

Entrepreneurs or Ekers? Neoliberalism and the Plight of the Youth in Kagera Region, Tanzania

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Abstract

This paper discusses the socioeconomic conditions that push and pull the youth into entrepreneurial activities in Kagera Region, Tanzania. In so doing, it interrogates the increasingly catchy concepts of necessity entrepreneurs, opportunity entrepreneurs, and interventionist entrepreneurs in the literature on youth (un)employment. The study employs Harvey's concept of accumulation by dispossession and Foucault's concept of bi-politics. Data were collected through a case study approach in which 60 youths engaged in entrepreneurial activities were interviewed in Bukoba Municipality and Kyerwa District. Documentary review and observation were also used to collect data. Findings indicate that the decline in agricultural production—especially coffee and bananas—is the main factor that ultimately pushes people from the countryside into urban areas. Lastly, the paper concludes that the bio-political techniques that represent the youth as entrepreneurs, is just an exaggeration: they are merely ekers who struggle to make ends meet. Thus, entrepreneurial skills should be about revitalizing productive activities, which employ most of the people, including youths.

Keywords: *entrepreneurs, youth, accumulation by dispossession, bio-politics, Kagera Region, Tanzania*

Introduction and Background

Recent data show that the youth constitute 1.8bn of the global population, of which nearly 85% live in developing countries, and constitute 40% of the world's unemployed people (S4YE, 2014: viii). It is estimated that by 2025 another 1bn youths are expected to join the labour market (ibid.). Given this context, the youth have attracted the attention of scholars, policy makers, practitioners, and development experts in an attempt to understand and decide how such youth can be managed.

The youthful stage of human growth is also characterized as a "... socially turbulent period in which the youth are characterized by mood disruptions, rebel against parental control and become engulfed in antisocial behaviour" (Arubayi, 2015: 12). The ultimate outcome of this thinking is the representation of the youth as a threat to peace and security since they are susceptible to criminal acts such as violence, gang affiliations, drug trafficking, and involvement in radical and fundamentalist ideas. Furthermore, other scholars have constructed the youth as either in crisis, or as a crisis by themselves (Carpenter & Mojab, 2017).

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One of the main mechanisms of averting threats presented by the youth is inculcating entrepreneurial mindset in them. In recent years, the notion of entrepreneurship has been extended beyond large-scale entrepreneurs who can sit with decision-makers and influence policies, to include small-scale traders working in the informal sector. According to De Sotto (2000), people who work in the informal sector are, in fact, talented entrepreneurs who struggle to overcome institutional barriers that constrain the realization of their full entrepreneurial potentials. It is this latter view of entrepreneurship that we seek to interrogate in this paper. We argue that it is conceptually inadequate to refer to this latter category as entrepreneurs, not because they are not innovative. Instead, we think, this cross-branding conceals important differences, particularly the socioeconomic circumstances that give birth to various categories of traders; on the basis of which we will categorise some of these traders merely as *ekers*.

By differentiating between *ekers* and entrepreneurs we seek to contribute to the conceptualization of business activities by going beyond the three dominant categorizations of entrepreneurs. First, we go beyond De Sotto's (2000) simplification that lumps together all people involved in trading activities, regardless of scale and context, as *entrepreneurs*. Secondly, we interrogate Olomi's (2010a) distinction between *necessity and opportunity entrepreneurs*; and, thirdly, we dispute Mgumia's (2019) view of an *interventionist entrepreneur*.

We argue that what Olomi calls *necessity entrepreneurs* are, in fact, not *entrepreneurs* but *ekers*. Further, we show that what Mgumia calls *interventionist entrepreneurs* do not necessarily translate into entrepreneurs in the sense of Olomi's *opportunity entrepreneurs*. Like other scholars, Olomi's theorization of entrepreneurship is mainly Schumpeterian: it seeks to invent a Western economic model that is geared towards value-creation/addition and profit-making, (Ochunu, 2018).

To contribute to such conceptualization, we use the Kagera region as a case study. Kagera region is in the North Western part of Tanzania. It is well known for the production of coffee as the main cash crop, and bananas as the main staple food. Other crops grown include tea, sugarcane, beans, maize, groundnuts, and tubers. Fishing on Lake Victoria is also common. While a large part of the region is rural, some parts are urban serving mainly administrative functions as headquarters of local authorities (region, districts, and wards) and commercial functions, especially retailing of imported goods and agricultural products. Most of the people engage in agricultural activities for both sale and consumption. It is for this reason that the region serves as the best case to examine the extent to which the proliferating entrepreneurial activities relate to people's main socio-economic activities.

Review of Literature

The Youth and Employment

Studies on the youth, employment, and entrepreneurship have been informed mainly by the modernization theory (Karides, 2010; Arubayi, 2015). More

specifically, scientific studies on the youth have focused on the physiological (biological) and psychological (mental) patterns of youth development. Following Kehily (2013), Arubayi (2015) shows that the youth is constructed as a linear, universal, and homogeneous group at a particular stage in the biological development of human life. In this case, the binary logics of modernization thinking dominate, classifying humanity as either primitive (with 'traditional' or 'pre-social self') or enlightened. Contrary to the enlightened or modern (finished) self, the 'primitive' is either subjected to transition to become (Arubayi, 2015: 12).

