African Union

AUDA-NEPAD
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SIFA
Skills Initiative for Africa
TC
Technical Cooperation

A LEARNING SERIES

WORKING TOWARDS AGILE AND RESPONSIVE SKILLS AND (SELF) EMPLOYMENT ECOSYSTEMS IN AFRICA

A Systems Approach to Addressing Youth Unemployment

ORIENTATION

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A Compilation of Learning Briefs Spotlighting Innovation, Impact, Tips & Strategies

ORIENTATION

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COMPREHENSIVE
CURRICULUM
of Basic Skills

Sharing of Learning Briefs is one of the roles of the **Skills Initiative for Africa (SIFA). SIFA** is an initiative of the **African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD)** supported by the German Government and the European Union. **SIFA** promotes the occupational prospects of young Africans through the support of innovative skills development programmes, and close cooperation with the private sector as a key player in job creation.

African Skills Portal for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (ASPYEE) is a knowledge platform managed by **SIFA,** built on the principles of collaboration, knowledge sharing and co-creation. Its aim is to foster peer learning, knowledge exchange, and capacity building on the continent. African innovation and good practices are a basis from which to learn lessons that influence future practice, and present opportunities for replication and scaling.

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ACRONYMS

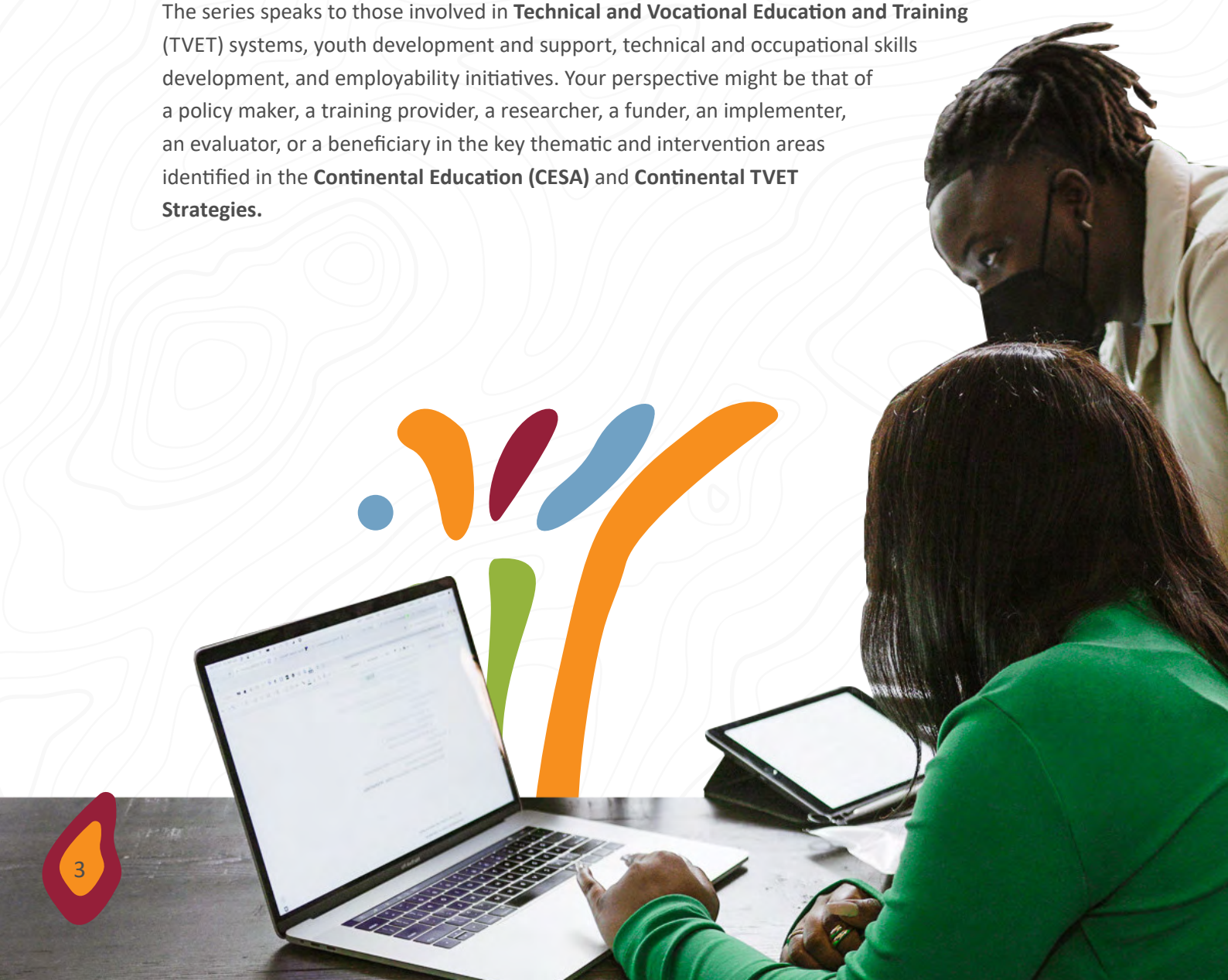
ASPYEE	African Skills Portal for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship
AUC	African Union Commission
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency New Partnership
SIFA	Skills Initiative for Africa
CESA	Continental Education Strategy for Africa
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

