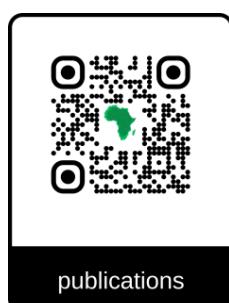
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Issued January 2026 Certificate

AR202668KUUR



ABSTRACT

Youth unemployment and limited access to practical skills remain significant challenges affecting socio-economic development in Malawi, particularly among young people in rural areas. This study evaluated the effectiveness of Rise Malawi Ministries in promoting youth empowerment in Madisi, Dowa District, with a focus on the types of programs offered, their contribution to employability and entrepreneurship, and the challenges encountered during implementation. A case study design using a qualitative approach was adopted, and data were collected from 14 youth beneficiaries through questionnaires and interviews. The findings revealed that Rise Malawi Ministries provides vocational skills training such as carpentry and joinery, as well as welding and fabrication, which were considered practical and relevant to income generation and employment opportunities. Several participants reported improved livelihoods through self-employment or paid work after completing the training. However, the effectiveness of the programs was constrained by challenges including inadequate resources, limited training equipment, shortage of trainers, and communication gaps. The study concludes that Rise Malawi Ministries plays a vital role in youth empowerment in Madisi by equipping youths with marketable skills, and recommends enhanced resource mobilization, strengthened stakeholder collaboration, and expansion of training programs to improve sustainability and impact.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of faith-based organizations in addressing development gaps within rural communities where government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) support is limited. By leveraging community trust and local participation, such as initiatives can enhance youth resilience and social inclusion. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms and aligning training programs with local market demands would further improve long-term outcomes for empowered youth.

Keywords: vocational training program, youth empowerment, employability, entrepreneurship, Rise Malawi Ministries.

INTRODUCTION

Youth empowerment is widely recognized as a critical component of sustainable development, particularly in low-income countries where young people face significant socio-economic challenges (*United Nations*, 2022). In Malawi, youth aged 15–35 constitute approximately 60% of the population yet experience high unemployment and underemployment, with over 70% engaged in informal or vulnerable work (*NSO*, 2021). In rural areas such as Madisi, Dowa, limited access to quality education, vocational training, and entrepreneurial opportunities further restricts youth advancement, reinforcing cycles of poverty and social exclusion (*World Bank*, 2020). Faith-based organizations have increasingly taken a leading role in youth development by providing structured programs that promote skills training, economic empowerment, and personal growth (*Smith & Johnson*, 2019). Rise Malawi Ministries is one such organization responding to these challenges through education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship initiatives; however, empirical evidence on the effectiveness of faith-based institutions in promoting sustainable youth livelihoods remains scarce. While studies indicate that skills development and entrepreneurship programs in Malawi have yielded positive outcomes such as improved income generation and enhanced community participation (*Manda et al.*, 2020), the specific impact of organizations like Rise Malawi Ministries on youth employability and entrepreneurship remains largely unexplored. Therefore, this study seeks to critically evaluate the effectiveness of Rise Malawi Ministries in empowering youth in Madisi, Dowa by examining participation levels, skills acquired, and economic outcomes, thereby contributing valuable insights to the understanding and

improvement of youth empowerment strategies.

Background of the Study

Youth empowerment is recognized globally as a critical factor in achieving sustainable development goals. International organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank emphasize youth empowerment through various programs focused on education, employment, and health. These programs aim to provide young people with the skills and opportunities necessary to contribute to their communities and economies (UN, 2020). Additionally, international policies advocate for the inclusion of youth in decision-making processes to ensure their voices are heard and their needs are addressed (World Bank, 2021).

Youth empowerment is especially important because the continent has a larger number of young people and they face many problems, including unemployment, poverty, and limited access to education and healthcare. The African Union (AU) has developed frameworks and strategies to promote youth development, focusing on areas such as skills development, entrepreneurship, and participation in governance (African Union, 2017). Various African governments and NGOs have implemented programs aimed at empowering youth through vocational training, access to finance, and mentorship opportunities (UNDP Africa, 2019).

These programs recognize the potential of young people to drive economic growth and social progress across the continent.

In Malawi, like many other African countries, has big challenges in helping young people grow and succeed. The National Youth Policy in Malawi outlines the government's commitment to empowering young people through education, skills training, and access to resources (Government of Malawi, 2013). However, implementation of these policies

is often hindered by limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, and socio-cultural barriers. Several NGOs and community-based organizations in Malawi are working to address these challenges by providing youth with opportunities for education, entrepreneurship, and leadership development (Malawi National Youth Council, 2018).

