

## 2. LABOUR MARKET NEEDS AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT IN THE GAMBIA

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the gaps between skills development and labour market needs in the Gambia and also how these two sub-systems are coordinated. The rapid increase in the number of skill providers, especially private providers, which is not supported by a corresponding increase in employment, especially in the formal sector, is a cause of concern. Thus the need for coordination of skills providers and employment. The study was conducted between January 2007 and the end of March 2007 with 43 training institutions, out of the 100 registered in the country, in the urban areas of Banjul and greater Banjul as well as in two rural areas. These institutions enrolled 3 572 students. Data was collected using questionnaires and semi structured interviews with skill providers and students. A survey on employing organizations was conducted with 15 employers from five of the groups of skills proposed by the National Training Authority (NTA). The study shows that collaboration exists between the training providers and employers but these are limited in size and scope and are not well coordinated. It also shows interesting findings especially on industrial attachment. Employers expressed concerns on the shortcomings of some of the training programmes offered and suggestions how to improve them. Training providers, employers and the NTA can coordinate better to anticipate labour market needs and adjust training accordingly.

**Key words :** Skills development, training institutions, labor market,

### **Résumé**

*Le but de l'étude est d'examiner d'une part les écarts entre le développement des compétences et des besoins du marché du travail en Gambie, et d'autre part de voir comment ces deux sous-systèmes sont coordonnés. L'augmentation rapide du nombre de fournisseurs de compétence, particulièrement des fournisseurs privés, qui n'est pas soutenu par une augmentation correspondante de l'emploi, spécialement dans le secteur formel, est une cause de cette inquiétude. De cela découle le besoin de coordination de fournisseurs de compétences et de l'emploi. L'étude a été conduite entre janvier 2007 et fin mars 2007 avec 43 institutions de formation sur les 100 enregistrées dans le pays, dans les zones urbaines de Banjul et toute l'étendue de Banjul, ainsi que dans deux zones rurales.*

*Ces institutions ont enregistré 3572 étudiants. Les données ont été collectées en utilisant des questionnaires et des entretiens semi structurés avec des fournisseurs de compétences et les étudiants. Une enquête d'organisations ayant des employés a été conduite avec 15 employeurs des cinq groupes de compétences proposés par l'Autorité de formation nationale (NTA). L'étude montre que la collaboration existe entre les fournisseurs et les employeurs, mais celle-ci est limitée et n'est pas bien coordonnée. Elle montre aussi des découvertes intéressantes sur l'aspect industriel. Les employeurs ont exprimé des soucis sur les défauts de certains des programmes de formation offerts et des suggestions sur comment les améliorer. En formant des fournisseurs, les employeurs et le NTA peuvent mieux coordonner le marché du travail et ajuster la formation, en conséquence.*

*Mots clés : développement des compétences, institutions de formation, marché du travail*

## **Introduction**

Earlier surveys acknowledge that efforts to coordinate employment policies with economic development strategies and social inclusion initiatives can bring significant benefits. Policy coordination is one of the central determinants of social and economic development especially in the Gambia (Benett, 1997, 2002; DoSE, 2003, 2004).

Gambia's vision for human resource development is embedded in the public sector institutions' strategic plan. Accordingly, the UTG (2005) shall pursue programmes that are "relevant to the demands of the labour market, make arrangements for internships for students, and set up a business development institute," while the GTTI (2002) shall focus on technical and vocational training that meets the country's middle-level human resources requirements.

Employment policy seeks to channel substantial resources to the local level. It is to be implemented in networks of government offices and, in some cases, private organizations and Non Governmental Organizations (NGO) pursuing common objectives.

The employment administration also provides a range of services locally, such as labour market information, which plays an important role in the design of national development strategies. Labour market policy and economic development policy strongly reinforce each other when developed in partnership. However, the extent to which partnership actually occurs depends on a number of institutional features.

The concern here is timely identification of the most effective ways of coordinating skills development and workforce needs in the Gambia, which could possibly provide guidance in other policy fields in the country.

Empirical studies have demonstrated the absence of effective linkages between public and private tertiary institutions and other organizations in the country, when it comes to technical education and vocational training in the Gambia. That is why we decided to conduct research to determine ways of improving linkages between tertiary education and employment.

The term 'system' refers to a set of policies, strategies and programmes.

