

e+i network of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SCD)

E-discussion on youth-specific approaches in the context of Vocational Skills Development (VSD) interventions

Introduction paper and guiding questions

1. Introduction

The employment and income (e+i) network of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SCD) is hosting an e-discussion on youth-specific approaches in the context of VSD interventions. The backstopping team of KEK/INBAS facilitates this e-discussion.

The e-discussion aims to

- discuss, for the first time, on how to deal with the main target group of VSD intervention i.e. youth in order to build their personal, social and technical competences and prepare them for life and work
- exchange experiences and good practice examples related to youth-specific approaches in the context of VSD interventions.

The facilitators will provide a summary of the results and lessons learnt to be shared with the e+i network. Ideally, this would include the identification of most suitable approaches for specific problems young people are facing, such as exposure to violence, health concerns, etc.

2. Background

2.1 Youth unemployment and underemployment

Youth unemployment is a key problem in many countries all over the world and particularly in most of SDC's partner countries. UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that the global youth unemployment rate is expected to remain at 13.1 per cent (= 71 Mio. young people) in 2017. Even if this rate is in developing countries (9,4%) substantially lower than in developed and emerging countries (14,3% resp. 13,7%) it is of greater concern that the number of young people in extreme or moderate poverty despite having a job are living foremost in emerging and developing countries¹. Underemployment is thus, next to unemployment, an important challenge for young people in SDC partner countries.

2.2 Skills and competences

A lack of appropriate skills and competences is often identified as one of the root causes of youth unemployment/underemployment. The mismatch between the demand and supply of skills possessed by young people and the relationship to high youth unemployment rates are particularly important in the developing world². This leads to a double dilemma in which young people are experiencing a difficult school-to-work transition, and businesses do not

¹ <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/2016/08/global-youth-unemployment-rise/>

² https://www.ifw-kiel.de/wirtschaftspolitik/zentrum-wirtschaftspolitik/kiel-policy-brief/kpb-2013/KPB_59.pdf

find suitable candidates for their positions³. In some cases young people are overqualified for their jobs but more relevant is the lack of skills, including entrepreneurship and life (or 'soft') skills. Obviously school curricula are not sufficiently promoting vocational, entrepreneurial and employability training. And a lack of understanding exists of how life skills, respectively personal, social and cultural competences, can be trained, how to include different learning environments in learning strategies and how to harness those skills many young people already have learned in formal, non-formal and informal learning processes and settings.

2.3 Challenges young people are facing

For young people, who are in the transition from childhood to adulthood, vocational training and access to employment and income is often not the only big challenge in their life. At the same time young people enjoy new and more opportunities (new technologies, digital media, educational pathways, access to information and mobility and more) but they also face higher risks and uncertainty⁴. In addition to the typical problems of adolescence many young people in particular from deprived backgrounds have to struggle with multiple and accumulated barriers to social inclusion. They are confronted with problems related to poverty, low educational levels, difficult family situation, housing, health problems, lack of access to social rights, leisure time facilities and civic engagement, exposure to violence and conflict, involvement in gangs and crime, drug problems etc. In view of these challenges VSD strategies have to adapt to the complex realities of young people and find appropriate approaches in order to satisfy their aspirations and needs.

2.4 The role of youth work

Against this background VSD interventions and strategies might liaise with the youth work sector and apply youth work and youth-specific approaches which are close to young people's expectations. According to commonly agreed definitions⁵ youth work covers a broad scope of activities of social, cultural, educational or political nature by, with and for young people. It is managed by professional or voluntary youth workers and is organised in different ways, forms and settings. Youth work is based on non-formal and informal learning processes⁶ in 'out-of-school' education as well as in specific leisure time activities. In this regard it equips young people with skills, competences and experiences for life, including the labour market. Youth work is marked by its participatory and voluntary principles. Youth work engages young people during a significant developmental period of their lives, and therefore it is ideally positioned to enhance their personal, social, educational, vocational and occupational development, well-being and social inclusion. In this respect youth work has a clearly defined position on the continuum of education and lifelong learning and spanning the areas of non-formal and informal learning.

³ <http://peacechild.org/youth-unemployment-causes-and-solutions/>

⁴ <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/eywc-website-final-report>

⁵ e.g. European Commission http://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/implementation/work_en or EU-Council of Europe youth partnership <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/youth-work2>

⁶ See definition of non-formal and informal learning in: Glossary on youth provided by EU-Council of Europe youth partnership <http://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/youth-partnership/glossary/-/glossary/All>

"Non-formal learning is a purposive, but voluntary learning that takes place in a diverse range of environments and situations for which teaching/training and learning is not necessarily their sole or main activity. ... Non-formal learning and education, understood as learning outside institutional contexts (out-of-school) ... is often structured, based on learning objectives, learning time and specific learning support and it is intentional."

