

## **Sustainable Development: TVET Training for the Present and the Future in Kenya**

*Ahmed Ferej*  
*University of Eldoret, Eldoret, Kenya*

### **Abstract**

*This paper highlights the problem of youth unemployment in Kenya and the strategy adopted by the government nearly three decades ago to introduce entrepreneurship education to all Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions to empower its graduates to seek to be self-employment as an alternative to formal employment. Data is scant on the success of this policy. However, formal employment continues to dwindle even as opportunities in the informal sector remain strong. Despite this reality, formal TVET institutions have continued to pay scant attention to the informal sector. Focus remains glued to a curriculum designed for the formal labour market with trainees often posted there for work experience. This paper argues that to better succeed in developing an entrepreneurial culture among trainees and hence build their confidence towards self-employment, TVET institutions must engage more with the informal and small micro enterprise (SME) sector. This would require a shift in the mindset of instructors and management. Students would need to be encouraged to seek work experience in both the informal and formal sectors as part of their training process. Further TVET institutions would benefit more by opening their facilities to the training of informal and SME sector operators by providing short and targeted courses to help them improve their operations.*

**Key words:** *Informal sector, youth unemployment, labour market*

### **Introduction**

World youth unemployment is a growing and troubling problem to most countries particularly in the developing countries. The rapid growth in the number of youth joining the labour market has been a familiar and recurrent issue affecting most countries in the world but is most acute on the African continent. It is estimated that unemployment in Kenya is at 40% (up from 12.7% in 2006) with the youth aged between 15 and 30 constituting 67% of the unemployed in 2013 (www.tradingeconomics.com, 2016). It is a concern that carries significant risks including political unrest, crime and more recently violence, conflicts, terrorism and illegal migration. In Kenya for example, over one million youth are discharged into the labour market each year. The economic growth must maintain a robust trend to cater for this growing number. According to the Kenya Bureau of Statistics (KBS, 2016) the economic growth for 2014 was 5.3% compared to 5.7% in 2013. This is a far cry from the prediction made in Kenya Vision 2030 of achieving an economic growth of 10% from the year 2012 and to sustain it to the year 2030 and beyond (Kenya Vision 2030, 2007).

In trying to find solutions to youth unemployment, countries have often times turned to TVET with the hope that imparting technical skills and sometimes entrepreneurial skills would help the youth find employment or opportunities in self-employment (UNESCO, 2016). There are no reliable tracer studies to determine the success of this strategy.

Recent Kenya employment statistics highlights trends in the country regarding the distribution of employment that has been observed for decades. Employment in the informal sector accounted for about 693,000 (82.7%) of the jobs created in 2014. This is quite significant and underscores the strength and resilience of the sector which has continued to be a source of employment. In spite of the contribution of the sector in job creation the KBS gives very scant information on segmented data of the sector unlike in the modern formal sector which created a scant 6% of jobs in the same year. The KBS data further indicates that there was a decline from a total of 131,060 in 2013 to 106,300 in 2014 in jobs created in the modern formal sector. Lack of in depth information makes it difficult to determine what areas were most fertile for job creation in the informal sector so that these could be better nurtured.

The data quoted in the foregoing paragraph is indeed very important for Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET). It should inform TVET institutions on what economic sectors to concentrate their training on and what skills were most relevant to ensure its graduates were more successful in the labour market.

### **Labour Market Needs**

What skills should TVET institutions therefore, produce for the labour market? As mentioned above, the KBS data does not shade much information on what economic activities created the 82.7% jobs in the informal sector labour market in 2014. But it goes to a fairly great length in explaining the activities of the modern formal sector which accounted for only 6% of the jobs created. KBS needs to do more to obtain sufficient informative data for the informal sector. It is also abundantly clear that much of the informal sector has become more formal. The so called informal sector businesses now tend to be registered by local authorities (County governments), pay taxes; collect Value Addition Tax (VAT) for the Kenya Revenue Authority and are members of relevant business groups. This should make it relatively easy to collect employment and other economic data from the sector.