**Table 1 :** System for the coordination between tertiary education and employment

| <b>The coordination system</b>   | <b>The Sub-Systems</b>  |
|--|---|
| <b>Employment</b><br>(policies, strategies, practices)                                     | (a) The National Labour Market occupational information and Counselling sub-system<br>(b) The National Occupational Standards and Competency Testing sub-system<br>(c) The National Entrepreneurship promotion sub-system |
| <b>Tertiary Education</b><br>(policies, strategies, and programmes for Skills Development) | (d) The Public sector Tertiary level delivery sub-system for co-ordination<br>(e) The Private sector Tertiary level delivery sub-system for co-ordination   |

**The objectives of the study were as follows:**

1: Each of the employment sub-systems was carefully analysed to determine its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), with a view to recommending policies, strategies and programmes for enhancing the effectiveness of the sub-system based on the results of the analysis. The SWOT analysis for each sub-system focused on issues such as: (a) its legislative basis and accountability; (b) its structure, management and modus operandi; (c) its usefulness; (d) its future development.

2: In each of the tertiary education sub-systems, case studies were undertaken with the objective of evaluating the arrangements for ensuring that the education and training provided met the national labour force needs and of making recommendations to improve effectiveness.

3: To see how skills development and employment needs could be best co-ordinated and integrated at national level.

4: To see how skills development and employment needs could cross-fertilise to meet business needs while providing sustainable solutions to the problems of the disadvantaged on the labour market.

### Methodology

The aim of the study was to collect data from a two-stage approach as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2 :** The two stages of the proposed approach to Data Collection

|                         |   |
|-------------------------|---|
| <b>At<br/>STAGE I:</b>  | A SWOT Analysis of the three targeted Employment sub-systems (see Figure 1)   |
| <b>At<br/>STAGE II:</b> | (A) CASE STUDIES of the Tertiary Education delivery sub-systems in a sample of institutions made up of:<br>all the Public Sector Tertiary institutions (n = 6)<br>a small number (n=12) of Private Sector Tertiary institutions (see Figure 1)<br>(B) a SURVEY of a large sample of Private Sector Tertiary institutions and of employing organizations |

STAGE II: (A) CASE STUDIES of the Tertiary Education delivery sub-systems in a sample of institutions made up of:

(a) all the Public Sector Tertiary institutions (n = 6)

(b) a small number (n=12) of Private Sector Tertiary institutions (see Figure 1)

(B) a SURVEY of a large sample of Private Sector Tertiary institutions and of employing organizations

Stage 1: The SWOT Analysis of the Employment sub-systems

#### Data collection procedures

(a) The SWOT Analysis focused on the relevant policies, strategies, processes and contents characterising each sub-system. Relevant issues were studied through:

(i) on-site observations of the sub-system operation in practice.

(ii) probing and questioning during face-to-face, semi-structured interviews of:

- key officials responsible for each sub-system

- a small sample (n=12) of male and female users of the sub-system.

An Interview Guide was developed for each sub-system and different Guides were developed for Officials and Users, respectively. The areas of questioning for the interviews included the following:

- the Labour Market Information sub-system: the methods used to develop projections of occupational employment, access to and use of the occupational information available in counselling and in planning and possible procedures for improving information quality and delivery.
- the Occupational Standards sub-system: the agencies and methods used for establishing standards for skills testing and for certification, the technical assistance available to local training organisations to ensure that job analyses, occupational standards and tests are valid and reliable.
- Entrepreneurship promotion sub-system: The Counselling, Training and Financial support programmes for entrepreneurs, the gender differential, the barriers to setting up enterprises, the effects of technology on labour substitution, and the attraction of qualified labour force to rural regions.

Confidentiality was guaranteed and anonymity preserved throughout.

#### (b) Literature Review

In addition to theoretical literature, relevant local, official and recent documents associated with each sub-system, such as the following, were closely studied:

- (i) Acts of Parliament (that is, the National Assembly); the New Education Policy; the new National Training Policy.
- (ii) Reports of the relevant Department of State's Working Groups, National Survey programmes, meetings of experts, NGOs, Private Sector organisations, United Nations organisation, I.L.O, and International Technical Assistance and Funding Agencies,

### **Data collection procedures**

A multi-method approach was used consisting of appropriate interviews, observations, and a sample survey.

### **Interviews**

An on-site study was undertaken of the links between Tertiary Education and Employment in the selected sample of institutions through face-to-face and semi-structured interviewing of the categories of persons indicated below. In each institution, appropriate Interview Guides were used and, in some cases, informal discussions with current students and students

undergoing industrial attachment were also conducted. The persons interviewed included the following: the Principal, the Counselling and Guidance Officer (if any), the Programme Leaders for the Business and Technical subject areas, respectively, and a sample (n=6) of male and female learners, per subject area (Business / Technical).

