

## **VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN ETHIOPIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS IN HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT**

**Wanna Leka\***

### **1. Introduction**

The federal government of Ethiopia is quite aware that economic development cannot be achieved without human resource development. Human resource development means the process of increasing the knowledge, the skills, and the capacities of the people through schooling (Sodhi, 1985). In the process of human resource development, schools play a significant role. According to Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1985), "schooling imparts specific knowledge and develops reasoning skills; it also includes change in beliefs, values and attitudes toward work and society" (p. 45).

Education has also become a human right issue since 1948. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (article 26) laid down that: Every one has the right to education.

\* Institute of Education Research, Addis Ababa University.

Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

Countries throughout the world see education as an engine for development. This is more so for developing countries. Recognising this, African governments including Ethiopia made a strong commitment to expand education in the Addis Ababa Conference of 1961.

African countries attending the conference recommended that: primary education shall be universal, compulsory and free by 1980, while education at the secondary level shall be provided to 30 percent of the children who complete the primary school (Addis Ababa Conference on Education 1961). Since then, massive investments have been made in education. However there are still problems of illiteracy, unemployment, shortage of trained manpower, inequality etc. Universal primary education (UPS) is still a long way off for many African countries including Ethiopia.

## **2. A Brief Review of Literature**

In this section, I will attempt to do three things: (1) conceptualise education and training in relation to human resource development, (2) briefly discuss the status of

education in Ethiopia, and (3) enumerate briefly major issues related to vocational education and training in the process of human resource development within the Ethiopian context.

## **2.1 Conceptual Framework**

The purpose of education is to impart knowledge, help to develop skills and bring about attitudinal change to individuals as well as to the society. Thus, education could be defined as a conscious and deliberate process, well planned to modify the behaviour of the educated in desirable and socially approved channels and to bring about in the educated specific knowledge and skills (Aggarwal, 1981:12).

Education could be given through different systems. The three best known are (1) formal (fulltime, hierarchical, and state sanctioned), (2) non-formal (organised, systematic, out of school, deliberate instruction), and (3) informal (not organised, not systematic, out of school).

Schools play an important role in developing human resource. Human resource development is essentially the process of increasing the knowledge, the skills and the capacities of the people (Sodhi, 1985: 60). The same author further states that from economics point of view development of human resource could be described as the accumulation of human capital and its effective investments in the development of an economy. In political terms, human resource development prepares for



adult participation in the political process, particularly as citizens in a democracy. From the social and cultural points, the development of human resource helps people to lead a happy life. Thus, human resource development could be realised when a holistic educational system is able to unlock the potentials of human beings by using different means of delivery.

## **2.2 A Brief Review of the Status of Education in Ethiopia**

Ethiopia can be considered as a country inhabited by people of different faith. In traditional Ethiopia two religious institutions, namely the Orthodox Church and the mosques were responsible for the dissemination of religious education. These religious institutions were mainly interested in promoting their respective doctrines and always had strong suspicion towards western education.

However, western type of education (modern education) was introduced into the country in 1908. Since then, a substantial progress has been made in the field of education. By 1999/2000, the total enrollment at primary level (1-8) was 51% of the school age children. In the same academic year, only 571,719 students were enrolled in the secondary schools. This means the secondary school enrollment was only 10.3% in 1999/2000 (MOE, 1999/2000).

The number of students enrolled in Technical/Vocational Schools (both in government and non-government) is very low. In 1999/2000 only 3427 students were enrolled in governmental Vocational/Technical schools. In nine documented non-government Technical/Vocational schools, a total of 1837 students attended the programmes. In 21 skill development centres located in the regions of Tigray, Oromia, Amhara and Southern Nations, a total of 2474 students attended the programme (MOE - 1999/2000).

For a long time, the educational system of the country has been plagued with problems such as wastage (dropout and repetition) low completion of primary education (i.e, 1-8 grades), disparity (in terms of gender, urban/rural, regional), lack of instructional materials, poor facilities, irrelevant curriculum, poorly trained teachers etc. Due to these problems, the country has not developed its human resource as expected through education and training.

### **3. Training For Skills Development**

The Ethiopian education system has been decentralised since 1990 and a new education and training policy has been in place as of 1994. The formal education structure has three levels, namely: primary, secondary and tertiary.

