

VET Toolbox II in Ghana

Lessons Learnt

VET Toolbox was designed to enhance the delivery of demand-driven skills to cater for investment needs in 11 selected countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. The main objective of the project was to support human capital development to enhance investment in supply chains in these selected countries, through the implementation of targeted skills development and by strengthening VET delivery systems for employment opportunities, especially for youth.

VET Toolbox aimed to improve the effectiveness of VET systems by making them more opportunity-driven to drive inclusive economic growth, social development and the creation of decent jobs, across three key areas:

Enhanced Public-Private Dialogue

Facilitating interaction between the public and the private sector and the development of public-private partnerships.

Targeted Skills Development

Supporting VET institutions to deliver training in line with investment needs.

VET Reform

Stimulating VET reform through capturing lessons learnt and promoting good practice models.

The implementation of VET Toolbox was a partnership of leading European Development agencies; the British Council, Enabel, Expertise France, GIZ and LuxDev and co-funded by the European Union and by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

In Ghana, the Agricultural Skills Enhancement Programme aimed to support skills development in the agriculture sector across the Northern, North-East, and Savannah regions of Ghana. The project built upon government investment programmes and laid the foundation for future investments in Ghana's dynamic agricultural and agro-processing sectors. The VET Toolbox project closely collaborated with the Savannah Zone Agricultural Productivity Improvement Project (SAPIP) to address the growing need for a skilled labour force, with a specific focus on training youth for employment in commercial farms.

Through innovative partnerships with public and private organisations, the programme has contributed to creating local jobs in the agriculture and agro-processing sectors through the development and delivery of three curricula: Agronomy, Farm Enterprise Management and Tractor Operation Maintenance and Management. The development of the curricula involved collaboration with training providers and private commercial farms. The project pioneered comprehensive Workplace Experience Learning (WEL) placements in the sector through the close collaboration of employers and training providers, aiming to enhance practical, employable skills for inclusive graduate employment.

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Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

These lessons learnt and recommendations were formulated through experiences gained throughout project implementation, from project inception to the conclusion of the workplace experience learning placements. A lessons learnt and recommendations workshop was held in November 2024, involving all of the project's key stakeholders (government ministries, training providers, private sector and trainees), providing them with an opportunity to feedback on the process and reflect upon what had been learnt through implementation of the VET Toolbox project.

These suggestions and feedback were then consolidated into the five key thematic areas outlined below. Whilst these recommendations are aimed at all stakeholders with a role in the delivery of TVET in Ghana, there is a specific emphasis on those that will not only guide future initiatives, but that can be acted upon by the Commission for TVET in leading the implementation of a robust and impactful TVET system.

Stakeholder Engagement

What we learnt

Obtaining the buy-in of key stakeholders was crucial for setting up the Technical Working Group. The Technical Working Group was the foundation for public-private dialogue which comprised both public sector and private sector stakeholders, including the commercial farms and SAPIP. Significant time and budget were invested in the initial engagement process to help bring stakeholders to a common understanding of the objective of public-private dialogue.

What we recommend

Invest in stakeholder engagement: this can take investment of significant resources but is critical for project success in designing TVET programmes. It is important to invest resources and time for comprehensive stakeholder engagement, for both the buy-in of project implementation and for the sustainability of the project.

Define clear responsibilities: assign specific roles to government bodies, industry associations, and education providers to avoid duplication of efforts. For example, through the Agricultural Sector Skills Body (ASSB), industry bodies can play a leading role in identifying skills needs, while educational institutions can focus on integrating these needs into their training programmes.

Integrate technology in governance: leverage digital tools to facilitate communication, data-sharing, and monitoring of TVET activities across stakeholders. A centralised digital platform could streamline collaboration, track outcomes and ensure accountability. This may include Whatsapp groups and collaboration tools like Microsoft Teams for easy communication, to file sharing tools like Google Drive and OneDrive to ensure that stakeholders retrieve information in real time.

Promote accountability mechanisms: develop metrics and evaluation frameworks to monitor the implementation of TVET policies and programmes. These frameworks should include regular feedback from industry partners and students to ensure continuous improvement.



