



Case Study

Innovating for Impact: Lessons from Hakizetu's Youth-Led Digital and Economic Initiatives

An independent case study by Bodhi Global Analysis, a firm specializing in analysis, research and evaluations in urban and rural locations in the Global South.

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Acronyms

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender Based Violence
TRA	Tanzania Revenue Authority
YL	Youth Leader
YLO	Youth Led Organizations
YP	Youth Peer
YSO	Youth Serving Organizations

Context

Going Beyond: Partnering for a Youth-led Future is a five-year project (2023–2028) funded by the Mastercard Foundation that places young people at the heart of community development. The initiative aims to unlock the creativity, energy, and passion of youth to drive meaningful change. Utilizing a proven peer-to-peer model that DOT has successfully implemented for over 20 years, the project exclusively collaborates with local youth-led and youth-serving organizations. It equips young women and men in Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia with essential digital and business skills, along with the confidence and leadership abilities needed to create and sustain dignified, fulfilling work. The overarching goal is to enhance the quality of life, resilience, agency, and voice of African youth across these four countries.

The project is guided by three key impact pillars:

1. Strengthening the capacity of 40 youth-led and youth-serving organizations (YLOs/YSOs) to deliver high-quality digital livelihoods programming.
2. Training and supporting young people to become digital business coaches and facilitators, enabling them to deliver programs to their peers (Youth Leaders, or YLs).
3. Providing disadvantaged youth engaged in nascent Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) with training in digital and entrepreneurship skills (Youth Peers, or YPs).

Overview

Working with young people, especially young women, is at the core of Hakizetu's mission, an organization established in 2016 to prevent gender-based violence (GBV) among girls and young women through implementing economic empowerment and livelihood activities.

When the founders of Hakizetu (a Swahili term that translates to “Our rights”) first set out to understand the challenges facing their community, they uncovered a troubling pattern. Their research revealed that gender-based violence within households often stemmed from a source that many overlooked—economic frustrations. The strain of financial hardship was not just a burden; it became a spark for conflict and harm.

Later, during a needs assessment conducted by the organization, the voices of girls and young women brought this reality into sharper focus. They shared stories of vulnerability, of difficult choices made under the weight of economic pressure. Many admitted that these hardships left them feeling trapped, leading to decisions that, in their words, they wouldn't have made if they had access to better opportunities.

These insights became the foundation of Hakizetu's mission: to address the root causes of these challenges and empower young women to rewrite their stories. According to Gervas Evodius Kikarugaha, Hakizetu's Director, Hakizetu's their objective is *“to empower girls and young women through livelihoods and economic development to ensure they are making decisions that are not driven by their economic hardships.”*

Men in their households including their husbands and dominant male figures would beat them due to their own frustrations brought about by economic challenges they face. Neglect by parents was also another source of the high GBV cases. Most parents have neglected their parental care role, leaving girls and young women vulnerable to GBV as nobody is looking out for their safety and well-being. In addition, economic challenges have resulted in some girls and young women dropping out of school and working as domestic helpers in insecure environments.

Figure 1: Interview with Gervas Evodius Kikarugaha, Hakizetu's Director.



Despite understanding that such an environment was not safe for their well-being, victim/survivors of GBV would remain in these households and put up with the violence because they depended on the male figures for their daily sustenance. To address this challenge, Hakizetu was founded to empower girls and young women with skills to become economically active, generate their own resources to meet their daily needs and empower them to be less dependent on male figures. This approach would enable the women to have the choice to make informed decisions about their safety and well-being, and delimit the extent to which the economic support they received from the male figures influence their decisions.

“We believe that a woman who is oppressed but economically stable has the choice to either stay in an oppressive situation or has the power to leave and use her skills to fend for herself. If women are economically empowered they are able to make informed choices, rather than continue to fall victim due to their economic situation.”¹

Hakizetu is a youth-led and youth-serving organization. The organization is led by a young person whose main role is managing the organization and partnerships with donors, government representatives, private sector and other partners. The director

¹KII. November 2024. Director, Hakizetu. Mwanza.

works in close collaboration with the board that sits twice a year to deliberate on strategy and support in decision-making. The board is composed of experts who provide technical expertise, with 50% of the members being youth below the age of 35 years. The day to day activities of the organisation are, however, run and managed by youth who include project managers, project officers, other project staff and a network of volunteers at community level. Each layer of management has defined roles and responsibilities to ensure timely implementation of the activities.

