

BACKGROUND

Skills development is globally considered as key for productive employment. Hence it is an important means for increased productivity, private-sector development, inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction. Economic diversification and structural change towards high productivity sectors is necessary for combating poverty in a sustainable way. This requires a better skilled and more adaptable labour force which can spur domestic and foreign investment. Linking skills development to broader education and employment, growth and development strategies and systems is essential to ensure relevance, policy coherence, coordination and alignment.

Studies show that effective, sustainable approaches to workforce development and employment must improve a combination of skills for employability of individuals, and at the same time build a sustainable system for improved private-sector competitiveness. Especially, youth unemployment resulting from mismatch between the supply of the education system and labour market needs could in part be addressed through adequate skills development within a future-oriented, flexible and holistic education system for lifelong learning.

Given increasing demands and based on the global goals (particularly SDGs 1, 4 and 8) as well as the Policy Framework for Swedish Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Assistance, Sida will support skills development for employment in an education system that provides opportunities for lifelong learning.

WHAT IS SKILLS DEVELOPMENT?

Skills development is generally used to refer to the productive capabilities acquired through all levels of learning and training, occurring in formal, non-formal, informal and on-the-job settings. It enables individuals to become fully and productively engaged in livelihoods, and to have the opportunity to adapt these capabilities to meet the changing demands and opportunities of economy and labour market. The acquisition of such capabilities depends on many factors, including a quality lifelong learning system and a supportive learning environment. The types of skills required for employment can be divided into:

- **Basic and foundation skills**, which are acquired through the primary and secondary formal school system, or through non-formal and/or informal learning processes (e.g. active learning, oral expression, reading comprehension, written expression, ICT literacy, active listening). These are pre-requisites for acquiring further skills enhancing the prospect of sustainable employment.
- **Transferable skills**, which include the abilities to learn and adapt, solve problems, communicate ideas effectively, think critically and creatively and the ability to manage self and others. These skills enable people to adapt to different work environments as well as improving their opportunities to career-building.
- **Technical and vocational skills**, which are specialized skills, knowledge or know-how to perform specific duties or tasks, mainly in a professional environment. These include, but are not limited to, the traditional forms of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), skills acquired through the secondary level of the formal school system or through non-formal and/or informal learning processes.
- **Professional and personal skills**, including individual attributes relevant to work such as honesty, integrity, reliability, work ethic, and judgement.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF LIFELONG LEARNING

Lifelong learning takes on a broader approach than education. It is the *organising principle* putting adequate integrated and systematic policy and practice into place for social transformation within a framework of sustainable development. In an education system that provides opportunities for lifelong learning, *policy* and *practice* provide every individual and community with a flexible and diversified range of useful learning and training options throughout his or her lifetime (context specific). A skills-development strategy, as an integral component of a national education system for lifelong learning, successfully links skills to productivity and employment creation while at the same time coping with all life situations (e.g. work, active citizenship, and family life).

To ensure leaving no one behind, lifelong learning also requires that the poor and most vulnerable groups in society fully participate in and contribute to the development process. The adoption of a human rights-based approach to skills development requires training contents and methods as well as a learning environment adapted to varied groups of people.

FACTORS FOR SUCCESS, PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

Adopting demand-led models: An active involvement of local communities, employers, unions, and other social partners is crucial for planning, carrying out and following up of responsive skills development programmes. It helps the training providers to better understand the variety of needs in the workplaces and respond appropriately. Such interaction will create win-win relationships between the world of learning and training and the world of work.

Ensuring quality training: Well qualified teachers are key to improving quality of training. Thus, investing in training of teachers, trainers and managers is decisive for quality. Interaction with the world of work is also crucial for improving the quality of learning and training activities. Improved quality in turn increases the attractiveness of skills training programmes. Apprenticeship training is one way to make employers more actively involved in skills development and contributing to the improvement of quality.

Enhancing the capacity of delivery: In many low-income countries skill training providers, both public and private, are often small and poorly equipped to meet the required needs for adequate and quality training. Investment in infrastructure, facilities, equipment and materials to meet the ever growing and changing demands of the world of work requires incentives and support mechanisms to stimulate and improve training capacity.

Ensuring broad and continued access to quality training and skills development, including quality counselling:

It is essential to foster opportunities and benefits of initial and lifelong learning for all, including disadvantaged young people who have dropped out of school or are working in the informal sector under precarious conditions. The participation of women in skills training should be ensured and gender stereotyping in occupational choice should be actively discouraged.

Establishing a system for labour market forecasting and information:

Up-to-date labour market information and forecasting is key to match current and future labour market needs for skills with the supply of skills. Such a system will provide necessary information for short-term and long-term planning as well as provide disaggregated data to track changes in labour market outcomes for different population groups (women, youth, the disabled and minority groups).

Mechanisms for efficient recognition, validation and accreditation of skills:

Such a system is necessary to allow for multiple paths for further learning and training (formal, non-formal and/or informal) and for the mobility of the workforce. Furthermore, such mechanisms for efficient recognition, validation and accreditation need to be developed with active participation of labour market actors.

FURTHER READING

Brewer, L. (2013) *Enhancing youth employability: What? Why? And How? Guide to core work skills*. Skills employability Department, ILO.

ILO (2011) *Increasing the employability of disadvantaged youth*. Skills for employment Policy Brief.

UNESCO (2012) *Youth and skills. Putting education to work*. EFA Global monitoring report.

World Economic Forum (2017). *Accelerating Workforce Reskilling for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. An Agenda for Leaders to Shape the Future of Education, Gender and Work*.