
VOCATION EDUCATION AND TRAINING REFORM: THE CASE FROM NIGERIA

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Summary

Policy makers and analysts alike agree with the view that one of the best ways to eradicate poverty is to provide people with relevant skills that will enable them to gain employment in the relevant sector of the economy. It is widely acknowledged that most jobs are now created in the private sector, especially in the small, medium-sized and micro enterprise sectors. Thus, training systems should prepare people to be productively employed (or self-employed) in these sectors (ILO, 1998:57). However, there is increasing recognition that the curricula of the education and training institutions in developing countries is not catching up with the changes in the economy (Bennell, 1996; 1998; Bennell e. al. 1998; Gill et al. 2000; Middleton et al. 1993). Thus, for the vocational education and training (VET) system to play a prominent role in helping unemployment, it needs to be reformed. The Nigerian federal government has realized this need and has embarked on a major reform of the formal VET system. The main objectives of this paper are:

- To provide a summary of the key features of the reform agenda
- To critique the features of the reform agenda
- To draw some of the implications of the agenda vis-à-vis implementation of the reform agenda

Background

This study is undertaken on the VET system in the country. For example, our review of ILO, UNESCO, DFID, OECD, and UNIDO publications in the last few years failed to produce a single study on the interface between labor market and the skills provided by the formal VET system in Nigeria. It is worth noting however, that the Department for International Development (DFID) and the ILO have funded some studies on VET systems in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. Tanzania, Zimbabwe, South Africa). For example, Bennell and colleagues (1998) carried out research in Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Ghana and a number of African countries south of Sahara. Similarly, Kenneth King, probably the most consistent researcher on VET system in Africa, has written widely on VET in East Africa but did not focus on Nigeria (see King 1996). These experts conclude that, by and large, formal education and training in Africa does not meet the needs of the poor and the under privileged as well as the needs of the labor market. Moreover, a publication of the World Bank concluded that “Governments often expect more from their vocational education and training (VET) systems than the systems have been able to provide. These high expectations have resulted in heavy government involvement in VET” (Middleton et al. 1993). According to many experts, training systems in developing countries are inadequate in supporting those seeking work or self-employment, and the inability of vocational training systems to serve labor markets is a problem of crisis proportions (Grierson and McKenzie, 1996).

The Reform Agenda

An adequate analysis of Nigeria's VET system should start with a discussion of the state of the Nigerian educational system as a whole. To say that the system has not lived up to expectations is an understatement. In fact, the failure of educational systems is common across most African countries. To some observers, the root cause of the problem has been largely attributed to colonialism. The colonial educational system has been widely criticized for producing administrators whose main role was the perpetuation of colonial rule. Although the system's emphasis on producing technicians, clerical and administrative personnel has resulted in employable graduates, this was mainly because Nigeria was at an early stage of development. In other words, the economy was able to support the population. Petroleum had not been discovered at that time. The discovery of petroleum as a major source of the country's foreign exchange coupled with the rapid growth in population has exposed weaknesses of the educational system. The post independence policies did not fare any better (Cheru, 2002). As Cheru (2002) pointed out:

“In its most recent manifestations, the educational crisis in Africa has been exacerbated by the regressive macroeconomic policies the African governments have implemented since the 1980s at the behest of IMF and the World Bank. While the purported goal of these economic reform programs was to bring efficiency in the economy and the use of public resources, the outcome has been detrimental to three main components: education, health and nutrition.” (p. 65).

It has been widely noted that the drive for rational economic policies has partly resulted in a dwindling education budget, resulting in inadequate teachers' salaries, books and teaching material. As Cheru (2002) pointed out, sub-Saharan Africa is the only region in the developing world where total educational expenditure has been declining over the past two decades. As demonstrated by the data generated by the ministries and VET institutions, this inadequacy of resources is seriously affecting the quality and employability of graduates. It is worth pointing out that the problem of dwindling resources is exacerbated further by mismanagement. Most observers on Nigerian economic performance point to corruption and misplacement of priority as among the major causes of Nigeria's poor social and economic development. The educational crisis in sub-Saharan Africa in general and Nigeria in particular can be summarized as follows: (a) high demand for education across all levels, (b) high drop-out and repetition rates, despite high enrolment, (c) falling standard of education caused by high enrolment and dwindling resources, (d) high education costs and misallocation of resources, (e) high unemployment among graduates across all levels of the educational system, and (f) disparities in access to and quality of education between rural and urban as well as between male and female members of the population. In fact, we found that graduates from VET institutions in semi-urban areas were more likely to be unemployed than their counterparts in the big cities.

