

## **Report *Africa Knows!* Conference Panel G41**

### **Youth employment, knowledge and the labour markets: knowledge and society (initiated by Edukans with INCLUDE, ISCTE-IU Lisbon and Advance Afrika [Kampala, Uganda]) 15 December 2020**

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#### Convenors:

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#### Contributors:

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#### **Abstract**

With close to 96% of employed youth in Sub-Saharan Africa being affected by informality, closing the gap between demanded and supplied skills on the labour market is a priority for national and international policy-makers. This panel contributed to this debate by investigating what are successful models for promoting soft and life skills, as well as natural talent of young people, and how to integrate them all into formal education systems and work-based learning programs for large-scale impact. To this end, the panel was divided into two sessions, featuring in total six papers. The first session considered formal and informal (vocational) education and training on the example of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Kenya and Guinea-Bissau, as well as traditional and indigenous training model in Nigeria. The paper on TVET in Kenya called for a sophisticated use of evidence and data for TVET institutions and policy makers. To facilitate this, they propose a Knowledge Broker Model. The paper on TVET in Guinea-Bissau found a profound gender imbalance in TVET, little partnerships between education and private sector, and the absence of formal certification of TVET.

The second session highlighted the importance of soft and 'life' skills as well as talent for more effective youth employment programmes as featured in case studies from Ethiopia, Uganda and Nigeria. This session called for the (re-)incorporation of traditional ways of learning, focusing on individual talents and the development of life skills. The panel was opened with an interactive quiz that magnify the current state of youth employment challenge in Africa and set the scene for the discussion. This discussion covered how talent, life skills and formal education (could) interrelate with TVET, while addressing regional and in-country differences. The presented papers and discussion fed into the development of a set of policy messages that was presented to the audience at the end of the session. Among key recommendations, establishing policy dialogues between scholars, practitioners and policy makers was advised to provide the latter with necessary robust evidence to inform the reforms (of education, including TVET, system) that are urgently needed.

## **Session 1: Formal and informal (vocational) education and training**

Currently, close to 96% of employed youth in Sub-Saharan Africa is affected by informality (ILO, 2020). Closing the gap between demanded and supplied skills is among the highest priorities to address the challenge of youth employment, along with the need to create more formal jobs.

The first session of this panel looked at technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and traditional apprenticeship. TVET is one of the most popular avenues through which workplace-based learning can be provided. National governments usually regulate TVET, which is offered by both public and private sector training providers and can be funded by donors, national governments or through public-private partnerships. Most of TVET in Africa incorporate a period of workplace-based learning through an internship component. However, the scope of TVET in Africa is limited and internships tend to be concentrated in the formal sector. Regarding informal/traditional apprenticeship, it is often an option for those pursuing trades in the informal sector. Informal apprenticeships are offered by master craftpersons operating in the informal sector and the role of governments, donors and civil society organisations has been minimal.

Despite its potential, across Africa only 18% of individuals in the 15-34 age category have ever been a formal apprentice. There is broad consensus that there are fewer opportunities for formal TVET and it is the informal or traditional apprenticeship system which is the main source of workplace-based learning for young Africans.

Finally, TVET is facing a number of challenges. Firstly, TVET is regarded as an alternative for weaker students and is associated with lower-paying jobs with limited options for progress. Secondly, TVET systems in Africa are hampered by the poor quality of training facilities, trainers, equipment and curricula. Thirdly, TVET is underfunded and is a low priority for African governments. Finally, there is a gender bias among the TVET programmes with only 12% of women between 15-34 age having been a formal apprentice.

Papers presented in this session contribute to the evidence base on formal and informal (vocational) education and training on the example of TVET in Kenya and Guinea-Bissau, as well as traditional and indigenous training model in Nigeria.

### **Technical and vocational education and the labour market in Guinea-Bissau**

By Antónia Barreto (IPL and CEI-Iscte) and Clara Carvalho (CEI-Iscte)

This article investigates the challenges of TVET in Guinea-Bissau. TVET continues to not be considered as a prestigious form of education. There is little collaboration between the labour market and TVET schools. This results in a significant gap between the demanded skills by employees and the supplied skills coming from TVET schools. There is also a lack of certification, both TVET teachers do not have any form of certified training and students following TVET education do not receive certification. Besides, there are no national quality standards for TVET schools. Furthermore, there is a lack of national data on employment, as 90% of employment is informal. Lastly, political instability complicates TVET education. Interventions by NGOs have resulted in some improvements in entrepreneurship, though those improvements are minimal and not structural.

