Development of SMART Indicators for the SADC TVET Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (2018-2027)

1. Background and Terms of Reference

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has been highlighted as a crucial arena for the provision of skills development (or human resources development) to the economy and for (traditionally) supporting the transition of young people to decent work in the South African Development Community (SADC). At the same time, there is unanimity that TVET's potential for economic and societal contributions is not limited to the delivery of this 'mainstream' mandate. Supporting poverty alleviation and entrepreneurship programmes, improving the productivity of existing workers, preparing the reinsertion/redeployment of the unemployed, assisting in reconstruction efforts post-conflict/disasters and tackling social exclusion are inextricably associated to the TVET agenda, albeit that these elements often overlap with other national and regional social and economic development policies.

Conceptually and pragmatically as well, it is important to note that TVET is not purely 'contained' within the delivery of alternate, neatly delineated, post-secondary 'non-university' or 'professional' programmes (Status of TVET in the SADC Region, SADC/UNESCO, 2013). TVET-related terminologies, definitions and scope differ across the region. International trends in TVET have emphasized the need to recognize lifelong learning outside of formal education, the inclusion of work-based learning in higher education settings to ensure academic-practice balance, the coverage of entrepreneurship/resilience skills, the need to account for greater incidence of learner/worker mobility. Finally, and in part spurred by further international developments (e.g. UNESCO Strategy for TVET 2016-2021, 2016), more recent pronouncements at the continental (e.g. African Union Strategy for TVET, 2016) and SADC (Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan for Development of TVET in SADC 2018-2017, 2018) levels have highlighted additional priorities relating to given sectors (agriculture, rural development and informal economy), the incorporation of skills relating to Green/Blue Economy, and promoting TVET access for women/girls and vulnerable groups, while addressing the key issues associated to TVET i.e. lack of formal apprenticeships, limited financing, supply- instead of demand-driven qualifications and negative public perceptions about TVET qualifications.

At the SADC level, all these crucial challenges have pointed to the need for the implementation of a detailed and joined-up regional strategy for TVET policy development and harmonization, aimed at staff development, systems and institutional development, advocacy, regional/national/local multi-stakeholder coordination (e.g. regulators, quality assurance bodies, TVET providers, employers), resource mobilization/capacity building, that are underpinned by a Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) framework. Based on the priority areas set out in the 2018 Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (and further adjustments gathered during the Inception Meeting Report, 31 Oct-1 November 2019), the associated M&E Framework sets out a number of interventions and (measurable) outcomes. As requested, this report reviews the Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan, and proposes changes, where needed, articulating the following:

1. To differentiate the outcomes and outputs as currently delineated in the SADC TVET M&E Framework;
2. To ensure the proposed M&E indicators be expressed in SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound) terms.

2. Situational analysis - Insights from 2018 SADC Strategic Framework and 2019 Inception Meeting Report

The SADC TVET Strategy Framework and Programme of Action (2012-2016) initially set out six objectives, namely the harmonization of TVET policies and standards regionally, and strengthening (i) regional knowledge base for planning, monitoring and evaluating TVET, (ii) capacity for TVET staff development, (iii) capacity to develop and implement TVET systems, (iv) TVET institutions, and (v) SADC Secretariat. It was reported that most of these objectives have not been fulfilled over the initial strategic period, attributable in part to an apparent absence (or limited work) into evaluations of national & regional systems as well as limited efforts to foster regional coordination (i.e. in particular the role of the SADC TVET Technical Committee). These objectives have been effectively carried over to the new strategic period (2018-2027) as priority areas with some minor changes and the inclusion of an advocacy agenda, as outlined below:

1) Regional coordination, Governance and Resource mobilization;
2) Policy Review and Development;
3) TVET Information and Monitoring System;

4) Institutional Development;

5) TVET Systems Development;