To revert threats presented by the youth, policy research by UN agencies, national governments, local and international NGOs, view youth as "the force to be recruited, organized, mobilized and trained by the state" and non-state organs (UNECA, 2011b: 67). To be specific, youth development is envisioned in terms of the four *e*'s, i.e., '*education, equal opportunity, entrepreneurship and employment creation*'. Through these *e*'s, it is expected that *the* youth would participate, be included, participate, empowered and mainstreamed (ibid.). Of the four *e*'s, entrepreneurship and employment-creation have received a particularly special attention. Consequently, there is a burgeoning body of literature trying to understand several issues pertaining to youth employment and entrepreneurial activities. Such issues include: the size of entrepreneurial activities, and the morale of the youth to carry out such activities (Giacomin et al., 2011; Olomi, 2010a; S4YE Coalition, 2014); youth's understandings of entrepreneurship (Mgumia, 2017); country-specific contextualization of global entrepreneurial policies and strategies (Arubayi, 2015); and theorization of microenterprises and the youth (Karides, 2010; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Ochunu, 2018).

Considering the representation of the youth in much of the literature, Carpenter and Mojab (2017), for instance, argue that the use of universal categories—such as biological and psychological features—conceal rather than shed light on the concept of youth. They argue that youth is a relational category that requires to be understood within a context of a specific socioeconomic framework to which they belong. They further show that as a relational concept, "... youth is.... shaped by processes" such as class, gender, race relations, including the "... historical, cultural, spatial, political and media representation" which construct age, body, and psychology. Thus, according to them, "... youths navigate multiple transition pathways differently depending on their age, sex, experiences, marital status, interests, religion, history and culture" (ibid: 7).

Banking on the universalized concept of youth who can yet hardly find employment opportunities, the main policy recommendations have been to encourage youth to venture into entrepreneurial activities. It is against this background we question whether the youth in Kagera region end up as entrepreneurs or mere ekers. We are particularly concerned with the question of whether the socioeconomic context of Kagera Region can allow the youth to rely on entrepreneurship (as represented in literature and popular discourses) to

improve their lives. This question is important because, in the context where the youth are defined universally and homogeneously, it is very easy to cause confusion regarding who *is*, and who *is not* an entrepreneur. For instance, there is a danger of confusing youth—who out of lack of more viable alternatives get into casual self-employment—with successful Tanzanian entrepreneurs who come from entrepreneurial families that are socialized within that context and entrusted to manage and expand their families' business ventures; or with other successful African entrepreneurs who manage their own businesses.¹

Entrepreneurs versus Ekers

The literature on the concept of entrepreneurship reveals two important aspects. First, practices that can be described as entrepreneurial date back to the mercantilist period in the 16th and 17th centuries in Western Europe. Second, since then, such practices have been changing over time (Ricketts, 2006). For example, during the pre-mercantile period, such practices were performed not mainly with a view to incrementing material wealth, but to fulfil their predestined roles and duties. Ricketts (ibid.) further shows that it was during the mercantile period when individual innovative actions—like the creation of new markets and piracy of other peoples' wealth—were encouraged by governments as a means of accumulating wealth needed to enhance state power. A lasting view of entrepreneurship was in the 18th and 19th centuries when constitutions constrained the powers of rulers and secured individual property rights. This period saw the unmatched innovation breakthroughs in various sectors like agriculture, industry, transportation, banking, etc., which were named after individual entrepreneurs.

The view of small-scale traders as entrepreneurs in developing countries, such as Tanzania, coincides with the thinking that the peasantry is a premodern category that is doomed to disappear following the spread of modern values, practices, and technologies. In this context, as Mugisha and Sigalla (2019) have argued, non-agricultural occupations—such as vending or carrying out small business—are celebrated as marking an end to the agrarian question; and the onset of a post-peasantry regime and entrepreneurship (Cook & Binford, 1990 & Kearney, 1996).²

¹In Tanzania, some families—especially those of Asian origin—have made very successful entrepreneurs who are looked at as role models by young Tanzanians who also look forward to becoming great entrepreneurs. What is always overlooked in the case of these Asian entrepreneurs is that they are representatives of family businesses that have been in existence for a long time. Taking such business representatives as role models of entrepreneurial activities for the youth who venture into trading activities as survival strategy after missing other formal opportunities may be misleading. There are also successful entrepreneurs of African origin who have taken advantage of both the privileged social positions they have had, and major policy and legal framework shifts to advance their business ventures. These are also incomparable, at least in terms of opportunities they have had access to, to ekers (small scale traders).

²The agrarian question consists of how and/or whether people who depend on peasantry and smallholder farming can be transformed from the situation of supposedly being traditional to being modern. This question is disturbing because, while some scholars think peasantry is the survival of the past that ought to be modernized, others think that peasantry is the creation of capitalism, and that capitalism depends on peasantry to reproduce itself (Bernstein, 2001).

Beyond the celebratory accounts of the possibility of post-peasantry and the onset of entrepreneurship, the experiences of the youth in Kagera region as presented in this article, are, in fact, not post-peasantry. Instead, the youth, like other social groups, respond to the dominant policy directives that de-emphasize activities related to crop production in favour of small-scale business activities. Such de-emphasis is, for instance, evident in the decline in public subsidies for farm implements since the mid-1980s, as underlined in the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) (Zezeza, 1997; Bernstein, 2001; Michael, 2006). It is against this background that we argue that the youth engaged in small businesses are not entrepreneurs but just ekers. By ekers, we refer to someone who engages in small business activities as a means of livelihood just to survive, and not to increase their income and expand their businesses. Such ekers have emerged following the decline of peasant activities. As noted above, the decline of peasant activities resulted from, among other things, the decline in the provision of subsidies and the emergence of other sources of national income such as mining, construction, communication, and tourism.

