

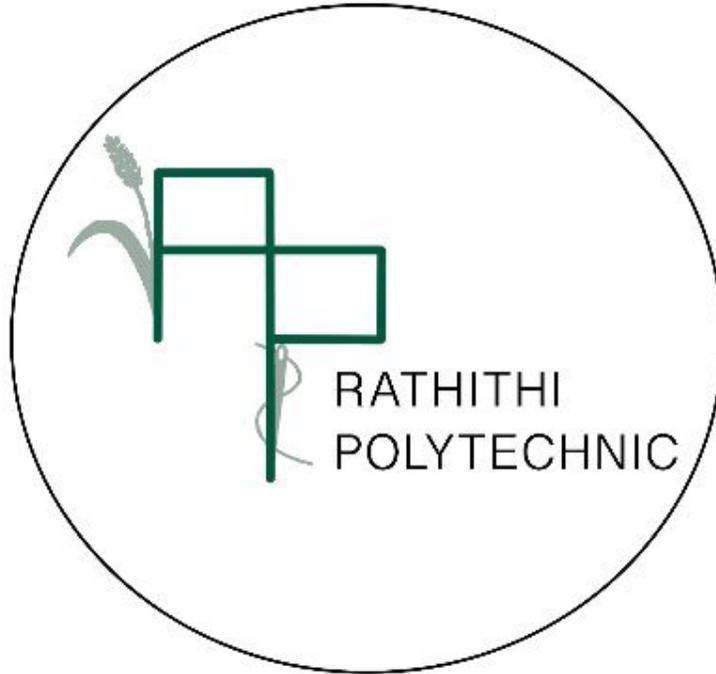
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The opening of Rathithi Polytechnic

The Children and Youth Empowerment Centre has opened a new polytechnic - Rathithi Polytechnic - to provide education and training in sustainable agriculture for the centre's older youth and for community members.





About Rathithi

Rathithi Polytechnic is a project of the Children and Youth Empowerment Centre (CYEC), in Nyeri. The centre, which provides housing, education and enrichment for former street-dwelling youth, established the polytechnic as a specialized facility to serve the young people based at the CYEC and related programs, who are graduating from high school.

The exceptionally high rates of unemployment (and underemployment) for young people in Kenya, which is even higher for the demographic that CYEC serves, means there is need for special efforts to ensure youth can be successful after leaving the centre. A well-thought-out skills development program, which the polytechnic intends to put in place, is a key component of such a program.

The polytechnic opened its doors to learners in June 2019 and currently serves a total of 52 learners, both full-time and part-time. Current formal programs include catering, tailoring, computing, masonry and life-skills and leadership. The agriculture program is yet to gain formal status. The polytechnic's official launch is set for November 2019 and the first lot of paying full-time students is

expected in January 2020.



Empowerment

In keeping with CYEC's goal of empowering young people to seize control of their personal and collective destinies, the polytechnic program has three main objectives:

- To equip learners with relevant and sound know-how
- To provide ready access to learning and production facilities
- To foster life skills development among learners.

The three objectives tally with the three requirements of general empowerment: increased practical know-how; accumulated material resources and enhanced self-understanding.



Know how

Teaching practical know-how is a central component any significant empowerment effort. For ordinary skills-training institutions, such know-how is focused on helping individuals find employment in the open market. For the CYEC's polytechnic program however, there is a keen appreciation of the need to use its skills-development program for the empowerment of the broader community. This is because an empowered community is a key component of any long-term solution to the challenges that have made the CYEC program necessary.

Even while preparing its students for marketable competencies, the polytechnic is focused on developing training programs that are likely to have a major positive impact on community empowerment. These programs include sustainable agriculture, management of waste, renewable energy solutions and non-timber-based building technologies.



Learning and production facilities

The socio-economic backgrounds of the students at the polytechnic are such that program sustainability is an issue of critical importance. It is necessary, for instance, that learners are able to have meals as part of what is offered at the polytechnic. For purposes of efficiency, this means that learning facilities are best utilized for production as well. For example, those in the agriculture program are expected to produce food for the polytechnic's kitchen while those learning catering are expected to cook for all. The same is true for the other programs. The polytechnic's facilities, with time, are expected to start generating income.



Life skills development

For the polytechnic to serve as an effective means of community empowerment, it will be necessary for it to have an active outreach service, which would best be done by students. To be able to do this the students need to be self-aware and have leadership competencies. This is why life-skills and leadership training is an integral part of the polytechnic's training program. The aim of this initiative is to enable students to see themselves not as victims of circumstances beyond their control but as agents of positive change for their communities. The learners are equipped with the skills to design and implement programs for positive change in their communities.



Program leadership

Of special significance for the polytechnic initiative is the fact that its leadership is based on beneficiaries of the CYEC program. The institution's manager belongs to the first cohort of children to be rescued from the streets of Nairobi at the inception of the national program. He is now a university graduate and is working with several other former street-dwelling children who are now instructors at the institution, with more set to join in when and as they graduate from their respective colleges and universities.



Support requirements

The polytechnic requires plenty of support in order to build its programs to a level that can realize meaningful sustainability, including from paying students. Such support includes the development of general infrastructure such as classrooms, workshops and dormitories, as well as program support such as staff salaries and utility bills. Of special significance for the development and sustainability effort however is the agriculture program.



Learn More

To learn more about the Children and Youth Empowerment Centre, please visit cyec.net. To read the latest biennial report, visit cyec.net/zawadi-fund-international.

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