



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONSULTATIONS ON TRANSFORMING EDUCATION IN NAMIBIA

Progress Report



INCLUSIVE, EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

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Position Paper No. 2

Learning and Skills for Life, Work and Sustainable Development

1. Introduction

Children, learners and youth are at the centre of transforming education. They are our future generations and need to be well prepared to lead the Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR), be resilient to any future pandemics, impacts of climate change and to any other crisis. Several reforms have been introduced in the basic education system, currently in the fourth reform. As a result of reforms and high-level commitment to education, Namibia has nearly achieved universal primary education, with 85% of children starting grade one continuing to lower secondary (Grade 8) (EMIS, 2020), and has eliminated gender disparity in access to education at all levels. However, teaching and learning outcomes have continued to remain a challenge with many high drop-out and high failure rates experienced over the years. The basic Education system continues to be challenged with inefficiencies in the schooling system due to high repetition and school-dropout-rates, low survival rates especially from Junior Secondary level and lack of, or poor, physical infrastructure and accessibility for persons with disabilities all compromising on the quality of learning and skills development.

Many children complete primary education without having mastered basic literacy and numeracy skills. While challenges were there before COVID-19, the pandemic has further exacerbated learning loss. The prolonged face to face school closure in 2020 and intermittent localised closures in 2021 continue to heavily impact learning outcomes. Since the onset of COVID-19, an estimated 24,691 learners did not return to school. In terms of learning outcomes, teachers continue to struggle recovering the learning losses from 2020 (EMIS, 2020). The Social Protection Policy states that Namibia continues to be Africa's third most unequal country, with significant poverty levels, particularly in rural areas, reaching 50% (2015/16, NHIES). The majority of the unemployed are youth which has contributed to youth poverty, with children (0-17years), who suffer disproportionately higher levels of multidimensional poverty at 51.3% compared to 37.4% for those 18+ years (National Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) for Namibia 2021.)

While linking schooling and the world of work, skilling in the 21st century also needs to be aware of the need to preserve the planet through increasing greening and reduced carbon emissions, the need to prepare for jobs which are not yet known, and the need for youth to be flexible, able to problem solve and be entrepreneurial. The role of education in addressing the challenges of climate change is increasingly recognised. It provides children and young people with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about how to adapt individual lives and ecological, social or economic systems to a changing environment (VVOB, 2019). In positioning the education system to address these issues it becomes clear that transformation must start during the period defined as early childhood development (ECD), when most children start to build the foundations of numeracy and literacy and have a focus throughout schooling and continue after leaving formal education. To address the complex set of challenges faced by our societies today, it is important to adopt a lifelong and life-wide approach to education and learning. This means addressing and responding to the learning needs of all individuals, regardless of their age, socio-economic or educational background, geographical context or employment status in a flexible way.

Increasingly education transformation strategies are being required to be aligned to industrial strategy and sector plans. The different government Ministries involved in addressing skills for the economy do not find it easy to coordinate and offer responses that resonate with the world of business. Also there are sections of learners who are often excluded, such as those who drop out of school after primary school, those with disabilities or who remain in school even though they are not succeeding to achieve basic literacy and numeracy levels.

2. Challenge

There is huge pressure on the global education system to better prepare children for the world of work. However, there are many barriers to prepare young people to enter the labour markets whereas there are expectations to prepare young people better for the world of work. One of the challenges facing many countries, Namibia included, is to put focus on strengthening basic literacy and numeracy skills, through focusing on the early years, in particular early childhood education and the junior primary phases to prepare children for lifelong learning.

Education for sustainable development (ESD) is an integral element of the SDGs on quality education and a key enabler of all other goals. A system-wide approach to transforming education will be needed to develop and support capacities to innovate. To equip young people and adults with the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, education will need to re-imagine and re-create more just and sustainable economies and societies in an increasingly uncertain and unpredictable world. It is also important to address major shortcomings regarding the extent and depth of ESD in educational plans and curricula. Efforts must be made in the short and medium terms to ensure that curricula and pedagogies support knowledge, skills, values and action for just and sustainable economies and societies. To this end, the fragmentation of climate change knowledge and education at policy levels should be addressed. Coherent policy environments in which the education sector is fully utilised as a strategic resource to transition towards a more climate resilient society are becoming a necessity. Sustainable education systems start by getting every school and every teacher ready for empowering learners with capabilities to think critically and be actively involved in finding solutions for social, economic and environmental challenges.

