

Pan African Initiative for Digital Transformation of Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Skills Development Systems

« State of play and prospects for a digital transformation of TVET and
Skills Development systems in Africa »

Presentation Note

April 2021

1. Background

Digitization and the gradual integration of new technologies represents one of the main challenges for TVET systems globally. An effective digital transition would allow skills development systems to better meet the ever-changing demands of labor markets by providing young people with relevant skills. Since 2020, the pandemic context has strengthened the need for a digital transition of TVET systems around the world, showing the enormous potential for digitizing TVET and identifying good practices according to the specificities of each context.

There are considerable opportunities for a true digital transition for TVET systems in sub-Saharan Africa, even in spite of the current digital divide. However, at the current stage decision-makers, planners and managers of national systems do not have an empirical knowledge base enabling for better decision-making in this domain. The absence of targeted research and in particular of studies tacking stock of the current situation in regard to the digitalization of TVET in Africa represents in this sense a major gap at the current stage.

A better use of digital technologies can strengthen skills development systems, leading to a better match between training and employment. A higher rate of digitization could provide a direct contribution to the SDGs. This applies in particular to progress on SDG 4, given the benefits of a digital transition in terms of expansion of access to education and the economies of scale leading to greater equity. Additional benefits include increasing employment opportunities for young people with a focus on 21st century skills, with direct relevance to SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth.

Within the framework of the African Union's Continental Education Strategy (CESA 2016-2025), UNESCO has taken the lead on issues related to the digitization of TVET and skills development systems. To this end, UNESCO and its partners, in particular the AUC, AfDB, GIZ, IDEP / ECA, IFEF, GIZ and AUDA-NEPAD, set up in January 2021 the **'Pan-African Initiative for the digital transformation of TVET and skills development in Africa'** which aims to create an enabling ecosystem for a digital transformation of TVET and skills development systems in Africa in connection with the 2030 Agenda for Education.

One of the six components of this continental initiative concerns the establishment of “**a regular and sustainable mechanism for the evaluation, monitoring and discussion on progress in the digital transformation of TVET and skills development systems in African countries**”. This component includes, among other things (i) setting up and running an online platform for the exchange and sharing of resources and knowledge, (ii) the organization of regional webinars / conferences and (iii) production at regular intervals of national, regional and continental reports on the state of digital transformation of TVET and skills development systems respectively in countries, economic communities and Africa.

It is within the framework of the implementation of the activities of this last sub-component that the Africa office of the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP-UNESCO Dakar) joined the initiative to support the publication of a continental report on “*the state of play and prospects on the digital transformation of TVET and skills development systems in Africa*”.

2. Objectives of the mission

The objective of this mission is to take stock of the current state of play as well as of prospects for the digital transformation of TVET and skills development systems in Africa. This will lead to the identification of a number of recommendations and actions to accelerate the digital transformation of TVET in Africa.

More specifically, this study will make it possible to:

- Take stock of the state of the digital transformation of TVET and the skills development system in African countries;
- Highlight good practices that are worth sharing with other countries;
- Highlight the issues that are common to several countries;
- Identify the potential roles and contributions that national and multinational companies operating in digital and digital ecosystems could play in accelerating the digital transformation of TVET and skills development systems in African countries, with a focus on best practices;
- Identify, with a focus on best practices, collaborative approaches between development partners (especially those at regional and continental level) to optimize the impact of the support and assistance provided to the countries;
- Highlight the priority needs of countries in terms of support from partners, particularly in respect to technical support for the planning and management of the digital transition;
- Put forward operational recommendations for countries for the short and medium term to: (1) accelerate the digital transformation of TVET and above all (ii) turn the digital transformation into an asset and an opportunity to better meet economic and social demand for skills;
- Put forward operational recommendations for development partners in the short and medium term in order to ensure better synergy and consistency in the various supports provided to States following the Covid19 crisis.

3. Questions and themes addressed by the study

The study, which will make it possible to construct this inventory and identify these perspectives, will seek to provide answers to a series of questions such as (not exhaustive):

- (a) How can digital transformation be effective in a context of persistent infrastructure gaps in TVET at both institutional and "ecosystem" level?
- (b) What are the prerequisites for a real digital, realistic and progressive transformation of TVET in African countries?
- (c) What cost-effective and appropriate approaches are possible to introduce / strengthen / accelerate the digital transformation of the entire skills development ecosystem?

In this perspective, the study will have to take into account two main aspects: on the one hand, how digital transformation is taken into account in terms of governance and functioning of the TVET system and on the other hand, the extent to which digital technologies are mainstreamed in the training offer, in line with the labor market needs.

Concerning the **aspects of governance and functioning**, the study will analyze in particular these issues (non-exhaustive list):

- policies and strategy for digitization of skills development and TVET, including elements related to the existing institutional framework;
- mechanisms for private sector involvement, in particular digital actors;
- existing investments in the digitization of training and, more generally, in the digitization of productive activities;
- the presence of a digital culture in the country, including in the public administration and in the private and informal sector.

This will help to better understand the institutional and operational context around the digitization of TVET in the country.

For the second major area of focus, the **role of digitization in the training offer** and in the links of TVET and skills development systems with the labor market, the emphasis will be on:

- the digitization of training courses and their orientation to digital skills and in the ICT sectors and in other sectors;
- the level of digitalization of teaching resources (online platforms, artificial intelligence, simulators, virtual and augmented reality, blockchain, gamification) including evaluation resources;
- the existence in the skills development system of more flexible types of training (micro-modules) and digital training resources in the formal, informal and non-formal sector in a logic of lifelong learning;
- the digital skills of trainers: current state of play and needs, integration into initial and continuing training plans and career plans;
- the digital infrastructure available for TVET: connectivity within training centers and possibility of connectivity for trainers and learners;
- the level of digitalization of employment and training observation and monitoring services the level of digitalization of employment and professional integration services;
- the educational and vocational guidance system;
- the place of digital skills in qualification frameworks.

Each of the above-listed fields for the two main areas of focus will be the subject of a stock-taking exercise and an analysis of strengths and weaknesses as well as action points and recommendations for stronger digitization.

This will make it possible to identify the major trends, the opportunities for greater digitalization and also the key obstacles to be removed. It will also be an opportunity to highlight good practices as well as the best guidelines for educational policies to promote a real digital transformation.