

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MTR UGA1402711 and UGA160331T SSU

1. Presentation of the evaluation

The Support to Skilling Uganda (SSU) programme aims at increasing employability of youth through better quality of instruction and learning in Skills Development and by making Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) more responsive to labour market needs. The programme is implemented from 2015 to mid 2021 in three regions of Uganda: the Albertine/Rwenzori region supported by Belgium with 16 M €, Karamoja supported by Ireland with 6 M € and Northern Uganda (refugee and host community focused) supported by the EU with 4.5 M €.

The SSU programme has three main components:

- Reform of TVET sector and governance in Uganda;
- Competitive pilot skills development fund (SDF) to support private sector focused skills development projects by multi-stakeholder partnerships on the ground;
- Support to 7 Technical and Vocational Institutions in Western Uganda and Karamoja to improving TVET teaching facilities and methods and become Centres of Excellence.

This mid-term review focuses on Belgium and Ireland funded interventions only and the period of start (October 2015) until the third Quarter of 2018. The MTR objectives are:

- Support steering of the SSU in the remaining programme period and possibly beyond;
- Contribute to learning and further innovation in SSU implementation and beyond;
- Provide accountability to Belgium and Ireland as the donors of the components of SSU reviewed in this MTR

The MTR team has reviewed a series of questions, based on the OECD-DAC evaluation criteria, crosscutting issues identified by Enabel and specific questions identified by the SSU programme team and Enabel in Uganda. The MTR team has used qualitative research methods to respond these questions, consisting of an extensive desk-review, in-depth open interviews with key informant, site visits, inspection visits to TVET training facilities and debriefing and validation meetings at the end of regional and national fieldwork and at Enabel Head Quarters in Brussels. This MTR was conducted by a team of two experts and with backstopping and quality control in Belgium by COTA. The whole process comprised the period October 2018 – February 2019.

2. Results and conclusions

2.1. Performance criteria.

Relevance

The SSU programme relevance is high. The interventions are aligned with policies of the Government of Uganda (GoU) , its development strategy and most directly the Skilling Uganda Strategy 2012-2020. Technical Assistance provided by SSU to the TVET reform Task Force has been constrained by different visions within the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) and the GoU

and between MoES and the SSU programme with respect to how to move forward the TVET reform process. These constraints remained until 2018, when the MoES embarked on a process of development of a draft TVET policy, breaking with a period of inertia in TVET reform during the previous years.

Alignment with the Education Development Partners in Uganda is strong and close cooperation exist with Ireland and EU as co-donors of SSU and with the World Bank, another important ally in the TVET sector.

SSU's relevance for target groups (private sector and youth) is also high because SSU addresses key challenges in skills development in Uganda. Relevance can still increase if more attention would be given to entrepreneurship and Micro Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) development to expand and formalise Uganda's private sector in addition to skills absorption by the private sector in the form of wage employment.

Efficiency

Efficiency of coordination and implementation of the SSU programme in the first two full programme years was low but has strongly improved in 2018. Programme implementation has gone up significantly and commitment of budgets to activities at the end of 2018 is now at the level of original programme planning, although a considerable amount of expenditures still has to be effectuated in 2019 and 2020.

Efficiency challenges are encountered particularly in the staffing of the SSU team, that has suffered significant discontinuity and now shows a considerable amount of vacancies. Also, in the area of M&E, the SSU programme has suffered from sometimes difficulties in measuring set of indicators and limited utility of the M&E for the SSU team in programme implementation.

Effectiveness

Effectiveness of the SSU programme varies.

At national level, SSU has faced constraints in the first years to move the TVET reform process forward. The policy change within MoES in 2018 to accelerate the development of the draft TVET policy has included insights of the SSU programme and, if approved, is likely to create new opportunities for effective support to reforming the TVET sector.

Effectiveness of the SDF and support to VTIs has been good, although these components required a rather long-term preparation process. However, at the end of 2018, these components have gathered steam and are reaching out effectively to the partner VTIs, private sector actors, district governments, NGOs and target groups. Effects produced by SSU at the district level are clearly noticeable and recognised by different stakeholders.