As mentioned earlier, Olomi's theorization of entrepreneurship is mainly Schumpeterian. As Ochunu (2018: 10) cautions, the Schumpeterian model is insensitive to African entrepreneurship in which "... value creation is an organic social endeavour, and not the intensely individualized enterprise intelligible to neoclassical and neoliberal economic frames." Alternatively, Ochunu (ibid.) advocates for context-sensitive studies of entrepreneurship in Africa to arrive at the ways in which Africans view of entrepreneurship is social rather than individualistic. In short, Ochunu calls for context-specific/separate view of entrepreneurship in Africa. Despite their valuable contribution to the conceptualization of entrepreneurial activities in Africa, yet one would wonder whether Ochunu takes seriously the transformations that Africa has undergone since the penetration of capitalist relations of production during colonialism to date. Karides (2010), for instance, cautions that the implementation and proliferation of microenterprise programs have been hacked by the neoliberal agenda, and have become a vehicle for capital to reap profits from the non-capitalist Caribbean and beyond.

Like the deficiencies in the conceptualization of youth and entrepreneurial activities, conditions that acted as an impetus for the development of microenterprises have been generalized as poverty and unemployment (Giacomin et al., 2011; Olomi, 2010a; S4YE Coalition, 2014; Arubayi, 2015; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Mgumia, 2017). It is from this background that eventually there emerged concepts in literature such as '*necessity entrepreneurs*', defined as "... individuals who are starting business following limited opportunities of work" (Kelley et al., 2011; Mgumia, 2017:39); '*opportunity entrepreneurs*' who start businesses to pursue an opportunity that is more likely to be more productive (Mgumia, 2017: 121), '*interventionist entrepreneurs*' who are assisted through interventions to become entrepreneurs (Mgumia, 2017). In addressing the central question raised in this paper, we will also appraise these concepts.

Like other countries in Africa and developing societies, Tanzania is being advised by world development bodies such as the UNDP, ILO, and the World Bank to develop micro-enterprises as the means of extricating out of burgeoning poverty and unemployment among the youth (Karides, 2010; Olomi, 2010a; Arubayi, 2015; Carpenter & Mojab, 2017; Mgumia, 2017). In this regard, it has developed various policy and legal instruments to facilitate the process of development of microenterprise. Such instruments include the Small and Medium Enterprise Policy (2002b), Business Environment Strengthening Programme in Tanzania (BEST), and the Property and Business Formalization and Poverty Reduction and Economic Growth Program (PREGP, 2005, 2010).

Despite these efforts, however, there seems to be an inadequate scholarship on the critical examination of the meaning and application of the concept of entrepreneurship within an African context. Kagera region is particularly interesting for this study because the production systems in this region were largely transformed during the colonial rule by, among other things, the introduction of cash crop (coffee) production. The ways in which the people in this region have interacted with market forces since the colonial period have largely shaped their livelihoods options. To critically examine the meaning and application of entrepreneurship, data collected from Bukoba Municipal and Kyerwa District are used here to highlight conditions—beyond mere mention of poverty and employment—that lure youth into the so-called entrepreneurial activities.

Accumulation by Dispossession, Biopolitics and Entrepreneurship: Some Conceptual Issues

To clearly understand the situation of the youth, we use Harvey's (2003) concept of accumulation by dispossession to see why many youths have found themselves in the situation of becoming ekers. We also use Foucault's (2008) concept of biopolitics to highlight how the youth's situation is represented and legitimated. These two concepts serve to unpack the concept of entrepreneurship by reflecting on the experiences of the youth in Kagera region. In particular, these analytical concepts highlight, on one hand, the transformations that Kagera region has gone through, and the ways in which such transformations constitute the context within which the youth are guided and/or guide themselves to eke out their livelihoods, on the other.

Unlike Marx, Luxemburg (1951) argues that capitalism does not expand uniformly to replace non-capitalist social formations. Instead, its expansion "... depends on the existence of non-capitalist (informal and non-waged) formation into which it can expand" (Karides, 2010: 20). Expanding on Luxemburg, Harvey (2003) shows that accumulation strategies, that Marx had dubbed as preconditions for the development of capitalism, have continued to shape the expansion and reproduction of capitalist relations. It is such accumulation strategies as colonization, neo-colonization, and neo-liberalization that Harvey sums up as accumulation by dispossession. Shivji (2009) further adds that accumulation by dispossession processes in Africa are perverted such that demands for production and consumption are determined not within, but outside, Africa.

The techniques used to legitimize accumulation processes—including instilling entrepreneurial values among the youth in this case—are what Foucault (2008) calls biopolitics. He defines biopolitics as techniques, procedures, and mechanisms for modifying human life to make it manageable, productive, and hence profitable. During colonialism, efforts were towards the production of docile subjects who served capitalism through agricultural production. That is, the colonials produced food crops for food and cash crops for sale from which they raised income to afford other subsistent household requirements. The youth joined the colonial education system to acquire some basic knowledge and skills with which to assist in the administration of the colonial economy. The socialization of the youth in the first two post-independent decades (despite the efforts to create nationalist development framework), did not stray much from the situation under colonialism. Youths went to school to undergo formal training so that they could later find jobs. Those who did not find jobs became agricultural producers for both sale and consumption.

Under neoliberalism, the pattern of accumulation has extended into managing people and their lives—especially the youth—to make further profits. In this regard, Harvey (2005: 2) has this to say:

... (it is) in the first instance a theory of political economic practices which proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of *entrepreneurial freedoms* within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to... set up... markets... in areas such as education, health care, social security or environmental pollution... but beyond these tasks the state should not venture (*emphasis added*).