The interviewees were questioned on such issues as:

a) The liaison with employment agencies and the institution's employer surveys;

b) The placement of graduates of the institution by Programme area in related employment;

c) The involvement of Professional bodies, particularly with regard to expectations about Occupational Standards;

d) The balance in the Programmes between Practical, Academic and Professional training.

e) The career Counselling and Employment services provided on admission to and on departure from the institution.

f) The initiatives for promoting employment generation, such as inclusion of Small Businesses training in established Programmes of study.

### **Observations**

Multiple observations were made of the operation of the sub-systems in practice to experience the realities of the operation.

STAGE II (B): The survey of the co-ordination system

Only some 12 registered Private Sector Tertiary Education institutions were studied in depth on-site, though the research was intended to fill gaps in the data through a survey of a large sample of registered Private Sector Tertiary institutions combined with a survey of a sample of employing organisations. Accordingly, programme leaders for Business and Technical subjects in the sampled institutions and the Personnel Managers of the sampled employing organisations were asked in person to complete appropriate questionnaires centred on issues such as whether: (a) local employers participate in the development of the training programmes of the institutions and are represented in the Governing Bodies (b) Work Experience for learners is mandatory and is supervised, (c) tracer studies of the first destinations of the institutions' graduates are undertaken.

The following analyses were undertaken:

- a) Content analysis of the interview, observational and documentary data at both STAGES attempted to deconstruct the ‘discourse’ about the Co-ordination between Tertiary Education institutions and Employment.
- b) A Statistical analysis of the survey data gave Frequency Counts of responses to each variable stated in the questionnaire. The appropriate Chi-Squared test and descriptive statistics (Means and Standard Deviations) were used to permit relevant comparisons to be made.

**The work plan**

The sequence of project activities over time is shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3 :** The sequence of activities over time

|                           |   |  |  |
|---------------------------|---|--|--|
| Inception and orientation | STAGE I activities (Desk Study and SWOT Analysis); Interim Report I | STAGE II A & B activities (Case studies and survey); Interim Report II | Completion of the project (including report writing, validation workshop, and dissemination) |
| (1 week)                  | (7 weeks)   | (12 weeks)   | (8 weeks)  |

The three Research Trainees and the three Researchers worked in pairs and their deployment was made taking into account the locations of the training providers and the employment sub-systems in the Gambia.

**Limitations of the study**

The study was focused on the above sub-systems, given the limited resources (including time) allocated for it. In addition, despite all the six Public Sector tertiary institutions were targeted in this study, only twelve of them were intensively studied. They were randomly selected from Greater Banjul (the only urban area), and one rural area (the Lower River Division). However, a complementary survey in these two areas was undertaken and the research plan was to achieve a representative sample. Furthermore, a sample of employing organisations in the two socio-economic areas was similarly surveyed. Other limitations include:

- a) Some of the training institutions visited registered with the National Training Authority (NTA), were substandard. This was due to the lack of funding; as they rely on tuition fees only, they admit school dropouts and therefore tend to confirm the saying that technical and vocational education is for school dropouts.

a) There were no students registered in some programmes of the private institutions visited. These programmes were cancelled this year because no student was registered this year or the number registered was not viable.

b) In the rural areas, some institutions admit students who lacked formal secondary education. This can be explained by the lack of funds and senior secondary schools in those areas; or the senior secondary schools are located very far away.

c) It was really hard to obtain relevant information as the authorities found it difficult to fill out the questionnaire and numerous visits were made before the completed questionnaire could be collected.

d) The employers took much time to respond to the semi structured interview or did not reply at all. This sometimes resulted in inaccurate or vague answers. Review of relevant literature

The skills demanded by employers are more readily related to an 'employability' criterion than to a 'knowledge' criterion. Skills are merely one of the four facets of 'knowledge' (OECD 2001: 18) that is, know-what; know-why; know-how and know-who.

Since skills appear to correspond mainly to the 'know-how' dimension of knowledge, it is therefore the ability to perform tasks in the workplace that skills-upgrading seeks to address. On this basis, it is evident that the aim is not to improve cognitive and academic abilities, but essentially psychomotor ability of 'doing' abilities.