Several attempts have been made by Nigerian governments to address some of the problems highlighted above. Most of the initiatives were geared toward the

problem of graduate unemployment. Government policies and initiatives in this regard focused on *vocationalization* of curricula especially at secondary school levels. This approach still persists, as will be demonstrated in our discussion of the recent Master Plan for the VET system. In the 1970s, there was also an attempt to make science subjects more practical than theory-based. Recently, various poverty reduction initiatives have focused on providing skills for self-employment which are largely targeted at unemployed youths in the urban and semi-urban centers.

It is reasonable to conclude that many government initiatives have not achieved their objectives, given that graduate unemployment is still rising instead of falling. Several reasons can be attributed to the failure of government initiatives to address the limitations of the Nigerian educational system. One of the most significant reasons is the economic structure of the country. The oil boom of the 1970s and 1980s has generated a bias toward white collar jobs, and governments have failed to improve the profile of vocational trade. By putting emphasis on general education, governments have been inadvertently sending messages to children and their parents that the best way to achieve a decent standard of living is by acquiring non-vocational qualifications that will guarantee employment as a white collar worker in the public sector. As Cheru (2002:77) pointed out,

“Any attempt to formalise and ritualise vocational education without significant change in the existing structure of economic and social relationships and particularly in the incentive structure that

directly links the educational sector to the labour market will be futile.”

As will be revealed shortly, VET institutions and their graduates still feel that government policies and actions are biased against them. A superiority complex among graduates from general education over their counterparts from VET institutions still persists. We have discovered that some employers consider graduates from VET institutions as a *cheaper alternative* to graduates from universities. Thus, the wages and benefits attracted by the graduates of VET institutions help perpetuate their perceived low profile in the labor market. This bias is even stronger against the informal sector. This is despite the fact that some employees in the informal sector can earn higher income than their counterparts in the formal sector. Thus vocational trade, particularly in the informal sector, should be more attractive to many. But, as we will argue later, cultural, institutional and inadequate government support has prevented many people from taking the self-employment option.

VET Reform: The Master Plan for 2001-2010

The strategic direction of the VET system in the country is encapsulated in the 2001-2010 Master Plan. The federal government through the federal ministry of education has produced the Master Plan with the sole aim of addressing some of the limitations and failures of the current VET system. The plan is an elaborate and comprehensive one, therefore, the effort is worth acknowledging and commending. However, it is not uncommon for policy makers and technocrats in Nigeria to

produce a wonderful piece of policy documentation only to be shelved and left gathering dust, or implemented without adequate resources or attention to the main purpose and objectives of the policy. In fact, the proposed plan has many potential limitations. Our concern is based on the primary data and soft data collected from the formal and informal sector of the SME and VET system. The following sections summarize the key aspect of the plan and what we consider as its strengths and weaknesses.

Vision and philosophy of the plan: It seems appropriate to start with the vision and philosophy of the Master Plan. The *Master Plan* envisions:

Beginning from the first decade of the 21st century, the emergence of a vibrant Nigeria was catalyzed by a virile technical and vocational education system – a system that is characterized by high public esteem and demand, and high internal efficiency. A democratic Nigeria became triumphant over poverty and corruption and victorious in its struggle for gainful self-employment of its youth through an enriched curriculum of its technical and vocational education delivery system. A peaceful Nigeria where the knowledge, skills and attitudes of its technical and vocational education trainees and graduates assures fulfillment for the individual, prosperity for the nation as well as socio-economic sustainability.