In fact, following Polanyi (1944), Burawoy (2013) shows that under neoliberalism, the realm of exchange (marketization) increasingly dominates over the realm of production. That is, entrepreneurial activities imply the marketization of almost everything including the commodification of the previously non-commodities, the 'fictitious commodities': labour, land, and money (Polanyi, 1944), and knowledge (Burawoy, 2013). Consequently, development initiatives for youths and other population categories became dominated by techniques that sought to inculcate entrepreneurial mindsets. In this regard, various development agencies dispositioned themselves to participate in creating entrepreneurs. Karides (2010: 17), for instance, aptly reveals this:

Development agencies and governments have recast small producers as the most micro units of neoliberalism. Under this guise, they warrant assistance because they are perceived to be seeking suitability and profitability. UNDP has formally and consciously changed their mission. Rather than presenting themselves as an aid agency, they now ascribe to a program of sustainable development that can be sustained without financial contributions and without government involvement in redistributing national economic gains.

Here, the thrust of neoliberalism is to create an individual whom Foucault (2008) describes as ‘homo-economicus’—i.e., ‘an entrepreneur of himself/herself’. The idea of homo-economicus is actualized through human capital by which “... capital is no more only something that is invested, exchanged and accumulated at the market; rather, it is inseparable from the entrepreneur of the self who constitutes the very capital itself” (Kristensen, 2013: 85). Eventually, an individual is seen as an “... ability-machine whose skills, knowledge, health, genetic make-up and so forth are all ways of making income through their application towards different ends” (ibid: 85). In Tanzania in general, and Kagera Region in particular, the entrepreneurial spirit is further inculcated through another set of techniques such as inspirational speeches, lectures, books, workshops, seminars and practice-based interventions by development and entrepreneurial experts, capitalization/access to capital, and the use of media to inculcate among youth the notions of self-determination and drive.

Methodology

The study employed three main techniques for collecting qualitative information: in-depth interviews (IDIs), observation, and documentary review. In-depth interview was the main data collection technique used to collect information from the youth about their life skills, employment, and self-employment experiences. The aim was to gain an in-depth understanding of their backgrounds and personal skills, which are the basic source of income for the youth. We also observed some of the activities undertaken by youths and took some photos to gain an in-depth understanding of youth’s skills and experiences. This technique also helped to verify the information collected through in-depth interviews. IDIs and observations were complemented by documentary reviews. Documents reviewed under this technique included reports such as district profiles; nutrition, demographic and health survey reports; and entrepreneurship, education and employment policies.

Sampling

The sampling procedure was mainly purposive: the youth, community leaders and relevant experts in Bukoba Municipal and Kyerwa District were approached for participation in the study because we thought they had information that we needed to address the research questions. At the district/municipal level, we conducted interviews with community development officers because they are the ones in charge of youth development and entrepreneurial activities. The study was conducted in two streets (*mitaa*) from two wards in each of the districts. At the *mtaa* level, a chairperson or *mtaa* executive officers (MEO) introduced us to the youth of varied socio-economic backgrounds and occupations, such as carpenters, welders, *bodaboda* drivers, bicycle transporters, tailors, masonry, shopkeepers, vendors, etc. The selection of informants was conveniently based on the availability and readiness to participate in the study. Ultimately, 60 out of the 64 youths who were contacted—30 from Kyerwa District and 30 from Bukoba Municipal—agreed to participate, and were interviewed.

From the IDIs, participants who were more knowledgeable of the youth's conditions were invited for the focus group discussion (FGDs). Recruitment for FGDs also considered the socio-economic and occupational differences such that those who were involved had diverse backgrounds.

Research clearance was sought from the University of Dar es Salaam, which introduced researchers to the Regional Administrative Secretary (RAS) and the District Administrative Secretary (DAS). The RAS then introduced us to the Bukoba Municipal and Kyerwa Executive directors. From the executive directors' offices, we were introduced to community leaders and then communities. At the community level, we sought oral consent from the participants, whom we informed in detail about the objectives of the study. We also informed them that participation was voluntary, and that one could decide not to participate, refrain from answering certain questions, or withdraw at any stage of the study.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed thematically: we reviewed all the data and drew some important chunks that best captured youth's personal skills, competencies, and livelihood-seeking experiences. The interpretation was in the light of the concepts of accumulation by dispossession and biopolitics. That is, while accumulation by dispossession highlights that the accumulation requirements of Kagera region are dictated by global processes, biopolitics describes the ways in which such processes and their outcomes are legitimated through the biopolitical technique of entrepreneurship and the creation of entrepreneurs.

Production and Employment in Rural Kagera as Youth's Push Factors

The Kagera Region has a typical dual economy characterized by the production of both food and cash crops. The staple food, especially in Bukoba, Muleba and Karagwe District, has historically been plantain bananas (*musasapientum*). Other food crops include beans, maize, groundnuts, tubers (yams, sweet potatoes, cassava), and various types of vegetables. The main cash crop is coffee. Arabica coffee was produced for local consumption in the region even before colonialism. The colonialists introduced a new species of robusta coffee and transformed both—i.e., arabica and robusta—into commodities (cash products) for export.

Jorgen and Rald (1975: 55) remark that the British "... made it compulsory for each family to plant 100 coffee trees among their banana farms." In addition, the colonial agricultural policy in general, and the Coffee (Control and Marketing) Ordinance of 1937 in particular, intended to fully entrench people in Kagera region in the dual economy where they produced coffee for cash and bananas for food. This goal was effected through three mechanisms:

... first, uprooting all unproductive coffee trees and replacing them with new seedlings; secondly, immediate uprooting of banana stem when the bunch was harvested (to eradicate the banana weevil which was at that time causing serious damage to banana production) and thirdly, heavy mulching of that part of the *kibanja* where coffee trees were growing using both banana systems and grass (Jorgen & Rald, 1975: 55).