6) TVET Staff and Teacher Training; and

7) Advocacy

Informed by the above, the Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (2018) provided a detailed list of 'interventions' (Table 5, pp. 27-30) in each priority area that were aligned to a relatively large number of 'measurable outcomes'; presumably as means to evidence (and provide an 'audit trail') whether these interventions have been enacted. Relatedly, Annexure 2 of the Strategic Framework (pp. 43-44) provides a smaller number of these measurable outcomes as 'performance indicators' per priority area, with intermediate targets for Phase I (effectively up to 2022) and Phase II (2023-2027). In a few cases, baseline indicators are provided (for 2017), assumingly due to the availability of such data at the Member State level (and arguably non-availability for all other indicators). All the stated indicators or outcomes are expressed in quantitative terms. Finally, the detailed areas of interventions outlined in Table 5 are reflected in an operational annual budget for the strategic period (2018-2027; Table 6 & Annexure 1).

The 2019 Inception Meeting (31 Oct - 1 Nov 2019, Windhoek, Namibia) and resulting report drew upon in-depth experiences and insights from five countries[1] to consider the development of a pilot TVET M&E Framework, based on what has been in place in each of these countries. Alongside the list of common challenges affecting the TVET sector and a call for better regional coordination and sharing of data/experiences/practices, deliberations also focused on the need to distinguish between 'outcome' and 'output' indicators. From an analysis of the strategic priorities, outcomes/indicators and structural TVET challenges (inequitable access by vulnerable/disadvantaged groups issues, mismatch between supply and demand, lack of comparable standards, shortage of skills for critical sectors/activities, addressing the needs of rural/local areas), there appears to be somewhat a tension between *means* vs. *ends* as well as *what counts* vs. *what can be counted*? This is reflected in some concerns expressed in the Inception Meeting Report (p. 14) that an M&E framework may sometimes invite a proliferation of indicators that do not, in themselves, improve outcomes or inform policy-makers if one is on the right/wrong track in terms of fulfilling a priority area. As mentioned, this often leads to data

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[1] Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, eSwatini and Zambia

aggregation and additional reporting for reporting sake i.e. a clear case of means overriding the ends and privileging easier to obtain (and faster to achieve) metrics. Furthermore, an indication of timing / timescale for actual implementation (realistically from second half of 2021/start of 2022) and how engaging with one priority area may impact on another priority area do not appear to have been sufficiently considered. Finally, at the start of a process of regional coordination across countries with visibly different or nascent TVET institutional structures/systems, funding regimes and nomenclature, managing reforms/change on the basis of reducible (inherently narrower) quantitative evaluations may not provide a sufficiently clear picture of actual progress, particularly when comparing across Member States[2]. These points underline the call for a SMART approach to the Implementation Plan (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-Bound).

3. Methodology

Given the nature of the assignment and in particular how to extricate outcomes from outputs and indicators, the approach being undertaken relies on the tenets of the theory of change (ToC) and the logical framework. ToC is often viewed as a tool to map out the logical sequence of an initiative, from activities through to the changes it seeks to influence (Vogel, 2012). However, others see it as a reflective process: a mapping and analysis of values, worldviews and philosophies of change that make more explicit the underlying assumptions of how and why change might happen as an outcome of a strategy/initiative. According to Stein and Valters (2012), both approaches are equally important.

The ToC addresses the big picture (i.e. TVET being part of the SADC Industrialisation Strategy through Skills Development) and recognises the complexity of the environment and the multi-faceted nature of the challenges in which SADC seeks to impact on the provision of adequate/relevant skills for industry competitiveness, skilled worker mobility in the region, and increase access/numbers of women, persons with disabilities and vulnerable groups to skills development opportunities (Strategic Framework, 2018, p. 26). There is however a clear recognition that there may be different routes to the same impact and that in different settings

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[2] These points are highlighted in an article by McGrath and Lugg (2012), borne out of an analysis of the SADC/UNESCO TVET assessment and review process of 2011.

(i.e. Member States), different approaches (e.g. relying on private vs public training providers) may be more appropriate.

