



## Livelihood Skills Development for Youth in Africa

Approaches to remote & digital learning  
during COVID-19 and beyond

**COVID-19 Learning Brief**

## 1. Introduction

During May and June 2020, the AUDA-NEPAD, hosted four pan-African webinars in English and French to discuss the experiences with youth skills development under COVID-19 lockdown conditions and beyond. These webinars were accompanied by snap surveys and interviews on good practice experiences. This document illuminates the most salient ideas, challenges and strategies, and draws out some implications for national and regional policy.

## 2. COVID-19- a wake-up call

The COVID-19 moment has been a surprise, a rupture, a wake-up call for many African practitioners and policymakers of youth skills development, as reflected in the information box below.

## 3. Catalysing systemic institutional change

Leaders, decisionmakers and managers of youth skills organisations and TVET colleges provided animated accounts of the challenges that they confronted and the creativity with which these were tackled. Many anticipate that the COVID-19 pandemic will become endemic in Africa. Thus, emergency response strategies need to be crafted to also catalyse systemic institutional change.



## THE TOP COVID-19 WAKE-UP CALLS

### 1. LEADERSHIP: CONFRONTING THE RISING LOSS OF LEARNING, SKILLS & LIVELIHOOD

- a. *Dynamic, courageous leadership can stem the tide of pandemic-induced loss of learning, skills and livelihood;*
- b. *Youth skills organisations are capable of turning emergency crisis conditions into positive opportunities for change;*
- c. *New creative innovations are possible at all levels under crisis conditions; and*
- d. *Pandemic response strategies can catalyse short-term and long-term systemic change.*

### 2. PEDAGOGY: OPENING UP NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR LEARNING & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

- a. *Learning need not take place in physical classrooms only. The home and community are also essential social spaces for learning, in relationship to the classroom or workshop.*
- b. *Lecturer/facilitator training and support can make the difference to quality learning continuity and skill formation under crisis conditions and beyond;*

### 3. TECHNOLOGIES: ADOPT A SPECTRUM OF OLD & EMERGING LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

- a. *Learning technologies personally owned by learners and lecturers, and technologies available in their homes, can be mobilised in support of learning continuity;*
- b. *Digital access to devices, the Internet and Open Education Resources (OER) for all is an urgent priority; and*
- c. *In the absence of robust Internet access for all, analogue technologies such as print radio, and educational TV can be mobilised as interim enablers of remote learning.*

### 4. COMMUNITY: BUILD NETWORKS OF COMMUNITY CARE & SUPPORT

- a. *Maintaining and building human dignity through self-care and care for others via feeding programmes, cash grants, healthcare and psycho-social support are critical to ward off deepening inequality and creeping precarity.*
- b. *Building networks of community care and support involving civil society, local micro enterprises, local and national government are effective response strategies.*

## Challenge 1: LEADERSHIP: Confronting escalating loss of learning, skills & livelihood among African youth

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted youth education, training, apprenticeship, employment and employability. Already youth have encountered income losses due to retrenchments and reduced working hours and faced difficulties with finding decent jobs during the pandemic. Young women face the double burden to manage both paid and unpaid care and household work due to widespread school closures. Youth with disabilities, in rural communities, young refugees and displaced persons, confront additional burdens to access learning and decent work opportunities. Rising youth drop-out from school, teenage pregnancies and gender-based violence are anticipated, catalysed deepening inequality, precarity and attacks on human dignity. The following opportunities and strategies for bold leadership emerged from the discussion, in response to deepening structural inequalities.

Leadership Challenges	Combatting Livelihood Loss: Strategies Adopted So Far	Bold Leadership Opportunity
<p>Loss of education, training and skills development for millions of African youth</p> <p><b>Lockdown conditions and enforced institutional closures have led to learning loss and an anticipated rise in drop-out numbers from training programmes</b></p>	<p>Recognise and formalise apprenticeship programmes in the informal economies and enterprises;</p> <p>Recognise non-formal non-traditional certification programmes</p> <p>Expand access to TVET by hosting dedicated skills programmes for youth with disabilities and youth workers &amp; managers in the informal economy.</p>	<p>An opportunity to direct skills development investment more systematically towards youth working in informal survivalist enterprises.</p> <p>An opportunity to prioritise the most marginalised youth communities: young women, rural youth, youth with disabilities.</p>
<p>Loss of youth income and livelihood</p> <p><b>Nearly 20 million formal &amp; informal jobs &amp; 81% informal economy workers' income will be lost in Africa under COVID-19. 95% of employed African youth, work in the informal economy (AU, 2020)</b></p>	<p><b>Reskilling youth who have become unemployed or under-employed</b></p> <p><b>Provided basic income or cash grants for youth such as in Togo</b></p> <p><b>Provide entrepreneurship training for survivalist, small, medium and micro enterprises</b></p>	<p><b>An opportunity for bold steps towards building youth skills among those who have lost income and jobs</b></p>
<p>TVET Institutional constraints to reach vulnerable youth.</p> <p><b>Limited budgets, poor organisational infrastructure, being under-staffed, lack of sufficient intellectual resources militate against effective emergency responses and sustainable systemic change.</b></p>	<p>Dedicated crisis-responsive leadership development for TVET management</p> <p>Redirecting investment in building agile skills development institutions.</p> <p>Building partnerships with private companies to support digital access provisions for students and internship opportunities</p>	<p>An opportunity to invest in and build crisis-resilient leadership skills for TVET college leaders</p> <p>An opportunity to shift investment from that which reinforces static bureaucracy towards building capacity for institutional agility</p> <p>An opportunity for deepening multi-stakeholder partnerships with civil society and community-based organisations, local small and medium enterprises and large multinational firms, as well as the donor and development aid community in support of institutional systems strengthening</p>