Eventually, coffee production increased from 493 tons in 1910 to 10,883 tons in 1932 (ibid.). Smith (1987) adds that, for many decades during and after colonialism, coffee production was the main economic activity in Kagera region. At the national level, between 1974 to 1983, coffee exports (from Kagera, Kilimanjaro and Mbeya regions) accounted for 28% of the country's foreign exchange earnings. Kagera alone produced 40.5% of this coffee during the period.

The conditions for the production of coffee for sale have since long deteriorated following the increasing dominance of the realm of exchange over the realm of production (Burawoy, 2013). Accumulation processes are no longer exclusively centred on production of commodities, but includes marketization of the previously non-commodities. According to Polanyi (1944) and Burawoy (2013) there is a proliferation of commodification processes beyond the produced commodities and the production of fictitious (artificial) commodities. Such commodification has resulted in, among other things, the decline of both the demand for and price of coffee. For instance, according to Amin & Bush (2014: 52):

Africa is still exporting coffee, cocoa, cotton and other things, but that is losing in importance relative to the gains from opening up to the plunder of the natural resources. Natural resources today are not only oil and gas and minerals, copper, gold, bauxite, tungsten, uranium, et cetera, but also the new natural resources which can be plundered to the benefit of monopoly capital: land, land grabbing and, along with land, water and whatever can be in the future produced out of that, that is, agrofuels, eventually energy, which will be exported to the north, and so on. But while that type of export is moving from the old classical, colonial to a new type of exporting natural resources, the principle remains, that is, export oriented and exclusively export oriented.

In the context of declining coffee exports, food crops have increasingly found market in urban areas following the increasing pace of urbanization in Tanzania. Bananas, beans, maize are sold in various urban centres in Kagera Region, but also outside the region in Mwanza, Shinyanga, Kahama, and Dar es Salaam. Mugisha (2019) recently made a similar observation in the southern coastal Tanzania where crops that used to be food crops have found lucrative markets in urban areas in Tanzania and beyond. Nkuba (2007) shows that in the 1990s and 2000s, incomes from bananas in Kagera region were increasing, whereas those from traditional crops—especially coffee and tea—were declining. Unfortunately, banana production has also been on the decline due to deteriorating soil fertility induced by leaching by heavy rainfalls and the infestation of bananas by various diseases (ibid.).

Ownership of property, especially land which is the main source of livelihood, has evolved through various stages. During the precolonial period, all the land was owned by chiefs. People lived on the land as tenants, and they were supposed to pay part of the produce in kind as tributes to the chiefs (owners of the land). However, the British colonialists passed the Land Ordinance of 1923 that made all land in Tanganyika a property of the Queen of England. This ordinance, among other things, legitimated the flow of wealth (raw materials including coffee) from

the colonies to western countries. As a result of this ordinance, chiefs in the region became custodians of the Queen's land, and were supposed to ensure that people (tenants) produced for consumption, and coffee for export.

After independence, the government abolished chiefdoms. So, people were allowed to occupy the land on which they used to occupy as tenants. Under new arrangements the state managed the marketing of coffee through cooperative unions and crop marketing boards (Maghimbi, 2010).³ It is pertinent to mention here that the Haya society is patriarchal, and hence the ownership of property—especially land and cattle—is by men on behalf of their families. Men also control farm products: coffee (the cash crop) and valuable food crops—e.g., bananas, beans, and maize—which have also been commoditised. As such women and youth can access wealth e.g., land, by buying it.

The impact of the declining demand for coffee, deteriorating banana production, and skewed arable land distribution is mediated and amplified by other factors such as population increase and the shortage of arable land. More than three decades ago, Smith (1987: 214) noted that while the average farm size in Kagera was 1ha per household, the range was between 0.5-1ha for poor households, up to 40ha for rich households. Although there is a decline in the demand for and production of the traditional cash crop (coffee), there has not been a corresponding decline in accumulation requirements. Instead, accumulation demands have been shifting towards extractives (minerals, and recently gases) to the circulation of imported goods by hawkers, well-known as *machinga* in Tanzania. It is within this context that the youth started migrating from rural to urban areas to look for employment and other self-managed income generating activities. For instance, Smith (1987; 1994) shows that in the 1980s youths and divorced/separated women were migrating from villages in Bukoba, Muleba and Karagwe districts to urban areas to look for employment, educational, and business opportunities.⁴ It was under these conditions that small-scale traders—whom we refer to as *ekers*, and not *entrepreneurs*—emerged.

Creating an Interventionist Entrepreneur: A Futile Mission?

In an attempt to address poverty and unemployment, there have been institutional efforts to legitimize and enhance entrepreneurial spirit among the youth at both global and local levels. At the global level, is the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM). In Tanzania, as noted in the introductory section, various efforts in place include the establishment of the small and medium enterprise policy, business environment-strengthening programmes, and property and business formalization. In light of the above efforts, local actors—especially local government authorities,

³Maghimbi attributes the decline of coffee production in Kagera Region—as in other coffee-producing regions—to the state interference in the running of the cooperatives through its socialist policies. While Maghimbi's argument is valid, it is also a reality that the expansion of accumulation logics beyond production to marketization (including of non-produced commodities) also contributed to the decline of agricultural production in the region.

