

Meeting of the ICQN / TVSD Working Group on Youth Integration

Concept note

Introduction

The second meeting of the Inter-Country Quality Node in the field of technical and vocational skills development (ICQN/TVSD), which was held in Abidjan from 19 to 21 September 2011, led to a decision by the ministers and ministerial representatives of the 20 countries present to create three working groups: a working group on youth integration into the labour market, a working group on national qualifications frameworks, and a working group on the role of the professional branches in the field of TVSD. This concept note is intended to implement the first of these working groups.

Context and justification

The African economies, like those of the developed countries, are failing to create jobs. Between 2000 and 2007, the labour force in Africa grew by 96 million, while the number of jobs increased by only 63 million (ILO). Young people, the first victims of this lack of jobs, now account for 60% of all those unemployed on the African continent, leaving aside those who have given up hope or are visibly underemployed (ILO, World Bank).

This socioeconomic situation explains why social and vocational integration has become a priority, if not an outright emergency, for many African countries. The countries of West Africa are currently making significant investments in setting up informational and support programmes to assist the numerous unemployed and discouraged youth to get back into the world of work. Inspired by the Services Platform (the "PFS") set up by Côte d'Ivoire, four countries are in the process of starting or expanding vocational integration programmes. These include, in addition to Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Niger and Senegal. Other countries, such as Benin and Burkina Faso, have adopted specific vocational integration measures and are considering the establishment of a PFS. Mali, for its part, has a programme to support youth entrepreneurship.

A services platform, it should be noted, involves a process of organizing vocational training and integration in line with the economy that brings together all the organizations working in this field. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the platform is being implemented at the local level with all the concerned partners, public and private. It is being coordinated nationally by a non-profit association that brings together the Agency for Vocational Training (AGEFOP), the Agency for the Study and Promotion of Employment (AGEPE), the Development Fund for Vocational Training (FDVP) and the National Solidarity Fund (FNS).

These various efforts show that youth employment is at the heart of the policies being implemented in the sub-region. The recent declaration of Niamey, which concluded the annual meeting of the WAEMU Ministers in charge of Employment and Vocational Training, has asserted that every effort must be made to promote job-rich growth and to give young people the technical and vocational skills they need to integrate into the workplace as quickly as possible. The unemployment and

hopelessness affecting young people have harmful consequences for the economy, society and the world of work.

- One out of every two young people who join an insurgency declare that unemployment was their main motivation (World Bank);
- Young people's future vocational development is largely determined by the skills and experience they accumulate or, on the contrary, have no opportunity to accumulate, at the start of their working lives (OECD/ADB);
- There is a very real social and financial cost to a lack of vocational integration, which can be seen in particular in the need to retrain youth who have been excluded from any vocational activity for too long.

The goals of a meeting of the ICQN/TVSD Working Group on Youth Integration

All of the ministers who took part in the second ICQN/TVSD meeting in 2011 decided on concretizing the guidelines developed at the meeting. They want the participating countries to be able to proceed with the operationalization of the priority goals on which they agreed:

- The promotion of public/private partnerships in the design, implementation and evaluation of training;
- The design and implementation of efficient mechanisms for the social, vocational and economic integration of young people;
- The development of national certification frameworks for recognizing and validating the skills acquired in formal, non-formal and informal training programmes.

To this end, the final declaration in Abidjan in September 2011 proposed the creation of three inter-country working groups whose purpose is to discuss the themes adopted and to propose action plans for the effective inter-country pooling of the most important practices in the fields selected.

Côte d'Ivoire, the convener of the Node, has proposed launching the working group on youth integration first, given the urgency that exists to "establish effective mechanisms for economically integrating young people in an occupation or job to fight against their exclusion from the world of work." The country also has some very significant experience in the above-mentioned field through the PFS.

The overall purpose of the working group would thus be to ask the countries to share their experience in setting up effective programmes for the integration of young people. The specific goals would include:

- To extend the discussion that just took place in Abidjan, from 23 to 25 July 2012, in the course of a seminar entitled "The social and vocational integration of young people in West Africa: The strategies, methods and conditions for success", to include the English-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries;
- To use the experience of the PFS to raise awareness of what is needed to establish programmes that are effective and successful;
- To pool methods and tools that can be used to more effectively fight against the unemployment and hopelessness affecting young people and to assist them in successfully finding job and setting up businesses;

- To make recommendations to the forthcoming meeting of the Ministers in the ICQN/TVSD in order to develop integration programmes that are best suited to fighting youth unemployment.

The working group would bring together the following countries in particular: the six West African countries already mentioned, as well as Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, Angola, Mozambique, Morocco, Mauritius and South Africa.

The results expected

Each country concerned would delegate three representatives: a senior official in the Ministry in charge of vocational integration, a senior official in the Ministry responsible for TVSD (if the delegate is not an expert in the field of vocational integration) and the person in charge of the existing or developing integration programme. The Technical and Financial Partners that support these programmes will also be invited, but at their own expense.

The mission of this group of experts would be:

- To develop a mapping of the effectiveness and relevance of the existing programmes;
- To develop a realistic scenario for the potential sharing of experience and where possible for pooling practices in this field;
- To draw up a document for the attention of the ICQN ministers in order to ask them to make use of inter-country synergies with regard to strategies and practices for the social, vocational and economic integration of young people.

Schedule

The meeting will be held during the first half of November. It will last two days, with the first day being devoted to the exchange of experience and an analysis of the potential for pooling practices. The goal of the second day is to prepare the documents to be submitted to the ministers at the ministerial meeting scheduled for 2013.