Target Community and Needs

Key stakeholders Hakizetu engage with regularly include youth, government officials including the village and ward administrators, partner organizations and donors supporting implementation of other projects implemented by Hakizetu.

During the Going Beyond project, Hakizetu leveraged on its partnerships with key community level stakeholders to mobilize the youth to join the project. Having understood that engaging community structures and resources was the best way to achieve their goal, Hakizetu partnered with host organizations to conduct recruitment of YLs and YPs. Host organizations are Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) who partnered with Hakizetu to host YP training sessions in their offices during the project. Host organization staff along with Hakizetu staff displayed posters encouraging youth to apply and join the project. The recruitment team also mobilized participants in social places such as churches, women's meetings and locations where youth typically gather in each community. At community level, local youth were enrolled by the host organizations to support mobilization efforts. This made it easier as both the youth and host organizations supporting Hakizetu in participant mobilization were well known at community level.

In addition, each mobilization team set up help desks in their communities where they supported youth to send in applications. Another help desk was also set up at the Hakizetu offices in Mwanza to help youth who came to seek more information about the project and get assistance in completing the application. Social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook groups were also used to mobilize participants and create awareness about the project, which helped the team to reach out to more youth. The recruitment team also conducted door-to-door campaigns to mobilize participants in areas with poor internet connectivity. This approach also helped to increase the enrolment of some young women and people with disabilities, who needed more explanation about the project and why it might be valuable to them before committing to join. This approach was also useful in instances where staff and volunteers helped prospective participants build buy-in from parents and guardians so that they are supportive of their participation.

During mobilization of YLs and YPs, the project staff noted that there was an overwhelming number of men applicants compared to women. In the context of Mwanza, men are perceived to be more aggressive and technologically savvy than women. A key informant reported that girls are culturally conservative and timid and therefore they would be less likely to take the initiative to seek more information about the project and put in their application to join.² A staff member reported that using the word technology and digital in the recruitment poster was sufficient to discourage some young women from seeking to understand what the project was about and making the effort to apply to join it. In the local context, men have more access to information as they move freely in the communities, interact with their

² KII. November 2024. Implementation staff, Hakizetu. Mwanza.

peers and share information. Girls and young women are often constrained by domestic and caregiving duties, and therefore do not easily access information. Recognising this disparity in the gender of prospective participants, Hakizetu initiated rapid interventions to recruit and retain more young women in the project. Hakizetu partnered with local organizations to localise recruitment of participants and leverage the credibility these organizations have among their communities to engage an audience of young women to explain the Going Beyond project to.

Figure 2: Interview with Hakizetu staff at their offices in Mwanza



YPs reported that the digital space is fast evolving and is an area of interest to young people. Some of the key factors that motivated these youth to join and participate in the Going Beyond project included the recruitment approach, where youth were used to recruit their peers rather than sending adult figures who may not relate to the needs of the youth. Among those who took part in the recruitment exercise, 64% were women and 36% were men. The youth also have some education but lack functional skills to enable them to earn a living. This made the training on business skills, digital and financial literacy and basic skills quite interesting for young people. In addition, most online platforms that provide such knowledge are subscription based and often required a fee while the project was offering them functional skills training for free. Lastly, the youth reported they liked the non-discriminatory nature in which participants, including those living with disability, were recruited. All participants were given the opportunity to fill in an application form to join the project and those who needed assistance to fill in the application were also supported to do so.

Outcomes and Impact

Hakizetu addresses the needs of survivors of GBV through three intervention models. The first intervention model involves training women aged 18 to 49 on vocational skills such as handcrafts, garments making, design, photography and videography to equip them with the necessary skills to either be self employed or join formal employment. In this model, Hakizetu trains them for 9 months and then offers a 3 month apprenticeship with its partner businesses. Those who graduate and prefer to be employed are linked to potential employers, while those who prefer to start their own businesses are provided with start up kits, business incubation and mentorship services for the first 6 months. Through the business incubation services, beneficiaries access support services such as assistance in business development, linkage to financial institutions and seminars to showcase their work to prospective clients and partners.

The second model is the small enterprise development intervention. This is a 14 day business management training curriculum that trains entrepreneurs on business management, customer care, record keeping among other topics. Hakizetu also links the entrepreneurs with microfinance institutions and helps them to access micro loans. In addition, they also provide business incubation services to the entrepreneurs for 6 months, as is done in the first model.