⁴Especially if the reasons for separation/divorce did not make sense to parents, a divorced woman was not welcome back home. So, such women decided to go to urban areas to start their living afresh.

microfinance institutions such as saving and credit cooperative societies (SACCOS), banks, and NGOs that operate at grassroots levels—are required, among other things, to stir up entrepreneurial mindsets and activities among the youth. As a general requirement, all district councils are required to allocate 4% of their internal revenues for youths’ activities.

For example, during the fieldwork of this study in April, 2018, the Bukoba Municipal had already allocated more than TZS50m to support youth entrepreneurial activities. The way this fund was to be accessed, however, is very interesting. The Municipal is supposed to disburse the amount to the VIJANA TEGEMEO SACCOS⁵ (VT SACCOS). For youths to access the money, they must abide by the guidelines of the VT SACCOS, which include, forming a group, applying for VT SACCOS membership by, among others, paying membership fees of TZS153,000. The amount of money to be borrowed ranged from TZS3m to TZS5m, depending on the group’s capacity to pay back the loan. CDOs at the municipal asserted that subjecting the applicants to the VT SACCOS was the only effective way of ensuring that the youth pay back the loans. They added that past experiences had shown that when the youth borrow government money they do not pay back; they turn such loans into donations.

Interviews with the youth revealed that it is only a few who knew about this fund. Also, the few who knew about it had either heard it from relatives working in the local government, or had connections with the ruling political party. Yet, even the few that knew of the existence of the fund, claimed that they did not have the required qualifications to get the loan, especially the financial requirement of depositing TZS153,000 to qualify for the loan. In an FGD, all participants converged on this concern that *“We want a loan because we don’t have money; still we are being forced to pay the amount of money which we don’t have as a condition for a loan.”* They added that the conditions set by the VT SACCOS cannot be met by youth who wish to venture into entrepreneurial activities. Instead, it is only adults who have already accumulated some savings and have collaterals could access the fund. To the youth, it seemed that the government had put in place insurmountable conditions that are more or less similar to those of private financial institutions like commercial banks.

On their part, officials at the VT SACCOS were of the view that the criterion of depositing some money as a precondition of qualifying for a loan was necessary because it is an indicator that a group is serious about a loan, and that it could pay back the loan. As one officer exclaimed: *“If a group cannot mobilize TZS153,000 to qualify for a loan, how will it be able to pay back TZS4,000m?”* He added that the VT SACCOS was commissioned by the government to manage the fund, and it is supposed to pay back the money; and as such it has to ensure that those who borrow the money have the capacity to pay it back.

⁵This is a Saving and Credit Cooperative Society established by the Lutheran Church at Bukoba to pool together financial resources from youths so that they can participate in addressing financial and employment problems in the region.

What can be discerned from the foregoing is that, despite efforts to homogenize the call for entrepreneurial activities, the mechanisms for creating entrepreneurs cannot be generalized. As shown above, the application of financial regulations that requires borrowers to meet certain requirements disqualifies many youths who cannot meet such minimum qualifications. Contrary to Mgumia's (2017) concept of interventionist entrepreneurship, what is evident in Kagera Region is a failed interventionist entrepreneurship, because the fund set to assist entrepreneurs cannot assist young entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds. The approach does not reflect the social realities of rural communities, and especially of most youths. The only choice for such people is to struggle on their own and/or with the help of relatives to raise some capital, a process that we refer to as the making of a necessity entrepreneur. We talk about the 'making' because, it is not simply assumed, instead a lot of effort must be made informally by relatives of would-be entrepreneur to attain what they call necessity entrepreneurs. The failure of the youth to qualify for the loans provided by district councils also questions De Sotro's (2000) overgeneralization of the possibility of the formalization of the businesses of informal workers.

The Making of the So-called Necessity Entrepreneur

To connect with the situation of production in rural areas, it was also deemed important to explore experiences of youth who were either employees or wished to be employed in urban areas. Findings suggest that youth's experiences in urban areas can be divided into three: the first few months of arrival (after leaving or dropping out of school); being employed; and shifting from one employment to another to raise capital for a petty business.

Primary School Leavers and School Dropouts

Following the decision by the Tanzania government to establish secondary schools in every ward since 2005, the chances of youths who complete primary school to join secondary school have greatly increased. There have been several options among youth, such as joining public schools at national, regional, district, or ward levels; or private schools. As a result, the number of young people whose highest level of education is primary school has declined significantly. Thus, it is very few youths who miss an opportunity to join, or drop out of secondary school; and hence end up on the streets. Our discussion with CDOs revealed that there are few cases of primary school leavers on the streets, and these are mainly orphans. Such young people live with guardians who are either ignorant of issues related to education, or ignore them, or have no means of providing basic school requirements such as school uniforms, books, and pocket money: all of which lead to school drop-outs.

The CDOs further revealed that such youth go through harsh experiences because many of are always strangers with no relatives in towns, and hence have nowhere to go. Also, as newcomers they have no means of earning a living as it is very hard for them to find an occupation. In most cases, they end up as casual labourers (commonly known as *deiwaka* in Tanzania), employed on a daily basis to survive. Being newcomers, and due to their young age, some of employers even refuse to pay them.

A CDO at the Bilele ward revealed that she received several complaints from the youth for being denied their due payments by their bosses after completion of activities they were assigned. Generally, newcomers survive the hard way in urban areas.

