



United Nations
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UNEVOC

International Centre
for Technical and Vocational
Education and Training



Rift Valley Technical Training Institute: The Innovation Awards

i-hubs Innovative Practice

Context

Preparing youth for the future

There is a tremendous need in Kenya, and indeed globally, to prepare youth for new economic opportunities by improving their skills, employability, industry competitiveness and capacity for innovation. Recognizing this need, Rift Valley Technical Training Institute (RVTTI) decided to prioritize investments in innovation and focused on an area that is often overlooked in the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector.

Increasing the capacity to solve societal problems

There is a growing consensus that encouraging innovation among youth in TVET significantly increases their capacity to solve societal problems and prepare for an unpredictable future. However, one key hindrance is often the lack of funds to commercialize innovations or even develop the initial idea to its full capacity.

Rewarding innovative thinking

As a means of incentivizing innovative thinking, RVTTI developed the Innovation Awards in 2015. The Awards align with national development priorities, such as Kenyan Vision 2030, and shine a spotlight on the creativity and innovative abilities of TVET students.

Over the years, the Innovation Awards have been improved and expanded. In the most recent edition, students from across the East African Community (EAC) were invited to participate. Innovative solutions were presented in a variety of areas, including but not limited to, Engineering, Medical and Pharmaceutical Services, Food and Nutrition, Business Processes, and Information Technology.

Institutional Overview

Rift Valley Technical Training Institute (RVTTI), Eldoret, Kenya

Established: 1962

Student body: 5,200 (2019)

Teachers and trainers: 138 (2019)

RVTTI is a leading technical training institution in Kenya. As an East African Community (EAC) Centre of Excellence in TVET, RVTTI plays a pivotal role in helping Kenya achieve its development goals through competence-based education and training in technical and business disciplines.

Mission statement: *"To train competent and innovative human resources in technical and vocational disciplines to meet the changing needs of industry and society."*

Enablers of institutional innovation

The following four dimensions of institutional operation represent the evaluation lens that was applied in the selection of this initiative as an Innovative Practice:

Strategy and Management: Strong leadership to align institutional, regional, national and global development priorities in a single Innovative Practice.

Teaching and Learning: Created a system for teaching and developing innovation skills such as creativity and problem-solving.

Products and Services: New incubation and mentoring opportunities for students represents evolving products and services beyond what is normally provided by a TVET institution.

Ecosystem Relationship Management: RVTTI began by introducing innovation into its ecosystem, which is now responding by approaching RVTTI for new opportunities.

Implementing the Innovation Awards was driven by a variety of factors across all dimensions, but the most important involved RVTTI's Strategy and Management.

A strategic decision taken by the Board of Management made the Innovation Awards a top governance priority. In the initial phase of the project, an analysis of innovation award schemes in other institutions was conducted to learn key lessons from their experiences, particularly those in higher education.

Since the Awards were established, the management of RVTTI has made deliberate efforts to create an enabling environment for innovation to thrive. A Research and Development Coordination Office was set up to ensure the smooth running of innovation activities and to foster innovation at the departmental level.

The Innovation Awards have impacted Teaching and Learning by providing teachers, students and the ecosystem with practical examples of how new innovation-related skills and competencies could be applied.

Innovation begins in the classroom. The Innovation Awards have provided an opportunity to shift curricular focus to core innovation skills such as creativity and problem-solving. Students are also taught project management and how to develop business proposals. Previously, RVTTI's instruction relied on traditional, classroom-based TVET instruction and was geared toward completing exams and graduation. An institution-wide initiative such as the Innovation Awards has been a game changer for innovating content and delivery.

Information and communications technology is a crucial tool that teachers and students have used to refine innovations. Without such resources, there would be no way for the innovators to evolve. Furthermore, modernizing curricula and teaching methods has helped to engage and motivate teachers and trainers.

Through the Awards, faculty members have been provided with greater opportunities to work with industry partners and gain relevant skills and experiences that have led to new roles, such as mentoring young entrepreneurs. In parallel, students have benefitted from an enriched classroom experience - not only are they encouraged to take part in the competition for the opportunity to win, but also for the exposure, promotion, and new skills associated with submitting an entry.

New Products and Services, such as business incubation and registering intellectual property, have emerged as a result of the initiative.

The overall result of this initiative has been a tremendous increase in the number of innovative proposals. In addition, the Innovation Awards have enabled RVTTI to work with external partners on an analysis of skills demands and business opportunities in East Africa. This included an analysis of funding opportunities for aspiring TVET entrepreneurs – normally a key weakness in business development. Through these partnerships, RVTTI has been able to increase its incubation capacities, provide start-up business services and offer assistance in registering intellectual property for products developed by students. Mentorship has also been expanded, including advice to students on how to patent their innovations and coaching of students whose innovations did not meet the threshold.

RVTTI has used the Innovation Awards scheme to further its research into TVET, with an emphasis on the role of TVET in innovation. Consequently, RVTTI has combined the Innovation Awards with an annual TVET conference for East Africa. The conference promotes research in TVET and provides insights into how innovative TVET skills can lead to business development opportunities. It also provides a local, national and international platform for industry leaders, policymakers and researchers to share knowledge and reflect on current needs and opportunities for TVET skills.

In terms of Ecosystem Relationship Management, RVTTI has gained new capacities to identify key actors and potential partners.

The visibility of the Innovation Awards has motivated national and local partners to deepen their level of engagement with RVTTI. This includes providing technical and financial support for student start-up enterprises, as well as work-based experience for teachers.

By developing partnerships and constantly engaging with industry professionals, RVTTI has facilitated opportunities for students to complete attachments with leading companies and gain hands-on experience in their selected fields of study. Teachers have also benefitted from institutional partnerships by having the opportunity to enrol in online courses to equip themselves with twenty-first century pedagogical skills.



Insights

Tap into ideas

Students have diverse talents, but unless their passion is ignited, we run the risk of them never bringing their innovative ideas to life. Bearing this in mind, efforts need to be made to encourage and mentor students in applying the knowledge gained in the classroom setting to the real world. The Innovation Awards are a unique way of recognizing the untapped talent and ingenuity of TVET students. A further and potentially more valuable piece of the puzzle is that the Awards provide an outlet for students to learn how to make their ideas viable in the market.

Tips for implementing innovation awards

- Credibility is achieved through a rigorous evaluation process. Without transparent evaluation, the awards would struggle to attract high quality entries and industry partners.
- A revolving fund is crucial for any institution that intends to organize annual innovation awards.
- There is a need for follow-up after the awards, where students are guided on how to make their projects viable and how to better communicate their ideas.
- Media coverage should be explored to increase visibility of the event and attract future sponsors.

UNESCO-UNEVOC Innovative Practice

This practice is considered innovative because growth, maturation and scalability are built into the strategy. From the very beginning, the Innovation Awards provided benefits to immediate stakeholders in the RVTTI network. Subsequent years have seen a steady stream of new stakeholders, collaborations and opportunities for award-winning entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into viable businesses and solve real social problems in Kenya.

UNESCO-UNEVOC encourages innovative practices, such as RVTTI's Innovation Awards, that have high growth potential and present opportunities for collaboration with other TVET institutions and stakeholders. As the RVTTI example shows, a clear strategy helps ensure the project's momentum and growth are effectively channelled.

Learn more

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Skills for innovation Hubs (i-hubs) is a global initiative led by UNESCO-UNEVOC and supported by the Beijing Caofeidian International Vocational Education City (BCEC), with contributions from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ).

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