The third model involves development of digital business skills, which is similar to the Going Beyond project. Hakizetu supports its participants to use digital platforms to access new markets, manage their business and also create different opportunities for collaboration with other entrepreneurs. This model is particularly successful due to good internet connection in most of their implementation areas and smartphone penetration among young people.

According to the director, Hakizetu conducted numerous prototypes to ensure the three models worked and were beneficial to the girls and young women who took part in them. This formative research and design iteration ensured Hakizetu was able to effectively address girls and young women's economic needs and provided them the opportunity to make informed decisions.

To this end, the Going Beyond project was not a new concept to Hakizetu, but added value to already existing structures and systems within the organisation. The project was very similar to activities they were already implementing under the third model mentioned above. This also made it easy for Hakizetu project staff to integrate the Going Beyond project into their regular activities. This contributed to the project's success, as Hakizetu staff were familiar with the use of digital platforms and working with young people to address and meet their needs.

The projects implemented by Hakizetu are attractive to the youth because they were developed in consultation with youth to address key issues that are important to them. Hakizetu implements projects that offer economic opportunities to vulnerable and neglected girls and young women, while offering safe spaces for them to learn skills and also interact with their peers facing similar challenges. Not only are they empowered economically, Hakizetu also provides an avenue for young women to share their life experiences and how to navigate day to day challenges.

The Going Beyond project similarly resonated with key needs of youth. During a focus group discussion (FGD) with YLs, the youth reported that the project attracted their interest as it addressed key issues that affect them, such as unemployment. FGD participants reported that the lack of economic opportunities led to stress and

mental issues, drug abuse, prostitution, alcohol and substance abuse, GBV, abuse of digital spaces and inability of youth to fend for themselves or meet their daily needs. Most educated youth are also not aware of places to seek formal employment or do not have ideas to start businesses. YLs reported that youth are often not taught how to create opportunities in school but rather wait for employment advertisements for them to apply for jobs. They also reported that educational institutions primarily focus on teaching students educational content as outlined in the curriculum rather than providing students with skills that are relevant to the workplace, leaving most youth without income sources. The lack of economic opportunities among the youth also leads to low self-confidence, depression, frustration and in some instances involvement in theft and crime to enable them to meet their needs. This highlights the importance of having an avenue the youth can use or engage in to address their economic hardships.

Going Beyond addresses the youth's needs by providing skills and avenues youth can use to generate income. The approach proposed by the project does not require much capital, which strengthening the inclusion of resource-constrained youth. This provides an avenue to address the economic constraints that largely affect the youth's ability to subsist and meet their needs. The majority of youth are ever present in online spaces but lack the knowledge or skills to navigate online spaces and make productive use of their time. YLs reported that Going Beyond influenced them to have a change in attitudes and behaviours regarding how they utilise their time and what they do when online. They report most of their peers they train have learnt how to professionally use social media sites to look for jobs or market products that generate income for them. In one cohort of youth peers, 8 of the 22 youth have started online businesses and their businesses are thriving, while two secured employment opportunities. Another YL reported that most of the youth in his learning site learnt how to market their businesses online, know how to do business plans, do value addition to their businesses and use online networks to reach wider markets. Most of them have now professionalised their businesses to ensure that they can access formal markets and have service contracts to supply the goods they make.

Youth leaders reported that youth who took part in the Going Beyond project have identified and reached out to other businesses for collaboration through the digital spaces. This has not only opened up new markets for them, but also helped them generate ideas on value addition opportunities, or unique product ideas. Other youth have also used their own networks and pursued formalisation of their businesses through the Tanzania Revenue Authority (TRA). This approach has opened up more opportunities for the entrepreneurs to trade with other formal establishments such as supermarkets and other private sector businesses. The Going Beyond project also resulted in some innovative approaches to employment, with youth writing proposals to businesses to help them manage their social media accounts and help those businesses utilise opportunities in the digital space. Through the training they received, the skills the participants strengthened while in the YP program enabled them to think of innovative ideas to create employment opportunities rather than seek to be employed.