The twin transitions towards digital and green economies will result in job losses and uncertainty for a segment of the workforce, as well as the creation of new opportunities. Being mindful of the importance of training and skills for the world of work, already in 1999, Bennell wrote about a training and skills crisis over 30 years ago. However, this crisis still pertains to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Bennell writes that even though there is agreement that poor and marginalised communities need access to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) so they can access jobs, there is poor TVET provision for such communities. The result of providing such TVET would be great both in reducing unemployment and increasing productivity. However, provision, and particularly state provided TVET institutions, rarely deliver useful training. Little has changed in much of Africa. The Bennell dilemma is still relevant today: *“Of particular concern is that, while the number of people living in absolute poverty continues to grow, the capacity of the state to support appropriate training appears to be declining in many developing countries. More generally, given dwindling resources and other pressing demands for training services from other sectors, there is a sense of being overwhelmed by the enormity of the skills challenge in support of the poor”* (1999: 1).

Atkinson (2016) identifies a range of policy levers to promote the uptake of work-based and work-integrated learning among education providers and employers:

- government-funded incentive payments to employers to take on apprentices and trainees and work-integrated learning students
- funding for education and training providers linked with work-based or work-integrated learning provision
- tax concessions for companies which offer work-based or work-integrated learning opportunities
- an education and training levy for industry to support the development and implementation of work-based or work-integrated learning opportunities and programmes, as is operational in South Africa
- work-based learning or work-integrated learning components included in procurement policy.

Education, learning, and vocational training must therefore be seen from a holistic and lifelong learning perspective that emphasizes ecological, social and emotional, intercultural, interdisciplinary and intergenerational learning to foster global citizenship, rule of law, mutual trust and global solidarity. There is general agreement in the literature that the relationship between education providers of technical and vocational education and workplaces is key to a successful TVET sector. In developing improved work-based learning and work-integrated learning improved relations between education institutions and employers is critical. Education providers should proactively develop and maintain partnerships with industry, accepting that some flexibility may be required in their approach; and business leaders and their staff need to be committed to providing work-based and work-integrated learning activities, and to supporting the apprentices and students they host (Atkinson 2016).

3. International Good Practice

There are several examples of good practice in mainstreaming Learning and Skills for Life, Work and Sustainable Development in different contexts. These include:

- Empowering learners for human and planetary sustainability by mainstreaming ESD
- Building and implementing robust lifelong learning policies and systems
- Promoting a whole-institution approach to learning
- Addressing evolving skills demands in changing economies and transition to green and digital economies
- Ensuring inclusion, equity, and justice
- Strengthening governance and financing

In Japan, ESD principles and perspectives are at the heart of National Curriculum Standards for all levels of education from pre-school to upper secondary. In Ghana, the Unlock Literacy Project goes beyond traditional literacy approaches to empower children to think critically about local issues and take actions, involving whole-communities. In Australia there is increasing focus on work-based learning and work-integrated learning (Atkinson 2016). The keys to successful engagement in either approach include clear information, ongoing communication, flexibility with approaches, committed and skilled educators who support students, engaged students, the involvement of intermediary organisations to organise and facilitate activities, and the commitment of business and education leaders to drive work-based learning and work-integrated learning in their communities and companies.

In South Africa, in 2006, a national project was launched to revive artisan training which had fallen to less than 6000 a year. By 2010 nearly 10 000 artisans were qualifying each year. In 2012 the National Development Plan set a target of 30 000 artisans a year by 2030. In 2018 20 public TVET colleges were selected to be allocated 26 centres of specialisation for 13 priority trades. A number of obstacles were identified and were addressed, a funding mechanism was agreed, whereby the theoretical and practical training was funded from the fiscus, and the workplace component from levy income located in sector education and training authorities. A single artisan grant was agreed. New qualifications and curriculum were developed. Funding from the National Skills Fund was made available for reequipping workshops. By 2019 the annual number of artisans produced rose to 23 000. Progress slowed during the Covid lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, but the building blocks of a long term revival of artisan training have been put in place, with public colleges playing an important role.