Similar to the vision of the *Master Plan*, the philosophy is also broad and encompassing. The philosophy is based on the premise that:

Technical and vocational education in Nigeria in the 21st century shall prepare Nigerians regardless of gender, socio-economic status, creed and ethnic affiliation, to take control of their own destiny, liberating them from dependency and endowing them with initiative, creativity, critical thinking, entrepreneurial skills, democratic values and appreciation of work and the world of work. Technical and vocational education shall be the collective responsibility of government (federal, state and local) civil society and development partners all working in concert to ensure a harmonious development of the sub-sector.

This vision and philosophy has broadly acknowledged the political, economic and social situation of the country and how the skills and potentials of the people can and should play a significant role. However, given the current emphasis on economic liberalization and the role of the private sector, it is rather surprising that the philosophy of the plan made no mention of the private sector and the role it can and should play in the VET system. Similarly, in spite of the real and potential capacity of the informal sector to deliver on skills acquisition and employment, the vision and philosophy of the policy framework is rather silent on the place of the informal sector in the VET system. Finally, we believe, the issue of the *employability of graduates* of the VET systems should be made much more prominent in the vision and philosophy of the policy framework. However, we noted that civil societies and development partners are specifically mentioned in the plan. However, they did not feature prominently in the action plans as we will indicate shortly.

The objectives of the plan are outlined in Box 1 below. Again, although the objectives are clear and commendable, the private sector does not feature prominently in the list of objectives. It can only be assumed that the developers of the policy framework imply that the objectives relate to both the public and private sector. This approach is inadequate given that most formal VET institutions in Nigeria are oriented toward preparing graduates for employment in the public sector. Therefore, if the framework wishes to give the private sector a prominent role in the VET system, it should be made clear in the list of objectives. Otherwise, the old emphasis on the public sector employment will persist despite the attempt to shift the economy more toward the private sector.

Box 1: Objectives of National Policy Framework on VET

The objectives of technical and vocational education in Nigeria in the 21st Century are to:

- Produce the semi-skilled, skilled and technical manpower necessary to restore, revitalize, energize, operate and sustain the national economy and substantially reduce unemployment;
- Provide technical and vocational education that is broad-based in nature, accommodating all ages, at all periods of life without discrimination or bias on grounds of sex, intellectual talents and aptitudes, physical disabilities or culture, religion or ideology;

- Reform the content of technical and vocational education to make it more responsive to the socio-economic needs of the country;
- Serve as a means of national defense against poverty brought about by lack of job skills;
- Harmonize and inter-relate with industry and the labor market in terms of resources for training as well as occupational and production standards;
- Raise and sustain a generation of job creators rather than job seekers;
- Enhance access to technical and vocational education programs at all levels of the educational system;
- Ensure equity of access, participation and completion rates.

The plan is supposed to be based on a comprehensive analysis of the priority areas. Specific objectives and action points were identified. There are nine priority areas identified in the *Master Plan*. They relate to *access and equity; curriculum and curriculum delivery; facilities; teacher production and certification; remuneration and incentives; qualification framework; monitoring research and evaluation; enhancement; upward mobility*. Specifically, the nine priority areas are:

1. Getting all Nigerian youths to benefit from qualitative technical and vocational education.
2. The provision of learning experience that will ensure that beneficiaries of

technical and vocational education schemes have job skills for solving many of Nigeria's socio-economic problems.

3. Provision of an enabling environment that will ensure that students derive the maximum benefit from technical and vocational education.
4. Preparation of a new breed of teachers that will translate the new vision of technical and vocational education into action in classrooms, workshops, laboratories and other places of learning.
5. Motivation for a better performance from the new breed of teachers through appropriate welfare scheme and incentives.
6. National assessment and certification.
7. Monitoring the progress of the delivery of technical and vocational education to ensure that all is going well.
8. Status of technical and vocational education institutions.
9. Academic and professional progression of trainees.

Undoubtedly, most of the priority areas are very relevant to the context of the Nigerian VET situation. However, it also depends on how they are interpreted by those who initiate and write the policy and how the policies are implemented. A closer look at the objectives and action plan of each priority area could provide an indication and an understanding of how the priorities are

conceived and comprehended by those who develop the *Master Plan*. The following paragraphs provide a few examples of these objectives and action plans.

