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**Promoting critical knowledge, skills and  
qualifications for sustainable development in  
Africa: How to design and implement an effective  
response by education and training systems**

## **Sub-theme 2**

**Lifelong technical and vocational skills development  
for sustainable socioeconomic growth in Africa**

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**Synthesis Paper – Sub-Theme 2  
Executive Summary**

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*by George AFETI and Ayélé Léa ADUBRA*

**Working Document**

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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

1. Over the past decade or so, many African countries have embarked on wide-ranging policy reforms and initiatives to revitalize their technical and vocational skills development (TVSD) systems. Governments have become increasingly aware of the critical role that technical and vocational skills can play in enhancing labor productivity and economic growth. More importantly, the acquisition of employable skills by the youth is recognized as a key response to youth unemployment.

## Challenge of unemployment

2. Youth unemployment is a serious concern in Africa. Although the youth (15 – 24 years) make up 40% of Africa's total population, they account for 60% of the unemployed. An estimated 95 million young men and women in sub-Saharan Africa out of a total youth population of about 200 million are illiterate and are either unemployed or in low-paid jobs. Every year, between 7 million and 10 million young Africans enter labor markets that are characterized by high unemployment, low productivity and poverty-level incomes. These figures point to the absence of relevant skills for productive employment and demonstrate the reality of the huge numbers of African youth engaged in precarious jobs as street vendors and poorly-paid workers in irregular and seasonal employment.

3. The large numbers of young people who are not in education, employment or training is not only an indictment on the efficiency of national education and training systems but also a national security concern. As the recent history of conflicts and wars in Africa amply demonstrates, unemployed youth are more likely to be recruited into armed movements and criminal gangs. They are also candidates for illicit activities, including drug trafficking, prostitution, cyber crime, and inter-communal strife. Equipping the youth and the adult population with employable skills is therefore a key development issue and challenge.

4. The informal sector is particularly conducive to empowering out-of-school youth for gainful employment and many countries have developed strategies to tackle the critical challenge of skills development for early school leavers. Apart from being culture-friendly, informal sector training is often delivered in the mother tongue using a flexible methodological approach adapted to the learner's abilities and needs. However, the success of apprenticeship training depends on a number of organizational and managerial factors, the most critical being the workplace learning conditions and the skills competence of the master crafts persons, since they must have enough of the relevant skills to transmit to their trainees.

## Situational analysis and findings from case-studies

5. In almost all Sub-Saharan African countries, informal and private sector training providers account for the bulk of opportunities available to all categories of learners for the acquisition of employable skills. Traditional apprenticeships, NGO and faith-based organizations, and on-the-job training provide the most opportunities for skills development for the vast majority of African youth. Informal sector employment and self employment dominate in both rural and urban areas in Africa.

6. The participation of NGOs and faith-based organizations as well as professional bodies and trade associations in the delivery of TVSD has also been on the increase, particularly with regard to the skills needs of vulnerable groups such as women, poorly educated and uneducated youth, and urban slum dwellers. NGOs and Churches are often present in areas where formal sector TVET providers are absent.

7. The findings from the national case studies do confirm that many countries have recently embarked on important legal and policy reforms geared towards a more holistic and flexible TVSD

delivery system that is better coordinated and managed. The evidence from the case studies also show that public-private multi-stakeholder partnerships involving key players such as government ministries responsible for education and training, enterprises, international donors and development partners, local communities, training providers, professional bodies, NGOs, CSOs, and the media are capable of generating synergies for the development of employable skills.

8. The integration of ICT and technology-mediated teaching and learning into training provision can also contribute to quality delivery. Unlike the situation in schools, colleges and universities, the use of ICT in TVET delivery in Africa is still in its infancy.

9. In recent years, the competency based training (CBT) approach has been acknowledged as a quality-improvement training methodology. Many countries have started piloting the CBT methodology in their training systems. However, the effectiveness of CBT also requires teachers who are trained for CBT delivery and are regularly exposed to new technologies through periodic internships in industry.

10. Female participation in TVSD is generally low in the engineering and technology disciplines. In the West African sub-region, female participation in these traditionally male-dominated disciplines is less than 28%. However, this participation rate rises to more than 50% in the business and commercial disciplines.

11. Skills development in post conflict countries or contexts is particularly challenging. The TVET environment in post-conflict zones is often characterized by damaged or destroyed academic infrastructure, poor learning facilities, low capacity and high demand for skills training, inadequate and poorly qualified teachers, and a dearth of data and statistics on the TVET sector.

12. The acquisition of technical and vocational skills must lead to gainful employment. For this to happen, it is important that training is geared towards the needs of the labor market. One way of doing this is to create a mechanism for identifying and predicting the skills gaps and shortages at the workplace by following the dynamics of the labor market. In order to engineer a TVET delivery system that is flexible and responsive to the skills needs of the employment sector, the establishment of a labor market observatory or Labor Market Information System (LMIS) is considered a priority.

13. To ease the transition into the world of work, some countries have instituted a range of measures targeting new graduates, job-seekers and candidates willing to become self-employed. These measures range from providing access to information on jobs availability to business start-up credit facilities.

