Opportunities, Challenges and Recommendations for Education, Vocational, and Digital Skills Development

Introduction

This summary report was created based on discussions at the workshop on "Educational, Vocational, and Digital Skills Development," held online on June 16 and June 18, 2020. The workshop was part of the "Development in the Age of Digital Platforms" conference, organized by GIZ, Münchner Kreis, and the World Bank. The workshop was split into two focus areas: (1) introduction to digital learning platforms in the context of development cooperation and (2) showcasing African examples of projects and businesses engaged in this space: African Centers of Excellence, Digital Skills Accelerator Africa, Festo, atingi, GOON, and Pan African Cooperation and Educational Technologies (PACET). The exchange explored current challenges and potential opportunities to provide recommendations for the conceptualisation and institutionalisation of digital platforms for education.

Opportunities

- Digital learning platforms allow for the creation of new relationships and new forms of interaction and didactics between learners, trainers, facilitators, providers, stakeholders, and content. Participants can take control of their own learning by completing self-study courses and planning their own learning paths.
- Innovative combinations of synchronous and asynchronous learning (blended learning) can be developed, which in turn can be combined with offerings outside of the traditional learning space (e.g., community, government, and commercial services)
- Virtual learning formats allow for participation in learning activities despite the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and/or geographic boundaries
- Fostering local education and training providers and developers of learning content, building partnerships

Challenges

- The digital divide and gender gap continue to be major challenges in the effort to reach target groups in sustainable and equitable ways (in line with "Leave No One Behind")
- Access to technology and Internet is still uneven and not universal
- Skills of potential employees in the workforce are often lacking and need upskilling
- Existing learning content may not fit the needs of local target groups, and hence needs to be adapted to local contexts
- Digital learning platforms often lack financial backing and support

Recommendations

- Collaborate across all stakeholder groups to establish and promote digital platforms for learning, including the public and private sectors, NGOs, international development organizations, start-ups and creatives
- Innovate and be creative in designing digital and blended learning offerings, while at the same time keeping in mind that in-person contact and communication are still needed.
- Be sure to include underrepresented groups (women, minorities, those living in rural and remote areas, etc.) and make low-bandwidth learning tools available. Design with the user and take the needs of the local communities and ecosystems into account
- Bundle offerings onto fewer platforms if feasible, instead of reinventing the wheel every time by establishing a new platform. Make use of Open Educational Resources and open-source solutions.
- Encourage investments from the public and private sectors and international development programs to continue to connect the unconnected
- Continue to build digital skills at all levels, adopting a wider definition of capabilities. Capabilities = skills + (infra)structure + enablers
- Establish the right regulatory and framework conditions and leadership to strengthen digital access and skills, e.g. by integrating digital access and skills in national and local agendas for digitalization, offering certification of online degrees, funding and promoting public learning platforms, etc.