

28 September

Driving gender transformative approaches for Africa: Strategies to empower women and girls in the world of work through vocational education training (VET)

The African Union and AUDA NEPAD, through Skills Initiative for Africa and GAN Global hosted a webinar on driving gender-transformative approaches for Africa: Strategies to empower women in the world of work through VET. The webinar showcased how the AU Commission, AUDA-NEPAD and GAN Global members, with the support of funders and partners, are continually pursuing to increase and sustain African women working in STEM and other underrepresented fields on the continent.

Nazrene Mannie,
Executive Director,
GAN Global

“Challenges in the African context include infrastructure and access to both hardware and software. However, we must ensure an inclusive Future of Work and not leave an entire continent behind. The purpose of our work and of this webinar is to encourage more private sector best practices, with the support of partners on the ground.”

Innovative gender-transformative approaches include fostering entrepreneurial skills and increasing women’s participation in the world of work. To gain a diverse perspective on designing and sharing solutions that increase female participation in targeted occupations, we brought together the following business leaders and policymakers:

- *Nazrene Mannie, GAN Global, Executive Director*
- *Yankey-Ouattara Simone, Senior Policy Officer, Girls & Women's Education, (African Union) Centre International pour l'Education des Filles & des Femmes en Afrique, (AU/CIEFFA)*
- *Sara Jabril, Technical Advisor Skills Initiative for Africa-ATVET4W*
- *Laura Schmid - Skills and Employability Representative (Gender focus), ILO*
- *Winnie Karanu, Philanthropy lead for Sub-Saharan Africa, Microsoft*
- *Mamello Selamolela, Managing Executive for Group Strategy and Innovation, Vodacom*
- *Jessica Annor, Senior Programme Office, Gender, (AUDA-NEPAD)*
- *Nicholas Ouma, Senior youth advisor at the African Union Commission (AUC) Department of Education, Science, Technology and Innovations*

The overall objective of hosting this virtual event for the run-up to [Africa's Women's Day](#) was to showcase exemplary gender-oriented programmes that champion women in VET, with industry-relevant work-based learning (WBL) opportunities from the private sector and partners, such as

AUDA-NEPAD's Gender makes Business Sense (GmBS), a self-paced e-learning course for entrepreneurs across Africa. If we want to break down glass ceilings for girls and women at work, they need to be equipped with tools to advance. Gender-transformative approaches across work-based learning opportunities, including apprenticeship, upskilling, reskilling, and entrepreneurship programmes can empower girls and women at all levels of their careers. Many AU member states, GAN members and partners are exemplary in offering WBL and VET programmes to promote skills acquisition, including entrepreneurship for girls and women.

Presentation on the AUDA-NEPAD led Gender-Transformative programmes - Lessons from the Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training for Women Programme (ATVET4W)

Ms Jabril kicked off the discussion by sharing an AUDA-NEPAD project implemented since 2017 with support from the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) in six AU member states (Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi and Togo), on gender transformative approaches in agricultural skills development. For the start of implementation, she explained the framework of Reach, Benefit and Empower(ment). The concept starts with reaching out to women (via meetings or trainings), which will not necessarily ensure that they will benefit (e.g., from increased income) and even if there is a benefit, this cannot ensure empowerment (e.g., control over that income or making household choices). The last point on empowerment is particularly important as this relates to how skills development can empower women.

Ms Jabril highlighted agricultural pilot projects in the six countries and the specific groups they targeted. Incorporating the theory of gender transformative approaches, each benefit and empowerment outcome, was adapted for each group. When conceptualizing empowerment, there are four quadrants of change regarding the individual, relations, systems and structures, and culture. One of the examples she gave was a project on access to land, finance, and training in Burkina Faso, where men were also involved, further empowering women.

Lastly, Ms Jabril gave insight on the Gender makes Business Sense (GmBS) which exemplifies entrepreneurship training with a gender lens. It is a new approach to agribusiness training that works, incorporating tools like the Business Model Canvas in addition to gender-related elements. It is now available as on [online version](#) and the scope has widened to include entrepreneurs in all sectors and in all countries.