Madisi is located in the Dowa district of Malawi, it is a rural area with mostly young people who are facing many socio-economic problems. Limited access to education, high rates of unemployment, and inadequate healthcare services are major issues affecting the youth in this region. Local organizations and religious institutions, such as Rise Malawi Ministries, has an important role in caring out youth empowerment programs. These programs often focus on providing vocational skills training, promoting entrepreneurship, and addressing health-related issues such as HIV/AIDS (Dowa District Council, 2015). The effectiveness of these programs is important for improving the livelihoods and overall well-being of young people in Madisi.

Problem Statement

Youth empowerment is widely recognized as a critical component of sustainable development, particularly in low-income countries where young people face significant socio-economic challenges (United Nations, 2022). In Malawi, youth aged 15–35 constitute approximately 60% of the population yet experience high unemployment and underemployment, with over 70% engaged in informal or vulnerable work (NSO, 2021). In rural areas such as Madisi, Dowa, limited access to quality education, vocational training, and entrepreneurial opportunities further restricts youth advancement, reinforcing cycles of poverty and social exclusion (World Bank, 2020). Faith-based organizations have increasingly taken a leading role in youth development by providing structured programs that promote skills training, economic empowerment, and personal growth

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RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Main Objective

- To evaluate the effectiveness of Rise Malawi Ministries in youth empowerment.

Specific Objectives

- To understand the programs that are conducted in the organization.
- To evaluate the effects of skills training on youth employability and entrepreneurial success.
- To find the challenges that are faced by the supply and demand sides in the execution of the training.

Research Questions

- What types of programs are conducted by Rise Malawi Ministries to support youth empowerment?
- What are the effects of skills

training on youth employability and entrepreneurial success?

- What are some of the challenges that are faced by both parties in the participation and execution of training?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Definition of Terms

• Youth

United Nations defined youth as an individual between the age of 15 and 24 years old, (UN, 2017). United Nations Educational, scientific and cultural organisation defined youth as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member states, (UNESCO, 2017).

• Youth Empowerment

Youth empowerment is broadly understood as a multifaceted process through which young people gain the necessary skills, knowledge, confidence, and agency to make informed decisions, influence their circumstances, and contribute meaningfully to society. It encompasses emotional, social, intellectual, economic, and spiritual development. According to UNESCO (2017), empowerment involves active participation in programs and decision-making processes that affect youth lives.

• Effectiveness

Effectiveness is the extent to which a program, intervention, or policy achieves its intended outcomes or objective to producing a desired result (Patton, 2018).

• Rise Malawi Ministries

Rise Malawi Ministries is an organization focused on addressing specific needs and fostering community development in Malawi (*Organisational Documentation*,

2024).

- **Ministry**

A Ministry is a department or agency within an organisation that focuses on a specific area of activity or service, (*Business Dictionary*, 2024).

- **Capacity Building**

Capacity Building is the process of strengthening the skills abilities, resources and systems of individuals, organisations or communities to enable them to achieve their goals (*United Nations Development Programme*, 2010).

- **Sustainability**

Sustainability is the ability of a program or initiative to continue delivering benefits over the long term without diminishing resources or compromising future outcomes (Morellie, 2011).

- **Social Inclusion**

Social inclusion refers to the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in the society (*World Bank*, 2013).

- **Youth Empowerment**

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resources and opportunities may be limited, empowerment provides a critical pathway for youth to escape cycles of poverty, dependency, and social exclusion. It promotes resilience, fosters leadership, and cultivates self-reliant individuals capable of shaping their futures.

- **Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs)**

Faith-based organizations play a pivotal role in youth development, particularly in sub-Saharan African communities where they often act as the primary providers of social services. These institutions are grounded in religious values and serve as trusted sources of mentorship, moral guidance, and resource mobilization.

Empirical Review

Faith-based organizations (FBOs) play a critical role in youth empowerment across sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in countries such as Malawi where structural barriers and limited formal employment opportunities persist. Empirical literature shows that FBOs are uniquely positioned to respond to youth challenges due to their deep community trust and moral authority. *Clarke and Jennings* (2018) observe that FBOs integrate moral guidance, psychosocial support, and practical training, enabling them to deliver holistic empowerment interventions. As a result, faith-based youth empowerment programs commonly adopt integrated approaches that combine vocational skills training, mentorship, personal development, and entrepreneurship support to address both economic and social vulnerabilities among young people.