Priority Objectives and Action Plans

The first priority area for the Master Plan is to get all Nigerian youth to benefit from qualitative technical and vocational education. This priority area has five specific objectives which are: (1) To enable children in Nigeria who have taken advantage of the UBE program to acquire a sound foundation in technical and vocational education (VET); (2) To increase access to VET at the secondary (technical college) and post secondary levels to a minimum of 30% of year 2000 rates; (3) To achieve a 50% reduction in gender imbalance in access, participation, retention and performance; (4) To expand VET opportunities to disadvantaged groups such as nomads and the disabled; (5) To achieve 50% public enlightenment on the value of technical and vocational education for self, family, community and national development. The objectives outlined above are undoubtedly based on a supplier model of vocational education. This is because the Situational Analysis of the master plan did not provide statistical evidence of demand for VET in the country. Instead, it is assumed that, because there is an imbalance in enrolment of students in favor of general education, there should be an increase in enrolment of students to technical and vocational institutions to address the imbalance. The analysis also did not provide evidence of the employability of current graduates of the VET system, many of whom are without jobs after graduation. It is worth pointing out that we are not arguing against higher

enrolment in VET, but questioning the assumption underlining it. If the assumption is wrong, the outcome of higher enrolment will be wrong and vice versa. The objectives of the first priority area are accompanied by action plan which is summarized in Box 2 below.

Box 2: Action plan for Priority Area (1)

- Strengthen the technical and vocational education component of the UBE through a massive and comprehensive rehabilitation of existing technical colleges
- The modification of the admission policy to junior secondary schools to enable all technical colleges to admit their students from junior secondary school level
- Removal of the stigma attached to VET as being inferior
- Establishment of one Federal Technical college in each state of the federation and one State Technical college in each local government area to serve as model of excellence in VET
- Boost the benefit of non-formal VET
- Increase access to VET at secondary and post-secondary levels to a minimum of 30% of year 2000
- Achieve a 50% reduction in gender imbalance in access, participation, retention and performance
- Expand VET opportunities to disadvantaged groups such as nomads and the disabled

- Achieve 50% public enlightenment on the value of technical and vocational education for self, family, community and national development

Some of the elements of the action plan are consistent with what is needed to solve some of the problems facing the VET system in the country. For example, the idea of removing the stigma attached to VET in the country is a good one. Similarly, recognizing and boosting non-formal vocational education is an excellent idea. However, some elements of the plan seem to be wishful thinking while others are not based on sound analysis of the problems of VET in the country. For example, the idea of establishing more VET institutions by the states and Federal government failed to take into account that many of the graduates of the current institutions are unemployed. Similarly, most of the current institutions are ill-equipped to carry out their mandate of providing vocational training and development. A stronger case can be made for making the current VET institutions more viable than creating more institutions that will end up ill-equipped as well.

One of the priority areas of the *Master Plan* is *the Provision of learning experience that will ensure that beneficiaries of the technical and vocational education scheme have job skills for solving many of Nigeria's socio-economic problems*. This priority comes with ten specific objectives which can be summarized as: (1) The encouragement of the transfer of culture and tradition through VET; (2) Employability through provision of *survival skills*; (3) An increase in the number of qualified teaching staff to teach

trade courses; (4) The rehabilitation and renovation of facilities and equipments; (5) Increasing the number of student enrolments by creating more federal technical colleges; (6) Reviewing and updating the curriculum of technical colleges; (7) Reviewing and updating the curriculum of polytechnics and monotronics; (8) Enabling polytechnics to implement core engineering and computer programs; (9) Set up a Centre for Work Experience in each senatorial district; (10) The inclusion of entrepreneurial courses in all programs to enhance students' chances for employment.

The objectives outlined to achieve the second priority of the Master Plan are commendable. If they are successfully implemented, they will make a significant positive impact on the VET system in the country. However, some elements of the objectives carry the old baggage of the supply model of VET. For example, the idea of increasing the number of students in technical colleges through the creation of more federal technical colleges is not consistent with the information in the *Master Plan* which indicates that most of the existing VET institutions in the country are dilapidated and need renovating. Thus, renovation of the facilities will require enormous resources which will be taken away by the creation of more technical colleges.