4. Current situation in Namibia

Several good practices have been highlighted on learning and skills development and should be further strengthened rather than starting anew. Namibia has been implementing an adult education and literacy programme over the years which has resulted in an increase in adult literacy rates. The programme has not only focused on literacy and numeracy but has also trained adults and youth on employability skills. In addition, with the introduction of pre-primary education, many children are benefiting from early numeracy and literacy skills before formal education. In addition, more children are accessing early childhood development centres. Education for Sustainable Development is taught in schools.

There are several achievements that have been noted in the Namibian TVET and skills development system in the past decade. These include inter alia, the establishment the National Training Authority (NTA) which advises the minister responsible for TVET. A sound and sustainable training levy system was introduced with the VET Levy from 2014, which resulted in employers with a monthly payroll of over N\$1 million registering with the NTA and contributing 1% of their payroll as a levy. Billions of dollars have already been collected and some of the funds have been made available for training.

There has been increase in the number of private TVET providers ensuring a mix of provision between public and private. Physical infrastructure and equipment at public VTCs were upgraded over the years and in addition there was expansion of public vocational training centres. Trainers at public VTCs underwent various skills upgrading programmes - locally, regionally and internationally to help improve quality of provision.

There have been year-on-year increases in national annual TVET trainee intakes and throughput. Between 2014 and 2019 there was an improvement of average trainee pass rates from 42% to 68%.

A framework to recognise skills acquired outside the formal VET sector (recognition of prior learning) was also adopted to the extent that candidates can be assessed and certified for the competencies and skills they possess. Over 53% of those assessed using this approach have been found to be competent.

Through partnerships with industry, a work-integrated learning framework was adopted and the apprenticeship system, which had been severely scaled down, was re-introduced. In addition, an intensified national TVET career advocacy programme was implemented.

Within the schooling system there are some technical schools and various programmes aimed at assisting young people with aspirations to engage in technical and vocational occupations. The ministry has identified food production as being an important focus.

5. Reflections from the Regional Stakeholder Consultations

The Regional consultations highlighted key achievements and challenges affecting the basic education sector in terms of learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development. Below is a summary of the highlights:

- Absence of a Namibian reading system at junior primary level to inculcate the reading skills into the learners.
- Lack of qualified and experienced teachers on technical subjects and Advance Subsidiary level.
- Acute shortage of functional public and school libraries in the region (Namibia is having 1894 schools (2019 EMIS Report) and 66 public libraries).
- Limited recognition of traditional knowledge and that of skills development certificates/programmes.
- Absence of a clear system for transition from Adult Learning into formal education, especially after completing Adult Upper Primary Education (AUPE).
- Absence of a policy to promote and recognise prior learning (RPL).
- Limited entrepreneurial, financial literacy, and soft skills coverage in the curriculum. These are known to help learners after school.
- Under-resourced/lack of infrastructures (classrooms, laboratories & workshops)
- There is a lack of appropriate skills orientation programmes and many teachers have no or limited ICT skills as well as having little awareness of the capabilities inherent in ICT for achieving blended learning opportunities and practical skills training in simulated workplaces.
- Absence of a standardised evaluation system of trades for expatriates and immigrants making absorption hard.
- Low literacy and numeracy and computer skills across all phases of the basic education sector.
- The duplication and overlap of functions, especially regulatory functions, is still prevalent and affects efficiency and effectiveness in the TVET sector.
- The TVET sector lacks a unified training model and because of this does not have strong links with the education sector.
- Lack of access to the TVET sector due to inadequate funding and inequities in financing between public and private providers.
- Graduates often do not meet the changing skills demands of the world of work.
- Inadequately trained TVET trainers (technically and as educators).
- Negative societal perception of TVET careers.
- Lack of articulation within the entire education and training sector.
- Limited entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, ICT and soft skills coverage in the curriculum was identified.