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Public-Private Dialogue

What we learnt

A Technical Working Group was established as the appropriate consultative and validation forum for both project-level implementation and for public-private dialogue. Recognising gaps in capacity, the VET Toolbox focused on training members in the competency-based training (CBT) approach, leading to standards generation, curriculum development, assessment and WEL facilitation. The ability of the project to adjust and adapt to the local conditions helped in smooth implementation. The project strengthened public-private partnerships across Ghana's agricultural skills development agenda and increased awareness of the need for localised and market-driven training curricula, especially working with commercial farmers who previously had not been involved in TVET delivery in Ghana, bringing to the fore the recognition of WEL as a key factor in bridging the skills-employment gap. Through sustainable public-private dialogue, the project aligned vocational training with market needs and improved the relevance of skills development to the labour market.

Lessons learnt show that private employers will pay for learner activity if training includes workplace experience learning placements in the private sector and meets the needs of employers, through regular dialogue with training providers. For private employers, this is a win-win situation. The private sector is willing to co-invest with the public sector for new equipment if private sector partners work with the vocational training institutes and government. Additionally, the development of sustainable financing mechanisms for the Technical Working Group and public-private dialogue is critical for the sustainability of the dialogue mechanism.

What we recommend

Establish formal and inclusive public-private dialogue structures: develop multi-level dialogue platforms at national and regional levels that integrate government, industry and TVET institutions to regularly address labour market needs, enshrine public-private dialogue in TVET policy frameworks, and decentralise structures to reflect regional demands. These fora ensure that diverse perspectives are considered in curriculum development and implementation, aligning TVET programmes with labour market demands.

Align training with market needs: utilise up to date labour market intelligence to inform curriculum design and focus training on region-specific demands. Encourage employer involvement in WEL and mentorship programmes, train stakeholders in dialogue facilitation, establish knowledge-sharing platforms and adopt best practices to improve public-private dialogue efficiency and outcomes.

Provide incentives and financial support: introduce tax breaks, subsidies and public recognition for employers engaging in public-private dialogue, whilst promoting cost-sharing models to finance infrastructure, training and public-private dialogue activities.

Monitor and evaluate public-private dialogue effectiveness: implement robust monitoring frameworks to assess alignment, stakeholder engagement, and public-private dialogue outcomes. Create continuous feedback loops to adapt and refine mechanisms dynamically.



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Curriculum Development

What we learnt

Occupational standards' generation in Ghana is routinely done by industry experts who often do not have experience or expertise directly in the field of work in which the curriculum is being developed. Previous curriculum development processes have seen experts who do not have experience related to the subject matter in question. VET Toolbox was the first time that commercial farmers were directly involved in the generation of occupational standards and overall curriculum development and validation, utilising their experience and expertise to ensure the relevance of training materials.

The project was fortunate to have the involvement of a past female trainee in the curriculum development process, helping the trainers and other supporting agencies to understand how the occupational standards would impact trainees directly. She contributed immensely to providing a female perspective on topics such as safeguarding in a male dominated field. Involving past trainees in the curriculum development provides direct feedback to the scope and depth of the curriculum and ensures its relevance to the needs of not only industry, but the trainees themselves.

What we recommend

Focus on practical skills: curricula should emphasise the importance of teaching and learning that follow the recommended practical training, to enable students to gain better practical skills directly related to agricultural techniques. This will further close the gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation.

Include soft skills: soft skills such as emotional intelligence and empathy, computer literacy, farm management skills and leadership are key to enhancing employability, workplace productivity and collaboration, as well as manage student expectations, manage ability to adapt to industry changes, improve customer and client relations, and enable leadership and career growth.

Work with industry experts: not just specific to the agriculture sector, direct industry players with experience in the specific field of work should be included in the operational standards generation and validation to have a strong voice in deciding on the standards required for a specific course. Curriculum experts can still have a role to play in complementing these industry players.

Involve past trainees in curriculum development: this gives voice and agency to young trainees, improving the relevance and quality of training courses based on lived experience. Past trainees from marginalised groups can be excellent role models for future students.