The actions earmarked to achieve the objectives of the second priority echo the government initiatives of the 1970s when there was a significant attempt to vocationalize the curriculum of secondary schools. Indeed, the current government would do well to seek the advice and experience of the Keyan Educational

System Reform where primary education was vocationalized with inclusive results (Oketch 1995). The action plan for the current master plan includes:

- Vocationalization of primary school curriculum
- Training of primary school teachers in vocational subjects
- Review of colleges of Education Curriculum to include vocational subjects
- Modularizing senior secondary school (VET) curriculum
- Mounting of courses for teachers which will lead to the award of Advance Craft Certificates

The above is a brief summary of the action plan designed to achieve the objectives of the second priority of the master plan. In a nutshell, the assumptions underlining this action plan are not backed up by empirical evidence but by the traditional belief that vocational education is the main answer to youth unemployment. While this belief has some credibility, the results of vocational education will depend on the social and economic situation of the country. Over the years, general education rather than vocational has provided better opportunities for employment. This is because the social and economic situation in Nigeria was more favorable to general education. There is not enough evidence to suggest that the situation has significantly changed. Producing more people with vocational skills, especially in the technical area, is not likely to improve the employability of graduates. This is particularly the case because the Nigerian economy is

progressively based on traders and middlemen instead of producers. Many industrialists have found it more profitable to import goods rather than produce them at home. This strategy limits the opportunity for graduates of vocational institutions to find employment in local industries. Similarly, our investigation has found that many automobile workshops owned by big businesses have closed down due to the economic situation of the country. This action further limits the opportunity of graduates of polytechnics to find jobs in a formal sector of the economy where their skills will generate higher income.

Our analysis of the objectives and action plan of the second priority area failed to identify an integration of what is planned with the economic and social situation of the country. Thus, the objectives and the plans do not reflect the social and economic conditions of the country. This is because the solutions to the VET problems are sought within the traditional formal VET system where the government and public sector play a significant role. Unfortunately, this approach has proved to be inadequate but policymakers find it difficult to break away from this paradigm. For example, in the list of objectives and action plans for the second priority, there is no mention or even indication of the role of the private sector, informal sector, employers' associations or trade associations. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the VET institutions have developed an orientation which leads to preparing their students for employment in the public sector.

The third priority of the master plan focuses on "provision of an enabling environment that will ensure that students derive

maximum benefit from technical and vocational education". The objectives and action plan to address this priority area is shown in box 3 below.

Box 3: Objectives and Action Plan of Priority 1 Objectives

- Rehabilitation of facilities is necessary to equip the existing Technical Colleges and Polytechnics sufficiently to meet accreditation standards and optimize their enrolments;
- A substantial increase in the numbers of both Technical Colleges and Polytechnics is necessary to raise the percentage of VET specialists in the workforce;
- A special arrangement is necessary to produce the additional teachers to meet both the current deficit and staff the new institutions;
- Basic VET skill training (non-formal) must be aggressively promoted to cater for unemployed youth and adults.

Action

The following steps are recommended to address the identified problems:

- Rehabilitation of Classrooms, Laboratories and Workshops in Technical Colleges and Polytechnics
- Rehabilitation of Vocational Training Centers
- Provision of Funds for Qualified Technical Colleges to run Advanced Craft Programs

- Building of one Federal Technical College in each Senatorial District and on Polytechnic in each State
- Training of an additional 20,000 Teachers for Technical Colleges and 10,000 Teachers for Polytechnics: Publication of Textbooks for Technical Schools
- Publication of Textbooks for Polytechnics

The above objectives and action plan were based on a situational analysis which revealed that VET institutions suffer from dilapidated and inadequate infrastructures, books and instructional equipments. The analysis also revealed that the ratio of technical colleges to conventional secondary schools in Nigeria ranks among the lowest even among the developing countries. There is also an indication in the analysis that polytechnics' enrolment is barely half that of the universities. Even casual observation would indicate that the findings of the situational analysis are a fair representation of the current situation of the VET system. In general the master plans' approach to solving the problem is to expand and renovate the VET institutions. However, it would seem much more appropriate to address the current inadequacies of resources in the system rather than to expand the coverage of VET system given that there is no empirical evidence of high demand on VET as mentioned earlier in the previous sections. Thus, some of the objectives and actions are not consistent with each other. Given the limited resources in the country, there is a significant potential conflict between rehabilitating existing VET institutions and building new ones. The objectives can best

be described as a wish-list rather than a realistic target because they are so ambitious in nature.