6. Namibian good practice

It is important, where possible, to build on existing good practice rather than starting anew. There are several achievements that have been noted in the Namibian education system which serve as a

foundation for improving learning and skills for life. A policy on environmental education and education for sustainable development as well as a public awareness strategy and education were developed to guide national education on environmental issues. Education for sustainable development is incorporated in some teacher education courses, whilst in 2020, school curriculum was reviewed to include these concepts.

An intensified national career advocacy programme to provide career knowledge and improve career choices has been implemented with a framework to recognise skills acquired outside the formal VET sector (recognition of prior learning) This means that candidates can be assessed and certified for the competencies and skills they possess. Over 53% of those assessed using this approach have been found to be competent. This provides opportunities for those who lack formal education to be recognised for the prior learning they obtained through work experience.

The increase in the number of registered private training providers has improved the supply of skills development opportunities. Physical infrastructure and equipment at public VTCs were upgraded over the years and this has expanded public vocational training. Trainers at public VTCs underwent various skills upgrading programmes - locally, regionally and internationally. This helps to improve quality of skills development provision. As a result of these developments, there have been year-on-year increases in national annual TVET trainee intakes and throughput. Between 2014 and 2019 there was an improvement of average trainee pass rates from 42% to 68%.

The National Training Authority (NTA) was established to advise the minister responsible for training and skills development. A sound and sustainable training levy system was introduced in 2014 resulting in employers with a monthly payroll of over N\$1 million registering to contribute 1% of their payroll as a levy. Billions of dollars have already been collected and some of the funds have already been made available for learning and skills development. Industry Skills Committees (ISCs), representing major economic sectors, were established to foster industry engagement towards ensuring the relevance of course offerings by public and private training providers. The ISCs are involved in the development of qualifications and unit standards. A diverse range of these qualifications and unit standards which follow competency-based education and training were registered on the national qualifications framework.

7. Proposed Transforming Levers

The following levers may be used to promote and enhance of learning and skills for life, work and sustainable development.

A focus on early childhood education. There must be an increased understanding and awareness that unless literacy and numeracy is achieved early in life, all life and career choices are affected. A sound early learning foundation is needed. Programmes are needed that help adults and older pupils who have not succeeded academically to re-enter education and training through programmes aimed at raising literacy levels to enable them to access vocational and occupational programmes. For example, if a young person is not literate, but is repairing cars and potentially able to earn a living doing that, that person should be assisted to enter relevant programmes that will assist him/her.

Infrastructure development. The lack of adequate infrastructure and equipment across the schooling system needs to be addressed. In this regard it was recommended that schools must be equipped with well-resourced classrooms, ICT tools, laboratories and workshops and where required these be

refurbished to enhance teaching and learning. In addition there should be provision of accessible functional libraries at schools and in the community. Partnerships with employers could be explored to bring currently used machinery and tools into schools and colleges and/or to make them accessible to those engaged in TVET programmes.

Curriculum adjustments. Pre-vocational subjects including entrepreneurship and concepts of sustainable development should be introduced at school level and be taught by TVET trained teachers. Moreover, financial literacy and agricultural/food production skills should be mainstreamed at school level as a compulsory subjects. To compliment this, soft skills should be Integrated and promoted in the curriculum. Mother tongue as a mode of learning should also be promoted across the schooling system.

Train the trainers. The lack of qualified teachers at different levels remains a challenge. It was recommended that employment of qualified teachers especially in technical subjects and Advance Subsidiary Level should be a priority.

Strengthened assessment systems. With regard to the artisan development system it was recommended that a standardised assessment system for trades be established, especially for expatriates and immigrants so that their qualifications could be evaluated before they are able to operate in the country. Furthermore, there needs to be strengthened awareness and advocacy for Recognition Prior Learning provision so that those who have acquired skills through their work experience outside of the mainstream TVET system, could obtain recognised qualifications through this pathway. Partnerships between the TVET system and industry should be at the forefront of this initiative.