Primary education has two chief purposes: (1) to produce a literate and numerate population that can deal with problems

at home and work; and (2) to serve as a foundation upon which further education is built (World Bank Policy paper, 1990).

Similarly, secondary schools have two major purposes: (a) preparing students for the world of work and (2) preparing for post secondary (i.e tertiary level education).

It must be emphasised here that primary education is the foundation for all types of training. It is a prerequisite for further education and training.

Ethiopia with its long history of culture and tradition had artisan population over the country for centuries. Craft work is common through out the country. However, the modern school based vocational/technical programmes that train young people for different skills were introduced to Ethiopia in the early part of the 1940s. Since the 1940s, many young people were trained to occupy positions that required skills. However, the needed skilled manpower has always been in short supply. Ethiopia ranks quite low among African countries in terms of students enrolled in vocational/technical areas at secondary level (Science and Technology in Africa 1999, UNESCO).



### **3.1 Categories of Training**

Individuals could be trained in different ways to acquire skills. However, it is possible to divide training into two major areas: Training for the modern sector and training for the informal sectors.

#### **3.1.1 Training for the Modern Sector include:**

##### **a. Employer Training**

In this kind of training both public and private sector employers are involved. Public sector employers usually provide a large share of this training. An example of such training could include project-related training that accompanies new physical investment or training given in public agencies serving a particular sector – such as agriculture, or public works or state – owned enterprises.

##### **b. Private Training**

This kind of training is done by vocational schools and training centres for profit making. Sometimes, voluntary agencies or NGOs could carry out this kind of training. Private training vocational institutions keep their capital costs low, are flexible in operation and are more student interest centred.

### **c. Public Pre-employment Training**

Many types of vocational schools and training centres offer publicly supported pre-employment training for entry into skilled jobs in the modern sector. The instruction provided in vocational schools is referred to as "vocational education", that provided in training centres is called "vocational training". Vocational schools are most often run by ministries of education (operate on a three-four years cycle that parallels the academic secondary schools).

Training centres are usually run by ministries of labour or quasi-autonomous training authorities. Training here is more intensive and often of shorter duration than that provided in schools.

#### **3.1.2. Training for the Informal Sectors include:**

##### **a. Rural Sector**

In most developing countries, farming is the main source of employment. Agricultural extension services are the main source of technical information and skills development for farmers. Agricultural schools and colleges run by ministries of education or agriculture prepare young people for farm employment, as well as wage employment in the agricultural sector.



## **b. Urban Informal Sector**

Young people in the urban informal sector acquire much of their skill training through traditional apprenticeship. Graduates of pre-employment vocational education and training institutions also join the informal sector when opportunities for wage employment in the modern sector is limited.

The formal vocational-technical programmes in Ethiopia have poor institutional links with employers. One of the main reasons is that these institutions are only accountable to the regional education bureaus; placing their graduates in jobs is rarely used as a criterion for obtaining budget or promotion. Successful job placement of vocational programme graduates is one of the indicators of effective training system.

Most of the Ethiopian workforce in the modern sector (formal sector) has low level vocational training. At the same time, most graduates from vocational-technical schools are either unemployed or underemployed. Thus, Ethiopia faces a dual employment problem common to many developing countries. Available data indicates that vocational education and training is more successful in terms of enhancing worker productivity rather than guaranteeing employment. For vocational education and training to pay off for individuals and for government, skill oriented jobs must be available in the labour

market. When jobs are not available in the labour market, the returns on training investment are low.

Due to its inherent nature and other external factors, vocational educational and training programs in countries like Ethiopia are not successful. Some of the major factors that could be cited include:

- a. a small modern and near stagnating employment market;
- b. financial constraints and weak implementation capacity;
- c. training programmes based on anticipated employment demand rather than on planned labour need;
- d. fewer linkages with enterprises, or employers;
- e. little or no success in developing alternative financing sources;
- f. little investment in quality improvement.

When training institutions do not get the necessary feedback from employers about their graduates, the programmes in training institutions stagnate. Establishing link between training institutions and employing agencies will be helpful for both groups.

