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Sharpening youth business skills in creative industry

Pushed by loss of employment, **Lucy Wariara** dusted herself up to set up a consultancy firm and mentorship programme to equip youths with skills-based training to curb joblessness

by **Clifford Akumu**
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In November 2019, Lucy Wariara was fired from her job of six years. Prior to this, she had worked in the communication departments of several international and development organisations, crafting communication strategies and solving crisis at all levels. Although good at her craft, she had to exit the swanky office at that critical time in her career.

Like all the communication strategies she had helped put together, this time around, it was her job loss crisis—that needed urgent fixing. “I was told I was the reason the project was underperforming. It was the darkest hour of my life,” Wariara begins our conversation, during the Absa Bank’s SHE Stars programme graduation ceremony in Nairobi, recently.

She was part of a host of 257 women entrepreneurs across the country trained by the bank and its partners on technical business management programme, to increase their growth and competitiveness.

Wariara concurs with the reality of acute unemployment in Kenya, especially among the youth, noting the need to equip youths with skills-based training to curb the joblessness and mental health challenges.

Vulnerable lot

“Youth are really suffering because they are expected to act like adults. Since they are vulnerable, it’s a delicate stage, and not all of them get out of the storm. As a society, we are disenfranchising the vulnerable youth, so they end up engaging in any activity to eke out a living, sometimes going the extra mile

to engage in criminal activities or drugs and substance abuse. Even our systems need to recognise there is a yawning gap in youth unemployment,” notes the Kenya Methodist University alumnus.

Wariara took the leap of faith and formed Recast Career Consultancy, a creative agency that develops communication tools for companies, to keep her busy and ultimately provide for her family.

Her firm produces communication tools that help businesses and organisations to engage more with their stakeholders and get their products and services known in the market. However, since it was set up during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the business was slow to an extent that at some point she contemplated closing shop.

To keep going

“When the country was put on lockdown at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was totally jobless. I couldn’t go out or reach out to my friends to get clients,” she narrates, adding that to keep her company going, she decided to produce different gift items including women pouches, notebooks, mugs, and slim fit T-shirts for men to make some money.

In her career, she had seen organisations invest a lot of money on giving grants to youth and realised there was a gap that needed to be filled. She explains, “For example, when giving youth grants to run businesses, nobody is there to equip them with information and knowledge on how to develop a business model.”

In August 2020, during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Your-Mentor programme to empower youth in the



Recast Career Consultancy and Your-Mentor programme founder Lucy Wariara. COURTESY

creative industry categories of music, fashion, graphics, and crafts was born.

“I felt the burden within my heart to help mentor the youth to use their talent to make money and tackle the Sustainable Development Goals, with the primary driver behind our work being the eradication of extreme poverty,” Wariara shares.

Your-Mentor programme is an arts-based youth entity that collaborates with youth entrepreneurs who want to build a career within the creative industry, by creating content that celebrates their work. It also shares youths’ lessons on business, entrepreneurship, and artistry to promote peer-to-peer learning.

“We have so many talented youth, but most of them waste their time watching movies the whole day. The youth need someone to show them how to use their talent and package themselves to make money. My passion is to see youth become more productive and successful entrepreneurs in society. I want to build a sustainable and robust creative industry one youth at a time,” she notes.

Just like any other entrepreneur, Wariara had earlier done some homework before rolling the initiative. She says, “One year before being jobless, I had given my son (then a university student) a questionnaire to pass to his fellow learners engaging them on what they needed most in the event they did not get a job after graduating from the university.”

From the survey, she noted that many students lamented the lack of guidance on how to use their respective talents to get money. With this in mind, Wariara penned the book *The Sharp Entrepreneur* in 2021, detailing step-by-step ways on

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how to work creatively and think like an entrepreneur.

“Young people have been taught so much about the technical side of doing things, but not on soft skills such as time management, office etiquette, or how to negotiate their services. We are changing and empowering the youth to develop an entrepreneurial mindset. We equip them with information on how to price their talents, and think like entrepreneurs,” Wariara adds.

She continues, “Many of our youths use their data bundles to like other people’s social media posts. What if they use the same data to post and promote their creative works on social media? In developed nations, unlike here, youth creatives are using social media to promote and earn a living from their talents.”

The main challenge in Wariara’s mission, however, is lack of capital to reach the most deserving youth creatives. She aims to impact groups of over 3,500 youth with the mentorship programme by 2025. Her prayer is to partner with a philanthropist to fulfil her mandate.

Youth mentees

The initiative has also formed what she terms as ‘The Creatives Community platform’, where the youth creatives showcase their work and mentor others through peer-to-peer learning. The platform, she adds, has seen some youth develop innovative business models and supported livelihoods along the creative industry value chain.

“There are youth in our programme that make snacks for meetings, weddings, and birthday parties. They have created income opportunities by teaming up with riders to deliver their finished products. And this is one of the success stories of our programme,” Wariara shares.

Wariara plans to distribute her book under Your-Mentor book donation campaign between February and August 2023, in order to increase the youth’s access to information to boost their economic wellbeing. She targets to donate up to 500 books.

“For us, it is a matter of growth because we have already put the systems and structures in place and have started building a network of youth creatives. We want to scale up our activities of equipping youth with the information and resources they need to run successful businesses in the creative industry over the next five years,” she says.

In conclusion, she shares a word of advice to young creatives and graduates saying: “Be good at what you do. Be patient, resilient and open to possibilities.”



Some of the participants during the Your-Mentor music mentorship event at Riara University in Nairobi in June, 2022. COURTESY

WARIARA

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