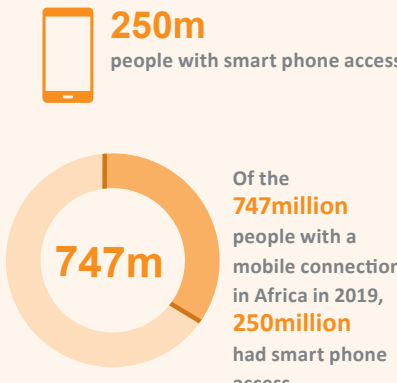
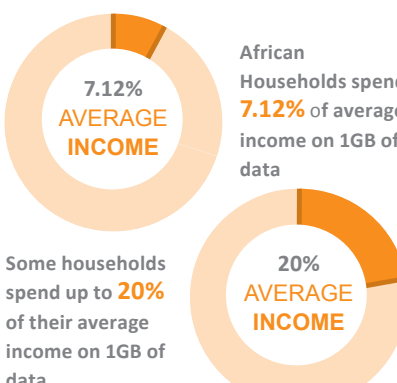
## Challenge 2: PEDAGOGY: Opening up possibilities for learning beyond the physical classroom when lecturers lack the requisite competencies & content

Even though there have been many distance learning and blended learning programmes provided by African TVET colleges and open schools, the vast majority of youth skills development programmes still rely on face to face delivery in classrooms or workshops. Many institutions reported on their challenges with delivering training in practical hands-on vocational skills, soft skills, entrepreneurship, and basic employability skills. Some reported struggles to sustain remote learning, even when digital access was available. Many also highlighted widespread challenges with lecturer/teacher competencies with technologies to support their teaching practice and the lack of relevant content.

Pedagogical challenges	Tackling Pedagogical Challenges: Strategies Adopted So Far..	Bold Leadership Opportunity
Delivering and sustaining learning and vocational training beyond the confines of the classroom and workshop	<p>Set up systems for print materials to be collected at fixed places and times.</p> <p>Curate offline content distribution channels for remote learning of TVET skills</p> <p>Introduce hybrid training that combines distance training and practical training in companies with private sector support</p>	<p>The opportunity to invest less in physical buildings and classrooms and focus on investments in infrastructure and capacity to deliver remote learning</p> <p>The opportunity to explore new possibilities for delivering practical vocational training remotely</p>
Teachers lack knowledge and experience with remote and online learning and teaching	<p>Establishing coaches to support lecturers and promote peer-coaching via WhatsApp Groups</p> <p>Introduce mentorship to 'hand-hold' lecturers through their changing pedagogical practices</p>	The opportunity to explore better ways to invest in continuing lecturer professional development, support and training
There are challenges with relevant curriculum content to enable remote learning	Curating online and offline teacher professional development programmes for TVET teachers	Invest in sourcing and creating open education resources (OER) as well as in content development training among teachers and teacher trainers
Difficulties with conducting learning assessment remotely	Explore phone-based formative assessment using SMS or WhatsApp	Leadership explores new possibilities for assessing learning outcomes

### Challenge 3: TECHNOLOGIES: Confronting persistent digital inequality

Digital inequality refers to disparities in access to digital resources (such as affordable digital devices, Internet connectivity, adequate power supply, relevant digital content, digital literacy and), which are necessities for meaningful participation in an increasingly-digital economy and society.