Strategies for Improved VET Transitions for Women and Girls

Ms Yankey explained the role of Girls & Women's Education (Centre International pour l'Education des Filles & des Femmes en Afrique - CIEFFA), a specialized institution of the AU, which implements strategies to improve TVET for women and girls. She highlighted the need for this program as women and girls in TVET don't necessarily have all the tools needed, especially for STEM specific pathways to succeed. She outlined the context; AU policies on TVET and gender; AU/ CIEFFA strategies and initiatives; and recommendations.

Ms Yankey explained some of the challenges and context for a low rate of women and girls in TVET. This includes, formal TVET systems not well-aligned with market needs; an absence of both funding and apprenticeship opportunities; inadequate TVET infrastructure, and socio-cultural myths surrounding girls and women pursuing TVET pathways. In terms of policy supporting more girls and women in TVET, she went over three AU Policy objectives on TVET.



The first objective supports a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development. As part of this objective, development is people-driven, especially for women and youth. The second objective concerns a continental education strategy for Africa. This obligates member states to integrate gender in each of its objectives, including “gender equality and sensitivity throughout the education and training systems.”

On recommendations for governments and policymakers, Ms Yankey outlined the following points:

- Provide gender sensitive learning infrastructure in TVET institutions.
- Design and implement national affirmative action policies for female participation in male-dominated occupations.
- Allocate part of government expenditure on TVET to support girls.
- Research on specific strategies to facilitate women and girls in TVET.
- Recruit significant numbers of competent female TVET instructors to teach in male-dominated disciplines.

Moderated Panel Discussion Showcasing Company and Partner Case Studies

Ms Schmid referenced her work with the regional office of the ILO, based in Cairo, covering several countries in Africa. Being of German descent, she has witnessed first-hand the benefits of a strong TVET system, which includes strong career opportunities for youth. However, TVET is often not as prioritized in the overall education system in many countries. She reminded participants that this should not be the case and that in Africa, investing more in the TVET system could fill in gaps in the education system, while providing more options for youth. She referred to an upcoming review of TVET systems across Africa that will soon be released by the AU. This includes policy analysis of specific country contexts and provides practical case studies of countries that have managed to restructure and reform their TVET systems.

On gender inclusion in TVET systems, Ms Schmid confirmed that there are still hurdles to overcome to equalize certain sectors. Some of the challenges she referred to go back to cultural stereotypes and myths associated with TVET and blue-collar work. Typically, females are more likely to be found in what is believed to be more feminine sectors in hairdressing, textiles, or caretaking work.

On solutions to attract females to other sectors which could have better prospects in the labour market, Ms Schmid referred to a few examples. This includes awareness raising days inviting girls and their parents to TVET centres. Recently, the ILO has conducted awareness raising campaigns in Somalia and other regions sensitizing girls and parents to pathways of becoming an electrician. Particularly, for this sector, Ms Schmid referred to a few challenges that still need to be overcome for females, which includes ensuring safe transportation and changing facilities.

Another project that the ILO is undertaking is to equip females with skills for supervisory and/or master trainer positions. As these roles are largely male dominated, Ms Schmid also referred to gender sensitization training for male supervisors and master trainers, especially in fields where trainees are largely female. In Egypt, scholarships for girls going into STEM fields through TVET or university pathways have also been offered. Ms Schmid referred to the importance of having role models in STEM fields to attract and to show girls the potential.



Ms Annor gave insight on the AU's continental TVET strategy and explained the role that SIFA is contributing to in terms of shaping skills for the future of work and mentioned the current gender assessment it is currently undertaking to make this component more robust for the future. Lastly, she referred to the portal provided by GmBS equipping MSMEs with training. She noted the current gender component of this program that is being strengthened to ensure that women are not left behind. On gender responsiveness, all of the programs that Ms Annor referred to will be aligned with the recently [launched "African Union's Women and Youth Financial and Economic Inclusion Initiative"](#), which ensures that women and youth are given the right tools to be included in the economy.

Ms Selamolela reviewed a key pillar for [Vodacom](#), which is inclusion for all. To achieve this key pillar, prerequisites including affordable access and basic connectivity need to be in place. Without this, we cannot achieve inclusion and participation for all to reap the benefits that technology can offer.

In terms of levelling the playing field, Vodacom acknowledges that women, particularly in rural areas are most affected. Therefore, the company is working with local partners to increase the availability and affordability of devices and technological infrastructure for women in these areas. As this is the foundation for women being able to leverage the benefits from technology, Vodacom's ambition over the next three years is to connect 20 million more women to affordable technology in the continent and Turkey.