The 'Gift of Work' should not be exclusive of education, background, age, gender or culture.

WHO IS THIS LEARNING SERIES FOR?

This Learning Series is aimed at African practitioners and policymakers interested in good practices, successes, and lessons learnt regarding women and youth unemployment and underemployment.

The series speaks to those involved in **Technical and Vocational Education and Training** (TVET) systems, youth development and support, technical and occupational skills development, and employability initiatives. Your perspective might be that of a policy maker, a training provider, a researcher, a funder, an implementer, an evaluator, or a beneficiary in the key thematic and intervention areas identified in the **Continental Education (CESA)** and **Continental TVET Strategies.**



Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it.

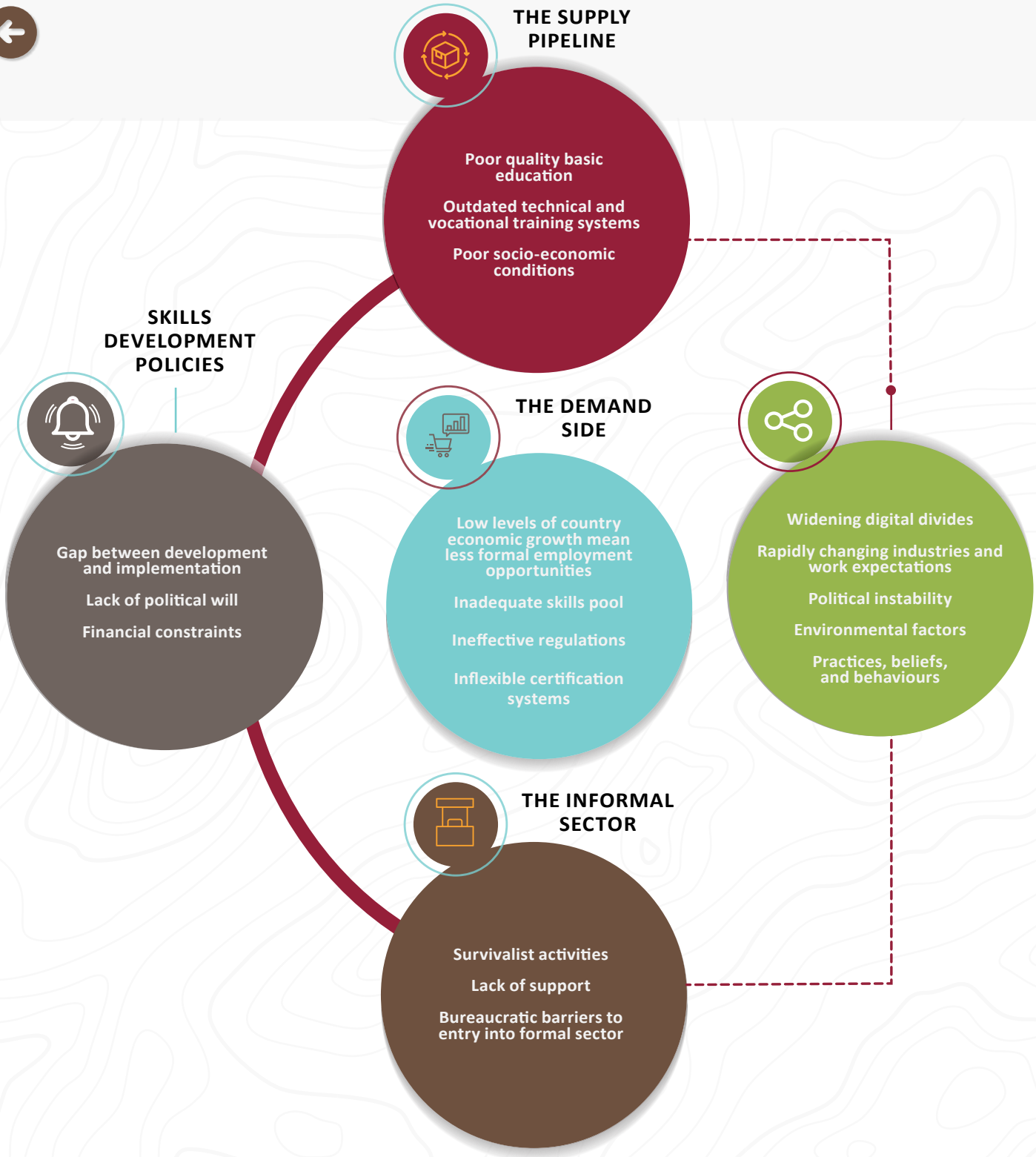
INTRODUCTION

Skills development refers to the full range of formal and non-formal vocational, technical, and skills-based education and training for employment or for self-employment and entrepreneurship. Learning can happen in many contexts, through formal, non-formal, informal, and on-the-job settings.

A vibrant and productive workforce is a crucial element in a country's overall prosperity and the security of its citizens. Work is key to self-actualisation, helping us develop and access the insights, tools, disciplines, relationships, and competencies essential for