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by: Robert Palmer, University of Edinburgh and NORRAG

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT, EMPLOYMENT AND SUSTAINED GROWTH IN GHANA: SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES

Email: Rob.Palmer@norrags.org

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Summary

Against a backdrop of some two decades of sustained economic growth in Ghana, this article argues that there are a series of sustainability challenges related to technical and vocational skills development that need to be addressed [1].

Trade, rapid advances in science and technology, and intensified economic competition have shaped the demand for skills in countries worldwide. Ghana is no exception. Technical and vocational skills development (TVSD), delivered through public and private schools, vocational training institutes and informal apprenticeships, continues to be seen by the Government of Ghana as an important link to employment, and as a means to promote economic growth and reduce poverty in the country.

Since the mid-1980s Ghana has experienced sustained gross domestic product growth in the 4 to 5 % range and has seen large average reductions in poverty levels. Nonetheless, concerns exist as to whether skill deficits have or may become a constraint to Ghana's sustained growth and capacity for reducing poverty.

The New Education Reform, which was launched in September 2007, includes TVSD components which, together, have the goal of making Ghana's TVSD system more accessible, of better quality and more relevant to the needs to industry and sustained socio-economic development.

Against a backdrop of some two decades of sustained economic growth in Ghana, there are a series of sustainability challenges related to TVSD that need to be addressed:

- Promoting the sustainability of education-for-all achievements through expanding post-basic education and TVSD;
- Identifying sustainable financing mechanisms for an expansion of TVSD;
- Promoting and sustaining equitable access;
- Ensuring that expansion in quantity does not lead to a compromise on the achievement and sustainability of quality and relevance issues;
- Promoting the sustainability of TVSD expansion by widening opportunities for lifelong learning;
- Creating an enabling environment for skills utilization through sustainable employment growth.

The New Patriotic Party's (NPP) first term of office (2001-2004) did not bring about the kind of visible 'positive change' that much of the population expected. Now, almost at the end of its second term, the NPP face significant pressure noticeably to improve living standards and to follow-through on job creation pledges or else risk losing the December 2008 elections. The effect such political pressure will have on addressing the policy challenges noted above is potentially a concern. The impact this pressure has already had on policy formation and implementation has perhaps already been seen in the highly politicized Skills Training and Entrepreneurship Programme (2002-2005), the launching of the over-hyped and potentially unsustainable National Youth Employment Programme (in 2006) and the moves towards developing a New Apprenticeship Programme in 2008. These all appear to be manifestations of emerging populist policies.

Notes

[1] The full text of this article is forthcoming in a special issue of the *International Journal of Education Development* on Education and Training for Sustainable Growth.