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**Training And Work
Experience Learning**
What we learnt

The involvement of the commercial farms in the skills needs analysis helped employers to articulate their skills requirements, which culminated in the choice of programmes fitting into their skills needs. Once training began, the designated WEL supervisors and farmers were well trained in the delivery of the new curricula, ensuring that both trainers and trainees knew their responsibilities. There were also practical demonstrations during the training, allowing learners to further develop their competencies before embarking on their work placements.

Funding remains one critical unresolved issue for WEL in Ghana. The project benefitted from EU and BMZ funding of WEL, where commercial farms were paid for the upkeep and transportation of the learners. Without a sustainable funding mechanism, it is extremely challenging for vocational training institutes and commercial farms to continue implementing the WEL component of the training.

For an agriculture programme, especially in a rain-fed condition and unimodal rainfall regime, it is important that training planning considers the farming season so that the learners benefit extensively at the farm during the short rainfall season, whilst all phases of production are taking place. The WEL duration was important to help farmers assess the learners firsthand and support them to reach their potential. The more that learners are exposed to practical training, the more marketable their skills.

A pilot training was implemented by Damongo Agriculture College, using the opportunity to trial the training and WEL modules designed for the project, with trainers from other institutions getting the opportunity to exchange on the training. This allowed the project to test the modalities for WEL funding and how these funds should be administered. Because it was the first time comprehensive WEL placements were being implemented, the pilot training helped to manage expectations of the three key stakeholders, the trainees, the trainers and the WEL providers.

What we recommend

Match WEL with industry demand: collaborate with private sector employers to schedule WEL placements based on their operational needs rather than adhering strictly to academic calendars. This flexibility can help students to gain relevant experience during peak industry periods, increasing their chances of post-training employment. Factoring WEL into National Service would allow employers to select the students they wish to employ based on demonstrated skills and experience, whilst offering young people the chance to realise the benefits of working in agriculture.

Incorporate practical experience and entrepreneurship: curricula should allow for sufficient practical experience during the training period, whilst industry experience for VTI staff is a potential concept to help build relationships and technical competence, tested during the onboarding process to guarantee the right candidates are employed.

Design flexible training: additional training should be given to learners to accommodate different harvest seasons in different regions, to increase versatility in trainees being able to work across sectors and geographical areas. Agro-processing techniques which increase the value of the product and therefore bring additional income to the farm should be covered during training.

Align the academic calendar: it is recommended that the academic calendar is planned for agriculture and farming separately from other sectors that are not affected by rainfall patterns, to allow students to experience the full range of activities across a farming season.

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Build grant management capacity: the capacity of the vocational training institutes for grant preparation and receipt should be incorporated into the capacity-building strategy of the vocational training institutes to prepare for future funding disbursements.

Provide comprehensive orientation: an orientation programme should be delivered by the training providers before trainees embark on training courses, to set expectations and provide important background to topics such as safeguarding. This would also help to alleviate learners' fears about where they will be placed geographically during WEL.

UK-Ghana Mentoring Partnership

What we learnt

A mentorship programme with Gower College Swansea was introduced through the project. Gower College conducted regular mentoring sessions online with key stakeholders for the period of project implementation, including the vocational training institutes, employers and the ASSB. They also introduced Lantra, the UK and Ireland's leading awarding body for training in the land-based industries for knowledge exchanges and to share best practices and lessons in agriculture TVET delivery. The mentorship programme has benefitted and deepened public-private dialogue between the vocational training institutes and commercial farms, building their capacity on the organisation of WEL and publishing a sustainable funding toolkit to consider funding models beyond the lifetime of the project.

What we recommend

Share learning through mentoring partnerships: not only between different country models but also encourage local stakeholders to share their own experiences amongst themselves. Learning works both ways, with Gower College emphasising several aspects of learning that they gained through the mentorship programme to take back to Wales.

Collaborate in-person: whilst online communication tools are important, the opportunity for mentoring partners to meet face to face allows both sides to understand the operating contexts better, as well as build relationships that are more likely to last beyond the lifetime of the project.

Focus on sustainability from the beginning: mentoring partnerships can be a sustainable way to continue dialogue and learning beyond the lifetime of the project. How this collaboration could continue should be articulated from the beginning of the partnership and incorporated into project plans.



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