

Accelerating Youth employment through the TVET sector
Report of the webinar held 23rd September 2021 as part of the RUFORUM
Triennial Pre-Conference Events

Introduction

Agenda 2063 has envisioned the need to catalyze education and skills revolution and actively promote science, technology, research and innovation, to build knowledge, human resources, capabilities and skills for the African century. To achieve this, it has earmarked strengthening technical and vocational education and training through scaled up investments, the establishment of a pool of high-quality Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centres across Africa. Further, the need for greater links with industry and alignment to labour markets, with a view to improve the skills profile, employability and entrepreneurship of especially youth and women, and closing the skills gap across the continent is being encouraged¹. Accordingly, TVET has gained ground as a winner in the ‘race to the top’ of government priorities for education and national development agendas. The African Union has further strengthened this priority setting with the development of a strategy to revitalize TVET in Africa. Several African governments have followed suit by mainstreaming TVET in their national development agenda. Further, African governments have been urged to further expand their investment in technical and vocational skills development if Africa is to generate the internal growth capable of addressing the unemployment and underemployment of youth and adults, and of creating businesses, jobs and substantial economic revenue.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training is primarily focused at enhancing the acquisition of employable skills for the world of work. As such, a national workforce imbued with high-level technical, entrepreneurial, and other work-related skills becomes a critical success factor for national wealth creation and prosperity and provides opportunity for inclusive growth. The TVET sector in SSA is generally low with formal enrolment in most African countries being 5% or less but with a predominant non-formal TVET that is highly fragmented. But, the demand for TVET training in sub-Saharan Africa is particularly enormous given the unprecedented levels unemployment; for example, every three out of five young people in SSA is unemployed and those that earn a living do so from the informal sector based on artisanal skills development.

Building the momentum for TVET in SSA requires taking several strategic actions aimed at escalating in-country and regional TVET capacity building efforts. The actions often require multi-faceted implementation within a broader framework that allows for exploitation of a range of opportunities across actors including; governments, non-governmental organisations, formal enterprise sector and informal enterprise sector as well as development partners. To this end, the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) with support from the Mastercard Foundation through the “Transforming African Agricultural Universities to meaningfully contribute to Africa’s growth and development (TAGDev)” programme piloted a University-TVET collaborative action in skills development. The pilot action was embedded within the overall Community Action Research Programmes Plus

¹ Agend 2063; Africa we Want. <http://archive.au.int/assets/images/agenda2063.pdf>

(CARP+) projects that focus on agricultural value chains development. The programme has further piloted the “Out of School Youth Skilling” approach for developing agripreneurial skills capacities of rural youth.

Objectives of the Pre-conference event

This Triennial Pre-Conference event was twofold:

1. Converge stakeholders in the TVET sector to share lessons and best practices from various interventions
2. Provide a platform to universities and TVET institutions implementing the TAGDev programme TVET pilot interventions to provide evidence of TVET contributions to expanding youth opportunities for employment in Africa
3. Explore opportunities for building and connecting TVET interventions and actions in Africa

Moderation and opening remarks

The event moderated by Dr. Eusebius Mukhwana, Director General of the Kenya National Qualifications Authority was aimed at sharing experiences of how to accelerate and utilize the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector as a foundation for addressing youth employment challenge across the continent. The webinar, part of the webinar series of the 1st RUFORUM Triennial Conference organized by RUFORUM in conjunction with the Government of Benin builds onto programme implementation undertaken by RUFORUM Secretariat with support from the Mastercard Foundation and other partners to enhance RUFORUM work in the TVET space. RUFORUM has been in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation since 2016 through the TAGDev Programme.

Dialogue on Youth employment is important because Youth are a key constituent within the African Continent and one of the challenges today is how to provide meaningful employment to young people. The TVET sector offers a good opportunity for skilling the youth to enable them function within their countries and beyond. Within the TVET ecosystem in Africa, different countries have different challenges in terms of trying to addressing issues of TVET including Infrastructure (modern, relevant and current), trainers and their capability, outdated equipment, curriculum development and relevance to industry, competence-based training (the training delivered needs to enable them fit within the entrepreneurial and work space) and progression from TVET to University.