Assisting adults to reenter education. Acknowledging that within the population there are people who have not completed their schooling, it was further recommended that there should be establishment of bridging courses in Adult Education that would enable learners' entrance into the formal labour market. Government should expand Community Learning and Development Centres (CLDCs) in all regions to ensure that adult learners, out-of-school youth and community members have access to learning hubs.

Make up for time lost due to COVID-19. The challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic are well recorded and it was recommended that learning support should be implemented across the curriculum. There should be consideration for introduction of holiday schools to bridge the COVID-19 gap and strengthen children's early literacy skills. Teachers should be incentivised for providing these remedial lessons. In addition, parents should be encouraged to engage in the education of their children by strengthening the Family Literacy programme

Career development. Career development should be introduced into all education institutions. Teachers should understand different career pathways and be trained to conduct aptitude tests at a foundational phase to help identify learners' career potentials, guide them to the programmes linked to their aspirations, and groom them as they progress through all the phases. Those exiting the school and college system should also have access to career-guidance so as to increase their understanding of the labour market and the importance of continuing their education and training.

Monitoring and Evaluation. There should be an overarching monitoring and evaluation framework that takes stock of key resolutions and policy implementation. The M&E framework should be linked with a strengthened Performance Management System to ensure accountability by implementors.

Incentives. Much can be done by public schools and colleges, but even more can be done when the private sector is incentive to play a role. This is particularly true of apprenticeships for artisan trades, but applied more broadly. It will be important for the various stakeholder Ministries to explore how use can be made of such things as: a) the levy and grants available from the NTA, b) tax incentives for employers to train apprentices and other work-based programmes, c) other grants to support economic growth and industrial strategies that might fund equipment and machinery.

Building capacity for adult education and training. It will be important for a number of Ministries, and in particular MoEAC and MHETI, but also those involved in industrial and business development, to work together to improve access to education and training for those no longer in the schooling, college or university system. This is not a simple task, but it is important to identify the challenges (as expressed in the regional consultations), to understand them in relation to the entire value chain (ECD, schooling, work and adapting to changes in the labour market, to create opportunities for ongoing education and training and to communicate these effectively.

8. Conclusions

It is important to look holistically at the alignment of education and training to the needs of individuals as citizens, as social beings and as workers who need skills to work and earn a living. Stakeholders within ECD and all phases of schooling should never lose sight of, or underestimate the importance of numeracy and literacy to a person's ability to obtain work and earn a livelihood. The single most important contribution that the schooling system can make to empowering new entrants to the labour market is to give them a sound foundation of numeracy and literacy and the skills to analyse and solve problems.

There is other support that teachers can assist with, for example facilitating access to career development, inclusion of certain hard and soft skills into the school curriculum, exposing learners to work and development projects etc, but this cannot be at the expense of, or by sacrificing, basic education. Within the public education system there is a need for strong programmes that have occupational qualifications as the outcome, but again the schooling and college system should not see the task of preparing learners for work as being solely a schooling responsibility.

It is importance that all stakeholders share a common understanding of the skills requirements in the labour market, and that each role-player identifies and understands their role in the process. As each role-player achieves the outputs that they are committed to achieve, the need for partnerships and understandings emerges as critical to achieving successful outcomes.

When it comes to delivery of occupational and professional qualifications, there are potentially huge cost implications (for example the cost of machinery for workshops where certain trades are taught can be very high) and so it will be important to recognise that public colleges cannot teach or train for all occupations, but rather work with others to enable learners to be exposed to equipment and production processes for their chosen career-pathway. It is suggested that rather than trying to do everything, the policy should be to focus resources and build capacity to do what they do well and then to partner others to do what cannot be done so well in schools or colleges. So, for example, colleges might focus on delivering certain trades, but government signals that other occupations will be expected to be delivered by employers and private providers and put in place appropriate incentives to achieve that. It will be important to explore how Recognition of Prior Learning can be used to recognise practical skills and help technically orientated youth and adults to access

programmes that lead to qualifications. There will also be a need to look holistically at programmes being offered to those no longer in the schooling system, whether they are in work or not in employment. It will be important for all relevant ministries to work together to provide access to ongoing, life-long learning.

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