personal growth and well-being. At the same time, a thriving economy requires a skilled labour pool that is accessible, competent, and varied. However, across the continent, the many challenges that exist in relation to unemployment, in particular in relation to youth and women, are well documented. Equally, many economic sectors face workforce skills gaps which are detrimental to growth and inhibit innovation and development.

Growing the skills of those who cannot access sustainable work is acknowledged as the best route to tackling the complex challenges relating to opportunity, economic growth, and development on the African continent. The question many countries face is how to align supply and demand in ways that benefit all. The barriers to a productive interplay between skills, opportunities and the needs of economic sectors are many, and often relate to the broad skills development ecosystem. An ecosystem is a group of entities and factors that interact with and influence each other in a specific environment. The skills development ecosystem exists at many levels and is influenced by factors ranging from national policies and public budgets to local contexts and pressures. This ecosystem's various entities and factors are interlinked but often work in fragmented and counter-productive ways. Some examples are highlighted below.

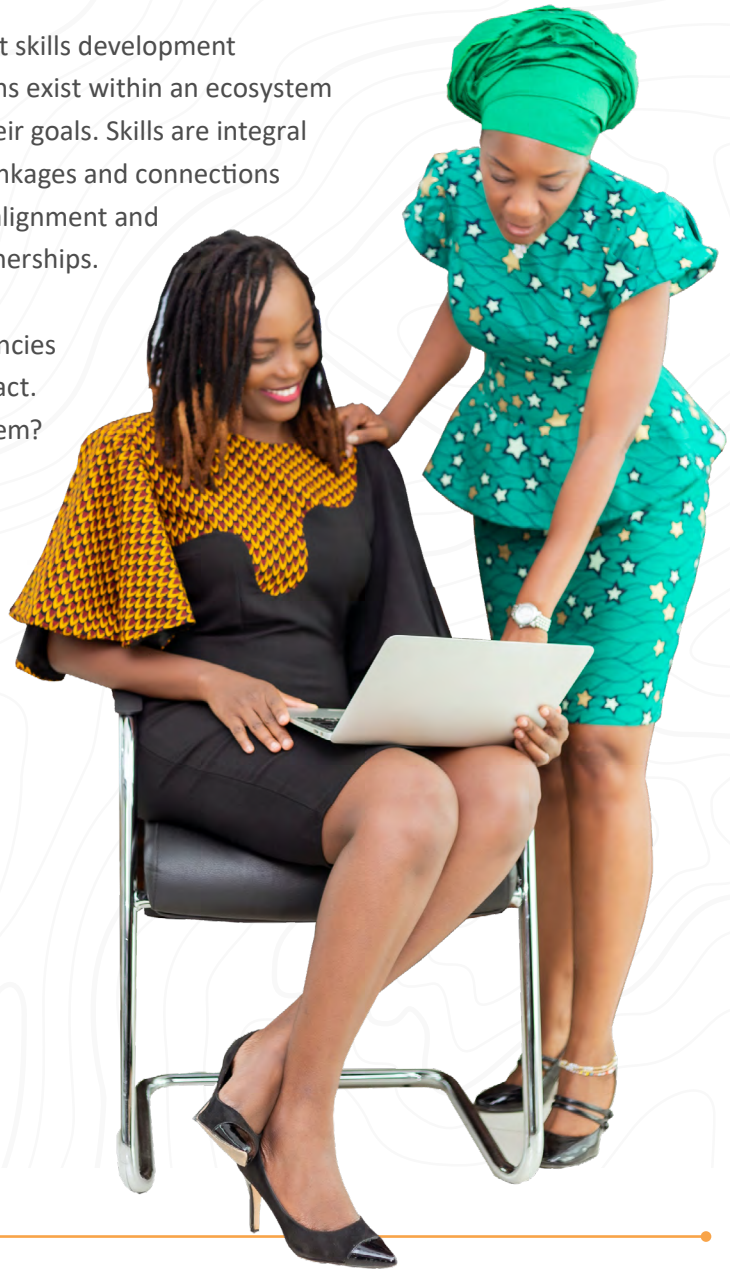
INHIBITING FACTORS IN THE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT ECOSYSTEM