Since skills-upgrading involves significant training requirements, it is by nature an investment, and for various reasons such as the fear of poaching or poor management strategies, many employers - especially small and medium enterprises - are either unable or unwilling to bear the related cost (Booth & Snower, 1996). Adult workers are thus even more at risk of being trapped in low-skilled employment when compared to their younger counterparts. Recommendations have been made with regard to such objectives of skills-development centres in the Gambia as policy implementation, curriculum review and innovation, institutional management and research allocation (UNESCO, 1998).

The Government of the Gambia is increasingly realising the impact of failures and is bringing about several institutional changes to refocus active labour market policies on skills acquisition and lifelong learning. This was demonstrated in the Gambia Skills Qualification Framework (GSQF) recently approved (GSQF, 2006) by the National Training Authority (NTA) and the recent transfer of vocational and technical training from the Directorate for Technical and Vocational Training to NTA under the Department of State for

Education. This is a pointer to the importance the Government of the Gambia attaches to skills training (NTA Bill, 2001; Gambia Gazette, 2005).

For the purpose of the study, the informal sector refers to the 'shadow economy' (McLaughlin, 1989), a term usually reserved for small enterprises, which utilize the most rudimentary, traditional technology and business practices. These enterprises are unknown to the Government and accordingly, their owners evade all tax obligations as well as other labour regulations. Also, these enterprises make heavy use of unpaid family labour. The operators in the sectors are highly flexible in entering and exiting particular economic activities, in response to market demands.

Institutional networks such as linkages between tertiary institutions and industries provide the preconditions for management and implementation of skills development initiatives for the poor to generate broad-based impacts on the economy. Such initiatives have been proposed (GTZ, 2005).

In spite of shortcomings, traditional apprenticeship brings important skills to huge numbers of young people, particularly in West African countries and a strategy to improve traditional apprenticeship training was proposed (Fluitman & Haan, 2001). The emergence of independent, self-sustained training markets for the informal sector seems a long way off, however. Subsidies are likely to be necessary, except for certain services to existing businesses. Efforts should focus on keeping unit costs to a minimum. Training interventions tend to be more effective when beneficiaries participate in their planning. Informal sector associations have shown that they can be instrumental in addressing common problems of skill shortages, for example by organizing supplementary training and common examinations for workshop trainees among their membership.

According to the Department of State for Education of the Gambia, fifty per cent of the Gambian population is functionally illiterate (DoSE, 2003, 2004), meaning that around half the workforce is illiterate. Therefore, the Gambia Skills Qualification Framework (GSQF) recognizes these statistics and provides inclusive training opportunities to match the needs of the illiterate adult (Launch of GSQF, 2006).

The central theme of the 2005 Human Development Report for the Gambia is 'Capacity Building' for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Skills can help to:

- promote gender equality and women's empowerment,
- combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases,
- promote environmental sustainability.

The informal sector of the Gambian economy absorbs the vast majority of new entrants to the labour market and is growing annually. Many men

and women in search of work and income find that there are not enough jobs to go around and, eventually, create their own employment. That is, they start a micro-enterprise, usually in an urban area, in which they will work alone or with one or two others, possibly apprentices. The multitude and diversity of unincorporated, household-based, small ventures are typically unregistered, and, at least initially, overlooked by public authorities. They are producers and traders providing essential goods and services to large numbers of customers in markets, along major highways, and wherever their peers have their homes, sell whatever sells, dress the nation, make pots and pans, paint signs and dye clothes, repair mobile phones, run local restaurants, open barber shops, and, increasingly, cyber cafés and so on, and so forth. They are the working poor in what is now widely known as the urban informal sector, or informal economy (Fluitman & Haan, 2001).<sup>2</sup>

Both technical and management skills appear badly needed in the informal sector to raise productivity and incomes, and hence help in reducing poverty. Moreover, training might improve product quality, contribute to diversification and enhance occupational safety and health. In particular, women, large numbers of whom work in small and medium enterprises (SME), would benefit from acquiring additional skills. This is one of the areas in which the Indigenous Business Advisory Services (IBAS) has been working over the years. Another area in which IBAS is working is enhancing prospects for job creation and self-employment in the context of productive engagement within the informal economic sector. IBAS is a Government institution established in 1975 under the Ministry of Economic Planning and industrial Development (MEPID). At present, it operates under the Department of State for Trade, Industry and Employment.

The Study was conducted between January 2007 and end of March 2007 with training Institutions listed on the NTA's list of providers. It was realized that some of the training institutions had ceased to exist or that they did not have a viable number of students in some of the programmes and as a result some programmes were cancelled.

