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Guidelines for working with
Youth in Non-formal Settings in
Southern Africa

The logo for DVV International's 50th anniversary. It features the number '50' in a large, bold, dark blue font. To the right of '50' is the word 'Years' in a smaller, gold-colored font. Below '50 Years' is the text 'DVV International' in a dark blue font. To the left of the '50' is a small graphic of three overlapping circles in shades of blue and grey.
50 Years
DVV International

INTRODUCTION

In 2019 a regional workshop was held with representatives from Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), government departments as well as academia from the Southern African countries of Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa where DWV International is based. The workshop considered good practices and approaches when working with youth and their learning needs in non-formal settings.

Drawing on key theoretical underpinnings the workshop considered the dominant ideological and philosophical approaches that are typically applied to youth education, internationally and at country level. While the United Nations defines youth as those aged between 15-24 in the region, the youth age range spans from 15-35 years. High levels of youth not in education, employment or training (NEET) exist across the region, which is unsustainable.

The workshop therefore considered the bridges and barriers that impact youth in their efforts to be active citizens and develop skills and livelihoods. Each country context was considered in terms of the specific youth education, training and development practices that exist and explored apparent gaps.

GUIDELINES

Policy Frameworks

A scan of policy frameworks revealed that various policies exist in the respective countries with the specific intention to support youth education and training, while other policies relate to youth employment and skills development as well as issues of social security. Despite various youth policies being in place implementation levels are uneven, while it is also notable that some efforts are being made to realise the policy-practice nexus. The challenge of access to relevant programmes for youth in non-formal settings remains huge.

Guidelines on Policy

- Education policies should be aligned to the local learning needs of youth and not only speak to education for formal employment as these opportunities are shrinking.
- The importance of "alternative" and locally relevant non-formal skills and knowledge should be given greater consideration by policy frameworks that are aligned to available budgets.
- Youth related policies should be made explicit and integrated into Community Colleges to advance youth development.
- A range of other community learning spaces, especially for youth not in education, employment or training should also be supported.
- As government administrations change this was found to affect commitments to youth development and the implementation of programmes, which should be avoided.

Partnerships and advocacy

It was agreed that some of the most effective lobbying and advocacy activities are possible through collaborative efforts between social actors focussing on non-formal youth education and development.

Guidelines on Partnerships and Advocacy

- Partnership efforts between the various education sector actors have proven to shape progressive policy frameworks, practices and approaches that are meaningful and relevant to local youth needs.
- Partnerships between more experienced youth and community members have the potential to engage social issues as well as address skills and livelihoods development.
- Community level advocacy and mobilisation have proven to support and grow the interest in youth education and skills development.
- Youth activists and youth educators should develop regional partnerships and engage through documentation exchange, digital platforms or face-to-face activities that will help to advance the profile and interest in community education.

Resourcing of youth programmes

As is the case with youth and adult education globally, youth programmes in Southern Africa are severely under-funded and impacts the potential to address the huge challenges that confront youth across the region. In the absence of dedicated funding for youth education, many socio-economic conditions that plague mostly poor communities will persist.

Guidelines on Resourcing Youth Programmes

- Resource mobilisation is key to advancing youth education and training in non-formal settings.
- Government departments that have a youth development mandate need to unlock the resource potential in-country and where possible also internationally, to enable the implementation of targeted youth education and training programmes.
- Collaborative engagements and planning between NGOs, government departments and other social players enhance the potential and capacity to leverage resources for non-formal youth education.
- On the basis of established policy and a community college/community education system, it is likely that funds could be targeted for non-formal youth education alongside the much-favoured formal education provisioning.

Education and Training Programmes for Youth

Typically, dominant education and training programmes for youth, in most countries, are linked to business and market-orientated notions of what counts as important or useful education. It is for this reason that Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) receives high levels of resource allocation while often the inputs do not translate to the requisite learner through-put.

Guidelines in Education and Training Programmes for Youth

- It is now evident that youth programmes offered as second chance education that primarily mimic school education approaches, offered as re-modelled programmes that are often not suitable in content or as learning approaches, in the first instance.
- Relevant education and training for youth in non-formal settings should ideally comprise a mix of non-formal, technical, cultural and socially relevant programmes.
- Contextual considerations and the interests of youth should prevail over prescriptive models that are often out of sync with the needs of learners and local communities.
- Good community education programmes facilitated with, and by youth have shown to support livelihoods and skills development for unemployed youth for whom jobs in the formal job market are not available.
- Dynamic youth education in non-formal contexts has the potential to shape and influence social and cultural practices.
- Youth programmes in street theatre, flash-mob sessions and other public engaging events are effective approaches when engaging issues such as patriarchy and gender-justice, xenophobia and racism among many social challenges.

With the necessary support, we can engage youth in dynamic community learning and education approaches in non-formal settings that have shown significant transformative possibilities, in almost any context.

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