Based on the KBS data, therefore, TVET institutions should pay more attention to the informal sector by which more accurately should be referred to as 'Small and Micro Enterprises' (SMEs) as potential employment destination for its graduates for the foreseeable future than the modern formal sector which represents the labour market destination for the majority. This is easier said than done. Parents, teachers and most citizens in investing in their children often presume that the outcome would be modern formal sector jobs for them. TVET institutions are the most rigid in this mind set. Programs are geared to producing graduates who would enter 'industry' upon completion of their training. Industry is often interpreted to mean large multi-national corporations that provide 'lifetime' employment. Of course modern formal sector employment tends to provide more job security and in the

event of being laid off, which is presently quite common, adequate compensation packages offered.

In the implementation of their training programs, TVET institutions are usually required to send their trainees for industrial attachment to acquire work based experience to complete institutional training. The tradition has been to send their trainees for industrial attachment to the formal modern sectors of the economy with little attention paid to informal or SMEs. The preferred destination is large corporations or modern formal sector businesses. But the underlying policy of the government for the last couple of decades has been to prepare the youth to think of self-employment as possible work destination upon graduation. To underscore this policy, all trainees in TVET institutions were required to take an entrepreneurship module to help build an entrepreneurial culture among the graduates (Republic of Kenya 1988; Nelson & Johnson, 1995). However, it is difficult for trainees to develop a favourable impression of the informal sector or SMEs as work destination when all their training has presumed to prepare them for the formal modern sector employment!

### **Skills Mismatch**

One often hears of a mismatch in skills imparted by formal training institutions and those needed by the labour market. This phrase is trending practically everywhere in the world. It occurs mostly because of technological developments that are now so rapid that institutions often find it difficult to stay at par with the labour market. To remain competitive, companies continually invest in new technology to stay on the cutting edge, reduce cost of production; and produce better quality products. It is therefore difficult and expensive for TVET institutions to continually remain relevant both in their curriculum and their training environment. But what makes the situation complex for TVET institutions in Kenya is the labour needs that should be focused on. Should it invest time and direct the curriculum towards addressing the needs of the formal modern labour market or that of the informal or SME sector? At the present time the focus is on making every attempt to meet the needs of the formal modern labour market. Little or no attention is paid to the needs of the SMES or the informal sector.

The current situation is not tenable. It does not make sense to focus on a sector that is yielding 6% of the jobs over a sector that is creating 83%. Is it possible for TVET institutions to create eclectic training programmes that would serve the needs of both sectors? This is the context that TVET planners need to address urgently. The unemployment problem faced by the country and the economic context must guide the planners rather than simply adopting trends created to address the needs of the developed nations whose modern formal sector accounts for the majority of employment. The rest of this paper shall address this possibility after considering international trends in TVET.

## **International Trends in TVET**

Every twenty years or so, UNESCO, which is the UN specialized agency for education and training has brought together the international community to discuss matters of common interest with regard to TVET. The last congress took place in Shanghai, China in 2010<sup>2</sup> and the one before that in Seoul, South Korea in 1999. After each congress, recommendations are made on the way forward in the development of TVET. Each member states then tailors these recommendations to address its specific needs. After the 2nd Congress, the ‘Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education’ was released. It makes very good reading for all TVET stakeholders and its recommendations are quite apt for the prevailing context as the world awaits the release of the new revised document after the 3rd congress in 2012. In one of its recommendation it states, for example, that:

“...Given the necessity for new relationships between education, the world of work and the community as a whole, technical and vocational education should exist as part of a system of lifelong learning adapted to the needs of each particular country and to worldwide technological development. This system should be directed to: (a) abolishing barriers between levels and areas of education, between education and the world of work, and between school and society through: (i) the appropriate integration of technical/vocational and general education at all levels; (ii) the creation of open and flexible educational structures;(iii) the taking into account of individuals’ educational needs, the evolution of occupations and jobs recognizing work experience as a part of learning...” (UNESCO, 2001, P9).

