

Making public-private partnerships in vocational training a powerful lever for economic emergence in Africa

Summary note from the regional sharing and mutual reinforcement workshop on public-private partnerships in vocational training in Africa – Dakar, March 2018

Faced with a set of contextual, demographic, economic, social, technical, political and administrative issues, the economic development of Africa must go hand-in-hand with the strengthening of vocational education and training (VET) in order to train young people in high-quality skills that meet the expectations of businesses and the economy while ensuring the possibility of entrepreneurial development.

The vocational training systems that offer the most employment opportunities are based on two components:

- education founded on skills training: competency-based education (CBE);
- management and funding steered by public-private partnerships (PPP) at central, regional and local level: the involvement of the private sector in the running of VT increases the match between skills and economic needs.

The latter component, PPPs, involves reorganizing the training offer and redefining roles and responsibilities with regard to financial contributions to formal VET as well as the measures to be taken in terms of VET regulation and methods. Traditional or “improved” apprenticeship should also be taken into account in addition to classic classroom-based training, and the content of vocational training should be defined according to skills validated by professionals.

PPP concepts and issues in VET within the African context

Nowadays there is a wide diversity of understandings of PPPs in Africa. PPPs exist at various levels – institutional, sectoral, territorial, local (institutes) – and focus on one or several themes, such as CBE, governance (frameworks for dialogue), monitoring and assessment of training schemes, trainers and governance (frameworks for dialogue).

Various typologies may be drawn up depending on the powers, roles and responsibilities of the actors, who is in charge of steering, and the functions or processes. In a broader context, the aim is to develop a culture of multidimensional partnership based on strong principles such as pooling and coordination, piloted at different levels beyond PPPs.

The contextual (growth, social, globalization, forms of work) and VET-specific issues (skills, certification, financing) determine those of the PPPs, the most important of which are governance decentralization and/or regionalization, the autonomy of training institutes, the effective coordination of training, its adjustment and its sustainability.

PPPs to adapt the training offer to economic needs

The need for businesses to improve competitiveness makes skills development a strategic investment. Skills needs must be identified, along with their development and their assessment, in order to constantly renew training systems and adapt training types, whether they target the formal or informal economy.

Tools and approaches to identify skills needs in the economy

Properly managing the increasing complexity and modernity of occupations and sectors by the training system requires informed and strategic adaptation based on sectoral and territorial approaches in order to improve the existing service offer and revise the goals for the future.

For several years now, technical and financial partners, employment observatories and certain sectoral ministers have organized studies and surveys every year that identify specific problems regarding jobs and the organization of the national economy, classified by sector, with an analysis of employment and development potential. These sectoral studies are accompanied by others that establish a mapping of the vocational training system. The application of these studies to training programmes is rarely effective.

In order for this access to information and its application to the training system to be truly effective, the use of PPP is central: indeed, economic actors have the most realistic information on their development. It is thus vital to establish a joint partnership body to capitalize on this information (national employment observatory, Sector Skills Council, occupational observatory, regional committee), underpinned by clear legal and regulatory bases.

External evaluation tools

In order to measure the alignment of training with needs, as well as its quality, and to take corrective action at the appropriate levels (institute, region or policy), the main tools available concern either the follow-up of and assistance for graduates (student database, integration support units), or assessment (prospective studies, business satisfaction surveys, integration rate measurements).

The current evaluation mechanism in Africa are often either absent or incomplete and do not provide career guidance for young people towards economic sectors with high potential in terms of employment at local, sectoral and national level. There is very little data on employers' satisfaction with regard to the skills of the employees trained through VET, or data on the rate of integration into the formal and informal economy, and in the case of business creation, no studies estimate the lifespan of these new companies.

The participation of companies in surveys to measure their satisfaction with regard to the skills of the young people hired is therefore central to ensuring the best possible transition of young people from school-to-work.

For this, beyond the need to develop the use of these tools, a results analysis is required to transform observations into public decisions and actions to improve the quality and relevance of the range of training programmes available (corrective actions, creation/removal of sectors, content adaptation, etc.).

Tools to implement "improved apprenticeship"

There is a broad consensus among public and private actors on the need to develop and promote apprenticeship: either through the standardization and certification of traditional apprenticeship (what is

known as “improved apprenticeship”), or through dual education systems (which concern the majority of learners in the informal economy in Africa, but can include companies in the formal economy). These tools are occupational and training standards, training organization standards, assessment and certification standards, partnership-based governance frameworks and crowdfunding.

This type of training requires robust partnership governance frameworks in order to train a high number of young people at shared costs (companies cover 80% of training, whilst 20% is funded through State resources) and to ensure the instant adjustment of training to labour market needs (learners are already working within companies and the training content has been set by professionals).

These partnerships must be participatory and inclusive and must include the supervisory ministry, the sectoral ministries, decentralized structures, sectoral professional organizations, chambers of commerce and civil society. The effective involvement of craftspeople is essential, and can require the implementation of incentive measures to ensure that this is the case, as well as reinforced structuring of professional organizations.

In order for public-private dialogue to bring genuine added value to the adjustment of training to economic needs, the leadership of professional structures must be strengthened with tools for assessment and integration, and the relationship between steering, support and monitoring of integration must be improved. The experiences in Africa highlight the importance of the independence of assessment bodies and the need to strengthen the powers of vocational training centres (VTCs).

