



Guidelines for Cooperation between ATCs and Private Enterprises





Published by
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

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On behalf of
German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Programme/project description
Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training for Women (ATVET4W)

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ATVET4W project

Layout and design
Tronimex Design

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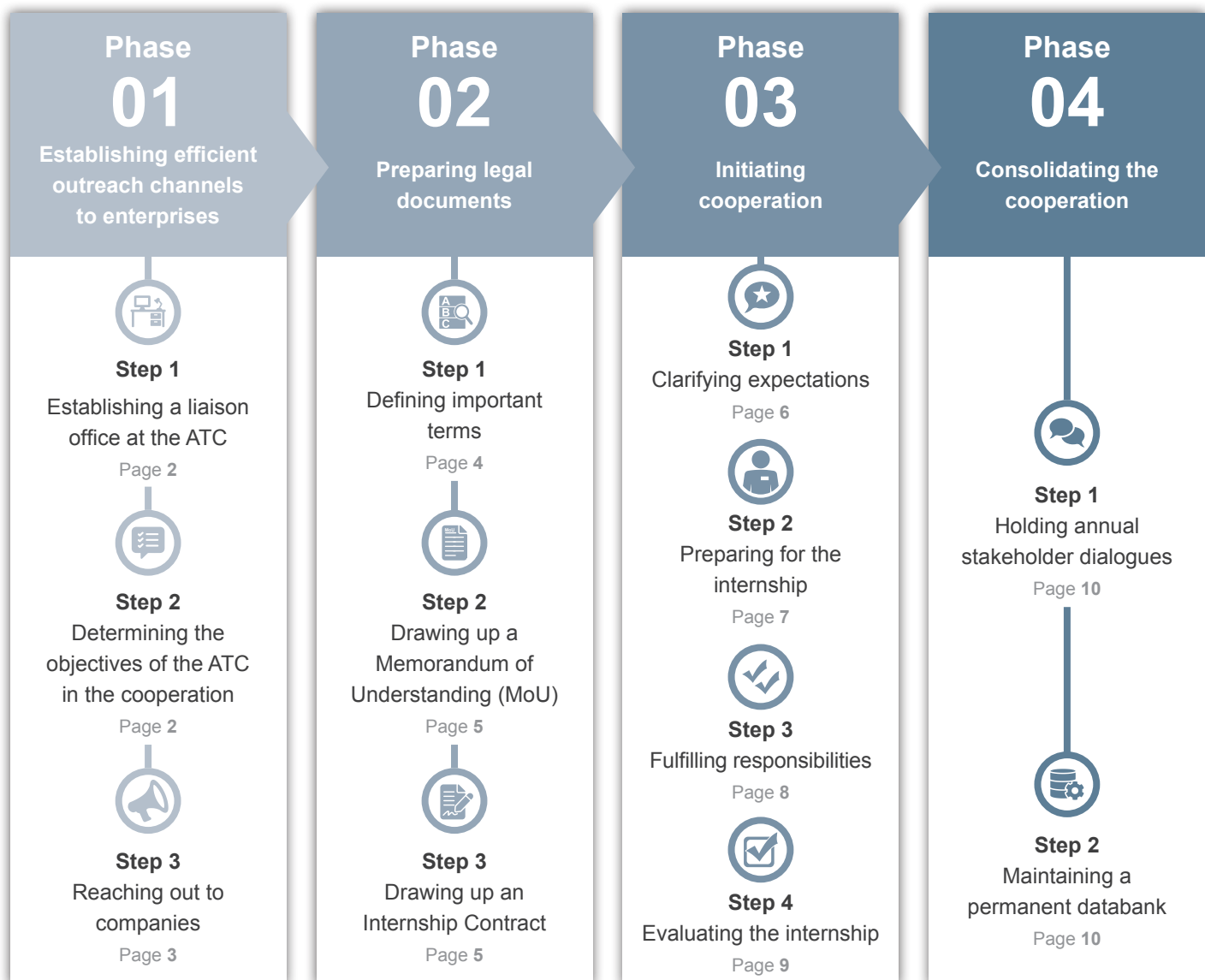
South Africa 2020



Guidelines for cooperation between ATCs and private enterprises

This guideline is designed to help Agricultural Training Centres (ATCs) to cooperate and engage with private enterprises to create quality internship programmes. The steps given here are directed at achieving more efficient integration of enterprises in the provision of internships. The goal of the internship is to provide students with a professional learning and mentoring experience where they gain skills and new knowledge by performing tasks, working on projects and completing other on-the-job learning experiences in a professional work environment.