There are about one hundred recommendations offered, but the above captures what must be done by the labour market, government and institutions to ensure that TVET continues to provide the highest return on societal investment. It recognizes that each country needs to adopt a TVET system that meets its specific needs while remaining cognizant of global trends.

Taking off from the 2001 TVET recommendations, the 3rd TVET congress in Shanghai proposes that for TVET to remain relevant it should improve systems for identifying current and future skills needs, promote use of ICT, introduce green technologies, involve all stakeholders in the planning and governance of TVET, developing flexible pathways, and improving partnerships among others (UNESCO, 2012). Finally, the international community met under the auspices of the United Nations in New York towards the end of 2015 to launch a new initiative that would replace the Millennium Development Goals that were coming to close. Under the new global agenda, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) was launched to guide the nations for the next fifteen years.

Education is covered under SDG 4 which aims to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, and its associated targets. Education 2030 on its part devotes considerable attention to technical and vocational skills specifically, regarding access to affordable quality

Technical and Vocational Education and Training; acquisition of TVET for decent jobs and entrepreneurship; elimination of gender disparity and ensuring access for the vulnerable (UN, 2015).

### **Way Forward**

Kenya needs to chart its way forward with a TVET system that recognizes international trends but accommodates current national labour market needs. Sustainable development means ‘Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.’ As illustrated earlier Kenya has a huge unemployment problem that is presently mostly mitigated by the informal sector. By producing graduates who have the flexibility to work for the modern formal sector but also fit in the informal or SME sector TVET institutions would be killing two birds with one stone. Accomplishing this goal, however, needs a complete paradigm shift by policy makers, curriculum developers and trainers. The present training innovation, Competency Based Education and Training (CBET) is a good starting point. This mode of training emphasizes certifiable acquired competency as opposed to previous models of written examinations as the means of judging outcomes. Industrial attachment plays a critical part in the implementation of the CBET system. To better integrate SMEs and informal sector, it should be a requirement that trainees undertake half or more of their attachment in those establishment. This will give trainees the opportunity to observe at close quarters the work environment, appreciate the culture and create mental images of what it would take to be self-employed and successful within the sector (Ferej, 2000). Industrial attachment at larger more formal establishments shall also afford the trainees opportunities to compare the two sectors and if necessary borrow system ideas should they find themselves in self-employment after graduating.

It is also critical that TVET institutions start to make serious effort to accommodate the needs of SME and informal sector clients. They need to create flexibility in attendance patterns, entry requirements and recognition of prior learning. Universities which were the most rigid are now most flexible and have created programmes where students can access further education during school holidays for teachers, evening programmes for those working during the day, credits for prior knowledge and skills, and bridging programmes for those not meeting admission standards. TVET institutions have stuck to the narrow and rigid entry requirements and attendance patterns. Little or no consideration is given to recognition of prior experience and qualifications. Little effort has been made to date to create short programs that meet the immediate needs of the sector without over reliance on academic qualification pre-requisites.

Further to the acquisition of technical skills it has been argued, by many experts as well as in international forums such as the last two UNESCO congresses, that providing trainees with a strong foundation in generic skills is important in a fast changing world of work (UNESCO 2001; UNESCO 2012). Such skills include

communication, entrepreneurship, ICT, negotiation, creativity, problem solving among others. The assumption has been that technical competence was all it took to succeed in employment or in self-employment. The generic or employability skills help trainees to improve their confidence levels, abilities to negotiate their way at work, change jobs, appreciate and address personal weaknesses. Policy makers and TVET institutions have tended to pay lip service in expecting graduates to perform, be self-employed and be net employers. For the youth to focus on self-employment, the appropriate mindsets should be developed as necessary skills must be imparted and confidence of the trainees developed to succeed in self-employment.