The fourth priority in the Master Plan focuses on the production of more VET teachers by VET institutions. The situational analysis of the Master Plan indicates that there is a demand for 270,000 VET teachers in secondary schools across the country. Based on the plan to create more VET institutions, the demand for VET teachers is bound to increase significantly. The objectives and plan of action to address the fourth priority are presented in box 4 below.

Box 4: Objectives and Action Plan of Priority 4 Objectives

- To increase the production of technical teachers in terms of numbers and quality
- To improve the quality of technical teachers produced
- To evolve appropriate means of retaining qualified technical teachers
- To ensure that teachers with requisite qualifications teach at the appropriate level in the school system where they are certified to teach
- To ensure that there are no blind alleys in the upward academic mobility of the technical teachers
- To establish appropriate institutions for the training of the teachers to fit the require level

Action

- Increase the number of science and technical colleges and equip them to offer advance craft course for the production of technical teachers
- Equip/refurbish the existing technical teacher training colleges to produce quality teachers. Comparable salary and incentives given in industry should be given to teachers in the system
- Government should support Polytechnics and Universities with technical teacher programs to reinforce their teacher education programs
- Federal Government should as a matter of urgency convert one of the existing Universities of Technology to a Teachers University of Science and Technology
- At the JSS, the following will form distinct specialization areas – Agriculture, Business Studies, Home Economics, and Computer practice. Introductory Technology should be split into three main components:
 1. Construction Technology & Technical Drawing.
 2. Mechanical and Manufacturing Technology & Technical Drawing.
 3. Electricity, Electronics and Technical Drawing.
- Teachers at any level should have the opportunity to progress to a

higher level, provided they have the aptitude and qualifications for upward mobility

- Polytechnics with appropriate manpower and instructional resources should be empowered to award degrees in Technology Education

As far as the demand for VET teachers is concerned, there is a strong case for encouraging graduates of polytechnics and universities to consider a career in teaching after undergoing further training. However, the irony of the situation is that many of those trained as VET teachers do not pursue careers in teaching. Instead, they seek careers in more lucrative sectors of the economy such as banking and manufacturing. The other problem connected to the shortage of VET teachers is that there are many qualified VET teachers willing to teach but only in the urban centers. In fact, during our investigation, one director of a school indicated that they wished to hire more available teachers but due to a government embargo on employment, they were not able to do so. Close observation of the objectives and action plans of the fourth priority indicates that, if implemented, they can help address the shortage of VET teachers in the country.

One of the major priorities of the Master Plan is to improve the image of VET and its institutions. That vocational qualifications suffer from an inferiority complex and a low image is a fact widely recognized in the country and well acknowledged by the Master Plan. The plan identified the following as the factors militating against

the growth, development, image and performance of VET system in the country:

1. “The antithetical behavior of academic (liberal) education i.e. its disdain of and hostility and discrimination towards VET.
2. VET accommodation of the rejects of academic education as a confirmation of its (VET) non-academic (intellectual) status.
3. The capital intensive nature of VET.
4. Low economic returns to individuals in VET due to its low job value in the labor market.” (P. 16).