Ms Selamolela added that if we can succeed in tapping into the most out of reach populations on accessing basic technology, then this can also enable MSMEs for financial literacy and digital skills training. With these basics, this can level the playing field especially for female entrepreneurs. Another example she gave is a program working with female farmers. In Africa, 70% of economic activities are in the agricultural sector and subsistence farming is largely made up of females. Investment in female farmers then has an amplified benefit for society. When they can provide basic skills training to this segment of society, they are then empowered to access bigger markets and have more control over the commercial aspect through digital platforms provided by the company.

Working particularly with the education sector in South Africa, Ms Selamolola gave examples working with universities and TVET colleges on ensuring that programs were more accessible and affordable during lockdown through technology. The company found that this had a surprising benefit more so for females as this provides the physical safety of being able to continue learning from home.

Internally, the company is also aware of the changing landscape of skills needed for future, which they have identified as "critical future ready skills". Current and future employees can develop these skills and stay relevant and contribute to the organization. An internal program called #onemoreskill encourages staff members to reskill and reinvent themselves to learn about data science, cloud engineering and other tech skills, to take on short and long term educational and skilling opportunities. On emerging talent, the company is partnering with young people. As a large component of this program is on inclusion, 60% of beneficiaries have been women, which is deliberate, as the company wants to nurture more female talent to improve the gender balance within the organization.



As a closing, Ms Selamolela reminded participants that the uptake of digital learning in Africa is higher than anywhere else. As the continent is younger demographically, the challenge with unemployment is also more pressing. Young people are aware of challenges but also opportunities. And when these opportunities are presented, young women take them up disproportionately, which is encouraging.

Lastly, Ms Karanu shared gender experiences from Microsoft Philanthropy's Global Skilling Initiative. This started as a [goal of up- and re-skilling 25 million by 2020](#). So far, they have well exceeded this goal by already reaching 42 million people. Achieving this goal, scaling and reaching hard to target populations, Ms Karanu highlighted requires forging partnerships to with both public and private sector actors, and especially governments who have integrated digital skilling targets as part of their development goals.

One key aspect that Microsoft has learned is that it is important to prepare people with role-based learning opportunities, as opposed to providing broad-based training. With all their programs, Ms Karanu confirmed that the target is to reach 50% females, although some programs focus primarily on girls and women. She referenced one program between Microsoft, Tech4Good and the Islamic Development Bank which aims to train 5 million females from 16-40 years old, across the continent on deep digital skills, through fellowships, bootcamps, open days, master classes, and connecting them to available jobs, involving industry as much as possible.

On diversifying the talent pool, Ms Karanu also highlighted the [Leap program](#) which targets non-traditional groups such as mothers returning to work and women in rural areas. They are then trained in deep digital skills to become senior engineers developing Microsoft products. Through an African Training Center, launched in 2019 in Kenya and Nigeria, this program has already taken hold with the overall spill over benefits to society including providing positive role models to girls interested in STEM roles. Particularly for young girls, she referenced a program called [DigiGirly](#), which targets middle and high school students, encouraging them to take up STEM programs. This program entails working alongside girls, mentoring, training and connecting them to opportunities in the digital economy, throughout their schooling and as they move into higher education.

Closing

Mr Ouma wrapped up the session with a few insights and closing remarks. He commended the shift towards an overall acknowledgement on the importance of inclusivity in TVET. He highlighted the important role that TVET plays in ensuring equal access and gender equality in both training and the workforce.

A careful gender analysis of TVET is important to render them more flexible, relevant and efficient in fast-changing economies. Mr Ouma also noted that whereas most TVET policies are gender responsive, there are still gaps in the monitoring, evaluation and reporting aspects. This affects capacities of TVET systems to improve, particularly on enrolment, retention, participation, placement, and school to work transitions for women. Overall, the data collection on gender specific areas remains weak, which affects the ability for policymakers to fully understand the challenges.

Another area that Mr Ouma highlighted was on the social-cultural attitudes towards women in non-traditional sectors and roles. This is where the importance of role models cannot be underestimated. Finally, his last point was on the necessity of gender sensitization training for all stakeholders including, governments, and the private sector to improve the capacity of TVET



systems to respond nimbly to labour market demands, particularly on recruitment of females in high-skilled, productive sectors.



Video link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TM6fwi0JCM>