The survey was conducted taking into account some of the skills recommended by the NTA 'GSQF':

1. Information & Communication Technology (ICT) users;
2. Professional Studies – Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT), Association of Business Executives (ABE), Institute of Commercial Management (ICM), Computer Accounting Technicians (CAT), Human Resource Management (HRM), etc.;

3. Technical programmes– Motor Vehicle Systems (MVS), Electrical Installation (EI), Electrical & Electronics, etc.;
4. The informal sector – welding, fabrication, Tailoring, Clothing & Textiles, Embroidery, Tie & Dye, etc.;
5. Hotel hospitality, Tourism and Restaurant (catering);
6. Secretarial studies and typing.

Forty-three training Institutions in the urban areas of Banjul and greater Banjul as well as three in the Lower River Region and one in the North Bank Region, which are rural areas, were surveyed. These institutions cater for 3 520 students.

Within the subgroups, the number of full-time enrolled students for the 2006-2007 academic year surveyed was 3 179 students of which 1,694 were male students and 1,433 female students. This is shown in table 1 and figure 1.

**Table 4 :** Number of full-time students by group and gender (February 2007)

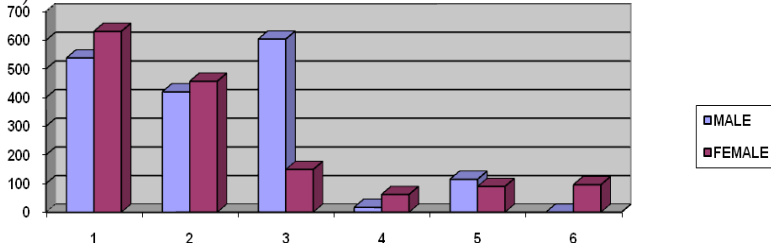
| <b>Gender/Group</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|--------------|
| Male                | 538      | 420      | 604      | 17       | 115      | 0        | 1694         |
| Female              | 631      | 457      | 149      | 62       | 90       | 96       | 1485         |
| Total               | 1169     | 877      | 753      | 79       | 205      | 96       | 3179         |

This represents a total of 3 127 students of which 1 694 are male students and 1 433 female.

**Tablea 5 :** KEY

| <b>NUMBER</b> | <b>PROGRAMMEME</b>          |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| 1             | ICT Users                   |
| 2             | Professional Studies        |
| 3             | Technical programmes        |
| 4             | Informal sector             |
| 5             | Hotel, Tourism Studies etc. |
| 6             | Secretarial studies         |

**Figure 1:** Number of part-time students by Group and Gender (February 2007)

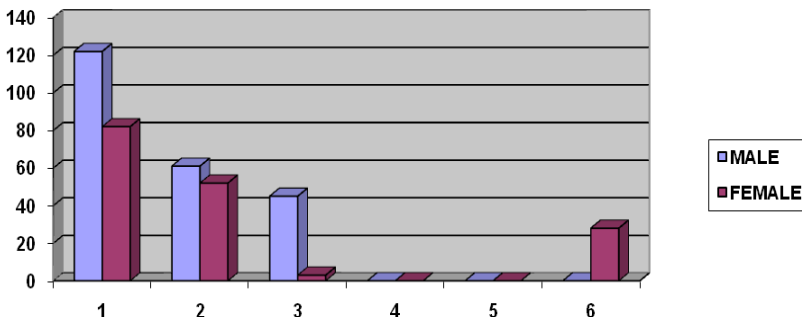


For part-time students, the corresponding figures were very small totalling 393 students of which 228 were male students and 165 were female students. The figures are represented in table 2 and figure 4 using the same key.

**Table 6 :** Number of part-time students by Group and Gender (February 2007)

| Gender/Group | 1          | 2          | 3         | 4        | 5        | 6         | Total      |
|--------------|------------|------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------|------------|
| Male         | 122        | 61         | 45        | 0        | 0        | 0         | 228        |
| Female       | 82         | 52         | 3         | 0        | 0        | 28        | 165        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>204</b> | <b>113</b> | <b>48</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>0</b> | <b>28</b> | <b>393</b> |

**Figure 2 :** Number of part-time students by group and gender for part-time students: Number of part-time students by group and gender for part-time students



The results of the survey clearly show the prevalence of males in the traditional areas such as in the technical programmes for both full-time and part-time students. It is worth noting that female students on these programmes were found mostly in Electrical & Electronic Engineering and Electronic Servicing representing about twelve percent. In Motor Vehicle Systems, only five female students were found, representing about three percent of students on that programme.