Studies from Malawi and the wider region identify three dominant program typologies within faith-based youth empowerment initiatives. Vocational skills training programs focusing on tailoring, carpentry, welding, and agriculture have been shown to improve employability,

particularly in rural areas where livelihoods are closely tied to local economic activities (Banda & Ngwira, 2021; Kamchedzera & Ndalama, 2019). Mentorship and personal development components provide emotional support, leadership skills, and life-skills training, which reduce risky behaviors and enhance self-esteem and resilience among youth (Peters & Marumo, 2017; Moyo, 2021). Entrepreneurship development initiatives, especially those that integrate business training with financial literacy, have been found to improve savings behavior, innovation, and economic independence, thereby contributing to the reduction of intergenerational poverty (Kalima & Mkandawire, 2022; Mkwezalamba, 2019).

Empirical evidence further demonstrates that integrated training models combining technical, soft, and entrepreneurial skills yield better employment and income outcomes than single-focus interventions. A meta-analysis of youth programs in low- and middle-income countries confirms the effectiveness of blended models (Kluve *et al.*, 2019), while studies in Kenya report improvements in business creation, income levels, and self-efficacy when post-training support is provided (Gichuki *et al.*, 2020). In Malawi, however, program outcomes remain uneven. Rural youth and those with limited formal education often struggle to translate acquired skills into sustainable income due to weak markets, poor infrastructure, and limited access to finance (Banda & Ngwira, 2021). Gender disparities further constrain impact, as young women face socio-cultural norms and financial barriers that limit participation in higher-income sectors (Moyo & Phiri, 2020).

Despite their potential, faith-based youth empowerment programs face persistent supply-side and demand-side challenges that undermine long-term effectiveness. On the supply side, limited funding, inadequate infrastructure, trainer shortages, and weak institutional coordination constrain implementation, while insufficient monitoring and post-training mentorship reduce sustainability (ILO, 2021; Chirwa & Mataya, 2022;

Mvula & Chisala, 2020). On the demand side, low education levels, transportation costs, geographic isolation, and gendered responsibilities limit youth participation and completion rates, with rural youth and young women disproportionately affected (Ahaibwe & Mbowa, 2019; Nkhoma & Banda, 2021). Overall, the literature concludes that faith-based youth empowerment programs are effective when they adopt context-sensitive, gender-responsive, and market-linked approaches supported by continuous mentorship and post-training support systems to address entrenched structural inequalities.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Integrated Empowerment Theory (Mouchrek & Benson, 2023), a contemporary framework that conceptualizes empowerment as a systemic and multilayered developmental process through which individuals gain capacities, assume meaningful roles, and navigate life transitions effectively. The theory identifies two central dimensions of empowerment: self-direction and meaningful engagement in society. Applying this framework allows the study to examine how Rise Malawi Ministries facilitates transformative empowerment that promotes sustainable development, resilience, and active citizenship among young people.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative case study design to support an in-depth exploration of Rise Malawi Ministries' youth empowerment programs in Madisi, Dowa. It employed a cross-sectional approach in which qualitative data were collected at a single point in time, and the findings were organized thematically to provide a clear interpretation of the programs' effectiveness.

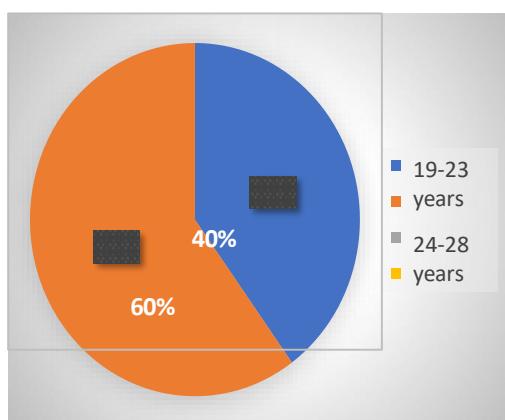
Results and Discussion Response Rate

Gender of respondents	Frequency	Percentages(%)
Female	1	7.69
Male	12	92.31
Total	13	100.00

The program is overwhelmingly male dominated, with males comprising 92.31% of participants, indicating it is likely in a field or context that attracts significantly more men than women.

Age of respondents

The participants group is exclusively young adults, with the majority (60%) in their mid-to- late twenties (24-28) and the (40%) in their early twenties (19-23), suggesting this is a program for early-career or entry-level individuals.



Educational Qualification of the respondents

All participants (100%) have completed secondary-level education, establishing this as the uniform baseline qualification for entry, with no participants having only primary or already holding a tertiary degree. The time participants have spent in the program varies, ranging from 3 to 8 months with 6 months being the single most common duration (reported by

30.77% of participants), showing that individuals are at different stages of progression.