You cannot tackle hunger, disease, and poverty unless you can also provide people with a healthy ecosystem where their economies can grow.

AN ECOSYSTEM APPROACH TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

This Learning Series is framed by recognising that skills development programmes, initiatives and training organisations exist within an ecosystem that can enable or hinder the achievement of their goals. Skills are integral contributors to the ecosystem. Since there are linkages and connections across the ecosystem, there is a need to create alignment and synergies, work in collaboration and create partnerships.



Understanding this helps skills development agencies navigate and influence their ecosystems for impact. What are the enablers that can unblock the system? How can these be leveraged to replicate and scale good practices? Who are the primary stakeholders that need to be engaged? How can practical contextual barriers to youth employment be reduced?

The six ecosystem components illustrated below are drawn from the many good practices shared in this Learning Series and a common set of “conditions” observed across all of them. They are therefore suggested as a starting point for growing this understanding and will be explored in relation to each of the Learning Briefs in the series.

ECOSYSTEM COMPONENTS

Brief descriptions of each of these ecosystem components are given below, linked to examples of what they might look like when considered in the context of a particular skills development initiative.

ECOSYSTEM COMPONENTS

BENEFICIARY GROUP

Direct project beneficiaries are those who will benefit from direct participation in the project. It is essential to understand their general circumstances and the pain points and challenges they are dealing with, as these may affect programme implementation and outcomes.

Examples

- Interrupted schooling (e.g., pregnancy rates in girls and young women).
- Gender stereotypes leading to a lack of willingness to hire women.
- Lack of inclusivity and challenges for those with disabilities.
- Foundational skills gaps, such as functional literacy, numeracy, and digital skills.
- Attitudes towards entrepreneurship or trade skills.

RESEARCH

Data collection and analysis will strengthen your contextual understanding of the landscape in which your programme takes place, as contextual factors may affect the success of your programme. In addition, a project that takes data and evidence into account is more easily replicable and scalable.

Examples

- Supply and demand in relation to the skills development programmes (e.g., technical, vocational, entrepreneurial) you offer.
- Availability of relevant industries, companies, or markets nearby that could absorb your trainees.
- National or local legislation that may affect employability or entrepreneurship, either positively or negatively (e.g., corporate or sector social investment requirements, municipal by-laws).
- Potential qualification or trade certification pathways for beneficiaries.
- Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of your programme, including post-programme tracking and feedback so that programmes can be adapted.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

These essential actors and agencies influence the skills development landscape, and their roles must be understood. Initiatives that are divorced from broader stakeholder engagement are not sustainable.

Examples

- Identify those who are stakeholders and those who are potential partners.
- Stakeholders include government agencies at various levels (e.g., provincial, state, municipal); your funders and investors; and industry bodies interested in skills development in their sectors.
- Partners can be identified for specific needs and projects (see below).

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Any skills development initiative requires resources various resources, which can be maximised through the ecosystem of collaborations and partnerships.

Examples

- Physical spaces for training, studying, networking, and setting up work. These 'hubs' can be used for various purposes and shared by different beneficiary groups.
- Communication resources for beneficiaries include toll-free numbers, free mobile data, and WhatsApp bots.
- Training equipment and materials
- Human resources: technical trainers, coaches, mentors

ACCESS REQUIRED

Identify and define the kinds of access needed by your beneficiary group – access to what, and how is this enabled? Use the ecosystem to assist them.