Successful internship experiences combine training, defined tasks and project assignments. Interns need clear and defined roles to keep them motivated and learning, in addition to meeting both their own and the enterprises' objectives. Thus, a successful internship programme utilises good practices that are put in place before the arrival of the intern and sustained until the end of the internship. The process involves four main phases. These can be broken down into different steps as set out below.



Establishing efficient outreach channels to enterprises

Before establishing direct contact with companies it is important to establish communication channels and to define the institution's general expectations of the partnership.



Step 1 Establishing a liaison office at the ATC

A foundation for successful cooperation between companies and ATCs is the establishment of liaison offices at ATCs. A liaison officer helps ATCs to coordinate and formalise cooperation initiatives. Their responsibilities include the following tasks:

- Represent the ATC in engagements with the private sector and serve as an immediate contact person for questions regarding the cooperation.
- Initiate and facilitate dialogue between the two parties.
- Establish and monitor cooperation agreements through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).
- Extend and strengthen networks with companies.
- Establish databases of ATC partners as well as alumni networks.



Step 2 Determining the objectives of the ATC in the cooperation

A. Define the profile of graduates the ATCs aim to produce

It is important for the management boards of ATCs to work with enterprises to define the partnership goals. Here are some questions to consider when addressing the profile of graduates:

- Are graduates trained to be employees?
- Are graduates trained to become entrepreneurs?
- Will graduates work in extension services?
- Which value chains will they engage in?
- At which position in the value chains will they work (input, supply, production, processing, distribution)?

B. Define the needs of ATCs for the internship programme

Based on the determined graduate profile, ATCs must decide on the type of enterprise that will support this outcome. The following information can help with this.

- Years in business
- Field of activity
- Position in the value chain
- Human and infrastructural resources
- Number of employees
- Capacity for receiving interns
- Available resources for internships (e.g. accommodation, coaching)



Step 3 Reaching out to companies

After defining the profile of graduates and matching these to company profiles. The liaison office can reach out to companies through:

A. Umbrella associations

The structure of these organisations may differ from country to country. However, they represent many companies according to their field of activity, value chain and/or size.

B. Alumni networks

Alumni who are employed in businesses or are agripreneurs themselves are valuable contacts for ATCs to engage in partnership with their companies. They are familiar with the programmes and can help to find suitable placements for interns.

C. ATC online presence

It is also important for ATCs to be visible and accessible to companies. If ATCs have their own websites, companies can find out about their programme scope and goals and initiate partnerships when they are interested.

A crucial challenge in partnership-building is the lack of formalisation at the ATC level. Although there is already a considerable amount of cooperation taking place, most of it is based on informal networks and agreements. It is often unclear to companies what is expected from them by the ATCs as well as what they can expect in return. Sometimes they do not have the same understanding of important terms in the collaboration. Below is an overview of important terms regarding the cooperation from the perspective of all stakeholders.



Step 1 Defining important terms

- **Internship:** In the current setup in Benin and Togo, an internship constitutes a first professional experience which serves as preparation for the trainee for a given job. The private sector hosts the trainee to make it possible for them to put the theoretical knowledge gained from their training into practice. It allows trainees to acquire skills related to a given profession or to prepare them for their own entrepreneurial projects.
- **Value chain (also called value link):** also called value link is the current leading concept of intervention in agriculture in Benin and Togo. The concept enables companies to bring production, processing and marketing into line to meet market needs. It is, therefore, important to design the internship in line with the position occupied in the value chain by the company and the interest shown by the intern in the value chain.
- **Memorandum of Understanding:** is a core product, a document that states all important aspects of the partnership between a chosen company and an ATC. The document provides clarity and security to all parties involved and helps to formalise the cooperation.
- **Internship contract:** is a written agreement between the trainee from the ATC and the mentor in the the hosting company that hosts the trainee. The internship contract defines the specific goals based on the professional project of the trainee. The contract states the roles of both parties in the achievement of the goals of the internship.
- **Trainee:** is a student formally registered in a major in an Agricultural Training Centre (ATC) who has a professional project* in line with a specific value chain and is willing to take on an internship. The trainee's professional project should link to the overall goal of the internship, and take into account the skills they need and the activities that will help them achieve this goal.
- **Internship supervisor:** is a facilitator from the training staff of the trainee's ATC who supports them in defining their professional project and in acquiring the necessary skills accordingly.
- **Mentor:** is the person responsible for guiding and working closely with the trainee during their internship in the enterprise. The mentor must have a good understanding of the company and the will to work closely with the trainee.