Impact

At the time of this MTR it is still too early to assess impact. Only perspectives for emerging impact can be identified.

To some extent, lack of impact can be attributed to the slow start of SSU and to the fact of linking the SSU programme to the TVET sector reform process at national level. As the SSU programme is now well established as a pilot and innovation programme on the ground, perspectives for impact at district and possibly sector level are good.

An issue that requires attention in monitoring and evaluation of is the strategy to provide in-depth support to only a limited number of VTIs, while the TVET sector is much larger.

Impact of SSU at policy level (the TVET reform process) has remained limited and also because of poor quality of the policy dialogue process until 2018, the programme has focused more on innovation and interventions on the ground. Impact of SSU at this level is still uncertain and depends largely on the approval of the draft TVET policy.

Sustainability

Sustainability of the infrastructure and capacity development interventions in VTIs is good because they are well embedded in longer-term business plans of the VTIs. Partner VTIs have a reasonable absorption capacity to receive and put these investments to good use.

Relations and cooperation between district level actors around TVET coordination for the private sector are good and the different actors are committed to invest in these relations. There is a risk that district skills development platforms are still too strongly in the hand of the SSU team. Transfer of these platforms to national partners requires more attention.

Perspectives for exiting and transfer of SDF are not yet good, as there is no clear multi-stakeholder body to which such a fund could be transferred. To a large extent, the sustainability of the SDF as a fund will depend on the approval of the draft TVET policy.

Sustainability of projects supported by the SDF is not yet possible to assess, as these activities had just started at the time of this review. However, an issue of concern is the short-term nature of SDF funded projects limits perspectives to produce long-lasting effects, particularly when vulnerable groups are targeted.

With respect to SSU support to TVET reform and governance, it is impossible to assess sustainability as this will depend on approval of the draft TVET policy.

2.2. Crosscutting issues

Gender

In spite of attention and efforts in the SSU programme to address gender issues and improve participation of girls and young women, results have remained limited. Two main challenges were identified in this review:

- Partner VTIs generally have only a small percentage of female students and most of the curriculums address in the SSU programme are focusing on male dominated skills;
- The approach to increase female participation has included breaking with gender stereotypes and lead women into male dominated skills. This approach is too narrow to significantly increase the participation of female beneficiaries in SDF, above the currently achieved percentage of 31%.

Environment

Attention to environmental issues in SSU implementation has been limited, though not absent. In VTIs, attention to environmental issues in TVET provision and curriculums is limited. In infrastructure interventions supported by SSU environmental issues were included, such as sustainable energy (solar panels), water-wells, septic tanks and WASH facilities. In SDF, some projects with specific environmental focus were funded, such as training in energy saving stove production.

2.3. Specific questions

Management of the SSU field offices

Staffing and management of the SSU field offices is good with high capacity to interact with all relevant stakeholders. Relations between field offices and the national SSU office are efficient and effective. Only in the area of M&E, limited user-friendliness and utility of M&E were regularly flagged and now this issue is being tackled. In Western Uganda some staffing constraints are encountered due to discontinuity in teams and a high number of vacancies. And relations with USSIA in Western Uganda were not considered very effective. In Karamoja challenges of connectivity were flagged.

Coordination and synergy of SDHR and SSU interventions

The coordination and synergy between the two interventions is considered good and no constraints were reported by the SSU team. However, at the local and organisation level, beneficiaries report that the supply of capacity development services is high compared to the absorption capacity of the local organisations. Also planning is not sufficiently flexible.

3. Main recommendations

The SSU steering committee and the SSU programme team are recommended to keep up the current high speed of implementation to ensure that the programme can be finalised within its original timeframe.

The SSU programme team and Enabel are recommended to follow closely the process of approval of the draft TVET policy and to coordinate with the Belgium Embassy and other development partners in the Education Sector Working group if and when policy dialogue with the Government of Uganda can be intensified to ensure that the TVET policy will be passed and can be used to guide the set-up of a new coordination system and body for TVET that brings all relevant partners together.