The survey revealed that enrolment in Secretarial Studies was one hundred percent female for both full-time and part-time students. It also showed that enrolment in this programme has declined as compared to enrolment during the past years. It was explained that this decline can be attributed to a decline in the demand for secretaries because of technological advances and the rapid growth of computer literacy among managerial staff.

In the rural areas the demand for hotel and restaurant workers was found to be very small as over ninety per cent of all the large hotels and restaurants are situated in the Greater Banjul area. The tourists who visited historical sites in the rural areas were catered for by tour operators based in the Greater Banjul area and the hotels were managed by some of the leading hotel operators also based in the Greater Banjul area.

In the informal sector, the majority were female students in traditional female areas such as tie & dye, sewing, embroidery, textiles, etc.

The majority of training institutions visited offer modular programmes in professional studies though in most of them, enrolment was very low in some programmes such as human resource management (10-15 students) and CAT (10-12). The most popular programmes were AAT and ABE. Here, enrolment was nearly the same for male and female students. In marketing (ICM), also a popular programme, there were more female students (70 percent than male students (30 percent).

Enrolment trends for ICT programmes were interesting. For example, in software applications, there were eight hundred and forty-two registered students of which six hundred and ten were female students representing seventy two percent. For computer hardware, information processing technology and maintenance and repairs, enrolment of male students was 297, representing about ninety-one percent. Some female students revealed that they would like to become secretaries but prefer to enrol in the software applications programme.

The survey on employing organizations was also conducted with fifteen employers from the various groupings listed above. This number was targeted because most of these organizations employ graduates from three or four of the groups of skills mentioned above. For example, hotels employ graduates from programmes such as hotel administration and management, information processing, accounting, technicians, electricians and secretaries, while tour operators employ graduates from motor vehicle systems. From each group, at least three employers were interviewed. The survey showed that in general, their workers have a good knowledge of their specialization from the providers but usually need special training to upgrade their skills to be very productive and efficient, particularly new workers not having undergone industrial attachment or apprenticeship.

## **Industrial attachment**

The relevance of industrial attachment cannot be overemphasized. The present NTA policy on industrial attachment is not very clear and in 2004, NTA assumed the responsibility of coordinating industrial attachment. It registered some successes in placing students but there have been a lot of failures. Presently the NTA is understaffed and ill-prepared to carry out this responsibility fully as there is only one officer at the industrial attachment section. It is also not very clear for which programmes industrial attachment is mandatory and at what stage during the period of studies the students should go on attachment.

Some institutions such as Gambia Ports Authority (GPA) and Gambia Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA), annually send out letters to most training institutions and the NTA reminding them that it is against their Rules and Regulations to accept final year students; that for continuing students the period of attachment is limited to only twelve weeks and that students cannot be attached more than once in these institutions during the student's period of study. The following question then arises: is twelve weeks sufficient for all programmes? In response, one may say that twelve weeks is perhaps not sufficient for programmes such as mechanical, electrical and electronic engineering and also electrical and electronic engineering where there are three and two components respectively and students need to spend at least twelve weeks on each of these components. For motor vehicle systems, the period should be at least nine months as this will give the students adequate time to acquire enough practical experience.

Placement is a serious problem, as the NTA is not in a position to place more than five percent of the students in tertiary technical and vocational training centres directly. At present, the students themselves go around, arrange for the placement, have it confirmed and then go to the NTA for the formal letter and logbook. This process is very much labour intensive and a successful outcome depends on the contacts the student can make through parents, guardians, relations or acquaintances. Ninety-five per cent of those who relied entirely on NTA for placement at the end were not placed. This was true especially for professional studies and to some extent ICT students.

The interviews with employers revealed that during the years when the training institutions were responsible for placements, there was a lot of chaos as every institution wrote letters but there was no coordination. Training institutions were interested in the performance of their students. Accordingly, they made efforts to visit the students on attachment occasionally. Now, this responsibility has been taken over by the NTA

and the officer in charge has not embarked on such an exercise. This has led to a breakdown in communication between employers and training institutions. The training institutions are always happy when visited by employers who sponsor some of their employees in their institutions. They see it as a means of selling their programmes and, as a result, try as best as they can to display the best facilities they have to convince the employer to continue sponsoring employees.

During the period of attachment, students try their best to catch the attention of senior management and thus become potential candidates for employment at their places of attachment. This occasionally results in cold working relationships between interns and low-level workers.

