

“How to ensure labour-market orientation of skills training?”

Setting the stage

Ensuring labour-market orientation of skills training has always been a key issue of many vocational skills development (VSD) (resp. Technical and Vocational Education and Training, TVET) projects. Nevertheless, the recent discussions in Switzerland and abroad on improved result-orientation of development interventions show that there is a need to explore ways and means to ensure that the focus of VSD/TVET projects goes beyond the training quality, development of vocational education systems and outreach and pays sufficient attention on the improved employability of the graduates.

Ways to address labour market orientation of skills training (lessons from the field)

Labour-market orientation of skills training usually takes place during various stages of the training and employment process. The usually applied measures can be roughly grouped into three main categories:

- Before training: ensuring that training content, mode of delivery and outputs are relevant for the labour market (e.g. Rapid Market Appraisals, labour market studies, participatory approaches to develop curricula (e.g. DACUM), employer dialogues to define needs/expected outcomes of training, etc.) and potential trainees are empowered to make informed decisions (e.g. mentorship, job information centres, etc.)
- During training: ensuring that trainees are exposed to the realities of the labour market during the training (e.g. dual system, internships, on-the-job training, instructors from the industry,...)
- After training: supporting the placement of graduates in gainful employment in the labour market (counselling, placement support, business follow-up, linkage to financial services, etc.)

Although a strong private sector involvement contributes significantly to the labour market orientation of skills training, the priorities of Government and respective Ministries need to be taken into account as often the State has an overall steering (and/or financing) function to ensure provision of skilled labour to the markets and in many cases has itself clearly defined needs for skilled labour in order to implement infrastructure projects.

How to sustain labour market orientation of skills training?

While projects are often successful in ensuring a (certain) labour market orientation during the implementation, this often does not happen in a systematic manner and remains prone to discontinuation during and after phasing out. Some key aspects of building systems for the continued updating and adaptation of skills training to the labour markets are:

- To ensure through DACUM or other participatory curriculum development methodologies that key actors (such as schools, central-level regulatory bodies, etc.) experiment with and learn approaches, tools and methodologies to involve the private sector when developing training content;
- To take care that the training providers have their own genuine motivation and interests for ensuring labour market orientation and to stimulate them to effectively use systems for the adaptation of training content, delivery and outputs to the constantly changing needs of the labour market;

- To ensure that the national TVET/VSD system has appropriate and competent systems in place for training the trainers by building up the capacities of existing institutions and/ or, if needed, the initiation of new bodies;
- To focus on teachers as they are the most powerful to overcome lack of labour-market orientation and related deficiencies in occupational profiles, curricula, workshop, equipment etc. by means of their own creativity and motivation;
- To identify ways to motivate employers to participate in TVET/VSD interventions and sustain their involvement after the end of a project.

From employability to job creation

The TVET/VSD community may have to explore opportunities beyond improving the employability of the trained graduates to actually contribute to the absorption capacity of the labour markets. In many countries, the often limited growth of the economy, which contrasts with a high population growth, lead to an increasing imbalance between job offers and job creation. Of course, there is a clear linkage to the private-sector development projects, which in general create increased opportunities for employment and gainful income. Ideas like exploring more labour-based (instead of mechanized) production forms, stimulating export-market oriented jobs, the substitution of foreign workers with skilled nationals, the transformation of marginalised activities (such as garbage collection) to gainful and decent businesses, green jobs, and stimulation of self-employment may be helpful in addressing this issue.

Gender

Attracting women to training and ensuring their insertion into the labour market is a particular challenge in many countries.

‘Swissness’ – the Swiss way of ensuring labour-market orientation

Switzerland disposes of many approaches which are perceived as being ‘Swiss’ and may help to address the labour-market orientation of skills training. Such systems like the dual system may still have a considerable value to be further explored in certain developing countries. In Switzerland, the strict labour market orientation of TVET/VSD emerged out of the system of trade guilds and continues up to the present with mainly private sector associations defining the occupational profiles. The dual system ensures that the trainees are working in the real world of work while the vocational schools are complementing the learning with curricula which was developed in close collaboration with the employers. The role of the authorities is limited to ensuring the frame conditions and to define the national standards. They are only financing about one quarter of the costs and have no influence on the development of new occupational profiles.

How this paper emerged?

Above topic was discussed during a 20 minute sharing platform among practitioners during the e+i face-to-face workshop of SDC at Gwatt on May 12, 2011. The following participants took place in the discussion and preparation of this paper:

- Ambroise Tabsoba, SDC Burkina Faso
- Bettina Jenny, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation
- Franz Kehl, KEK-CDC Consultants
- Gunter Kohlheyer, INBAS
- Ismaila Alhassane Maiga, SDC Mali
- Katharina, Walker, KEK-CDC Consultants
- Simone Giger, SDC Bosnia-Herzegovina
- Siroco Messerli, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation Nepal
- Sibylle Schmutz, Swisscontact
- Tanya Abdallah, SDC Gaza/West Bank