14. A holistic and inclusive TVSD requires an assessment and certification system that can validate and certify competencies and qualifications acquired from different learning environments, whether formal, non formal or informal. National Qualifications Frameworks, or nqfs, have been shown to be an effective tool for harmonizing learning achievements, validating experiential learning, and generally promoting lifelong learning. The development of a qualifications framework is high on the education and training reform agenda of many African countries. While some countries are already at an advanced stage of implementation, others are only just beginning the process. In this regard, South Africa and Mauritius are the pacesetters while Ghana, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania and The Gambia (to name only a few) are at various stages of implementation. Globally, more than 130 countries are currently exploring or developing nqfs.

15. Over the past five years or so, the revitalization of TVET within the context of regional cooperation and dynamics has engaged the attention of the African Union (AU), the Regional Economic Communities (RECs), and several UN agencies including UNESCO and UNDP. These regional initiatives are driven by a common understanding and acknowledgement of technical and vocational skills acquisition as a key requirement for tackling the problem of youth unemployment on the continent. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Francophone West

African Monetary Union (UEMOA), the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), and ADEA have been particularly active in driving the TVSD agenda on a regional basis.

16. An analytical review of the national case studies and background papers reveal a number of outstanding issues that need to be highlighted. These issues touch on the policy choices and interventions that are more likely to promote a more robust and effective delivery of technical and vocational skills.

### **Outstanding issues and policy choices**

- *Policy reforms must be rooted in national economic and human resource development strategies*

17. Policy reforms must assign specific national development functions to TVSD. Is the policy focus on providing skills for supporting private sector growth or youth and women economic empowerment? Or is the thrust of the policy on diversifying the national stock of skills and the development of high level skills for participation in the global economy? Of course, a national TVSD policy can address all of these concerns and more. However, it is important to link TVSD policies to clear and realistic economic and national human resource development goals that also take into account national values and technological preferences.

- *There is need to revitalize the informal TVSD sector*

18. The skills needs of out-of-school youth, early school leavers, and adults are best addressed by informal sector training providers. Formal sector training providers are often too rigid in their operations and training curricula, and are ill-equipped to respond to the peculiar training needs of these categories of learners in terms of flexibility in training delivery, teaching methodology, admission requirements, and language of instruction. Revitalizing the informal sector provision of skills will involve concrete efforts at the national level to regularly update the skills of master crafts persons and improve upon their pedagogical skills; introduce reforms into master-trainee performance contracts and agreements, and facilitate the injection of new technologies into the traditional apprenticeship system.

- *The provision skills for the agricultural sector should be strengthened*

19. With 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land, agricultural development has great potential for growth in Africa. TVSD policies and strategies should therefore include a strong component on the provision of skills required for areas such as irrigation, farm mechanization, land preparation, food processing, livestock production, marketing, and bio-fuels. In this regard, there is need for review of land tenure systems that hamper access to land.

- *Policy reforms should also target the development of higher level skills*

20. The type of low-level skills often acquired through traditional apprenticeship (such as hairdressing, dressmaking, carpentry, etc.) are not capable of producing a globally competitive workforce imbued with the higher level skills necessary for technology adaptation and innovation, transformation of national production systems, and industrialization of the economy. TVSD policies and strategies should therefore address the development of both basic and higher level skills.

- *The mere acquisition of skills by the youth does not lead to youth employment*

21. Very often national TVSD policies and strategies fail to recognize that skills acquisition in itself does not create jobs or guarantee employment unless the training is matched to demand that is driven by the employment market and the national economy. National TVSD policies should therefore be based on a sound analysis of the employment market (the skilled labor employers want) and the education and training market (the type of training being delivered) while paying attention to the phenomenon of occupational elasticity or the rapidly changing typology of occupations.

- *The availability of skills is not a sufficient condition for economic growth*

22. The availability of skills, even of the highest quality, does not constitute a sufficient condition for increased productivity and economic growth. New technologies and more efficient production systems and machinery are also important and may play a more dominant role in boosting productivity. However, the availability of a skilled and competent workforce is a necessary condition for driving the engine of growth for wealth creation. Investment in skills should therefore be accompanied by the modernization and improvement of production systems.

- *Economic, trade and industrialization policies impact on employment prospects*

23. Government economic policies that support the manufacturing and productive sectors or stimulate the creation and growth of enterprises can raise the demand for employable skills. As the productive sectors of the economy grow, new or additional job and skills training opportunities emerge and more people get employed. The market effects of globalization on the supply, demand, and prices of imported goods also impact on employability. In effect, the influx of cheaper imported products on the domestic market can impact negatively on the employability and incomes of skilled workers engaged in the local production of similar goods which are priced out by the cheaper imports.

24. Finally, it is recognized that Africa faces a huge deficit of socio-economic infrastructure in terms of adequate roads, housing, power supply, water and sanitation systems, telecommunications, and transportation among others. A skilled workforce is required to build and maintain this type of infrastructure. The people exist but the skills are lacking. Africa's working age population (of 15 – 64 years) which currently stands at about 500 million people is projected to exceed 1.1 billion by 2040. The challenge is how to provide this large potential workforce with the education and skills necessary for sustainable socio-economic growth. Meeting this challenge will require the effective implementation of national policies and strategies that emphasize the development of lifelong technical and vocational skills and are firmly rooted in national knowledge and value systems.