Examples

- Access to markets (e.g., micro-enterprises may need help with registration and compliance to access potential markets).
- Access to additional training, such as digital skills.
- Access to information (e.g., job opportunities through different online recruitment platforms).
- Access to transport to get to training centres and job interviews.
- Access to support for interview preparation (e.g., CV preparation, clothing for interviews).

PARTNERS

Partners are those with whom you enter into collaborative agreements, usually with a mutual benefit to those involved. The right partners can help with any of the components listed above, especially with resources and access.

Examples

- Partnerships with nearby growth-oriented small or medium businesses to absorb artisan programme graduates.
- Partnerships with corporates with policy commitments such as Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance [ESG] requirements.
- Partnerships with businesses and workplaces for defined placements, such as workers with disabilities, including appropriate settings for these new entrants.
- Partnerships with other bodies for supplementary certification agreements (e.g., for Information Communication Technology (ICT) short courses with providers to supplement any additional training received).
- Partnerships with government agencies or ministries (e.g., for trainee stipends or linking with youth unemployment government initiatives).
- Partnerships with government agencies for verification or accreditation of programmes.
- Agreements made with service providers for subsidised data or technology.

Work gives life meaning, helps us connect with our purpose, helps us find our tribes and makes life better.

THE LEARNING BRIEFS

Each Learning Brief discusses illustrative lessons learned and tips and strategies for different components grounded in programmes, learning experiences and innovations. These are made real through inspiring success stories of how beneficiaries have taken forward the opportunities provided through skills development engagement.

FOUR FOCUS AREAS

This Learning Series is a compilation of four Learning Briefs based on four focus areas identified as critical fields for effective skills development to address youth unemployment.

- DISABILITY INCLUSION
- ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND THE INFORMAL SECTOR
- GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE
- DEMAND-LED SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

LEARNING BRIEFS AS A METHODOLOGY

Learning Briefs distil the lessons learned and evidence gathered by people working on the ground. The sharing of evidence-based knowledge, real experiences, case studies, success stories and effective strategies across the continent promotes better planning and implementation of developmental interventions.

Each Learning Brief speaks to one of the Focus Areas listed above, presenting insights concerning various ecosystem components and practical solutions to problems encountered. Each part of the series is a chance to learn about common and unique challenges and new tools and solutions already being applied by practitioners in distinct public and private sectors across Africa.

SOURCES FOR THE LEARNING BRIEFS

The Study Tour

On a three-day Study Tour in Johannesburg, South Africa, delegates from seven organisations which have implemented good practice skills development initiatives in six African countries shared lessons learned from their country programmes and visited pioneering South African examples of skills development programmes in Johannesburg. Reflections captured during facilitated sessions inform different Focus Area Learning Briefs.

Over the three days, activities included:

Other Sources

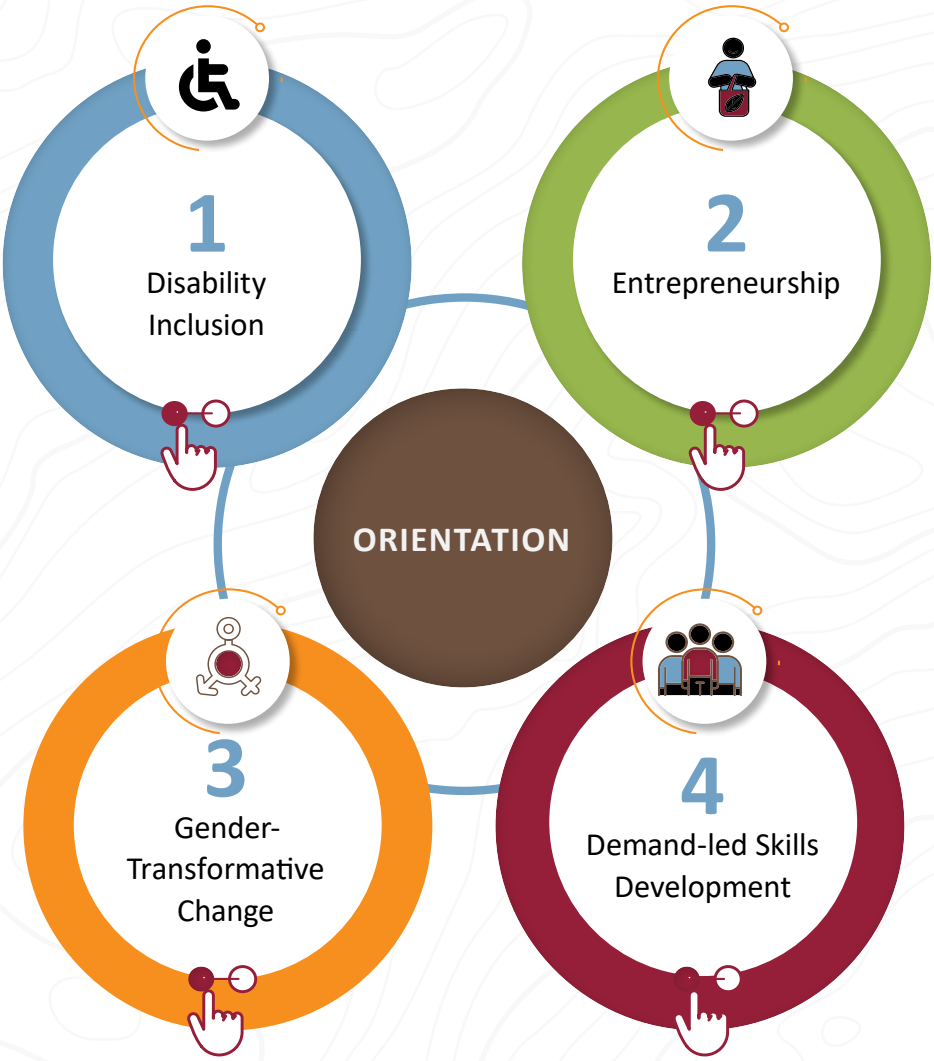
Disseminating information on good practices in skills development across the continent is an ongoing process, enabled not only by activities such as peer learning through study tours but also through webinars and the sharing of other case studies and learning briefs.

Voices from the Ground: Illuminating the Focus Areas

The Study Tour programmes, host sites and other sources have been linked to a particular focus area according to their main defining feature, interest area or theme.

	FOCUS AREA	LEARNING BRIEF SOURCES
1	**Disability Inclusion**	**Study Tour Delegate Initiatives**
		The Sightsavers IT Bridge Academy: Bringing people living with disabilities into IT jobs through partnerships and access
		Mbouo Bandjoun Multipurpose Centre: Promoting agripreneurship in Cameroon
		Webinars/Case Studies/Research
		Research - A Study on the inclusion of persons with disabilities - strengthening inclusion within TVET institutions in Africa
2	**Entrepreneurship and the Informal Sector**	**Study Tour Delegate Initiatives**
		The Lagos State Employability Trust Fund (LSETF) Employability Support Program: Creating an enabling environment for job and wealth creation!
		National Youth Exchange Association: Creating a supportive Network of Enterprising Youth
		Study Tour Site Visit Organisational Initiatives
		The Centre for Entrepreneurship Rapid Incubator at the **Ekurhuleni West TVET College**
		Webinars/Case Studies/Research
		Case Study - Recognition of Prior Learning in Kenya: Pathways to the Informal Sector
		Guideline - A Guideline on Fostering Entrepreneurship through the TVET sector

3	Gender-Transformative Change	**Study Tour Delegate Initiatives**
		Development Aid from People to People (DAPP Malawi): Mobile Vocational College Empowering Malawi Youth
		Youth Empowerment Systems (YES): Vocational Training and Recognition of Prior Learning for Vulnerable Youth in Marginalised Communities
		Webinars/Case Studies/Research
		Case Study - Gender makes Business Sense (GmBS): An innovative approach to entrepreneurship that works
		Webinar: Driving gender transformative approaches for Africa: Strategies to empower women and girls in the world of work through TVET
4	Demand-led Skills Development	**Study Tour Delegate Programmes**
		Generation Programme Kenya (GPK): You Employed! Matching supply and demand, delivering high-quality blended training to youth and matching graduates to decent work
		Study Tour Site Visit Organisational Initiatives
		Harambee: Accelerating Youth Employment through Partnerships and Technology
		Yes4Youth: Yes for successful employment journeys
		Webinars/Case Studies/Research
		Webinar: Partnerships for Demand-Driven Skills Development

USING THE LEARNING SERIES

This orientation section has outlined the background to the suite of Learning Briefs on the topic of skills development and set out the conceptual lens through which the challenges, lessons and recommendations for each focus area are explored. You can select the Focus Area that interests you by clicking on the relevant link, as illustrated below.