The above statements are a clear indication that people in the VET system do not see themselves as equal partners in the Nigerian educational system. This is why many graduates of the VET system prefer to be identified with the general education system. For example, graduates of Federal Technical Teachers college opt for career in the commercial sector instead of teaching in VET institutions. To address the issue of VET image, the Master Plan outlines the following objectives:

- To reposition VET institutions in Nigeria so that they can contribute more effectively to the technological emancipation of the country
- To make VET institutions more attractive to the youth and students
- To counter or reverse the antithetical behavior of academic or liberal education in favor of VET
- To capitalize VET in order to make it more attractive to youth

- To enhance VET job value and economic returns
- To recognize and enhance apprenticeship through some form of institutionalization and/or regulation for maximum benefits
- To remove the liberal-technical dichotomy by empowering the polytechnics to award degrees in special technology areas where they have adequate resources and expertise. (P. 17)

A number of elements in the plan of action are worth highlighting. The first element is the granting of legal status to polytechnics and colleges of education to award their own degrees. This is viewed as an action that will address the inferiority complex and low image of VET institutions and their graduates. The second element in the action plan worth highlighting is the suggestion of recognition of skills acquisition centers and apprenticeship training by all tiers of governments. This recognition is assumed or expected to improve the image of qualification and skills acquired through informal means. This is a highly appropriate suggestion which can help improve the image of vocational careers. However, improving the image of VET institutions and vocational skills cannot rely on government action alone. In fact, in a market economy such as Nigeria’s, employers would make equal (if not more) contribution to improving the image than government action. Unfortunately, the master plan appears to concentrate on the role of government and its agencies as the main means of improving the image of the VET system. This approach, by focusing on government and its agencies, is a reflection of the dominance of government not only in the educational

system but also in the social and economic system of the country, particularly in the formal sector.

Academic and professional progression is one of the main priorities of the Master Plan. The main thrust of this priority is aptly captured by the concept of equal opportunity. This is clearly elaborated by the following statement:

“...the philosophy for equal opportunities for all citizens of Nigeria appears elusive for many clienteles in technical and vocational sub sector. The artisan cannot progress into craftsman cadre unless he formally enters an institution, nor could craftsman become a technologist without formal institutionalised training. These bottlenecks are created because non-formal VET is not provided for in the National Policy on Education. At higher level also, HNDs are not easily registered as professional bodies. The universities would not accept them to pursue a higher degree even after completing a bridge programme.” (P. 18)

The above succinctly summarizes the current status of VET in the country. The specific objectives outlined by the Master Plan to address inequality in the system include recognition of non-formal vocational education, the elimination of gender bias in VET programs, the provision of opportunities for disadvantaged youth to acquire vocational skills and greater recognition of HND holders. The plan recommends harmonization of VET qualifications across all levels of the VET system. The action plan also includes a suggestion for the integration of the non-formal vocational education system with the formal one. To address the issue of

gender bias in the VET system there is a plan for intensive vocational guidance and counseling for girls in secondary schools.

The objectives and action plan are well intentioned but fail to take the business community and the informal sector of the country into account. For example, the integration of the formal VET system with the informal system is a good idea, but the informal trainers and the informal sector of the economy are not adequately articulated in the Master Plan or specific objectives and action plans. Similarly, there is no indication that local entrepreneurs and successful business people will be involved in the design and delivery of training.

Reforming the assessment and certification system of VET is one of the main priorities of the Master Plan. Central to the reform is the formation of a National Authority for Vocational Qualification (NAVQ). This is to take over all the responsibilities of the National Assessment Board for Business and Technical Education (NABTEB). The key difference between the new authority and the former authority is the inclusion of informal apprenticeship within the domain or jurisdiction of the NAVQ. As pointed out in the Master Plan:

“Realising the important role of essential manpower production at the non-formal level by the open apprenticeship scheme nationwide, it is desirable for the trainees of these schemes to be officially certified. Any attempts to certify them well require some input into their training methodologies,

relevancy and currency of their curriculum, etc.” (P. 20)

To achieve the broad aim of the reform, specific objectives and an action plan were outlined by the master plan. Box 5 below presents the objectives and the action plan.