Figure 3: FGD with Youth Leaders in Mwanza



Results measurement

Hakizetu uses several approaches to monitor its projects, assess progress and measure impact. These include conducting field monitoring visits, hosting regular feedback sessions with YLs and also conducting FGDs with youth to understand their needs and the strides the organization is making to address them. The project team also undertakes regular data collection to draw evidence against project indicators for reporting purposes. Hakizetu reported that through the Going Beyond project, they have improved on their monitoring and reporting practices and also adopted using SurveyCTO for project reporting activities. Using SurveyCTO helped Hakizetu to reduce the time they take to conduct data collection activities by 50% because they are able to reach more people and collect data faster. In addition, the staff also conduct phone verification of reported results and also do non-participatory observation to validate the reported project results. To reinforce project activities, project staff offer ad-hoc business support and mentorship services to graduates of all Hakizetu projects to ensure that all youth are supported to meet their goals. This increases their ability to showcase success stories among each community that local youth can easily identify and relate to.

Hakizetu has learnt how to effectively collect data and use data for decision making. In addition, they have improved their data management practices and identified better ways of reporting and documenting their work. A staff reported that they have adopted the data collection and reporting system used during the Going Beyond project and replicated it across their active projects. In addition, Hakizetu has also adopted digital tools for organisational management such as scanning documents and using e-signatures rather than printing every single document which is time-consuming, costly and not environmentally friendly.

Sustainability

A key factor in the project's success was fostering strong relationships with the host organizations. Hakizetu approached over 30 host organizations they partnered with on the project with a partnership-based proposal instead of seeking assistance to use their spaces as learning sites. Hakizetu ensured that the host organizations directly benefited from the project to ensure they were committed to supporting the project, rather than having a transactional relationship. Hakizetu used its YLs to identify common challenges that each host organization was facing and as part of the offering, supported them to identify and implement practical and cost effective solutions to address those challenges. In addition, Hakizetu included the partners in the design and recruitment stages of the project, and this increased their level of interest and engagement in the project while also providing a learning opportunity for their staff. This increased the host organizations' commitment to ensuring that Hakizetu achieved its goals, as they saw value in the relationship. Forward looking, this partnership will likely see these organizations offer technical support to YPs to ensure they meet their goals.

Hakizetu reported that through DOT, they have learnt how to better implement their third model of interventions explained above. While Hakizetu have previously been implementing digital business interventions, they reported that skills gained through their work with the Going Beyond project will be integrated into their project activities to better improve their digital business intervention. Hakizetu has integrated training on digital spaces and digital business across all three intervention models. This approach was taken to ensure young women taking part in other Hakizetu interventions also use the digital spaces to either market their products or also seek employment opportunities.

Hakizetu will continue to offer business mentorship services on a need basis to graduates of this first cohort. As they do with their other projects, participants who graduate from the 6 months incubation period still have access to business development support services from their team. It is expected that the Going Beyond YLs will continue to access these services as well, whenever they are in need of them.

Strategic Approach

As a youth-led and youth serving organisation, Hakizetu understands the different intergenerational priorities of the youth and how to work with them. Youth, despite being clustered in the same age bracket of 18 to 35 years, have demonstrated different priorities and lines of thought over the years and including them in conversations proved critical to the success of the Going Beyond project. Hakizetu learnt that youth do not like being directed or given instructions to follow even on matters that directly affect them, or are likely to positively influence their lives. However, engaging them more proactively in decision-making processes increases their level of participation and commitment to activities. Youth want to be leaders of change and to make decisions on issues that affect them and interventions should be designed in a way that relates to their day to day challenges. They are therefore likely to increase their participation in interventions if they are engaged in the design stage of interventions and work with their peers in their communities. In addition, a key respondent mentioned that youth speak the same language among their peers and this makes them easily relate with one another.

“Youth have a special way of working and you have to adopt their lifestyle and modality. You have to present yourself to their level. They relate more to those who are like them.”

Key staff reported that communities are aware of their challenges and the deep-rooted issues that affect them and what opportunities exist to effectively address them. These community members therefore need facilitated interventions to help them address their challenges, rather than issuing directives or instructions without engaging or consulting them

Youth are also likely to resonate with people from their communities and of similar backgrounds. For example, a youth from an urban area may not relate to challenges and nuanced barriers affecting youth from the rural communities therefore they are likely to fail in understanding and addressing their needs. However, having the intervention led by youth from the same communities who participants are aware of and resonate with their daily challenges will more likely yield results as they are privy to nuances in needs of youth from their community. Participants are also more likely to open up to them. A youth participant during a discussion reported that most people like to complain about the youth but never take time to understand what their needs are.