The convening attended by 175 participants deliberated on TVET and how TVET could be used to create youth employability. TVET in this case includes the entire value chain from the development of occupational standards to curriculum development, training, accreditation, quality assurance, assessment, certification and how the skills are made relevant to industry.

Meeting outcomes

Key discussion points

1. Dr. Hendrina Doroba, Division Manager, Education, Human Capital and Employment at the African Development Bank Group (AfDB) delivered the key note address on “Investing in TVET for addressing youth employment needs in Africa”. She noted that Africa is the only continent where the youth bulge is going to continue growing into the near foreseeable future. However, African economies are not growing at pace that they are generating the matching jobs for the growing youth population. Thus, unemployment rates are increasing every year, and even those that are working are under employed and/or working in extremely risk points. The continent also suffers from the problem of the ‘leaking pipe’ dropping of school and these largely lack employable skills. The TVET are better position to address the skills mismatch with potential to create jobs. This in part arises from the fact that TVETs are diverse across the countries thus can take on various levels of young people and create a potential for jobs creation. Despite this potential, the public spending on TVET in the continent is limited amounting to about 4% of the GDP of which 80% of this goes to salaries and other operational costs. This low investment has multiple effects on the sector including poor physical infrastructure, low student enrollment, and low morale among personnel. Developing short courses that address the immediate needs for skills could help improve uptake of TVET sector. The AfDB is implementing a model for skills development zones through application of the geotraining approach to rapidly increase the skills development and it is providing opportunity for quickly identify the required skills and get the on-job training take-off.
2. Ms. Laura Rita Lulua from the Mastercard Foundation noted that the Young Africa works is Mastercard Foundation’s strategy to enable 30 million young people (70% women) across Africa to access dignified and fulfilling work with country programs existing in Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda. Within Uganda, priority sectors include Agriculture, construction, tourism, and entrepreneurship. Key challenges young people face in accessing TVET and employment include skills mismatch; low digital and technical skills; limited access to on-job training; negative perceptions towards the girl-child undertaking certain courses especially science technology engineering and mathematics (STEM) as well as gender-based violence that contributes to lack of access to training; and, high costs of equipment.

Skills for the future of work, championed by Mastercard Foundation is important because young people lack practical, entrepreneurship, digital, marketing and work readiness skills which makes it harder for youth to find or keep work; young people, parents and society have negative attitude towards TVET and Agriculture related courses; young women have limited access to opportunities for education and skilling programs across sectors; the TVET institutions lack the relevant equipment and

instructors to provide youth with market-facing skills for work; the future of work is changing with major modifications needed in the skills required by the labour market; and, the workforce needs to be up-to-date with the right skills through formal and informal lifelong learning.

With improved training and exposure to opportunities championed by Mastercard Foundation, youth will be able to join agribusiness through formal employment and starting up competitive enterprises in agriculture. Areas of agricultural skilling will include: on-farm production skills, aggregation and marketing, fee for service skills, machine operation and maintenance (agricultural engineering), climate smart agriculture, technical specialization and in-depth skills, high-value agriculture skills and innovation in value addition.

Mastercard Foundation's secondary education report recommended seven sets of skills young people need to be prepared for the future of work now and in future including; foundational skills, 21st century skills, digital skills, STEM skills, technical and vocational skills, entrepreneurship skills and work readiness skills.

Mastercard foundation will work with its partners to: strengthen the TVETs, VTIs and apprenticeships to upskill and skill both trainers and students on relevant and quality-market facing skills across sectors, support hand holding of the youth through on-job training, mentorship, coaching and linkage to internships and job placements; and, work with mentors/role models to trigger mindset transformation and increase youth engagement in both on-farm and off-farm production and agribusiness opportunities in key value chains such as horticulture, Oil seeds, pulses, livestock, Cereals, Coffee, Poultry, among others.

