

## CASE STUDIES

# Creating a globally competitive workforce

Vocational education is important to unlocking Africa's economic potential. A number of multinational companies have spearheaded training and internship programmes on the continent, writes **Emilie Dock**

**T**he African education agenda is increasingly promoting the expansion and diversification of the continent's education system. This includes, among other things, the advancement of formal and non-formal technical and vocational education and training (TVET). However, bringing TVET into the mainstream will require extensive rebranding, better education and training facilities, widespread curriculum reform and substantial investment from both the state and the private sector.

Several private multinationals have recognised the benefits and importance of creating a skilled workforce in Africa and have invested in TVET programmes across the continent.

## Developing a skilled workforce

Since early 2013, Sweden-based Volvo Group has run a successful training programme for mechanics in partnership with Selam Technical and Vocational College and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The programme trains 30 young people every year in the fundamentals of electrics, drivetrain components and hydraulics.

Following on from this success, in November 2013 Volvo signed a memorandum of understanding with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to provide similar

vocational training programmes in 10 more African countries. Volvo has committed a total of SEK35 million (\$3.9 million) to introduce these schools over a five-year period beginning 2014.

"Trained mechanics will have the opportunity to gain work in countries with high unemployment, while the Volvo Group will gain access to the trained personnel that is required in order to expand in Africa," says Karin Wik, media spokesperson for the Volvo Group. "By training local manpower, we will contribute to sustainable growth in the countries in which Volvo operates. It's really a win-win situation."

Volvo is taking a hands-on approach with these vocational schools, providing modern equipment, teacher training, training materials, ongoing curriculum development and apprenticeship opportunities for students. UNIDO will provide administrative support.

In November 2014, Volvo and USAID announced plans to open a training academy in Settat, Morocco. The programme – which will commence in 2015 on the same premises as the country's existing national vocational school, Ecole des Métiers du Bâtiment et Travaux Publics – will train 150 students each year from Morocco, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal. Training will focus on maintenance of industrial and commercial equipment, equipping its students with technology and general business skills.

Volvo and USAID will also be working alongside UNIDO, the Moroccan Ministry of National Education and Vocational Training, and the Office Chérifien des Phosphates Foundation (OCPF).

"The distinctive feature of this training academy lies within its ability to produce skills and expertise that can directly be employed in the economic sectors that use heavy-duty equipment and that work on the big projects that are undertaken by Morocco," said Jamal Eddine El Aloua, General Secretary for the Moroccan Department of Vocational Training.

According to Karin Wik, setting up these schools has been "almost surprisingly straightforward, and this can be attributed to the cooperation

Trainees at a workshop supported by UNIDO and Volvo at the Selam Vocational College in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

UNIDO



with partners like UNIDO and USAID, who have the local knowledge and contacts, as well as a joint ambition to really create state-of-the-art vocational training schools.”

Finally, when asked if Volvo would encourage other international firms to invest in Africa's vocational training system, Wik said: “Yes, most definitely! The need for this concept is huge in many countries, and there is most certainly a business need for trained personnel as well. Our most important advice would be to partner up with an organisation that really has local knowledge, and to choose local partners that have a good understanding of vocational training.”

### Fostering entrepreneurship

In March 2013, Microsoft launched the Afrika Academy, “an education platform leveraging both online and offline learning tools, to help Africans develop both technical and business skills for entrepreneurship and improved employability”, according to the academy's official website.

The Academy is part of the 4Afrika initiative, which provides training on skills required to secure employment with Microsoft's network of 10,000 partners in Africa, thereby educating the next generation of African web developers. The initiative has also increased internet accessibility through the provision of affordable smart devices.

“We recognise Africa's potential for global impact and have developed the 4Afrika Initiative as a way to accelerate growth, entrepreneurship, skills and access for Africa and for Africans, so Africa can own its potential and grow its influence on the global stage,” Microsoft's Africa Initiatives General Manager Fernando de Sousa told ABN Digital in February.

Also through the initiative, Microsoft announced a partnership with the South African Government's Jobs Fund in 2013 to train more than 3,000 unemployed graduates with the aim of helping them secure permanent technology jobs over the course of three years. The new initiative will seek to triple the training



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Gustavo Fuchs, Director of Microsoft Mobility Windows Phone for Middle East and Africa, introduced the Windows 8-powered Huawei 4Afrika phone in Lagos in February 2013, as part of the company's wider 4Afrika Initiative

outreach programmes previously undertaken by Microsoft. According to Mteto Nyati, Microsoft South Africa's Managing Director, the training will focus on areas of need within the IT industry.

### Telecoms training

In 2012, Huawei opened its seventh state-of-the-art vocational training centre in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, to train the next generation of ICT professionals. Last year, Huawei invested NGN100 million (\$616,979) in a six-month vocational training programme for 41 Niger Delta youths. The course took place in Malaysia, before which the beneficiaries attended a two-week orientation and basic IT training course in Nigeria. The aim of the course was to provide young Nigerians with telecoms technical training, practical experience, telecom certification and entrepreneurial skills training. Upon their return, the beneficiaries were given employment opportunities with Nigerian ICT companies or in IT departments in other industries.

Finally, Huawei runs an internship programme called 'Huawei Seeds for the Future', whereby groups of students from various universities are selected to complete a two-week study tour in China to acquire skills in the latest technology, interact with top IT specialists at the

Huawei University or the company's key departments. Following completion of the programme, students are awarded certificates and professional mentorship. Huawei initiated the programme in 2008 to – as stated in a press release – “encourage regional building and participation in the digital community”.

Globally, the programme has been deployed in more than 20 countries, benefitting 10,000 students. In 2014, the programme became part of the wider Kenyan ICT Master Plan to develop the country's human capital and workforce in the ICT industry. In December 2014, nine Kenyan students from four different Kenyan universities were sent to China to receive ICT training from Huawei. The programme now extends to Namibia. Memorandums of understanding (MoUs) have been signed between Huawei and Angola, Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of Congo to introduce the programme during the course of 2015. In January, the African Union and Huawei signed an MoU for partnership in Addis Ababa. The MoU is aimed at “enhancing the existing partnership between the AU Commission and Huawei on various fields of common interest such as information and communication technology literacy and capability, and ICT infrastructure development”, according to a press release by the African Union. ●