"Informal learning is non-purposive learning, which takes place in everyday life contexts in the family, at work, during leisure and in the community."

3. The concept of Vocational Skills Development at SDC

The main target group for SDC interventions in VSD are young people, also from disadvantaged backgrounds, reiterated with the new SDC Education strategy that gives a priority focus on children and youth⁷.

However, programmes that limit their offer to the delivery of technical skills only fall short in most cases. Therefore, SDC follows a concept of vocational skills development that embraces the development of personal, social and technical competences alike. To reach out to young people and motivate them to subscribe to VSD programmes, to assure their retention and successful completion of the programmes as well as their smooth transition to the world of work requires more holistic approaches that take their overall situation, their aspirations, fears, doubts and their potential and interests into consideration.

Therefore the application of holistic approaches and instruments towards building social, personal and technical competences of young people gains importance in SDC's work. Psychosocial approaches are for instance used in the context of a VSD project with youth prone to gang violence in Honduras or in job clubs supporting transition to work in the Balkans. Some of these approaches were developed in the field of youth work, including their non-formal or informal learning elements, and the collaboration with youth programmes, youth projects or youth organisations becomes more and more relevant for VSD strategies in order to better reach out to target groups and meet their requirements.

4. Outlook to the forthcoming e-discussion

In this context, the KEK/INBAS backstopping team on behalf of the SDC VSD focal point takes stock of available experiences and good practice examples on working with youth, adopting a holistic understanding of their situation and needs, including youth work approaches in the context of VSD interventions. It facilitates the e-discussion in the framework of the e+i network (and potentially beyond).

The guiding key questions for this discussion are as follows:

- **Who are the groups of young people the SDC programmes are dealing with?**
What are typical common features of the current generation of young people? What are their main characteristics that have to be considered? What is the difference to the past, if there is any? What did change for young people recently? Are there new target groups and which? What are particular challenges and problems?
- **How do these young people learn and what is the role of new technologies** (mobile phones, social media) in learning processes? What are chances and risks of new media? Which role does informal and non-formal learning play for these young people besides formal learning?
- **Which approaches and instruments can be used and applied by VSD programmes**, including from youth work, to better reach out to their target groups and motivate in particular disadvantaged young people to participate in skills

⁷ https://www.eda.admin.ch/content/dam/deza/en/documents/themen/grund-und-berufsbildung/strategie-deza-bildung_EN.pdf

development? How can they be applied in order to increase retention and successful completion of the courses? How can this be done in collaboration with youth work, youth organisations and youth projects?

- **How can young people better participate** in the design, implementation and evaluation of these strategies? How can this be done in collaboration with youth work, youth organisations and youth projects? How can relevant themes such as intercultural dialogue, democracy, citizenship- and human rights be included in VSD strategies? What are the experiences so far?
- **Which skills achieved through non-formal and informal learning** including in youth work projects can be relevant to support the transition school / training – employment? How personal and social competences are built? How can skills and competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings be validated and recognised and which support measures are needed? How can the impact of non-formal and informal learning be made better visible?
- **How can VSD projects cooperate with other structures?** Which concepts and practices exist in terms of networking, partnerships, cooperation ties, between public and private actors, civil society, youth work providers, young people and others in order to implement holistic inclusion strategies for young people in vulnerable situations?.
- **What experiences are available of VSD interventions in the context of broader programmes and strategies** that combine skills development and with other objectives, such as local (community) and/or business development, health promotion or violence prevention, housing or others? Which examples for integrated joint projects do exist?

5. Proposed course of discussion

Keeping the above-mentioned questions in mind the e-discussion will be facilitated in seven one day stages. The facilitators will feed these seven core topics consecutively into the discussion.

The language of the e-discussion will be English. However, participants can also post their inputs in French or Spanish, but no translation will be provided.

The timeframe of the e-discussion is as follows:

- As of 19 June till 30 June 2017: e-discussion in e+i VSD network; network members share experiences and good practice examples along the seven key questions
- July 2017: analysis of the results and clustering of good practice examples, elaboration of a summary report and recommendations

The online discussion will be facilitated by Hanjo Schild (INBAS Germany) and Katharina Walker (HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Switzerland).

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