Ways in which digital inequality persist	Digital Inclusion Strategies, So Far....	Bold Leadership Opportunity
<p><b>Unequal access to connected digital devices.</b></p> <p><b>Mobile connection in Africa (2019)</b></p>  <p>Of the <b>747million</b> people with a mobile connection in Africa in 2019, <b>250million</b> had smart phone access</p>	<p>Use learning technologies that learners already have such as feature phones, WhatsApp, SMS via Rapid-Pro and USSD</p> <p>Secure subsidised pricing and low-cost loans for teachers and learners to purchase their own laptops/ tablets</p> <p>Securing donations from funders or private companies for low cost smart phone access to students</p> <p>Accessing packages where students can purchase refurbished laptops on flexible repayment terms</p> <p>Invest in and create partnerships in support of access to assistive technologies for learners with disabilities</p> <p>In the absence of digital infrastructure, utilise analogue education broadcasting as an interim measure</p>	<p>An opportunity to drive decisive leadership towards universal, quality digital inclusion for all students and teachers/lecturers.</p>
<p><b>High cost of data in Africa (2019)</b></p>  <p>African Households spend <b>7.12%</b> of average income on 1GB of data</p> <p>Some households spend up to <b>20%</b> of their average income on 1GB of data</p>	<p>Strengthen regulatory environment to enforce data price regulation</p> <p>Bring all telecom providers together to commit to zero-rating education and skills development sites and applications</p>	<p>The Alliance for an Affordable Internet shows that 1% to 2% of income on data would be affordable. An opportunity for concerted national campaigns towards reducing data costs for education and training.</p>
<p>Insecure, interrupted power supply</p>	<p>Invest in low cost low carbon alternatives and encouraging local enterprise development in alternative energy solutions</p>	<p>An opportunity to explore low cost low carbon alternatives to power generation</p>
<p>Lack of digital literacy and digital skills</p>	<p>Develop strategies to integrate digital literacy and digital skills development for all learners and teachers</p>	<p>Institutional leaders to take the lead in developing their digital literacy and digital skills</p>

## Challenge 4: COMMUNITY: Tackling Food insecurity & Psychosocial Challenges

COVID-19 has exacerbated pre-existing drivers of food insecurity in Africa, threatening the real prospect of mass starvation, considered to be deadlier than the effects of the coronavirus in Africa. Webinar participants reported on challenges with food security, health and mental well-being among their students. That TVET institutions can no longer only provide academic and vocational skills training but have to integrate strategies for care and support, emerged strongly in discussions.

Food security & psycho-social challenges	Strategies Adopted So Far....	Opportunity for Bold Leadership
Threats to income and livelihoods exacerbate poverty and accompanying threats to food security, social and mental well-being of learners and lecturers	<p>Building networks of community care and support with civil society, local micro-enterprises and local and national government.</p> <p>Some African governments provided emergency cash transfers to households in attempts to sustain livelihoods under lockdown</p>	<p>An opportunity to explore workable approaches to integrating care and support for teaching, learning and skills development with local organisations</p> <p>An opportunity to support the provision of regular cash transfers as part of social grants and social protection measures for vulnerable youth.</p>

## Re-imagining youth skills and livelihoods: policy implications

The webinars called for bold, decisive African leadership at regional, national and institutional levels to confront the potential devastating social and economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Calls for the reimagining of youth skill formation, youth livelihoods and economic development have been made. The implications for national and regional policy shifts are, that courageous steps will need to be taken. These include:

### 1. Shift away from narrow supply and demand labour market-centred approaches by focusing on institution-building and systems-strengthening

A narrow labour market-centred approach loses sight of the multi-faceted nature of skills development, and places pressure on weak institutional systems to adapt. Instead there are focus on strengthening institutional capacity which would be better placed to respond to youth vulnerability and build sustainable youth livelihoods.

### 2. Redouble efforts in support of digital inclusion for all

Decisive leadership is needed for national and pan African policy commitments on universal, quality, affordable digital access for all. These include redoubling efforts to lower the cost of data and devices and making the internet a safe, secure affordable space for learning and skills development. The African Union adopted a Digital Transformation Strategy in February 2020 which aims to 'erase the digital divide' and 'narrow the gender digital divide'. This strategy can become the basis for greater efforts at implementing the strategy. This strategy could also respond to the call also made at the webinars, for a continental digital learning strategy in TVET which also takes account regional specificities.

### 3. Commit to policy and improved practice on OERs

The webinars also made clear calls for commitment to policy and improved practice on open education resources that are also vetted and zero-rated. This becomes relevant especially since the United Nations Recommendation on OER adopted in November 2019. Some country governments provide examples of OER policy, such as Rwanda's national policy on OER

### 4. Implement social grants and protection measures for vulnerable African youth

A clear call for the adoption of social grants and social protection measures for Africa's growing vulnerable youth populations. Preventative social protection measures, including both formal and informal social insurance mechanisms, can enable youth livelihood building. African leaders can build on existing direct cash-transfer programs to reach vulnerable populations as has been tried for example, in Togo where the government acted swiftly to provide emergency financial support to households in Lomé.

The above calls for disruptive leadership find expression in existing visionary statements such as the Sustainable Development Goals and the AU Agenda 2063. Their realization has now become mission-critical for the sustainable future of the African continent.

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