Box 5: Objectives and Action Plan of Priority 6 Objectives

- To standardize VET curricula in Primary, JS, SS Schools and Polytechnics
- To standardize assessment and certification processes at the different centers of education
- To monitor students’ performance, population and other vital statistics needed for improvement
- To ensure good quality teachers at all levels
- To ensure VET institutions are well equipped and staffed
- To incorporate the roadside apprenticeship system into the VET for performance improvement, assessment and certification

Action

- All tiers of governments involved in VET must ensure compliance with the minimum laid out curricula at all levels of VET education
- Assessment and examination bodies such as WAEC, NECO, NABTEB and the Polytechnics must ensure quality control in schools and in the

conduct of malpractice-free examinations

- NABTEB and NBTE should carry out adequate and comprehensive accreditation of courses in the various institutions to ensure quality of facilities and staff
- NABTEB should continue to assess and certify craftsmen, master craftsmen and artisans
- NABTEB should also certify after assessment, the various artisans and craftsmen involved in the different forms of apprenticeship systems
- NABTEB is to transform into the National Authority for Vocational Qualification. (NAVQ)
- Certificates to be awarded are:
 - i. WASC, SSSC & NECO (for secondary School Leavers)
 - ii. NTC, NBC, ANTC & ANBC (For Science and Technical College students and qualified artisans and craftsmen)
 - iii. ND and HND certificates (for polytechnic students)
- The Federal Ministry of Labour should disengage from certifying artisans. Funding should be done through all tiers of government, NGOs, multinational organizations, parents, ETF, Ops, beneficiaries and all other stakeholders

Conclusion

This paper has summarized and analyzed the Nigerian VET reform agenda. In a nutshell, if appropriately implemented, the master plan will make a significant contribution to raising the image of the informal VET system as well as helping to improve the standard of living of people operating in the sector.

However, there is an issue regarding the way these objectives and the action plan come about. During our investigation we discovered that the informal sector is largely ignored by the formal VET system and government educational agencies. The only agencies or aims of government that are interested in the informal VET system are the revenue collectors and town planning departments. To succeed in integrating the formal system with the informal system a closer involvement of the latter in the design, delivery and certification of training is absolutely necessary. So far there is no indication that this is adequately taking place.

The final priority of the Master Plan is the issue of monitoring and evaluation of the implementation. In its analysis, the master plan provided an honest and candid assessment of why the plan (like many other plans before it) might not be implemented because of the lack of resources, lack of expertise and failure to budget for implementation. To avoid this happening, the following objectives were outlined:

- To ascertain the extent to which actual implementation of the VET is being carried out as planned i.e. checking the validity and accuracy of the implementation

- To ascertain the extent to which the performance objectives are being met, for example, are the trainees suitably trained to cope with the world of work? (p. 22)

The action plan for the achievement of the objectives is based on the proposal for the formation of a Presidential Task Force to implement the action plan. The proposal is based on the recognition that the implementation will involve many parties, stakeholders and government agencies, where effective coordination will be a key success factor. Undoubtedly the idea of a coordinating committee is a good one; however, coordination should only be the main role of the taskforce. The task of implementation should be given to various stakeholders who are more in tune with the actions needed to implement the plan. Any attempt to overburden the implementing parties with bureaucracy will only lead to failure. In a nutshell, the taskforce should be an enabling agent not a stumbling block. Also, implementing parties and stakeholders should be provided with the authority, responsibility and resources for the implementation. Accordingly, there should be a reward and punishment system attached to the implementation process.

The thrust of the *Master Plan* is commendable, which if implemented can improve the VET system and its output. However, the priority areas, objectives and action points do not acknowledge the role that the private sector can and should play. If it was acknowledged by the planners, they did not make it clear in the *Master Plan*. By and large, although the Master Plan is *proactive*, it is not *creative* enough to address the complexity and intractability of the problems facing the VET system

within the context of the Nigerian economic and social situation. In a nutshell, the *Master Plan* can contribute to the improvement of the VET system; however, there are key questions that need to be answered. Some of the questions are as follows:

- What role will the private sector play in the new VET system?
- Why do economic and social systems not feature prominently in the action points?
- What role would the informal sector play in the new VET system?
- Would the plan be implemented? How will the implementation differ from the previous initiatives?
- What resources would be allocated for implementation?
- Will there be stability and consistency in implementation and operation of the new VET system?

We believe the extent to which the above questions are answered will determine the outcome of the *Master Plan*. Several researchers have investigated VET systems and VET reform around the world.

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