Placement in Banks and some other financial institutions, such as insurance companies, is extremely difficult as the bankers are very reluctant to allow students to go through their financial documents either for purposes of confidentiality or maybe because the records are very badly kept or because they are afraid that the confidentiality of their clients may not be protected. Such officials even recommend that students should not request for attachment but apply directly for employment.

In the technical areas there is some success in placing students. Students pursuing the Technician programmes are placed on attachment for nine months and as a result, the NTA officer is able to visit them at least once during the period of attachment. Placing these students is not difficult as the students enrolled in the required level are usually less than one hundred and fifty (150). These students can be placed in the various institutions and after twelve weeks, they are rotated in order to focus on another component of their programme.

Also, not all students opt for industrial attachment and instead try to seek employment directly or continue the programme in training institutions where industrial attachment is not considered mandatory. In short, placing technical students and construction students is not a problem as the employers do not require office space for them. These students are easily moved from place to place depending on where the employer has some job to carry out at the time. Examples include wiring and electrical installation services, maintenance of telephone and electrical cables, etc. Servicing of vehicles is usually carried out in garages, etc. This explains why institutions such as Gambia Telecommunications Company Ltd (GAMTEL), National Water and Electricity Company (NAWEC), GCAA, Gambia Electrical Company Ltd (GEC), accept a lot of students on attachment annually and at any time of the academic year.

The case studies revealed that placing students in Hotel, Home Management and Tourism programmes is relatively easy. Gambia is a tourist destination and there are a lot of hotels and restaurants. These hotels and restaurants are always willing to have students placed the whole year round in groups spending twelve weeks each. In fact, training institutions with programmes targeting the hotel/tourism industry place their students directly into hotels and restaurants. They are usually very successful as the placement is not limited only to the summer holidays when most students go on attachment, but at any time of the year because their teaching schedule takes that into account. These students are usually visited by assessors from their training institutions to assess their performance directly on site.

Placement for students of Professional Studies and Information and Communication Technology is usually difficult. This is due to inadequate or lack of office space for the students or the limited number of computers available in offices. The interviews with employers highlighted some complaints about some students on industrial attachment. Such complaints included the following:

a) Lack of practical competencies for young school leavers from private technical institutions who have had no previous working experience. They find it hard to use measuring instruments accurately or to translate effectively their theoretical background knowledge into practice;

b) Financial institutions complain about students having little or no knowledge of certain accounting programmes or packages such as QuickBooks and Sage;

c) Hotel and restaurant managers and guests are very much concerned about food safety and hygiene and also the slow manner in which students serve customers. As a result, these hotels and restaurants lose potential customers to other reputable places;

d) The reliance of training institutions on some United Kingdom-based programmes is also a source of concern for some employers. In the Gambia, the City & Guilds of London Institute's certificate and diploma combined with that of the training institution are the requirements for applying for the position of a technician or data entry clerk, etc. During discussions with employers, some expressed reservations about the following programmes:

i) The Technician Diploma and Technician Certificate in Motor Vehicle Systems that do not take into account recent technological advances in auto electronics and, as a result, the students find it very hard to service electronic vehicles, which have onboard computers controlling all their major operating components.

ii) The Certificate and Diploma in Software Applications and Information Processing Technology that do not include current topics such as the Internet, Networking and graphic designing, which are very much in demand nowadays. Students are also unable to write proper computer programmes as they only rely on ready-made software packages and programmes.

iii) The Certificate in Electronic Servicing devotes about sixty percent of the time allocated for the programme to analogue electronics and a relatively shorter time to digital electronics. This was clearly evident on the course content. Given that the whole world is currently moving towards digital electronics, students taking these programmes would be unable to service recent electronic devices very well.

Indeed, City & Guilds of London Institute intends to withdraw the abovementioned programmes. However, since newer programmes have not yet been proposed, our institutions continue to run these programmes which have lost part of their relevance in the industry.

In all the industrial institutions visited, no discriminatory practice was recorded against females. The salaries, wages and positions of both sexes were virtually at par. In fact, there is a tendency or slight bias in favour of females especially in male-dominated areas of specialisation. It was explained that such positive bias is intended to act as an incentive to attract females to these areas.

### **The effect of migrant workers**

The effect on the labour market of migrant workers especially from sub-regional countries like Senegal, Guinea and Mali, is very important. This is true in both formal and informal sectors. The survey showed that such effect is very visible in the informal sector which is dominated mostly by migrant workers. For instance, migrants from Senegal are dominant in tailoring, while those from Guinea are dominant in painting and decoration and those from Mali are dominant in tie and dye. Migrants from Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria are found in the formal sector, where they teach in the tertiary institutions and skills centres. These workers play an important role in the socio-economic development of the Gambia. However, employers were unable to give clear reasons for the high number of migrant workers in this sector. Some suggested that this could be attributed to the relatively peaceful and stable atmosphere in the Gambia.