At the same time, the logical framework adopts a more mechanistic 'cause and effect' approach, whereby a given *input/activity* (e.g. within a given TVET priority area) is to be in place to generate a change directly arising from the activity/input (*an output*). In turn, the output (potentially in combination with other outputs) leads to an outcome (i.e. the change one expects to see) within a given window of time. In distinguishing between output and outcome, it is useful to conceptualise that activities and outputs are within one's control to design, deliver and measure, and are therefore referred to as being within one's *sphere of control*. However, outcomes are only within one's *sphere of influence* and inherently less amenable to change and/or subject to other key influential factors (e.g. national/sectoral TVET funding regimes; tax incentives for training/apprenticeships). Finally, the logical framework refers to *impact* as the ultimate behaviour/action one wishes to achieve and is located within one's *sphere of interest* (e.g. change of attitudes/behaviour amongst SADC learners towards TVET; employers in Member States revising their human resource policies to engage more with TVET providers)[3].

In reviewing the original and revised list of indicators (measureable outcomes) for the seven priority areas from the Strategic Framework and the Inception Meeting Report in light of the above, there has been an attempt to:

(i)   critically assess the nature of the indicators as being an input or output one, while also reclassifying / re-designing some of the indicators as being effectively outcomes. In effect, this report draws out the 'how' (to address the priority areas) from the list of interventions, the output is *'what needs to be happening'* (framed in terms of extent and timescale over the strategic period, where relevant) and finally, the outcome being '*the change we want*' during, or at the end of, the strategic period. It is important to note that there is normally less emphasis on quantitative evaluations when it comes to outcomes and eventually impact.

(ii)   combine several related interventions under a common theme to ensure clarity of the link(s) between similar/related interventions > output indicators > outcome, while still ensuring a cross-reference to the original implementation plan.

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[3] At the national level, UNESCO (2012) has issued some guidance on proposed indicators to assess national TVET progress, principally as a means to benchmark and evaluate the impact of particular reforms.

(iii) assess and account for the linkages (and coherence) between interventions in different priority areas (e.g. identification of specific sectors for partners' fora/sectoral strategy, and centres of specialisation)

(iv) incorporate specific references/indicators relating to cross-cutting issues of access for women/girls, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups, the promotion of Green/Blue Economy skills, the targeting of agriculture/rural development sectors, and addressing lack of demand-driven qualifications.

In progressing with the above approach, this report ensures that the SADC TVET M&E Framework can better differentiate between outputs and outcomes, emphasise a timeline(s) for review, incorporate an annual reporting process and frame indicators in a SMART way. One aspect that is in need of further work / elaboration is an evaluation of the **risks / assumptions** being made when formulating the logical framework i.e. interventions > outputs > outcomes. For example, numerous reference is made to human capacity and financial resources

4. Revised SADC TVET M&E Framework

The enclosed spreadsheet (Appendix 1) details the proposed framework. The review and key changes made to each priority area are discussed below.

4.1. Regional Coordination, Governance and Resource Mobilisation.

A crucial aspect within this priority area is the resourcing and expanding of the SADC coordination mechanism, not only with the aim of ensuring the sustained and regular operation of the SADC TVET Technical Committee and the (a noted challenge the 2018 Strategic Framework) to initial periodic/annual reviews, but also towards significantly broadening the network in line with sectoral strategies and setting up TVET Partners' Fora. From a timeline perspective, it would be logical to expect that the recruitment of the SADC programme coordinator be completed at the earliest, thereby leading to him/her to re-start or initiate engagement with respective focal person in each member state.

While there is little change in terms of funding and budget measures as output indicators, the number of Technical Committee meetings indicator might not be, on its own, adequate since a higher frequency of meetings does not necessarily imply that one is progressing towards a satisfactory outcome (the same would apply in the case of interacting with focal TVET person).