PPPs in the steering and governance of vocational training

Active and win-win PPPs are not solely based on legislation and policy: a paradigm shift and an organizational culture of change require both private and public investment, in terms of improving the quality and management of training centres and the relevance of trainers’ skills, and in terms of financing.

Partnership management models and tools in vocational training centres

Several countries already have tools for the introduction of PPPs in the management of training institutes: legal or legislative frameworks, organizational policies, administrative bodies, particularly joint administrative boards.

Nevertheless, a reluctance remains in the public sector when it comes to entrusting greater management responsibility to the private sector. Even when this is overcome, the lack of leadership or implementation capacity relegates many PPPs to the theoretical discussion stage, without ever becoming a practical reality. The idea of entrusting the full or partial management of a public VTC to a private entity also raises concerns over reduced state involvement.

The operationalization of PPPs therefore relies on an organizational culture that incorporates change and collaboration, dependent on the leadership of the administrators of and stakeholders in VTCs. Likewise, autonomy is an essential attribute of active and effective PPPs in the management of training centres, which implies positive regulation of the financial, administrative and educational management of centres.

Efficient PPPs in the management of centres can therefore play a unifying role as a resource centre for a sector with the inclusion of a “reinforcement/support” component for occupational branches in order to instil a more comprehensive training culture, something that is still insufficient among economic actors.

PPPs in the training and management of trainers

Partnerships have been established in the fields of training and management of trainers in Africa. Upstream, there is a generalized need to strengthen staff management models, from recruitment to assessment, as well as continued capacity building.

Trainers in in-service training programmes are rarely professionals, which can limit the alignment between training and employment requirements, as well as the employment of learners. The part played by PPPs is therefore essential in the training of trainers in order to allow economic actors to contribute to the validation of training content and skills, or directly to vocational training, or to participate in the evaluation of performances, trainers or teaching. The prerequisites for such a PPP are similar to those previously mentioned, that is to say the development of a partnership culture that allows for a balanced distribution of roles and responsibilities between public and private actors, but also and above all the autonomy of training centres, responsible for their own human resources.

In order to ensure that the training given has the desired balance of technical content and tailored educational approaches, modular or applied training would appear to be the appropriate solution. A partnership in which a company provides the source of technical skills and the state the source of pedagogical assistance and regulations is a path to be explored. This could take the form of support from the private economic sector for teacher training colleges or their creation, or in-depth discussion on training design.

Partnership financing models and tools for VT

Although the state remains the primary funder of skills development, the lack of funds to develop efficient and comprehensive training systems means that the assistance of economic sectors is required. For the last twenty years, businesses have provided support either through their contributions to training funds to finance in-service training and apprenticeships, or by directly funding training programmes run at training centres where the latter have a certain level of financial autonomy.

The apprenticeship tax levied on payroll for formal businesses contributes to funds for the in-service training of employees in the formal economy. When these funds also support apprenticeships, primarily in the informal economic sector, formal businesses may question the fact that they pay for training that does not benefit their employees. It is therefore vital that the collection processes and transfer of the products of the training levy meet clear eligibility criteria for allocation to training institutes.

PPPs should be able to organize more global funding that incorporates the participation -- even symbolic - of the informal economy in order to raise the quality of skills as a whole, all the more so given that the formal and informal sectors are closely interconnected in some industries such as civil engineering and construction and public works. The surge in private financing in VET also gives businesses greater control over the content of training schemes.

Some alternative financing systems offer new outlooks notably involving learners, thanks to loans, coupons or vouchers, training leave and reimbursement clauses.

The financing of VET is therefore an ideal breeding ground for PPPs, ensuring better sustainability, quality, and alignment with national, societal and labour market needs. This reality has political implications when it

comes to streamlining supervisory ministries, the balance between national, private and individual interests, and the supporting role of the state in assisting providers.

The creation of partnership-based financing systems is optimized through open, clear and participatory social dialogue that addresses the issues of cost sharing and the concerns of the partners with regard to the mobilization of resources, social equity and the autonomy of VTCs.

CONCLUSION

The current situation of public-private partnerships in the field of vocational training in Africa heralds changes that will bring with them real added value, such as inclusive governance, skills development and soft skills, management of VTCs based on employability, integrated initial/continuing training, and diversified yet stable and sustainable financing.

Several points deserve further analysis, such as the pathways that can be established between vocational training and basic education, and the place and role of the informal sector. That said, there have already been numerous and fruitful African pilots of public-private, public-public, private-public, public-civil and even tripartite partnerships and there is no doubt that the frameworks and mechanisms for the development of PPPs will continue to diversify and increase in scale. In order for this to come about, the relevance of tools needs to be increased and their number multiplied, as part of a sectoral or territorial approach, so as to set the roles and responsibilities of the partners and create more effective partnership synergies.

The full report on the Dakar regional workshop, illustrated with numerous case studies presented by the participants from 18 African countries, is accessible via the following link: <https://pefop.iiep.unesco.org/fr/publications/faire-des-partenariats-publics-privés-en-formation-professionnelle-un-levier-de>

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