#### **4. What should be done to have an effective training programmes in the country?**

It is quite clear now that the quality of a nation's workforce is important for economic growth and social development. The two factors considered determinants of the quality of a workforce are (a) labour productivity – the value of the goods and services produced by a worker, (b) the flexibility of the workforce – the ability of the workers to move across different sectors of the economy and between industries as economy changes (Adams et al., 1993).

Education and training develops the human capital. Developed human capital is necessary for the economic progress of a country. Government schools play significant role in the process of educating and training people. Moreover, training given outside the formal schools system by NGOs or private agencies is also important. The benefits of vocational education could be classified into two groups: (a) societal and (b) individual benefits.

The current training institutions, either in the formal school system or outside the formal schools operate in an environment where the economic activities are not strong. In such situations, institutional capacities to deliver effective training are weak. This is one of the main reasons why most vocational education and training institutes are ineffective. Therefore, the first challenge is to improve the use of this



existing capacity through policies and practices that capitalise on the strengths of each element of the training system. A good return on training investments requires not only efficiency in the use of training resource, but also effectiveness in placing trained individuals in the jobs that use their skills.

The success of training strategies depends on both the existence of employment opportunities and the capacity of training programmes to identify and develop the right skills. Vocational training in the absence of employment opportunities could be taken as "training for the shelf". What is the point of training skilled workers in anticipation of demand? Skills, if not used, deteriorate overtime.

Skills training can never lead to employment and productivity growth if job opportunities are not expanding. Thus, the viability of vocational education and training correlates much with the dynamism of an economy.

The main objective of vocational education and training is to prepare individuals for jobs at entry levels in the modern sector. In the Ethiopian context, the modern sector employs about 15 percent of the total labour force.

Available data indicates that young people having vocational training are swelling the ranks of the unemployed. However, the current education and training programmes at different levels can not be suspended. The challenge is to articulate both education and training with employment opportunities.

To activate employment opportunities and prioritise the training needs require policy decisions. Public training institutions have a number of common constraints that affect the quality of the programmes.

Some of the common constraints that need to be addressed by policy makers include inadequate financing, weak information links with employers, fragmentation of training systems and constraints at the level of each institutions etc.

## **5. Conclusion**

In Ethiopia, there are different modes of training systems in the form of formal and non-formal. These training systems are fragmented, and the effect is to prepare individuals for the same occupation, thus raising the costs of training. It is economically sound to have a lead agency to co-ordinate the different training programmes. It seems that different vocational education and training institutions in Ethiopia need re-assessment in light of the points discussed above and the new education and training policy.

We can not say that all the existing training programmes are effective. There is lack of accountability, in general. Vocational education and training programmes operate under changing economic environment. Training institutions can be more effective if they operate adaptively. Vocational schools

run by the government face problems due to their mechanistic system of management.

In order to reverse the existing situations both short term and long term approaches are needed. In short term approach, the existing training institutions must be evaluated in terms of their goals and objectives. Moreover, both public and private training institutions must create a forum to design training strategies in light of the new education and training policy.

As part of long term approaches, a system has to be designed that gives accurate information on the supply and demand of labour needs. The foundation for strong vocational education and training is good instruction in general education. This relationship must be strengthened when the existing programmes are reformed or as the new ones develop.

As indicated earlier, the majority of the Ethiopian workforce has no good education and training. This deficiency hampers the productivity of the workers. Both government and other training institutions need to have a strategy to upgrade the educational qualification of the existing workforce. Vocational education and training function in an environment of economic and social changes. Thus, its management must run based on adaptability. It is through this kind of approach that future training programmes could become dynamic in order to develop the human resource that the country needs.



## REFERENCES

- Adams, A; J. Middleton, & A.Ziderman 1993, Skills for Productivity: Vocational Education and Training in Developing Countries. London: Oxford.
- Aggarwal, J.C. 1981, Theory and Principles of Education: Philosophical and Sociological Bases of Education. Delhi: VIKAS.
- Ministry of Education 1999/2000, Educational Statistics Annual Abstract, Addis Ababa.
- Science and Technology in Africa 1990, Paris: UNESCO.
- Sodhi, T.S. 1985, Education and Development .Delhi: VIKAS.
- Woodhall, M. R. and G. Psacharopoulos 1985, Education for Development An Analysis of Investment Choices. London: Allyn and Bacon.