Instead, as with other related meetings, it is proposed that the percentage of action points being resolved (following previous meetings) serves to assess progress. Similarly, the number of periodic evaluations must be followed by an appreciation of how many actions points from these evaluations have been addressed to ensure meaningful progress. Finally, given the cross-cutting benefits of focusing regional efforts on particular sectors of the economy, the output indicators rely on the identification of relevant economic sectors (inclusive of sectors prioritised in the strategic framework) and the development of a TVET partners' fora. To this extent therefore, the outcomes reflect growth, resourcing, engagement and confidence of the SADC TVET Technical Committee in addressing and coordinating the Strategic Framework's priority areas with official organs of Member States and other relevant partners.

4.2. Policy Review and Development

In light of the findings from the joint SADC/UNESCO assessment and review of TVET in the region (UNESCO, 2013) and country insights from the inception meeting (SADC, 2019), a review and/or development of national TVET policies would be an important step towards fostering greater levels of engagement with national policy actors; especially if they happen to operate in a multi-agency environment. A policy framework and associated guidelines to inform such a review would be the first milestone, thereby informing subsequent activities (technical support to review national policies, training needs and training of national TVET actors).

Given the multiple challenges involved with the implementation of the SADC Strategic Framework and documented prior experiences, an annual review of the progress with the Framework needs to be done on qualitative / quantitative basis. This can coupled with an evaluation of the risks/assumptions associated to each priority area. In other words, it would be advisable for the SADC TVET Technical Committee to reflect on the consequences of potential delays in the deployment of different interventions e.g. existing economic/educational/political reforms by the Member State impacting on TVET policy and provision; engagements curtailed due to budget cutbacks). An evaluation of these risks/assumptions and any mitigating actions would be within the remit of the annual review process, thereby alerting the Technical Committee to possible delays and alternative courses of action.

4.3 TVET Information and Monitoring System

While there is broad international consensus on the nature of the monitoring indicators to be privileged in a TVET monitoring tool (e.g. UNESCO, 2012), there is a view (SADC, 2019) that

the existing data capturing and reporting systems at national level are very limited in some member states and will need to be strengthened. In terms of this priority area therefore, the emphasis is on activities towards agreeing and disseminating the monitoring indicators at Member State level whilst drawing on the national experiences of management information system (MIS) professionals. The latter will enable the identification of TVET data inconsistencies (e.g. definitions, incomplete or overlapping coverage of data from national institutions, providers and agencies). The SADC Technical Committee will therefore be in a position to harmonise assumptions underlying the collection of TVET indicators and ensure that comparable, rigorous and as near complete data can be available by the end of the strategic period. It may be possible (and somewhat pragmatic) to prioritise the collection/dissemination of some indicators on the basis of already agreed assumptions/terminologies. In other words, an incremental approach may be more effective.

4.4. Institutional Development

This priority area relates to the development of a joined-up approach to SADC TVET by leveraging on key national institutions (regulatory and quality assurance bodies) as well as the public/private TVET providers. Given the existing SADC structures (e.g. Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation - TCCA), the priority activities and output indicators relate to the development of (i) a joint action plan with TVET Technical Committee on promoting links between the different national bodies, and (ii) the design of a template memorandum of understanding (MoU) to underpin bilateral and multi-lateral relationships. As has been noted in the 2018 Strategic Framework (e.g. the Better Education for Africa's Rise – BEAR project) and in the 2019 Inception Meeting Report, there are several cases of good practice across the region, which could be shared between the different institutions and form the basis for MoUs.

Furthermore, and in light of Priority Area 1 interventions, it would be appropriate to focus on the identified sectors to foster partnership and network for training providers as part of national platforms. However, it is often the case that larger / more established providers (whether private or public, typically in urban areas / large cities) tend to have the necessary resources/capacity to draw opportunities and benefits from such networks. Smaller and local/rural providers, which tend to serve a higher proportion of learners and communities from disadvantaged backgrounds, tend to be less able to be involved. In this regard, the partnership/network activities need to encourage the involvement of such providers in national platforms through appropriate support and logistics, and by targeting particular rural networks (e.g. agriculture-focused TVET

institutions). Finally, in terms of facilitating the establishment of national Centres of Specialisation/Excellence, there seems to be recent developments at the SADC level (SADC University of Transformation) to be considered. As it stands, most of the strategic period could be devoted to the conceptualisation and financing of such centres, in line with the sectoral strategies.