3. Through the "Developing Rural Youth Agripreneurs: Evidence from the Out of School Youth Skilling Programme" project being implemented by Dr. Basil Mugonola, Gulu University in collaboration with Bobi Polytechnique, the out of school youth have had the opportunity for skills development. In particular, the project is delivering on; (1) enhancing entrepreneurial and technical skills among the youths especially those Not in Employment, Education and Training (NEET); (2) supporting the creation of vibrant youth producer organizations and market linkages and value chain especially fresh vegetables and fruits; and (3) building capacity and integrating efforts of TVETS and Gulu University in reaching out to NEET. The project has so far supported 42 youth groups with 490 out of school youth from Omoro District and Nwoya District. The out of school youth in some groups have been able to earn from becoming agripreneurs, and are now transitioning to become players in the grain and cereals trade.



Picture: Out of school youth under-going practical skills development at Bobi Polytechnique, northern Uganda

Key lessons from RUFORUM engagement with the out of youth includes:

- i. University-TVET partnership offers non-intimidating and non-congested platform/space for out of school Youth engagement
- ii. University-TVET partnership provides windows of opportunity to broker and operationalize PPPs to solve ‘wicked’ problems in agricultural value chains.
- iii. University-TVET offer diverse spheres of influence and competences to address Youth unemployment challenges
- iv. University-TVET partnership is vital for internal capacity building and resource mobilization
- v. University-TVET collaboration is important in creating a value chain that is beneficial to both the farmers and the university/institution at large

Building capacity of university students within the University-TVET collaboration framework is key in training TVET students in employable skills. The competence-based skills attained by TVET students enables them attain self-employment and further create employment opportunities for others. The collaboration between universities and TVETs is also key in addressing the TVET challenge of qualification frameworks that are deficient of a clear exit strategy to other educational systems.

4. Ms. Virginia Wanjiku Nyamu, the former Principal of Baraka Agricultural College, Kenya, noted that the future of agri-food system needs to be built on research and innovation and universities are the hubs of research and innovations. Meanwhile, the TVET institutions are the consumers of these innovations and translators of innovations into immediate products and services. For example, Baraka Agricultural College partnered with Egerton University to rapidly multiple certified seed potato. From the initial three acres, the college is currently able to produce 14 acres of seed potato. This production is not yet adequate to meet the demand for clean seed. Considering that Baraka Agricultural College for years has been in existence but had not ventured into seed potato production, the engagement with the university unlocked the potential of the Baraka Agricultural College as a TVET institution. Today, the college has become a reference point for the provision of seed potato to farmers.
5. Building on the university led innovation, Mr. Samwel Mwangi, the Founder and CEO of Plotus Technologies partner with the Njoro Polytechnique to establish a Teaching

Factory Model. Plotus Technology undertakes metal fabrication, electricity and electronics and plumbing technology. The company has so far trained over 60 students, employs 08 people and four of the former students have created their own companies. Currently, the partnership with the Njoro Polytechnique has led to increased enrollment by 75 percent. The students in the Teaching Factory also get a paid for the work they do in the Malkia incu-brooder, Jumbo cut CNC Nano tap Rafiki plastic extruder. The Teaching Factory Model is thus one of those unique approaches that universities and other institutions of learning can adopt to support the development of skills and products of value and catalyse job creation led by the youth themselves.



Pictures An assortment of products from Plotus Technologies, Njoro-Kenya

6. The University of Free State shared lessons and experiences from their work on building competitiveness for communal farmers through developing the wool value chain in the Free State Province of South Africa and their work on building a future for the unemployed youth by building capacity and developing economic viability through entrepreneurship in the Free State Province. These project interventions supported by RUFORUM with funding from the Mastercard



University of Free State Community Engagement and Skilling of rural women in wool value addition

Foundation generated value lessons including among others; the fact that marginalised people need effective training in the form of knowledge first followed by skills. This could be approached through competence based training, business planning, business management and industry input on training. It is also important to build networks / partnerships – private sector – government – academia (including universities and TVET engagement), taking hands

on mentorships with involvement of the private sector and commercial producers and focus to develop a clear sustainability action.