* A Professional Project is a special project or business case study linked to a student's area of study, undertaken during a training programme or course at an ATC.



Step 2 Drawing up a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

An MoU will set realistic expectations about goals and various aspects of the collaboration. There is no standard MoU format. The following guidelines are commonly used:

- **Introduction:** focuses on the reasons, the benefits and the means for the collaboration
- **Purpose:** states the purpose and the responsibilities of all stakeholders involved in the collaboration
- **Scope:** clarifies the role of each partner involved in the partnership as well as the duration of the agreement
- **Definitions:** describes the operational and technical terms associated with the contract regarding the stakeholders and the legal environment (any acronyms, community-specific terms, or technical aspects. See Step 1)
- **Responsibilities:** outlines the obligations of the agreement (financial obligations, schedule, frequency and means of communication)
- **Oversight:** clarifies how oversight will occur within the new partnerships (schedule of monitoring, clauses of confidentiality, recordkeeping requirements)



Step 3 Drawing up an Internship Contract

An Internship Contract can be added to the MoU as a closer commitment between the intern and their mentor. The goal is to engage the trainee in a formal framework and relationship vis-à-vis the company and the mentor. The ATCs can design an internship contract framework with the following elements:

- Specific internship goals of the trainee regarding their professional project
- Skill development goals to be acquired through an internship
- Strategies and means available to meet the goals
- Evaluation criteria to measure improvement
- Schedule and practical arrangements for the internship

In the third phase, contacts have been established and legal documents are prepared to formalise the collaboration and the internship. The next steps guide the process of clarifying the roles of each partner before, during and after the internship.



Step 1 Clarifying expectations

To be able to provide a high-quality internship, enterprises need to be informed about the framework in which the internship takes place. At the same time, ATCs need to be able to ensure the quality of the internship. Both need to be aware of:

- A. The contents of curricula:** Companies need to be aware of the level of knowledge their future interns hold through their previous training. This helps to avoid unrealistic expectations of the trainees' skills levels and enables the company to cater to the needs of trainees in the work processes. The profile of a trainee in a value chain requires mastery of a set of theoretical and practical skills. Good communication needs to be established between the Agricultural Training Centre (ATC) and the company to agree on the practical experience needed from the enterprises to match the theoretical background of the trainee. The Internship Contract can help play a role in addressing this issue.
- B. The subsidies and incentives (if present):** It may be possible for companies to receive benefits from the government for hosting trainees. This may differ from country to country. A crucial point in this regard is the possibility of insurance provision. If companies are insured, they are more willing to accept the risk of hosting interns, who might damage machinery or be injured. The liaison office should be aware of these benefits and should support the company in the application process.
- C. The capacities of the company to host trainees:** The company should clarify in which field and which positions of the value chain they are involved. This also includes the types of machinery available to them and whether they are willing to teach interns to use these. This helps both parties to find out whether these expectations can be met. Companies should indicate how many interns they can host. The following questions can be useful:
 - How many interns can the company accommodate in their facilities in terms of living arrangements? This is especially important in rural areas where accommodation cannot easily be outsourced, and which might be too far for commuting.
 - Is there sufficient capacity among the staff members to supervise the trainees?



Step 2 Preparing for the internship

This step is crucial for the success of the partnership. Entrepreneurs need to have clarity on what is expected from them. It also makes it possible for the ATC to check whether the goals of the internship have been achieved. As many of the trainees do not have in-company experience yet, it is important to prepare them for the internship period. They should be aware of what is expected from them, but also what they can expect.