## **Improving Use of Evidence to Increase Impact of TVET in Kenya**

By Jafred Muyaka, John Mugo, Lucy Heady and Kipkurui Langat

Even though TVET institutions in Kenya have grown over the years, challenges remain in promoting employability of TVET graduates. Firstly, not enough formal jobs are created due to shrinking macroeconomic growth. Secondly, the skills of TVET graduates do not match the skills demanded by the labour market. Partnerships between the TVET institutions and the private sector have the capacity to improve TVET training and more adequately address unemployment. The writers of this article plead for a better collection of data to realise evidence-based decision making. The writers call for establishing a Knowledge Broker Model for TVET, which will realise the distribution and the interpretation of evidence and data to all stakeholders involved. This model aims to create physical and digital linkages between the research, practice and policy (including educational specialists) working on demand and supply side of labour market to gather, store and use evidence.

## **The Igbo apprenticeship mentorship model as a youth entrepreneurship programme for economic and youth development in Nigeria**

By Obi Peter Onyeigwe

Onyeigwe argues that the Igbo Apprenticeship Model of job creation is a significantly successful one. Igbos often are owners of successful businesses across the country due to a long tradition of business skills transmitted within and by the community members. Igbo's entrepreneurship skills dominate Nigeria's economy because their business investments lead to the generation of employment in Nigeria and even cross-continently. However, the model does come with certain shortcomings. The Igbo apprenticeship lacks a legal framework and is largely male dominated, leading to a major gender imbalance. Lastly, it is inherently tied to Igbo tradition, potentially leading to exclusion of other ethnic groups. Despite these limitations, the model of Igbo mentorship should be considered in national education policy.

## **Session 2: The importance of life and soft skills, as well as nurturing talent of young people**

[The review of evidence on TVET in Africa](#) conducted for INCLUDE in 2020 by Ismail and Mujuru concludes, among other, that quality basic education is an essential requirement for the success of TVET, informal apprenticeships or other skills development programmes. That is the reason why the second session in this panel zoomed into the importance of skills (life skills, soft skills), as well as nurturing talent of young people.

Skills training, including TVET programs, aim at preparing young people for the labour market. It thus focuses primarily on technical competencies. Yet, it is now widely recognized that soft skills, as well as life skills are crucial for young people to get jobs or to run successful businesses. There are a lot of definitions of soft skills from different papers, but in general it is about people's skills, social skills, communication skills and general social intelligence. The concept of life skills is complementary to soft skills. Life skills are also about communication, but also about assertiveness, self-awareness, or informed decision-making.

The papers in this session highlight the importance of soft and 'life' skills as well as talent for more effective youth employment programmes as featured in case studies from Ethiopia, Uganda and Nigeria. They provide evidence on successful models for promoting soft and life skills, as well as natural talent of young people. Ultimately, papers from both sessions combined with the floor discussion investigated how to integrate soft and life skills development into formal education systems and work-based learning programs for large-scale impact.

## **Exploring positive liberty and life skills for youth employment: Positive liberty and the case of life skills programming in Ethiopia**

By Aniek Santema and Maryama Ismail

Positive liberty refers to one's ability to realise their internal desires; to exercise reason to overcome internal obstacles and resist external impressions in uncovering one's purpose(s). Santema & Ismail's paper discusses the ways in which life skills education empowers youth to explore their positive liberty and serves as a method to mitigate youth unemployment. Using evidence from the SINCE project implemented in Ethiopia by Edukans, the authors analyse the effectiveness of an approach to life skills training to address youth unemployment. What is revealed is that the political context in which the life skills programme operates, in this case one which has an effect on peoples' perspectives on migration, can create contradictions with regard to positive liberty. In this study in Ethiopia, it was found that the donor organisation's perspective of migration – that is: migration is an irresponsible choice – influenced the life skills training sessions. During these trainings, people were invited to talk about the negative experiences they had while migrating. This hereby discourages participants from migrating, rather than encouraging people to take their own, informed choices, which is what positive liberty stands for. The conclusion is that contextualisation is a fundamental part of the effect of life skills training, and for contextualisation to address the positive liberty paradox, young people themselves, rather than donor organisations, need to be at the centre of programme development.