Types of Programs Conducted by Rise Malawi Ministries

The study revealed that Rise Malawi Ministries offers vocational skills training programs focused on carpentry and joinery, welding, and fabrication. These programs are practical and hands-on, designed to equip youth with market-relevant skills for employment and self-employment. Enrollment requires completion of secondary education and a formal application. Training sessions are conducted regularly, though program reviews are infrequent. The programs are primarily attended by male youths (92.3%), reflecting gender disparities in vocational training participation in the area.

Effects of Skills Training on Youth Employability and Entrepreneurial Success

The findings indicate that the vocational training provided by Rise Malawi Ministries has positively impacted youth employability and entrepreneurship. Many participants secured wage employment in local workshops or construction, while others started their own small businesses, such as carpentry shops or welding services. The training also contributed to personal development, including increased self-esteem, confidence, and problem-solving skills. Additionally, graduates have applied their skills in daily life, performing household repairs and community projects, thereby enhancing local economic activity and reducing dependence on external services.

Challenges Faced in the Implementation of Training Programs

The study identified several challenges affecting both management and

beneficiaries. Key issues include inadequate resources (tools, equipment, raw materials), limited funding, communication gaps, and low female participation. Trainers faced difficulties due to large class sizes, low remuneration, and limited professional development. Beneficiaries encountered barriers such as transportation costs, financial pressures, and lack of post-training support. Despite these challenges, the organization employs strategies such as local partnerships, mentorship, and flexible scheduling to sustain program delivery.

Summary of Research Findings

The demographic characteristics of the respondents provided important contextual insights into the study findings. The age distribution of youth participants showed that the majority (69%) were between 24 and 28 years old, reflecting the active engagement of young adults seeking employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. In terms of gender, the findings revealed significantly higher participation of males (92.3%) compared to females (7.7%), indicating cultural and structural barriers that limit female involvement in vocational training programs in Madisi. All participants had attained secondary education, highlighting the program's focus on youths with a foundational educational background. These demographic characteristics helped shape the interpretation of the findings and provided a foundation for understanding youth engagement dynamics in the programs.

The findings further revealed that Rise Malawi Ministries provides practical vocational skills training programs aimed at enhancing youth economic empowerment. The main programs identified were Carpentry and Joinery, Welding, and Fabrication, which were described as hands-on and relevant to local market demands. Enrollment criteria included completion of secondary education and a formal application process, which helped ensure participant commitment and comprehension. The availability of these programs offers youth

a tangible pathway to skills acquisition, employment, and self-reliance, demonstrating the organization's commitment to addressing youth unemployment in a structured manner.

The study also established that the skills training programs have a positive influence on youth employability and entrepreneurial success. Beneficiaries reported securing wage employment in local workshops, while others started small businesses, generating independent income. Participants also experienced increased self-esteem, confidence, and problem-solving abilities, contributing to their personal and professional development. Additionally, graduates applied their skills in daily life, performing household repairs and contributing to community projects, which enhanced local economic activity and reduced dependence on external services. These findings indicate that the program plays a significant role in supporting both immediate livelihoods and long-term economic resilience.

Despite the positive contributions of Rise Malawi Ministries, the findings also highlighted several challenges that affect the quality and reach of the programs. Inadequate resources including shortages of tools, equipment, and training materials were identified as major constraints. Limited funding, communication gaps, and low female participation further restricted program effectiveness. Trainers faced challenges such as large class sizes and limited professional development, while some youths struggled with financial pressures and dropout risks. Overall, the findings indicate that while the initiative is making meaningful contributions to youth empowerment, strengthening resource mobilization, gender inclusion, and post-training support is essential to enhance program sustainability and impact.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study demonstrates that Rise Malawi Ministries plays a vital role in empowering youth in Madisi, Dowa, through vocational skills training that enhances employability, entrepreneurship, and personal development. However, program effectiveness is constrained by resource limitations, gender disparities, and operational challenges. Strengthening funding, improving trainer capacity, and fostering community and stakeholder collaboration are essential for maximizing the long-term impact of youth empowerment initiatives.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

- Rise Malawi Ministries should enhance resource mobilization through partnerships with local businesses, NGOs, and government agencies to secure sustainable funding and training equipment.
- Community awareness and outreach should be strengthened to improve program visibility, encourage female participation, and reduce gender-based barriers to enrollment.
- Post-training support systems such as mentorship, business incubation, and market linkages should be established to help graduates transition into employment or entrepreneurship.

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