As they get used to urban life, youth secure casual jobs especially of selling food items such as nuts, ice-cream, loaves of bread, sweets, etc. In an interview, a young man aged 16 years from a village in Bukoba Rural, and lived in Bukoba town as a dayworker, narrated how he secured the job of selling bread:

“My boss buys a number of loaves of bread, say worth TZS100,000, and sets the amount of profit he requires from those loaves. So, I ensure that I sell at prices from which such profit can be realized. Sometimes I sell at good prices, get the boss’s money, and also get my own because wholesale prices change depending on the market situation of a particular day. Some loaves for which the wholesale price is TZS2,000 can sell at TZS2,200 on some days, and hence I get TZS200 for my own per loaf. So, when I add up my salary, I get enough money to cater for my needs.”

The above quote represents the views of a youth who is slowly getting used to urban life, and has some skills like overpricing of loaves to increase his income. Yet, he shows that he is struggling with survival because what he earns just helps him to meet his daily basic needs.

Form Four Leavers

Another group of young people who have attempted to establish small businesses is that of Form IV leavers. For some reasons these are the ones that did not join high schools or colleges, and instead opted to migrate to urban areas to try their fortune. These are self-employed and/or are currently looking for employment. They confirmed that finding an employment is a tiresome undertaking. Those who had found employment narrated how it had taken time to find a job. A young man aged 26 years, living at Kashai Matopeni, Bukoba Municipality, shared the following experience:

“I looked for employment for a long time, but could not get one. I saw a job advertisement at a grocery in Buyekera and applied. I was shortlisted, and the interview was a written one requiring some knowledge of Mathematics because the job had to do with financial management. I did well and was asked to get a guarantor. I was not able to get one because I was a newcomer in Bukoba, as a result I did not get the job. I also applied for a job at one restaurant here at Bukoba. One of the requirements for this job was dressing in uniform (white shirt, black trousers, and leather shoes). I got shirt and trousers but could not get the leather shoes. I decided to put on black trainers’ shoes. I was denied the job because I did not have leather shoes. At the end I was able to get a job at the Bamboo Restaurant as a customer attendant (mhudumu/muuza chakula). That is where I was able to save some money for my own business.”

The above quote reveals the hurdles that the youth go through in their endeavours to get jobs. Despite the hurdles, some manage to secure jobs, while others do not. Those who secure jobs make it their aspiration to look for even better ones, or accumulate capital for self-employment.

Accumulation of Capital and Aspirations for Entrepreneurial Activities

The youth also noted their discomfort with being employed; instead preferring self-employment. This is because they face harsh conditions at some jobs such as the lack of freedom/autonomy, abuse by employers (e.g., insults, scolding, etc.), too much work, and low payment. On several occasions during IDIs, the youth noted that if one is doing his/her own business, s/he would always accept the situation even if one gets a loss. This is unlike the situation where, when employed, one may not know if the business is making profit or not: employers will almost always claim that they get no profit to justify low payments.

Further probing revealed that some youth hated being employed by individual persons in small businesses as shopkeepers, food vendors, and small workshops; instead, they preferred being employed by big organizations, firms or the government where there is no mistreatments such as they endure in small individually-owned businesses. The youth believed that it is the lack of requisite skills that hinder them from securing good jobs. Still, others thought that such good jobs would not be their final career destination, but as a means towards self-employment.

Both the popular and increasingly academic discourses on entrepreneurship has partly contributed to this youth dissatisfaction with employment. The popular discourse, for instance, is dominated by inspirational speakers/lecturers and writers who encourage youth to own their own businesses. A good example is offered by an American inspirational writer, Kiyosaki (1997), who authored *Rich Dad Poor Dad*, in which he encourages people to leave their jobs and start up their own business ventures (Matogwa, 2015). The Clouds Media—one of the favourite radio stations for the youth in Tanzania—have a slogan that says “*Tunakufungulia dunia kuwa unachotaka*” (lit: ‘We unlock your world, become what you want’). During the fieldwork of the study, a Clouds Media team was conducting a workshop in Bukoba town aimed at encouraging the youth to identify their potential talents and turn them into lucrative business ideas. Public discourse—as we will show shortly, and as underlined by Mgumia (2017)—drumbeats entrepreneurship as the means to address poverty and unemployment by training the youth to become potential job-creators, rather than job-seekers.

Consequently, some youths revealed to have ambitions of becoming big business-people, pointing out that one cannot become ‘rich’ through employment. So, because they had ambitions of becoming very rich people, they feel employment will not help them realize their dreams. Instead, they wished to employ themselves to increase the chances for becoming rich.

Venturing into Entrepreneurial Activities

The youth use various mechanisms such as self-employment or being employed by other individuals, to save money for their future investment. A young man aged 30 years in Bilele, Bukoba Municipality, who found a job to save some money (capital) for self-employment, had this to say:

When I completed Form IV, I did not pass my final examinations, and my mother had no means to support me. I decided to come to town to find a job. I was employed as a shopkeeper for one year; and then I employed myself to sell boiled traditional coffee for about two years. After three years I had accumulated enough capital of about TZS2,000,000, which enabled me to buy a motorcycle and become a bodaboda operator. I am more comfortable with this business than I was when I was employed at the shop. I get enough money to support my family and my siblings' education.

Entrepreneurs or Ekers?

The findings of this study and available literature on entrepreneurship among the youth present one important anomaly. That is, on the one hand, the literature represents necessity entrepreneurs⁶ and opportunity entrepreneurs;⁷ and the blur between these two categories as the means for getting youths out of the employment crisis and poverty trap. On the other, there is a very recent literature—such as Mgumia (2017)—which extends the idea of necessity entrepreneur to what she calls interventionist entrepreneur; denoting the role of other actors, especially institutions that participate (intervene) in creating entrepreneurs.