4.5. TVET Systems Development

Building on the policy review and institutional development planks of the Strategic Framework, the main output indicators relate to the design and development of good practice guidelines for a range of mainstream and emerging TVET systems. There is relatively more confidence in developing and promoting the application of 'good' practices and template guidelines relating to Quality Assurance, Assessments and Certification, Curriculum Review, Learning Pathways, Qualifications Framework, Recognition of Prior Learning, and Work Based Learning. Therefore it is assumed the timescale for implementation post-design (2023-2027) is achievable with Member States having embedded these systems, and through their national accreditation / registration schemes, ensuring that TVET providers adopt these processes/practices.

In contrast, there is arguably less familiarity with the development of skills for the Green/Blue Economies and informal Economy. In this respect, it would seem judicious to consider a more gradual process involving the funding of a number of pilot projects to be implemented by selected TVET providers. The intention therefore is not only to provide good practice guidelines but also to highlight examples of TVET programmes addressing skills development in these areas.

4.6. TVET Staff/Managers and Teacher Training/Trainers

This area first relies on the adoption of a common nomenclature to inform the preparation of a training needs analysis and capacity building strategy for the region. It is expected that many of the insights and data would flow from existing interactions with national bodies, partners' forum, national TVET strategies/reviews and higher education providers. Of particular note is the need to ascertain TVET staffing requirements vs. existing capacity (the TVET human resource gap), taking into account specific disciplines and emerging areas. This will lead to the articulation of a TVET Capacity Building Strategy, which can dovetail with the ambition to launch a regional TVET Teacher Training Centre. In parallel, existing TVET Teacher training programmes would be assessed in light of the Regional Teacher Standards and Competences

Framework (which as of now, does not appear to directly address the case of TVET Teacher Standards). What is however not very well articulated in the document is the prioritisation or focus on which roles within TVET institutions e.g TVET teachers/lecturers vs other roles (managers, professional services)

4.7 Advocacy

This is wide ranging set of interventions, firstly aimed at providing a research, intellectual and evidence base for TVET policies/initiatives in the region and for Africa. As highlighted by a recent review of the academic literature (McGrath et al., 2020), TVET in Africa is heavily structured within political economies that have emerged out of contestations and compromises. The authors argue that labour markets and education and training systems have often been characterised by different types of inequalities and exclusions; issues that are mentioned in the 2018 Strategic Framework but which are arguably challenging to address from a regional perspective. To this extent therefore, there is a need for detailed research base and capacity to evaluate TVET systems and their consequences to inform the Strategic Framework, which is reflected in the stated indicators and outcomes. Furthermore, an indicator is outlined with the aim of fostering a 'professionalization' of TVET to address concerns of its status vis-à-vis other teaching cadres. Finally, the advocacy element considers how one might popularise the TVET choice in schools, relative to other career/educational destinations.

5. Conclusion

Informed by the 2018 Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (and further adjustments gathered during the Inception Meeting Report, 31 Oct-1 November 2019), this report has provided the methodology and justifications underpinning the process of differentiating output indicators (to measure activities/priority actions) from the intended outcomes of the SADC Strategy and TVET M&E Framework. It also reviews the nature the M&E indicators to ensure these can be expressed in SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound) terms recognising the staggered nature of different activities over the strategic period and the time lag before actual outcomes are observed or evidenced. As highlighted earlier, and once there is agreement in terms of the indicators and outcomes, it would be advisable to consider a mapping of risks/assumptions underpinning priority area interventions since these would have an impact on the achievement of indicators and eventually outcomes/impact.

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