



12th African Regional Meeting

Johannesburg, South Africa, 11–14 October 2011

AFRM.12/P.5

Parallel thematic discussions

Theme 2: Investing in skills and sustainable enterprises for decent work: Information note for discussion

1. Background

The acquisition, development, maintenance and transferability of skills constitute a major challenge for individuals, enterprises and organizations. While there are very diverse definitions of the term “skills”, there is at least consensus on two key points: skill is the combination and application of abilities and capacities of different kinds (theoretical knowledge, expertise, aptitude, professional and personal conduct, etc.) and skill is formed not only through general and vocational training but also through experience acquired at work and through the way in which such work is organized within enterprises and, more generally, in organizations and civil society.

The main question thus relates to the types of action that will develop the skills of the active population in regard to two major objectives: to ensure access to employment or the retention of workers in employment through better visibility of their skills and to enhance enterprises’ performance through support for their human resource management initiatives. It is not simply a matter of strengthening initial and continuing technical and vocational education and training mechanisms or of focusing solely on the acquisition of degrees and vocational qualifications but, more fundamentally, on formulating an overall strategy whose design, implementation and follow-up have to be closely linked to employment policy and, more generally, both for every country concerned and for its subregion, to an accelerated growth and sustainable development strategy.

The 11th African Regional Meeting, organized by the ILO in April 2007 at Addis Ababa, pointed out that Africa was suffering from professional skills shortages, which held back employment growth and development. It was also agreed that States of the region would review their national technical and vocational education and training policies and implement measures to facilitate integration into the labour market as well as establish mechanisms geared to the different levels concerned.¹

Similarly, the International Labour Conference, at its session held in 2008, stressed the importance of education, vocational training, and lifelong learning as central pillars of

¹ The Director’s-General’s Programme and Budget proposals for 2010–11, ILO, March 2009, GB.304/PFA/3.

employability and sustainable enterprise development within the Decent Work Agenda.² In this connection, the Conference identified the main components of a holistic approach to skills development, namely continuous and seamless pathways of learning, development of core skills and higher-level skills (technical, professional and human resource skills), portability of skills and also employability, which results from all these factors.

Under the terms of the Global Jobs Pact³ and the various policy measures proposed in it, skills development increases workers' employability and strengthens enterprise competitiveness and global growth.

That stance corresponds to the main areas of the G20 training strategy formulated by the ILO and welcomed by the G20 summits held in Toronto (June 2010) and subsequently in Seoul (November 2010).⁴

The inclusive and holistic training strategy proposed within the G20 rightly focuses on the need to put in place partnerships between relevant international organizations through the development of a technical and vocational training (TVT) policy to meet the changing skills needs of the countries concerned. It is also planned for pilot countries to take part in this concerted endeavour by each forging close cooperation between the ministerial departments concerned, employers and workers, in particular at the sectoral level. Such an approach should help support implementation of the necessary employment strategies to foster economic growth and social development.

2. Objectives of the meeting

The present meeting will consider the following points:

- Modernizing and adjusting skills development policies and mechanisms as part of sustainable development and growth strategies.
- Improving capacities, governance and financing of national skills development systems.
- Strengthening social partners' participation with a view to their greater involvement in skills development policy implementation from a forward-looking human resource management perspective.
- Taking steps to improve access to training initiatives, in particular for young persons and women in rural areas and for informal-sector workers.

3. Key policy messages

Improving quality and levels of skills is at the heart of the concerns of all African countries given that it is acknowledged as being a powerful lever of reforms in strengthening competitiveness and social integration, securing decent employment and combating poverty. In general (and this is a key element of the ILO's Decent Work

² Conclusions on skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development, ILC, 2008.

³ The Global Jobs Pact, ILO, June 2009.

⁴ "A Skilled Workforce for Strong, Sustainable and Balanced Growth", ILO, Geneva, November 2010.

programme), adequate skills development is part of the tools recognized as essential for improving productivity and working conditions and also for promoting decent employment in the informal economy, which remains the primary job provider in Africa.

Education and training can also contribute to the creation of small informal enterprises, to the development of income-generating activities, in particular in rural areas, to the reintegration of displaced workers and migrants and to the transition from school to the world of work, both for dropouts from the educational system and for graduates. It is therefore not surprising that “skills development” appears in poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) and national development plans of the region’s countries.

On a broader level, investing in skills and expertise provides support for the development of a competent workforce, which can only improve the investment climate. National growth promotion strategies must, if they are to have maximum impact, prioritize skills development in sectors that are the most promising in employment terms.

In recent years, many countries in the region implemented structured and sustained skills development policies to promote male and female employability and enterprise productivity, focusing, in particular, on the following aspects:

- **strengthening access to TVT**, in particular in rural areas and the informal sector;
- **better adapting training programmes** to real skills needs of enterprises and of the economy in general;
- **developing targeted training activities for graduate employment placement** (for example, by supporting the establishment of partnerships with enterprises);
- **guaranteeing financial and operational sustainability of reform strategies** by ensuring that the partners concerned fully play their role and have the capacities required for that purpose;
- **widening access to different forms of apprenticeship** bearing in mind that enterprises in the modern sector may admit apprentices by reviewing, to the extent necessary, the rules, regulations and teaching provisions governing this learning path;
- **focusing on acquisition of skills and expertise** beyond the highly formal and academic nature of TVT, which is still too often directed towards obtaining qualifications;
- **strengthening financial and human resources** of public TVT establishments, in particular in industrial sectors;
- **developing a coordinated approach to TVT** by strengthening interactions between institutional, economic, social and local organizations and stakeholders involved in TVT;
- **improving existing mechanisms to anticipate and respond to changing skills needs** and analysing the related employment and labour market situation;
- **enhancing the quality of social dialogue** between economic and social partners to improve the relevance of TVT policies.

Implementation of such innovative TVT policies is progressing in the directions identified by the ILO, especially with regard to improving rural employability, in particular of young persons, women and disadvantaged groups. In this connection, the ILO is providing support for a series of skills development projects, for example in regard to

youth employment (Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Sierra Leone and Zimbabwe), upgrading traditional and informal apprenticeship systems (Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger, Republic of Tanzania and Zimbabwe) and improving labour market information and employment management systems.

In this context of skills development and implementation of a TVT mechanism more geared to market demand, the ILO is providing technical support for the setting up in a number of the region's countries of national funds for the promotion of continuing education and apprenticeship schemes. Also, the Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE) Programme, which is aimed at promoting income-generating activities and local development, focuses on the contribution of skills to creating new economic and sustainable employment opportunities for poor, unemployed or underemployed persons, informal-sector workers and other vulnerable groups, especially in rural areas (Benin, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka Zimbabwe).

4. Possible questions for discussion

- How to ensure greater consistency between basic education, TVT, lifelong learning and national employment policy implementation, bearing in mind in particular the essential need to focus on the informal economy, especially in rural areas? How can coordination be strengthened between public and private training providers and the enterprise sphere and, more generally, employers and social partners? What contribution can technical and financial partners make?
- How to strengthen interactions in the region's countries between skills development policies, TVT mechanisms and strategies implemented to strengthen sustained employment-generating growth, especially the creation of "green jobs", bearing in mind in particular the buoyant areas of the economy and extent of its informal sector? What contribution can be made in this connection by private TVT establishments from the perspective of the establishment of public-private training partnerships?
- How to implement forward-looking skills management in cooperation with social partners, involving, inter alia, increased knowledge of the job market and well designed employment information, analysis and anticipation mechanisms? How to improve flexibility, transparency and relevance of qualification recognition and validation systems, including for skills acquired in the workplace?