The trainee: After it is clear to both parties which prerequisites are in place, it should be jointly determined which knowledge gaps are present and how the internship can help to address them. These should include all main tasks that are part of the companies' activities. Several months (at least 2 months) before, the trainee should:

- Write a professional project
- Look for a company that matches the professional project
- Gather the information needed for the internship contract
- Participate in the internship preparation training
- Have the internship contract signed



The mentor (company): Before applying to internships, trainees should be familiar with the company staff. This should be achieved through individual interviews between applicants and enterprises. This would also help to find the best suited and most motivated trainees. It would allow the company to pick their candidates themselves and vice-versa. As this may not always be possible, the internship coach may consider the following:

- Design an internship handbook including the company policy, rules, clauses of non-disclosure, security requirements, etc.
- Design an internship as part of the professional project of the trainee
- Participate in the conceptualisation of the internship contract
- Establish a schedule of tasks that are part of the acquirement of skills for the trainee as specified in their professional project
- Prepare suitable conditions to host the trainee as specified in the internship contract
- Ensure that the internship supervisor is aware of what the trainee does



The internship supervisor (ATC): The internship supervisor is a facilitator at the ATC who works closely with several trainees on their professional project, ensuring that what they do in the company meets their needs. The roles and tasks to be carried out by the internship supervisor can be as follows:

- Support the trainee in writing their professional project
- Guide the trainee when necessary to choose the company to work in
- Define the objectives, content and conditions for carrying out the internship in the company
- Prepare and have the internship contract signed
- Ensure the psychological preparation of the trainee (working schedule, respect of rules, social interaction, clauses of non-disclosure, reporting, etc.)



Step 3 Fulfilling responsibilities

All actors involved in the internship process bear responsibilities to ensure that expectations are met from all sides during the internship.



The trainee: should align with the internship handbook and the advice of the mentor to integrate into the company. The trainee is commonly expected to write an internship report which is part of the internship assessment. During the internship, the trainee should:

- Respect the rules in the company and the content of the internship contract
- Comply with the health and safety rules implemented by the company
- Participate in the company's activities regarding their professional project
- Appreciate day-to-day achievements of new knowledge and skills
- Keep the mentor and the internship supervisor updated of any progress or challenge
- Provide a monthly evaluation sheet (can differ regarding the stakeholders)



The mentor (company): The mentor supports and works closely with the intern throughout the entire internship. Their responsibility is to ensure that all agreements with the ATC are fulfilled. They should:

- **Introduce the company:** guide the trainee through their first contact with people and the rules of the company
- **Interact:** guide the trainee on how they must socialise to succeed in working with all employees and achieve their purpose
- **Organise:** design tasks and suitable work situations for the trainee in the company
- **Evaluate:** collect the feedback of people who worked with the trainee during their internship for a final evaluation



The internship supervisor (ATC): the internship supervisor is responsible for monitoring the internship process which includes field visits, as well as evaluation at the end. They should organise regular meetings with the mentor and the trainee to:

- Evaluate the internship in relation to the content of the internship contract
- Identify the challenges and suggest solutions in consultation with others
- Provide technical and moral assistance to the trainee



Step 4 Evaluating the internship

All actors involved in the internship process should take part in the evaluation of the internship.



The intern: must write a report on the internship with a focus on the skills acquired. Here are some guidelines for the trainee:

- Tasks accomplished
- Activities scheduled
- Behaviours needed
- Difficulties encountered
- Coping strategies
- Challenges



The mentor (the company): evaluates the performance of the intern in relation to the content set in the MoU and the internship contract. The objective of this evaluation is not to judge the trainee, but rather to help them adopt behaviours and attitudes that will be favourable to their professional life. The evaluation can be based on the following main points:

- Punctuality
- Proactivity
- Professionalism
- Perseverance
- Resilience
- Teamwork
- Integrity



The internship supervisor: uses the feedback from the mentor and the trainee to evaluate whether the internship met all the criteria set in the internship contract. The mentor and the internship supervisor should then perform an exit interview with the intern to see if the internship has provided skills and inputs in line with their professional project, and to get feedback on how the internship experience can be improved. The results of this interview should be incorporated into the evaluation. Additionally, a certificate of completion should be given out to the intern by the host company after all evaluations.

**Step 1** Holding annual stakeholder dialogues

The liaison office should organise annual stakeholder dialogues in which companies with existing ties to the ATCs as well as potential new partners are invited to participate. The personal contact between the parties involved is crucial for open and transparent communication and feedback. They serve to:

- Provide an overall evaluation of existing cooperation
- Suggest aspects of improvements to the cooperation
- Extend cooperation into other fields
- Add inputs for better Memoranda of Understanding

**Step 2** Maintaining a permanent databank

An important tool for the liaison office is a well-maintained database in which all relevant private sector contacts are saved. This includes the information on companies as well as tracer studies on the alumni who enter the job market after completion of their studies.



