Skilling projects restore hope among young girls

The skilling projects will give the young girls practical skills coupled with market linkages for their produce.

BY RAJAB MUKOMBOZI



Bishop Stuart University Vice chancellor John Mugisha signs on a board during the launch of the Business Management Curriculum at the institution in Mbarara City on January 30, 2025. PHOTO/RAJAB MUKOMBOZI

There is growing optimism among young girls in Rwampara and Mbarara districts as empowerment projects aimed at transitioning them from unemployment to skills development are launched.

The projects are under Sustainable Inclusive Youth Employment Pathways (SIYEP) by Africa Agribusiness Incubators Network (AAIN) and Agency for Accelerated Regional Development (AFARD) in collaboration with Rwampara Farm Institute in Rwampara District, Bishop Stuart University and Excel Hort Consult in Mbarara City. They aim at empowering young girls with business development skills and marketing linkages.

At Rwampara Farm Institute, an Earn as You Learn business and skilling model was launched to skill girls from both the formal and informal sector to earn a decent living.

"We are training and giving them facilities to enable them engage in production," Mr Enock Ampumuza, the business incubation management specialist at AAIN said.

During the skilling period, 20 percent of the sales from the trainees' products will go to the institute, while 80 percent goes to empowerment and growth of their businesses.

Mr Ampumuza said to mitigate the market challenge, they have constructed a community based market stall on Mbarara-Ntungamo-Kabale Road where young girls will showcase and sell their products.

"The Mbarara-Ntungamo-Kabale Road is a gateway to the neighbouring countries of DR Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, which will help the girls target both local and international markets for the products. There is also a daily market for agricultural produce, which can boost their market linkage."

The Rwampara Institute principal, Mr Naboth Nuwagaba, said they have already enrolled 100 young girls from the institute and the community, who are undergoing skills training but also earning.

"This intervention will create a significant community impact as it involves young girls who have not attained any formal education. We will give the necessary support and skills to ensure the programme succeeds," he said.

They currently have 100 girls but the target is 500 girls in the next five years.

The other programme is the Business Management Curriculum (BIM) housed at Bishop Stuart University to skill young girls in agribusiness.

Prof Alex Ariho, an executive from AAIN, said the 2025 curriculum they developed is aimed at equipping the young people, especially girls, with entrepreneurial and smart business skills, nurture innovative enterprises, facilitate linkage to markets, private sector players and service providers.

"The most pressing challenges of Africa are youth unemployment, food insecurity and poverty and to address them, we need to train the youth, who form the majority of the population, to be actors in development. They need to be equipped with skills, access technologies, financing and markets and this is what we are addressing," he said.

Additionally, the young girls will be linked to markets and product certification.

Presenting the curriculum overview, Prof Samson James Opolot, the Vice Chancellor of Ibanda University, said beyond degrees, graduates need experience and income pathways.

"Students need to gain practical skills while learning, test ideas, build enterprises and master market realities if they want to be ready for the dynamic labour market," he said.

The Bishop Stuart University Vice chancellor, Professor John Mugisha said the university is committed to implement the BIM curriculum, especially by bringing community members on board to acquire transformative skills.

"I am very encouraged that the designers of this curriculum and funders thought of extending their reach beyond the university and other formal institutions gates. Without engaging and working with the community to understand their pains, the education would be a waste," he said.

He said the university has already received 100 students for the first cohort for this BIM curriculum.

Another Programme is the digital coaching and mentorship platform code named, Omuzaire Africa at Excel Hort Consult, Mbarara City.

Prof Ariho said the digital platform will help in the mentorship, skilling and access to business coaching of the young girls.

"We know that some of the young people may not get time and resources to access an incubator hence opening this digital platform that will make the process convenient like studying at home. The digital platform has other tools that can help the young girls to access markets," he said.

Prof Ariho said these projects are funded by Master Card Foundation under the Sustainable Inclusive Youth Employment Pathways (SIYEP) programme targeting girls between 18-35 years. The five year programme seeks to empower 5,000 girls in western Uganda and 25,000 across the country.

SKILLING THE GIRL

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