## **Towards inclusive agri-skills development for smallholders in Uganda: The case of Abim, Lira and Soroti districts**

By Sharon Atukunda

This study argues that more than technical skills are needed to help smallholder farmers in Uganda to be competitive. A holistic training including soft skills to complement technical agri-skills is necessary for comprehensive skills development and capacity building that leads to more economically fruitful living. The study, implemented by Advance Africa, was done by means of questionnaires and qualitative in-depth interviews in the three regions of Abim, Lira and Soroti in Uganda. Multiple Ugandan farmer-support organizations provided assistance in finding a representative sample of farmers from these three districts, including women, young people and people with disabilities.

## **The talent-career trajectory (TCT) in education as a paradigm for resolving some aspects of the youth employment question in Nigeria**

By Paul K. Michael

Michael's paper provides a philosophical background on individual development, placing its roots in the inherent ability in each person towards a certain skill – he calls this talent. Using the talent-career perspective, he analyses the youth employment, unemployment and underemployment dynamics in Nigeria. He argues that nurturing individual talent will result in employment creation, thus contribute to resolving the youth employment crisis. The paper recommends institutional reforms that would place talent as a core consideration in the education system to workforce transition.

## Discussion

Whereas the papers on TVET in Guinea-Bissau and Kenya focused on structural challenges in TVET systems, such as the disconnect between supplied skills by students and demanded skills by the labour market, the papers on life skills by Michael, Ismail and Santema focused on what education should build on content-wise. Michael highlighted that the pre-colonial context of education in Nigeria was significantly focused on specific talents of individuals and an adaptation of this kind of practice in education systems today would be more effective towards curbing youth unemployment. Similarly, Ismail and Santema also stress the importance of life skills such as building confidence, self-management, communication and social skills to enhance an individual's talent. They argue that positive liberty allows a development and exploration of those life skills. Life skills are relevant in closing the gap between the supply and demand of skills on the labour market, Santema argues, and Atakunda concurs. Atakunda's research with the small-scale farmers in the Abim, Lira and Soroti communities in Uganda demonstrates that comprehensively incorporating life skills with technical skills development requires a needs-based approach that closes the particular gaps present.

One of the discussion questions that arose from the panel conversation, was to what extent traditional apprenticeship programmes, like the Igbo apprenticeship model Obi Peter Onyeigwe wrote about, can be useful for TVET institutions. During the discussion, John Mugo, executive director of Zizi Afrique, highlighted that the Kenyan government is nowadays promoting apprenticeships as well. He said: "In Kenya right now, there is a deal going through parliament about national skills and how apprenticeship can now also come as an option, so that youths can either go to a full-time training college or get attached to a mentor." The evidence of a real-life case of curbing youth unemployment via state organised apprenticeships expressed the extent to which Onyeigwe's model can be advantageous.

Gender imbalance in the education system was seen by the audience as another urgent challenge to tackle. Gender imbalance poses an issue in both traditional models of apprenticeships described by Onyeigwe, and TVET institutions described by Antonia Barreto and Clara Carvalho from Lisbon University. In the discussion about how to address these gender imbalances, Carvalho pointed out that in Guinea-Bissau, even though girls are mainly trained in 'female' activities such as sewing or cooking, this is changing rapidly and will experience significant transformation in the next 10 to 15 years. Onyeigwe added that although in the Igbo apprenticeship model gender imbalance is currently a problem, but "we have continued to encourage more women participation in the apprenticeship model and women are now also taking leadership roles, such as owning shops." A focus on life skills and nurturing individual talent may contribute to closing of the gender gap according to Santema. When women are equipped with the confidence, self-management and social skills to actively participate on the job market, this will empower women in reclaiming their agency. However, Onyeigwe argues that most importantly, policy makers need to prioritize issues of gender inequality in order to further improve the existing imbalances. Therefore, despite, ongoing transition towards better gender balance in the education and labour market, more work is needed to accelerate this process.

This panel demonstrated that youth unemployment is a structure versus agency paradox in which both need reforms. The structure of TVETs is no longer informed by the market creating skills mismatch between the trained youth and the skills demanded by the economy. The agency of young people is dangerously minimised in the absence of core soft and/or life skills. Contextualisation is necessary for what skills to incorporate in a syllabus and, as Atakunda elaborates on, the way in which training occurs; making sure information gaps, language of instruction and training techniques are all respectively geared to each target group. The major action step coming out of the panel was a recommendation to include policy makers in the conversation where scholars and practitioners share the field findings. Such knowledge translation for policy will provide necessary robust evidence for the reforms that are urgently needed.