The SSU programme team is recommended, within its remaining timeframe and budget, to invest more time, effort and resources in updating and innovating the core curriculums and corresponding teaching methods and materials both for short and long courses of the 7 VTIs supported by SSU. The timeframe of developing the curriculums should match planning of opening the doors of the new Centres of Excellence.

The SSU programme team is recommended to continue to invest in district and sectoral dialogue and coordination structures and also try to involve district level government departments to also be more exposed to multi-stakeholder cooperation. Systematising and dissemination of lessons learned in inter-departmental coordination and multi-stakeholder cooperation by the SSU programme staff can serve to examples for such coordination and cooperation at the national level.

In the remaining implementation period of SSU, the SSU programme team and implementing partners should continue to work on further changes in mindsets on private sector relevance of TVET and inclusiveness. This is particularly needed in:

- Balancing training approaches and contents focusing on preparing for wage employment and preparing for self-employment and MSME development;
- Further progress in improving gender transformative TVET provision, targeting on increasing the participation of girls and young women and exploring not only bringing in women in male-dominated skills, but also in providing new gender-neutral skills. The SSU programme team and partner VTIs should be challenged to increase targets for participation of girls and young women to at least 50%.

4. Lessons learned

Capacity development takes time and requires long-term approaches. Capacity development at the institutional, organisational and individual level usually doesn't produce significant and sustainable results in the time-frame of short-term TVET programmes and projects:

- a) The complex and multi-stakeholder environment for skills development, requires investing in trust building and bringing parties together and to contribute to attitude and behavioural change. Larger scale and complex capacity development interventions in both hardware (buildings and materials) and software (teaching methods, management) also require considerable time. A five-year timeframe for this type of programmes seems rather short;
- b) Transfer of capacities to TVET institutions is likely to take several policy cycles and strategic planning periods before these capacities are effectively integrated at the organisation level. Also here a five year time frame-frame seems rather short;
- c) Specific projects that focus on skills development of specific target groups often have a short time frame of only a few months. While these projects can give a boost to self-esteem and empowerment of individuals, the timeframe is too short to produce long-lasting results in terms of effective labour-market integration of entrepreneurial activities of these target groups, particularly in the case of extra vulnerable groups.

For TVET to produce effective economic integration of youth a two-track approach is needed. TVET providing institutions traditionally prepare youth for integration in the labour-market, but when the formal private sector is small and enterprises are small or very small, the skills-absorption capacity of the private sector is also small. TVET providing institutions, therefore should also consider preparing youth for self-employment and the development of small enterprises. Both options are usually not mutually exclusive as youth often moves between wage- and contract-employment and self-employment. Therefore, TVET providing institutions should follow a two-track approach in skills development of youth, preparing them for both options.

Private sector driven and market-oriented TVET needs intensive multi-stakeholder coordination. Multi-stakeholder coordination is particularly useful at the district and sector level, where different stakeholders from the private sector, government and NGO's and TVET providing institutions can come together around concrete issues and challenges and can serve as an example for such cooperation at the national level. At the policy and Government level, effective multi-

stakeholder approaches also require inter-ministerial and inter-departmental coordination to tackle to full complexity of private sector driven and market oriented TVET provision.

Gender transformative change and inclusion of women in TVET require well-developed and tailored approaches. It is not enough to set targets for participation of women and vulnerable groups without introducing special measures and instruments to provide relevant and effective services for these target groups. While it is good to lead women into male dominated skills sectors to break with gender stereotypes, this alone is not enough and much more should be done. Breaking with the gender stereotypes requires multiple actions and projects and programmes working on TVET should consider setting more ambitious targets to achieve that women and men can participate equally in skills development.

While piloting of projects is useful to introduce new models and methods, links with the broader policy environment and institutions are needed for larger scale impact. In order to achieve higher level impact, experiences and results of pilots need to be translated into models and inputs for policy and systems development to ensure that the TVET sector as a whole can be reformed. Even when the national policy context might not be sufficiently open to receive such inputs, continued efforts are needed to avoid that projects on the ground only have impact at the local or organisational level.