“Most people complain about the youth but nobody is actually providing a solution. Each time you blame the youth they find a way to defend themselves and adapt by being hostile. Having a supportive and mutually beneficial approach is the right way to engage youth, rather than just complaining about the youth. The world is ever-changing and the youth are also evolving with it, and advancing with technology. Things that happened in our youth are not the same as what will happen in the future, or what happened in the earlier years.”

The peer to peer approach transcends most social barriers to communication and interaction among the youth. Project staff reported that the youth-led approach is advantageous because youth have a way of understanding each other in their own language and expressing themselves in ways only their peers can fully understand. This approach also makes creating rapport with participants very easy and they are able to open up about the challenges that affect them, both at home and in the businesses they run.

YLS participating in a focus group discussion reported that the Going Beyond training curriculum was designed to include a lot of practical and functional skills that can be implemented on the go. This made it quite easy for them to practically demonstrate how YPs can restructure their businesses or use online digital spaces. It also helped that some businesses at the go started releasing increased sales and orders came from far destinations through the adverts they placed on the Facebook marketplace. The ability of the youth to see the results in real time even as they went through other training modules encourage more YPs to be proactive and regularly attend training sessions. In addition, having close relationships with YPs and learning how to effectively communicate with them also helped the YLS achieve their goals and foster an environment where the youth could openly share their challenges and discuss among themselves to find proactive, functional and relevant solutions. However, YPs recommended that the training curriculum be translated to Swahili to avoid any errors in translation or misconception of terms.

Scaling up

While Hakizetu envisions scaling up the project as they have integrated the training content into their own curriculum, they are faced with resource challenges. The organization cares about its graduates and continues to offer them support to ensure their businesses grow and thrive. They have therefore invested additional resources to ensure all graduates get the necessary support. It is Hakizetu's desire to scale up into new locations and offer training opportunities to more youth, but they foresee a scenario where they will be resource constrained.

Collaboration

Key to the successful partnership between Hakizetu and DOT has been the collaborative and supportive approach DOT offered Hakizetu. Key Hakizetu staff reported that DOT supported them and worked with them to ensure they met their goal, rather than playing a supervisory role.

"DOT did not come to us with a solution. They came with a structure which we built upon through a collaborative co-design process as partners. We adapted the project based on our local context, rather than copy-paste solutions as other organizations do. There isn't a one fit-for-all solution to all challenges across all locations. DOT understood this and worked with us to address challenges we faced. We felt DOT was a partner to us rather than a funding institution."

The project is also very flexible in its nature. Hakizetu reported that the partnership with DOT provided opportunities for adaptive management, where DOT listened to Hakizetu's needs and addressed them. Staff reported that DOT listening to them made them more involved and increased their participation in project activities. Opportunities for learning, unlearning and adapting approaches increased their interest in further understanding the needs of youth people and mankind tailored solutions to support them. The adaptive approach utilised made staff more interested in ensuring the project achieved its goals regardless of the challenges they faced, as they were able to respond to them.

During the first year of the Going Beyond project, Hakizetu worked with at least 30 partner organizations who were based in the target communities. These organizations were included in the recruitment process of YLs and also supported mobilization of YPs. During the project implementation phase, Hakizetu also engaged the organizations in varied capacities from hosting some of the trainings, to bilateral engagements and capacity building their staff and volunteers to ensure the partners had the skills needed to effectively manage their organization. Through engagements and networks forged during the Going Beyond project, Hakizetu has created sustainable partnerships with other organizations in the Mwanza region. Looking forward, Hakizetu leveraged these partnerships to implement the Piga Picha Festival that will take place from 28th November to 30th November at Lutale, Magu, Mwanza. Hakizetu managed to mobilize at least 16 partners who committed to take part in the festival to commemorate the 16 Days of Activism, which aims to increase awareness and prevent GBV. Hakizetu staff reported that they have seen value in engaging with other youth serving organizations and since joining the project, they have created communities of practice. They also have exchange visits where they share ideas on addressing challenges they face, share contacts and resources to assist each other meet their objectives and also make referrals to business development

and funding opportunities to ensure each organization is able to achieve its goal in service to their community.

“Our work in this community has made us view other organizations as family and friends rather than competitors. There is more strength and efficiency in working together, rather than creating animosity by looking at them like other competing organizations. At the end of the day, if any of us get any opportunities, we are all happy because the community we serve get to benefit.”³

³KII. November 2024. Director, Hakizetu. Mwanza.