7. Mr. Gelvan Kisolo, Principal Bukalasa Agricultural College, Uganda noted that TVET sector still faces a number of challenges. However, the sector holds strong promise, it can still gain its glory if strategic investments are made to it.
8. In seeking to provide a set of actions towards developing the TVET sector, Dr. Richard Hawkins, Partnerships and Project Development at iCRA Foundation, Wageningen, Netherlands, noted that the TVET sector can be improved and made attractive through; 1) developing short courses for the TVET sector, 2) rebranding the TVET sector to fit the international curriculum so that it can incorporate international students, 3) conducting a tracer study to understand the issues evolving around the TVET and conducting community sensitization and outreach to remove the notion that TVET is for failures, 4) providing modern equipment and training the academic staff on the use of modern equipment, 5) producing innovative products which the students can associate with in order to attract the youth, 6) supporting and promoting careers and entrepreneurship in agriculture and food systems and linking the TVET via the value chain projects and 7) support international networking, develop a shared blended learning platform and provide competitive funding for skills development.

Key recommendations

1. Youth employment opportunities cannot be increased without working with the private sector. Private sector and education & skilling institutions need to be interconnected given the fact that Private sector entities have the employment opportunities whereas education & skilling is key in supplying human resource. Private sector need to be engaged in developing the curriculum and deliver it to the young people with the right skills to enable them access dignifying and fulfilling employment.
2. Whilst advocating for increased investment in Youth, the fourth industrial revolution needs to be considered by ensuring that the Youth have the right digital skills to guarantee that they fit in the world of work; and further embrace climate-smart strategies and green recovery, global health crisis, and the sustainable development goals.
3. Need to rebrand the TVET sector to improve the Youth perception of TVETs. For instance, the African Development Bank is working on skills development within an industrial park model to identify skills that industries within the park need, and establish how Governments can support the parks to quickly reskill/skill the youth that should be employed in the established industries.
4. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been neglected for a long time warranting policies, reforms and dialogues at the national level, building onto the

successes of countries where new TVET frameworks have been enacted. This will also counteract the negative perception about TVET.

5. Mapping of skills sets demanded by the private sector needs to be undertaken whilst considering the needs and interests of the Youth. The private sector can be invited to the institutions to deliver career talks, provide mentorship, internships, job placement and create an interaction environment where the education and skilling is not working in silos but working directly with the employers. This will significantly reduce the transition to work period for the Youth and further enable Youth attain meaningful employment rather than engaging in remedial jobs.
6. Prior learning needs to be embraced and involves assessing students based on the skills attained regardless of where they received these skills from, and offered certificates to enable them engage in business, formal employment or even continue with studies.
7. Given that different countries and institutions are at different levels with respect to ICT application in education, online content needs to be developed for sharing across TVET institutions. In different countries, there are islands of success that are worthy sharing for greater impact across the Continent.
8. Work readiness encompassing work ethics is a huge gap that needs to be addressed within the TVET sector. If not addressed, this hinders TVET graduates from transcending the employment ladder. Poor work ethics and other soft skills are an issue that need to be addressed.
9. To enable student enrolment with TVET institutions, scholarship opportunities need to be provided to TVET students given the limited opportunities currently available. This will further enhance interactive working relationships between university and TVET students.
10. Attractiveness of technical training centers towards the Youth needs to be enhanced through bolstering the infrastructural capacity, hiring qualified trainers and instituting a formal timetable with which the Youth can engage. This will ensure that youth attain the skills that they are interested and committed to realise success.
11. The quality of TVET training institutions needs to be given due attention to train quality graduates, with practically-oriented trainers and facilities. This will enhance the generation of job creators than seekers.
12. Successful TVET engagement requires a team of committed people, projects need to be managed and implemented, trainers and mentors need to be competent, focus needs to be paid towards creating entrepreneurs not only graduates/job seekers, clearly analyze value chains especially in the agricultural sector and eventually identify gaps and skills in the value chain, slotting people in the formal/informal value chains, developing a proper project plan.