Moreover, the findings of this study indicate that the youth are not automatically necessity entrepreneurs. Instead, they have to struggle on their own and/or be assisted—not necessarily by institutions and hence become interventionist entrepreneurs as Mgumia (2017) puts it—but by relatives (parents, guardians, friends, peers, etc.). Furthermore, the findings dispute the notion of interventionist entrepreneurship because interventions—e.g., the 4% of the municipal revenue—have conditionalities that hinder, rather than enhance, the youth from taking advantage of intervention (funds) and become entrepreneurs. So, rather than being assisted by interventions to become entrepreneurs, some youth, especially beginners, have to become entrepreneurs by themselves—i.e., by using physical strength or being helped by relatives to get some capital—as the only means to get to the status of a necessity entrepreneur. The inability of the youth to qualify for loans due to financial constraints questions De Sotto's (2000) attempt to lump together all categories of traders, regardless of their socio-economic conditions, as entrepreneurs. It is for this reason that we think the youth in Bukoba are ekers rather than entrepreneurs.

It is important to establish this distinction for two major reasons. First, the use of the term 'entrepreneurs' conceals the socio-economic history of the youth. That is, they are presented as people who are trapped by poverty and unemployment; but who could excel by engaging in entrepreneurial activities. What is concealed here is the fact that conditions of impoverishment continue to haunt such youth despite being seen—or seeing themselves—as entrepreneurs. Indicators of such conditions of impoverishment include, among other things, the lack of qualifications—e.g., collaterals—and hence, being denied access to loans to start up as entrepreneurs.

⁶Those who start businesses as a response to limited job opportunities

⁷Those who see an opportunity, and start business to pursue it. Such businesses are more likely to be productive (Mgumia, 2017:121).

Secondly, the term ‘entrepreneurs’ conceals the qualitative differences between and among individuals and groups that constitute what is referred to as entrepreneurs. Differentiating entrepreneurs in terms of the purposes of entrepreneurship—i.e., differentiating necessity and opportunity entrepreneurs—conceals the differences in the socio-economic classes and backgrounds of such entrepreneurs. Such concealment is further cemented by the popular discourse by some scholars like Olomi (2010) and De Sotro (2000) who think all the people who engage in private trading activities, regardless of their socio-economic status, can be lumped together as entrepreneurs. That means, in this popular discourse in Tanzania, both business-people whose net worth are billions of US dollars (equivalent to trillions of Tanzanian shillings), and those whom Olomi (2010a) calls necessity entrepreneurs, are all termed as entrepreneurs.

The findings of this study dispute the optimism—both in popular discourse and in some literature—about job-creation and self-employment as intimated by De Sotro (2000). The findings reveal that the youth are dissatisfied with both their self-initiated small businesses and the causal employment opportunities available to them. Most of the jobs performed by our informants, for instance, are of casual nature because they neither meet the criteria for decent work by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (see, <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang-en/index.htm>) and the Tanzania’s Employment and Labour Relations Act, 2004. In particular, Sections 13 and 14 of Tanzania’s Employment and Labour Act No. 6 of 2004 provide for officially recognized contract between employer and employee, and the legally binding minimum wage. By decent work, ILO also calls for job security and fair payment (see, <https://www.un.org/.../wp.../8>). It is thus not surprising to learn that contrary to the rhetoric of self-employment, the youth we interviewed were almost unanimously willing for employment by large organizations, firms, or by the government.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, and as a way of conclusion, one question remains worthy posing: what conceptual proposition do the findings of this study suggest? The findings of this study suggest that the understanding of the youth, their actions, practices, and activities—e.g., entrepreneurial activities in this case—should not be approached as distinct aspects, but as a part of the broader socio-historical and economic realities within which youth conduct their activities. This interconnection is important to underscore for one major reason. In a society such as the Kagera region where socio-economic activities have historically been small-scale agricultural production, entrepreneurship among the youth should mean two important things: first, adding value to the manner in which production activities are done by, for instance, processing them into high-value products; and second, locating and/or creating lucrative markets for such products.

Thus, the emigration of youth from rural areas (where production is done) to urban areas (where the market is more available) constitutes a serious rift in the socio-economic organization of society and socialization of the youth. This is because,

such emigration removes labour⁸ from the socio-economic activities on which the society depends, and hence affects productivity and proper utilization of the nation's natural resources at both local and national levels. Moreover, contrary to the views of Cook and Binford (1990) and Kearney (1996) that emigration to urban areas is an indicator of post-peasantry, the precarious conditions of the youth who migrate to urban areas (as the findings of this study shows) imply the extension of hardships under peasantry into urban area. While some youth may triumph through their entrepreneurial activities, such success is likely to be for very few individuals rather than the society because the entrepreneurial activities—e.g., the circulation of imported goods—have very minor impact on the socio-economic wellbeing of the society.

Thus, we recommend that interventions, such as entrepreneurship, which aim at improving the lives of the youth should not thrive on the exodus of the youth from socioeconomic activities in the rural areas. Instead, entrepreneurial activities should aim at revitalizing socioeconomic activities in the communities where the youths live. In the context of the Kagera Region, for instance, entrepreneurial activities should not end with the circulation of imported goods and products. Instead, efforts should be extended to aspects like adding value to agricultural production, fisheries and livestock-keeping, solving price crises, and finding solutions to crop infestations that continue to riddle many crops in the region.

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⁸ Youths belong to the most productive population category. Thus, their emigration to urban areas, limits production activities in rural areas.

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