### **Collaboration between employers and training providers**

The survey shows that thirty-five of the training institutions surveyed had engaged in some type of collaborative effort with employers. This collaboration varied vastly but it was clear that it mostly involved training institutions approaching employers and convincing them to send their employees to them to upgrade their training. In most cases, the training institutions were successful in winning these contracts from the employers. Training providers are now engaged in a very serious and aggressive advertisement campaign because they are many and the labour market is limited. This trend is due to the fact that the training providers are cash-trapped and therefore must lobby these employers very hard to remain in business. Not surprisingly, the study showed that tuition fees usually represent a major source of income for private institutions. However, none of them benefited from government subsidies and tax incentives. Church and Islamic training providers and other NGOs sometimes benefit from substantial donations, including from abroad. In some cases, these training providers seem to be more responsive to labour market demand so as to remain in business.

The study could not confirm that quality control can be enforced through market mechanisms. It is difficult for market mechanisms to operate here due to the high social demand for training and the absence of information about cost and performance. There is little or poor regulation and, as a result, some of the private training institutions are sub-standard. Registration and accreditation are essential functions of the NTA. However, at present it does not have the real capacity to perform such tasks. This is very crucial for the genuine expansion of private training institutions. Coordination of skills development and the labour market

The Gambia Skills Qualification Framework (GSQF) acknowledges that the majority of skills training going on in the Gambia at present is through informal apprenticeships, attachments, Community Skills Development and the other donor Project Schemes. Therefore, for such training to be successful and sustainable, it needs to develop a major strategy for the following:

- NTA Attachment Policy,
- NTA Apprenticeship Policy,
- Department of State for Education Adult Literacy Policy,
- National Economic Development Project Proposals by budgeting for Human Resource Development.

This shows the NTA is in the process of coordinating the informal sector which is currently catered for by the Community Skills Improvement Project (CSIP). The Project is the successor of the former Women in

Development Project and some other government agencies. In March 2007, the CSIP organized training on tie and dye for twenty-four adults – twenty-two women and two men. This was a trainer-training session on how to improve tie and dye products to match those from the sub-region. Prior to the session, the CSIP completed a training session for carpenters. In March 2007, the Reliance Financial Services embarked on the training of Gambian Women in Business through the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI). The main aim and objective of this training was to equip women in basic book keeping and thereby empower them on how to manage their businesses and keep records properly. These are examples to show that current coordination of skills and employment needs in the informal sector is done through community development projects.

### **Summary and recommendations**

The formal sector is 'limited' in size and scope and virtually contracting and the observations and interviews from the survey tend to show that large and medium size enterprises train more than small enterprises. Semi-public enterprises train more than public enterprises. The interviews revealed that employers are increasingly dependent upon in-plant training and training is more and more firm-specific and competency-based. There was no apparent tendency for collective action emerging to address broader enterprise skills training needs.

There is clear evidence of limited and declining interaction with the public sector, including, for example, declining off-the-job sponsorships, and the virtual disappearance of formal (that is, statutory) apprenticeship. Rapidly changing technologies, increasing population growth rates and growing demands for skills make apprenticeship even more relevant today. Training providers, policymakers, and employers alike are developing an increasing awareness of the educational and economic benefits of joint planning and coordination between the providers of vocational and technical training and the labour market. However, some basic differences between the goals, planning procedures and operating practices of the public and private sectors have, in many cases, made efforts to establish and implement cooperative technical / vocational education and labour market programmes difficult.

### **Conclusions**

The objectives of skills training are to ensure employability and guarantee productive use of people in creating productivity. The labour market is in dire need of skilled workers who will sustain and develop the

market and the society in general. The GSQF also is in the process of designing a training plan aligning curriculum to standards and the needs of the client. However, its progress is being slowed down by the lack of capacity. At present, the NTA is expanding and recruiting more personnel. The study concluded that within the next five years, the NTA will be in a very good position to perform such an important function, as mandated by the NTA Act of 2002. The NTA serves as an observatory for the coordination, supervision and monitoring of all training in the Gambia. As it is mandated to supervise, monitor and coordinate the training programmes of TVET institutions in the Gambia, this report will go a long way to aid the NTA find its feet and accomplish its main programme of activities which is to liaise between the training providers and the labour market.

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