There is one Rapid Social Response grant for Kenya and is divided into two parts: one that support the Kenya Youth Empowerment Program and the second that supports the Government of Kenya for social protection programming. This RSR story will describe the Kenya Youth Empowerment Program while the next story will focus on the social protection programming.

Kenya is named for Mount Kenya, the highest mountain in the country and the second highest in Africa. It borders five countries and lies between two important bodies of water: the Indian Ocean runs along to its south-east border, while Lake Victoria, the world’s second largest fresh water lake, edges its south-west border. Kenya is considered the regional hub for trade and finance in East Africa and is especially known for its wildlife, safaris, national parks and reserves – there are over 65 parks and national reserves.

In the past decade, the economy fluctuated in Kenya. After a long period of stagnation, the economic growth rate increased from 2.9 percent in 2003 to 7.1 percent in 2007 then dropped to 1.7 percent in 2008 due to a series of events. To begin, a disputed presidential election in December 2007 caused two months of violent civil unrest that killed over 1,000 people and internally displaced more than 350,000. At the same time, Kenya experienced a drought that led to a sharp increase in food prices. Since these events, the economy has started to grow again (2.5 percent in 2009). The country’s poverty rate remains high. In 2006, 46 percent of the population lived below the national poverty line, while 19 percent lived in extreme poverty.

Kenya’s population has tripled to nearly 39 million since the country gained independence in 1963. Its demographics reflect that of Africa’s – one third of the population are young (between 15 to 29 years of age). In Kenya, the median age is 18.9 years. Additionally, one in three of Kenya’s poor population is between 15 to 29 years of age. As stated by Johannes Zutt, the World Bank’s Country Director, “Kenya, like many other African countries, is struggling to manage a growing population of youth, of whom about one in five are neither in school nor working. While Kenya’s youth can be an asset and a source of growth, if they are neglected or marginalized they can also be a potent source of crime and violence”.i

Young people in Kenya face serious challenges, including high rates of unemployment and underemployment; they make up 67 percent of the unemployed. Youth are disproportionately affected by economic slowdowns and contracting labor markets given that new entrants are the ones least likely to find work and the ones more likely to be laid off first. Crisis such as the 2011 drought, the worst Kenya has seen in decades, is increasing food prices and creating more financial burdens for families with unemployed youth. The lack of jobs and employment cause other economic and social costs at the individual level (e.g., diminished personal health, well-being and income) and at the societal level (e.g., frustration among youth that can lead to social disruptions such and unrest).
Youth employment and skill development have emerged as top priorities for the Government of Kenya and development partners. In 2010, the government launched the Kenya Youth Empowerment Program (KYEP), a 60 million dollar World Bank financed program that aims to create employment for youth and build institutional capacity for youth policy planning and implementation. KYEP supports a public-private partnership between the government and Kenya Private Sector Alliance (KEPSA) and targets unemployed youth between ages 15 to 29.

KYEP provides the youth with 6-month internships that consist of training and private sector work placements in five growth industries identified by the government for the Vision 2030 (http://www.vision2030.go.ke/). The five growth industries include energy, finance, information and communication technology, micro-enterprise development, and manufacturing. Young people, both males and females, are provided training in life skills, core business and advanced industry-specific technical skills. After the trainings, the participants are matched with employers through an interview process and then placed in a three-month work experience.

Employers’ interests and understanding of what the private sector demands in terms of skills and knowledge is shaping the types of trainings and work experience offered to youth. This is a new approach to increase youth employment in Kenya. This pilot project expects to recruit over 10,000 youth in four years in Nairobi, Mombasa and in one rural area. The first internship cycle started on June 20, 2011.

The World Bank’s Rapid Social Response Program is providing funding in order to strengthen the government’s efforts to address youth unemployment. During initial preparation for the youth internship program, RSR funds were used to recruit staff and build a management team in KEPSA to implement the program. RSR is also providing financing to conduct an impact evaluation. The government has high hopes that the youth program will yield desirable results, as there are very few youth employment programs that have been evaluated. Consequently, the results of this evaluation will be crucial piece for the government to decide the future of its youth employment programs and policies. The RSR funded activities will be completed by June 2012.

Written by Andrea L. Robles, November 23, 2011

This article does not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank Group, its Executive Directors or the governments they represent. Rapid Social Response Program (RSR) is part of the World Bank’s response to the Food, Fuel and Financial Crisis. Its mission is to help the World’s poorest countries become better prepared to cope with systemic and unpredictable shocks. RSR has been generously supported by the governments of the Russian Federation, Norway and United Kingdom. For further information, please visit http://www.worldbank.org/rsr.


The specific criteria for the program includes unemployed youth between ages 15 to 29 who have at least 8 years of schooling, have finished a minimum of 8 years of school at least 1 year prior, and have been unemployed for at least 1 year.

The World Bank team leader for this project is Will Wiseman (Senior Economist, Africa Social Protection).