A causal observation of SME and informal sector businesses suggests that few of the nearly 700,000 jobs created in 2014 went to TVET graduates. Many TVET graduates sit at home waiting for jobs in modern formal sector when there are many opportunities around them. Due to the establishment of county governments following the promulgation of a new constitution in 2010, and many devolved functions, all parts of the country are witnessing major developments in construction of roads, schools, offices and so on (Republic of Kenya, 2010). Surprisingly many of those that have been awarded these lucrative contracts do not possess an iota of technical skill. They simply maneuver their way to these contracts and recruit skilled labour to do the work. There have been many complaints about the quality of the jobs by these contractors. In an attempt to alleviate youth unemployment, the government has also created the 'Youth Enterprise Fund' to loan youth funds at concessionary rates to start businesses. A more recent opportunity created by government is the setting aside of at least 30% of its tenders for the youth and women. The uptake by TVET graduates of these opportunities is not well documented. However, TVET institutions have not adjusted their curriculum to impart necessary skills for their trainees to be able to take advantage of these opportunities.

Another mode of time tested training is through the apprenticeship model. The German dual system has proved its viability. But without a strong industrial base and with little attention given to the SMEs it is difficult to implement. Mauritius has experimented with hospitality training using this model. Trainees spend four days with an enterprise and only one day at the technical institutions to catch up with the theoretical input of the course. The result was the quadrupling of enrolment and nearly 100% job placement (UNESCO, 2016). In a different model, trainees in an agricultural institution in Malawi spent one day every week with an assigned farmer. The result is amazing in terms of work culture that is learned. If SMEs are embraced and a trainee placed with an enterprise one day a week during the course of their training the number of trainees who would feel brave and confident to go into self-employment would increase dramatically.

Finally, TVET institutions need to be allowed to be creative to be able to address the needs of their particular locale. There is a positive development by the Kenya government to establish TVET institutions in all constituencies in the country. At the same time, Vocational Training Centers (formerly Youth Polytechnics) are planned for each Ward. This policy will increase the number of TVET institutions four folds.

These efforts will provide training access close to the trainees' homes and reduce the cost of commuting to institutions as well as cost of accommodation away from home. Unfortunately, the current trend is to replicate already established institutions. Institutions established in Mandera, which is a dry and semi-arid climate, for example, should have training programmes that meet the unique needs of the community that is largely pastoral and nomadic. While those at the Coast should have courses related to needs related to their close proximity to the sea and the large tourism market. Only in creating this kind of diversity would TVET institutions remain viable and competitive.

### **References**

- Ferej, A. K. (2000). The integration of youth into the informal sector: The Kenyan experience. In Atchoarena, D. (Eds.), *The transition of youth from school to work: Issues and policies*. Published in the series 'New Trends in Vocational Education'. Paris: UNESCO, IIEP.
- Nelson, R. E., & Johnson, S. (1997). Entrepreneurship education as a strategic approach to economic growth in Kenya. *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*. Retrieved from <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JITE/v35n1>
- Republic of Kenya. (1988). *Presidential Working Party on Education and Manpower Training for the Next Decade and Beyond*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Republic of Kenya. (2007). *Kenya Vision 2030*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Republic of Kenya. (2010). *The Constitution of the Republic of Kenya, 2010*. Nairobi: Government Printer
- Republic of Kenya. (2016). *Kenya Bureau of Statistics Annual Report*. Nairobi: Government Printer.
- Trading Economics.(2016). *Kenya unemployment rates*. <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/kenya/unemployment-rate1999-2017>
- UNESCO. (2001). *Revised Recommendation Concerning Technical and Vocational Education*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. (2016). Unpublished Draft Report on Seychelles Forum on Youth Skills for Work and Entrepreneurship. Retrieved from <http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php>
- UNESCO. (2012). Shanghai Consensus, Recommendations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> TVET Congress: Transforming TVET, Building Skills for Work and Life. Paris: UNESCO.
- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. New York: United Nations Department of Economics and Social Affairs. Retrieved from <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>