

Reaching the Unreached: Skills Development Policies and the Promise of ICT – A Scoping Study from India and South Africa

Background

The global education movement is in the midst of a paradigm shift. The latest discourse on sustainable development reflects an expanded vision for universal education: it places substantial emphasis on education and training that supports broader socio-economic development. [Sustainable Development Goal 4 \(SDG 4\)](#)¹ envisages “Inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all”, with targets specific to technical and vocational skills development (TVSD). Given that the former global development framework (the [Millennium Development Goals](#))² focused primarily on universal access to primary education, the attention that is currently being paid to TVSD and lifelong learning (LLL) as a global development priority, is significant.

The links between TVSD, economic productivity and social well-being are long-standing. As societies continue to grow in diversity and volume, the skills landscape will continue to evolve as well. The implications of this association are amplified in lower and middle income countries where a sizeable share of the population chronically straddles the base of the poverty line.³ Whilst political heads declare that skills development is at the forefront of their economic development agenda, policies and practices for TVSD often reflect a disjuncture from these intentions, especially when it comes to unreached groups such as individuals trained and employed within the informal sector (a term that will be further explored through this study).

The empowerment of individuals through economic and social opportunity, as well as the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions, have proven to be amongst the most effective ways to reduce poverty. TVSD is purposed to facilitate economic and social development.⁴ However, individuals who lack access to formal training and formal employment are often unreached.

For TVSD to serve as an effective poverty reduction strategy, an environment must be created that facilitates access to training, followed by the transfer of knowledge and skills gained, and by application that stimulates development at the individual, community and national levels of society.⁵ Recent developments demonstrate that the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in TVSD has the potential to help create such an environment. ICT holds promise in reaching the unreached populations, having shown that it enhances the provision of skills development, contributing towards social and economic development. Consistent upgrading of existing skills or gaining access to new skills through ICT-enhanced TVSD is hence considered as one of the key ways to ensure that citizens of tomorrow will thrive in the 21st century. However, ICT can also be problematic as its tools come with a number of pedagogical, operational and political complexities. The use and effectiveness of ICT for TVSD are also strongly related to the existence of a continuum between basic education and TVSD, especially in the case of unreached populations.

Scoping Study

It is within this context that this multi-dimensional scoping study between the REAL Center at the University of Witwatersrand in South Africa, AMMACHI Labs of Amrita University in India and NORRAG at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Switzerland, seeks to identify and assess knowledge gaps in the provision of TVSD for unreached populations within India and South Africa. More specifically, this 18 month study will investigate the interplay between TVSD and ICT policies and practice at national and local levels, in relation to the international context, focusing on the unreached populations in the two countries.

As members of the BRICS association, India and South Africa are similarly characterized by stark disparity and an emergent concern for the informal sector both in terms of training and employment. A wide range of economic, social, cultural and geographical challenges plague unreached groups' access to TVSD.⁶ Gaining an understanding of the socio-economic conditions in each country will be fundamental to studying the implementation of TVSD as a developmental tool⁷ to empower the unreached.

The study will also investigate issues concerning learning pathways for unreached communities, including the use of technology, integrating ICT into skills development. An anticipated outcome of this initiative is that findings from this scoping study will inform further research as well as produce actionable evidence, building upon TVSD policies and practices in India and South Africa.

In summary, this multi-dimensional, multi-party scoping study between REAL, AMMACHI Labs and NORRAG envisages the following objectives:

Objectives:

1. Identify the knowledge gaps within South Africa and India and explore convergence with the international context on the following dimensions:
 - a. The informal sectors with respect to training and employment
 - b. TVSD policies and funding in the informal sectors
 - c. The interplay between ICT and TVSD policies and practices in the formal and informal sectors
2. Promote South-South-North research and collaboration
3. Develop research capacity (in particular through the involvement of PhD students)

End Notes:

¹ See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg4>

² See: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

³ International Labor Organization. 2006. Employment challenges and strategies in India.

⁴ Asian Development Bank (2014). Innovative Strategies in Technical and Vocational Education and Training for Accelerated Human Resource Development in South Asia. Mandaluyong City: Asian Development Bank. <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/41186/innovative-strategies-technical-vocational-education-training.pdf>

⁵ Palmer, R., Wedgwood, R., Hayman, R., & Edinburgh Centre of African Studies. (2007). Educating out of poverty: A synthesis report on Ghana, India, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and South Africa. DFID

⁶ Majumdar, S. 2008. Workforce development in India policies and practices. Asian Development Bank Institute.

⁷ Palmer, R., Wedgwood, R., Hayman, R., & Edinburgh Centre of African Studies. (2007). Educating out of poverty: A synthesis report on Ghana, India, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and South Africa. DFID