



Making 'TVET' cool: Botswana shows the way in vocational training



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Changing negative perceptions of TVET required the key ingredients of creativity and flexibility in a campaign in Botswana to make vocational training “cool”. This was the theme of a national communication campaign begun in 2019 and funded by the European Union. The project was implemented by Young Africa Botswana, a local NGO.

The aim was to raise the appetite for vocational training, or TVET, without being too critical of relevant stakeholders as we needed to keep them on our side! The way to do so was to push and nudge from all sides. Happily, the EU was supportive and allowed us to constantly evaluate and adjust the route, ensuring flexibility, while interactive theatre, social media, influencers, art, panel discussions and weekly interviews on radio allowed us to be creative.

In 2020, COVID-19 stopped the world and Botswana went through several lockdowns. While most of our projects were paused, we adjusted and intensified our work on the TVET campaign. We knew that our main target group, the youth, was clinging to social media for support and guidance during the pandemic and that we would have their attention in changing perceptions of vocational training to “cool” through this form of media.

In an online competition, we invited young people to write a poem or make a painting inspired by

the question: “Which skills or professions will be needed to rebuild the country and the economy after Corona?”. The goal was to stimulate the youth to think about the future, employment and TVET.

In 2021, we extended the campaign, travelling around the country to learn about perceptions of TVET as well as promote it. It was an opportunity to see if the negative perceptions of vocational training had changed from when we started with the campaign.

In 2019, teachers at schools with whom we interacted didn't know what TVET was. Today this has changed, with TVET part of the speeches



of politicians, national agendas, media and daily conversations - a clear indication that TVET is now regarded as “cool”.

However, the new national TVET policy in Botswana is still in flux. While the announcement that a dual pathway will provide students an option after Junior Certificate to follow both an academic and technical route is welcome, its implementation is still unclear.

During our outreach programme, we discovered many examples of TVET colleges lacking resources to offer quality training. In one vocational training college, only three of 17 machines were working. In another, practical lessons were given on a car that is no longer in production.

At the same time, it was fascinating to see with how much pride and passion many of the teachers and students talk about TVET. It is more than work for them; it is a way to feed their families and build their country. Seeing them walking proudly in their overalls fills one with a longing to belong to this “cool” group of people.

So TVET is cool after all!

Maybe it is now time to change our focus and direct resources and energy to improving TVET by

modernising the programmes, refurbishing the workshops and actively engaging industry in this process? A way to speed up progress is to draw from the experiences of other countries, for example, the Kenya Association of Manufacturers that is featured as a best practice on the ASPYEE portal.

The Oodi Weavers are one of Botswana’s touristic attractions. A group of elderly women weave tapestries depicting folklore and local culture. The uniqueness and quality of their work was recognised internationally when a tapestry, presented to Queen Elizabeth II by President Seretse Khama during her state visit to Botswana in 1979, became part of the Royal Collection Trust.

The only wish of the women-led Oodi Weavers is to transfer their skills to the younger generation and see their work continue when they retire. However, they cannot find support to do so. If nothing happens by the end of 2022, they will be forced to stop their work and rent the workshop to a local business - and a unique legacy of Botswana’s culture will be lost to the world.

Oodie Weavers is an amazing opportunity to train youth in skills, to empower young women, and to preserve our culture and heritage! With the



assistance of, for example, marketing graduates in need of attachment, the Oodi Weavers arts and craft shop could be revived, and an ecommerce presence created and developed. Oodi Weavers could become a go-to place for tourists, bringing development to the whole area.

By capturing and accrediting the skills of Oodi Weavers, and training the future trainers, we would demonstrate the essence and potential of TVET.

What are we waiting for?



For more information about the Making TVET Cool outreach campaign, please see these short videos:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8v_WiCPUWI

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NsmFDbMobtA>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OY9dSHDzy6s&t=9s>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_yFnwdL_vo

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPW8kNAMT18>

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